

# SALUTE TO BANGABANDHU

## Rare moments with Bangabandhu

by M Matiul Islam

On the occasion of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib's first official visit to Calcutta in February 1972, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India hosted a banquet at the Banquet Hall of Calcutta Government House where we were all staying. Minutes before the appointed time, as I went to Bangabandhu's suite to accompany him to the banquet, I noticed a big commotion there. The Prime Minister was fuming with rage and the attendants were running about not knowing what to do. The Prime Minister's closed-neck Mujib jacket, his formal attire for the banquet, did not fit. Indira Gandhi was waiting outside the Banquet Hall so that the two leaders could enter the hall together and the time was running out. I decided to take charge. Standing in front of the Prime Minister, I could first manage to put all the buttons in place but the real problem was the neck—the two hooks were far apart. The Prime Minister could not go to a formal banquet with an open neck. My first two attempts to bring the two hooks together failed. I asked the Prime Minister to relax and raise his neck like a crane as far as he could, and simultaneously started putting pressure with all my might to bring the two collar hooks together. As I was almost giving up, the Prime Minister made a desperate last attempt and like a music in the ear I heard the click. The two hooks were now joined. Moments later, as the two Prime Ministers entered the Banquet Hall together, the national anthem of Bangladesh started playing.

On the second day of our visit I decided to stroll out of the Government House into the Old Court House Street, Dalhousie Square. (Old Road is named

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Road) where my alma mater was when I was studying in Calcutta. I remembered my student days when I used to stand in front of the Government House, thinking about the mystery that lay inside this massive structure. After finishing my round I returned to the Government House and operated the elevator myself to get the Residential Quarters on the 2nd floor where we were housed. As I stepped out of the elevator, crossed the long corridor leading to our room which was occupied by me and Mr. Totail Ahmed. I decided to peek into the Prime Minister's suite. As I entered the living room and was about to knock on the bedroom door, I heard voices inside and I froze. I realized that I was in the wrong floor and had stepped into Indira Gandhi's room instead. What a security lapse! I tiptoed out of the room into the corridor, ran to our floor, and was still panting when I met our Prime Minister. He roared with laughter when I described my misadventure.

On the last day of our stay in Calcutta, I decided to have my breakfast in the Dining Hall and met there a Colonel of the Indian Army, who was a Military Attaché of the Indian Prime Minister. He was a Muslim gentleman from Bihar. As we were talking, Bangabandhu strolled in and I introduced the Colonel to Bangabandhu. It was amazing how Bangabandhu instantly recognized and remembered the family of the Colonel and his home, which he visited during his days when he was a student leader of the Muslim League. After a while as the Colonel was leaving, he saluted the Prime Minister and said, "Klunda Hazi". As the Prime Minister reciprocated, I looked at him and said, "Sir, it's a pity



The writer with Bangabandhu

that we had to come all the way to India to hear the traditional Muslim greeting for the first time in two months." The Prime Minister made no comment, smiled and left the room.

In 1974, Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib went to Washington to meet with President Ford of the United States to seek food for Bangladesh which at that point of time was in the grip of a severe famine. The Prime Minister and his entourage were staying at the Blair House. Robert McNamara, President of the World Bank, came to meet the Prime Minister to advise him on the Bank's assistance programme to Bangladesh. As the World Bank President was leaving, he paused and said, "Sir, when are you devaluing your currency?" Came the prompt and spontaneous reply from our Prime Minister: "If you were my Finance Minister instead of being

the World Bank President, and rendered this advice, I would have devalued Bangladesh currency instantly." Robert McNamara seemed to enjoy the subtle way the Prime Minister rejected devaluation, took leave of him and left with his usual long strides.

In July 1975, when I came to Bangladesh on a month's home leave from the World Bank, full-scale drive for BAKSAL membership was on. I was also confronted with an application form which I declined to sign on the ground that I was still undecided about joining politics. I did not know whether Bangabandhu was informed of my refusal, but he never raised it during my meeting with him. He, on the other hand, entreated me to return to Bangladesh as he needed me badly. During the one month that I was in Dhaka, the thought that I would not be able to comply with his wishes constantly tormented me. So, I raided the subject again when I met him on August 8 to bid farewell, but he instantly stopped me saying that I should not worry about it; he had a number of well-groomed officers to take care of the administration.

On my way to Dhaka from Washington, I visited Geneva where Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, our Ambassador, gave me a personal message to be delivered to Bangabandhu. As I was about to convey him the message, an usher came in and announced that Justice Chowdhury was waiting to see Bangabandhu. This surprised me but relieved me of my responsibility. As Justice Chowdhury was coming in and I was going out, I informed Justice Chowdhury that his message had not been delivered to Bangabandhu whose final words, as I stepped out of the room into the corridor, were: You should at least come to my Janaja.

It was on the midnight of 16 August in Los Angeles, on the last leg of our journey to Washington DC, that we learnt about Bangabandhu's assassination. For a moment I was hysterical, but soon recomposed myself. My thoughts were: Both in his life and in death, Bangabandhu made supreme sacrifice. He lived and died a leader. How else history would give him place alongside Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy?

## The first procession protesting the assassination

by Dr Mohammed Hannan

WE had just passed the higher secondary examination then, waiting to get admitted to the next higher echelon of education. Around that time, Bangabandhu was assassinated on 15th August, 1975. Throughout that day we could not believe that such an incident had taken place in Bangladesh. So, we were amazed when we saw Khandaker Moshataque Ahmed taking oath as the President on BTV news in the evening. And we were surprised that the new ministers who took oath also did not come from outside the Awami League.

But it was slightly reassuring when I saw that leaders like Sved Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Captain Mansur Ali and A H M Kamruzzaman were absent from the cabinet. On the night of 16th August, there was only one line on BTV news which said that "the dead body of the former President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been buried at his village home today". I finally became convinced from the news that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had really been killed and he is no more alive in this world.

I was then only an ordinary teenage boy. Otherwise, I should have been convinced about Bangabandhu's demise much earlier when I had seen the oath-taking ceremony of the Moshataque cabinet on television. Who would have dared to revolt against Bangabandhu and take oath as minister while he was alive? No Bengalee could have mustered that courage. I later heard that even Moshataque had asked the assassins before taking oath as President, "Has Sheikh Mujib really died? Then show me the photograph of the dead body". And he took oath only after he was shown the photograph of the dead body. In reality, the evil elements within the fold of Awami League could not be identified beforehand while they were living in the shadow of Bangabandhu's magnanimity.

Thus, it became very difficult to organise protest demonstrations against the August 15 killings. That was mainly because Bangabandhu's party, the Awami League, itself was suffering from confusion. It was also difficult to pinpoint who was in favour of Moshataque and who was not. Opening one's mouth not only required courage, but it was also risky. And efforts to organise a boycott of the meeting of Members of Parliament convened by Khandaker Moshataque on 16 October also proved to be a failure. Apart from 10 to 12 Members of Parliament like Sajeda Chowdhury, Dr Abdul Malek, Nurul Kader and Lutful Rahman almost all others went to Bangabhaban to attend Moshataque's meeting.

Bangladesh Chhatra League and Bangladesh Chhatra Union was then a merged entity under the banner of BAKSAL. But the convener of Jatiya Chhatra League and the nephew of Bangabandhu — Sheikh Shahidul Islam — himself remained absconding from the start. At this juncture, Ismat Kadir Gama was the most courageous Chhatra League leader who remained active even after the 15th August episode to infuse new life into the Chhatra League. Other leaders such as K M Jahangir, Obaidul Qader, Sayed Nurul Islam, Rabiul Alam Chowdhury, Mukul Bose, Kazi Iqbal, Momtaz Hossein and Baharul Moynun Chunnua were also active during the period.

The mainstream leaders who inspired other students after the August 15 carnage were the then Vice President of DUCSU Mujahidul Islam Selim and General Secretary Mahbub Zaman. They were also the President and General Secretary of then extinct Bangladesh Chhatra Union. Other ex-Chhatra Union leaders who were active during the period were Nuhul Alam, Lenin, Kazi Akram Hossein, Quamrul Ahsan Khan, Ajoy Das Gupta, Khandaker Shawkat Jullius, Abdul Mannan Khan, Miral Sarkar, Niaz Ahmed Opu, Gazi Uddin Chowdhury and others.

Former student leader Ajoy Das Gupta says that the first spontaneous gathering in protest against Bangabandhu's assassination took place on 20 October, 1975 at Madhu's Canteen on the Dhaka University campus (Daily Bhoror Kagoi, 17 August, 1996).

But these gatherings never came out of the Dhaka University campus. The decision to bring out a procession outside the campus was taken a few days later. Initially, it was decided that the Bangabandhu memorial day would be observed on the 29th of October and a procession would head for Bangabandhu's house on the day. But the programme was later shifted by seven days to November 4.

Incidentally, a military coup took place in the country on 3 November under the leadership of Brigadier (later Major General) Khaled Mosharraf. That was purely a coincidence, but

initially we were baffled by it. We thought that Mujahidul Islam Selim had fixed the date after consultations with Khaled Mosharraf. So, feeling very upset, my friends Mosharraf, Ilyas, Mallik, Salahuddin and myself took our position in the front row of that procession. We started our silent march (in reality, it was a mourning procession) from the Bat-tala (shade under the banyan tree) of Dhaka University campus in two rows, heading towards Bangabandhu's residence at Dhanmondi Road Number 32. But very soon, we were disillusioned when we saw a police barricade near the Nilkhet check-post. I clearly heard a police officer shouting over his wireless set, "Firing is not possible, hundreds of students have joined the procession".

Around this time, a tall police officer approached us and asked, "Where is Salim?" I was taken aback, because I did not know that anybody by the name

of Salim was in the procession. In our thousand-year-old history, this was a historic building. Only 82 days ago, Bangabandhu had given up his life here. "Cry Bengalee cry" everybody cried out. There were tears in everybody's eyes. A Moulana raised his hands to Allah, he could not pray, he was only crying, shouting "Allah, Allah" and looking up vacantly at the sky. I can still recall his words; he was saying, "Allah, you will try those who killed our Bangabandhu, you will, you will. Allah, you will surely try them."

After the Munazat, I was curious to know the name of the Moulana. Somebody said that he was Moulana Jehadi. Where is Moulana Jehadi now? He was the first Bengalee who led the prayers for the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the broad daylight of November 4, 1975, even during Khandaker Moshataque's military rule. I recall with reverence that courageous

religious leader who made the event possible.

Moshataque's soldiers also heard this loud prayer by Moulana Jehadi. There was fear in their eyes and faces. We could understand that something new was taking place in the country. I could not understand why the student leaders were asking everybody to leave the place hurriedly. I could hear whispering sounds and consultations going on around. Has something new happened in the country? Signs of terror were on everybody's face. There was a faint indication that something had happened in the Dhaka Central Jail (the four national leaders Sved Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Captain Mansur Ali and A H M Kamruzzaman had in fact been assassinated by then by Moshataque's men). But nobody opened his mouth.

Translated by Helal Uddin Ahmed



1975 ... Bangabandhu and Begum Mujib flanked with family members after Sheikh Kamal's wedding ceremony.

## A tribute to Bangabandhu

Continued from page 4

sitting president who incidentally braided his cabinet ministers as a bunch of corrupt individuals some time earlier on. The remark of the army chief clearly exposed the mockery to which the country's democratic and constitutional systems were reduced after Mujib. The number of coups staged and those attempted between 1975 and 1982 bordered in the region of fifteen. The post Mujib Bangladesh turned into a fertile breeding ground for the rogues to grab power in the darkness of the night while everybody else was asleep.

The new military ruler followed the footsteps of his predecessors by appointing a surrogate president and running the country by a mixture of muscle flexing and blandishment of gilded crumbs. Like his predecessors the new ruler also formed a party and God himself elected as President.

The common masses of the people however have had enough of the overt and covert military rules for long fifteen years and launched united movement for a return to truly democratic and constitutional governance culminating in the fall of the autocratic regime in December 1990 and holding of a general election in February 1991 under a caretaker government. This development ushered in a new era in the country's march along the path of democracy and constitutionalism in which the party of Sheikh Mujib was a major player.

After 21 years Mujib's party has come to power again. But the truth is Mujib today belongs to no party although in his time he stood well and firmly within party ranks. His spirit ought to inspire all parties. He was a partisan second a Bangali first as he was the first of Bangalis. Mujib has become for us the test of human leadership and we ought to honour other leaders in the measure in which they approach the absolute standard of Mujib. Other leaders may resemble and approach him, he remains the standard whereby all other leaders ought to be measured and appraised. Such a standard Mujib is become for us today and we dare not hope that any Bangali may serve Bangladesh better than did Mujib.

The killers of Mujib who the once dared prosecution, boastfully and publicly screamed killing him have been brought to justice after long 21 years. Some of them have been hauled up and put behind the bar but some are still on the lam. The long arm of justice, reduced to mockery for long 21 years after Mujib's assassination, is now stretching in every nook and corner of the globe to nab the fugitive killers. At long last, justice is moving along its own natural way.

If we want to make this day of advantage to us then we will have to cultivate in us the quality of Mujib as a great leader.

What is that we admire most about a great leader? What we admire most about a great leader is that he has the courage of losing his own life for the life of a larger cause; that he holds his personal suffering of no consequence; that he flings down in the gaze of battle his all and says "I will stand or fall with this cause". This is what the glorious thing we most admire about a great leader that Mujib was.

Many world leaders have monuments built on their graves. No such worldly structure can however, fitly form the monument of Sheikh Mujib. He does not need any mundane monument. The humblest sod of the independent Bangladesh with nothing but dewdrops in the morning to gild it is a prouder mausoleum than kings and conquerors can boast. The country is his monument, its independence is his epitaph. Mujib belongs today to no particular period of time and to no particular state but to ages and to the world. When the great account of humanity shall be closed in the bright list of those who have best adorned it shall he found the name of Sheikh Mujib. Mujib represents the quintessence of an ideal Bangali hero; uplifted without pride, firm without obduracy, magnanimous in victory and lovely though in frown.

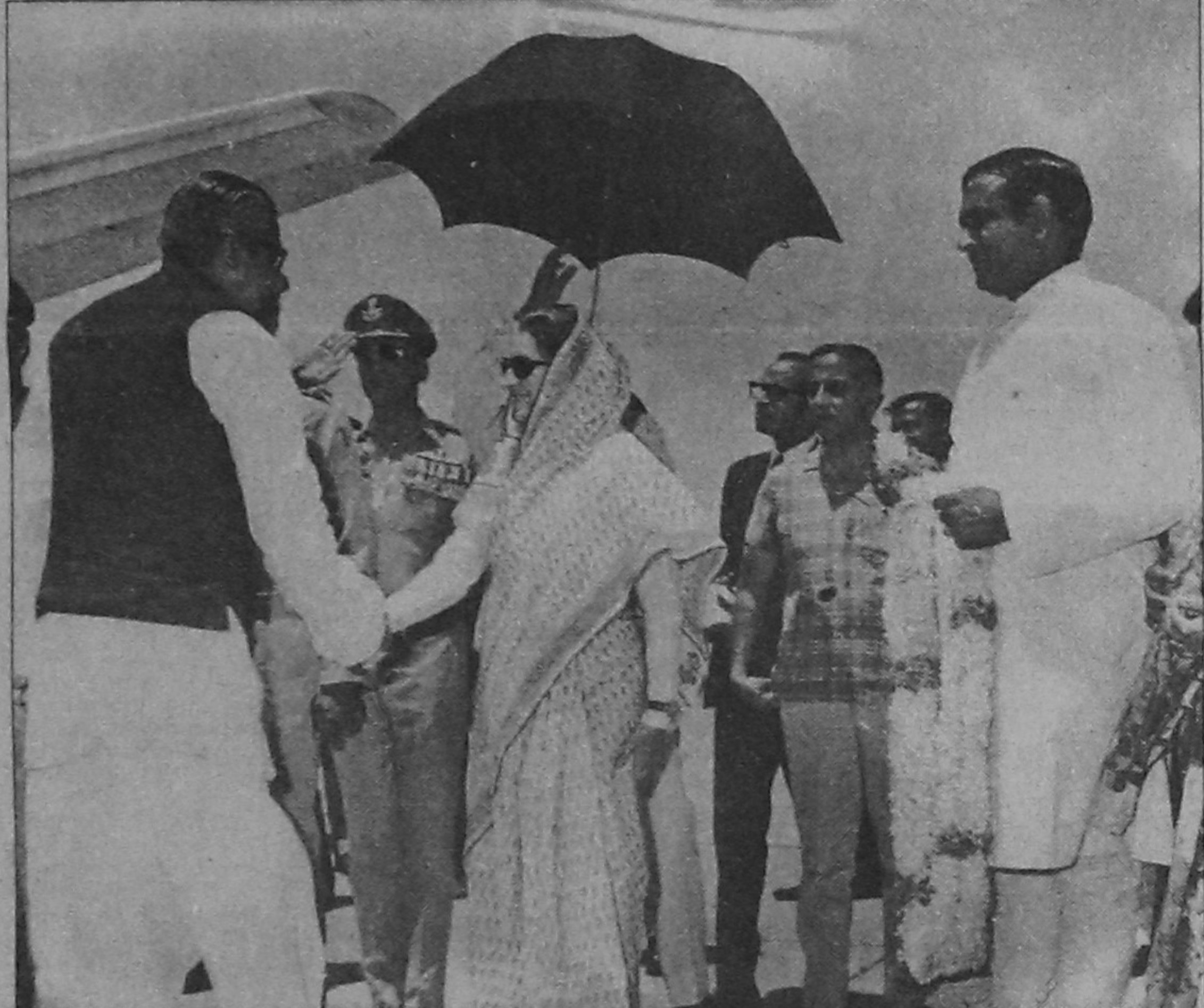
## Blot on history

Continued from page 4

with the Constitution bringing about enormous changes to give it a religious colour. Yet throughout her struggle for emancipation, people of Bangladesh have always stood by secular principles. The people of Bangladesh, deeply religious whether Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist, have known to keep religion separate from state affairs.

Most of the assassins are hiding in safe sanctuaries in foreign lands. Yet the wheels of justice have been turning relentlessly and the ring leader of the assassins Col. Farooq Rahman along with a few others are facing trial. The lower court has passed the death sentence and the matter is before the higher court. These are self confessed killers. In fact Col. Farooq in his earlier days had boasted in interviews with the BBC about his exploits in the assassination of Bangabandhu and his family. The curtain is about to fall on this drama. But to assassinate the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Bangabandhu. The intention of the new plotters would be no less than to turn the clock back and bring in the forces of darkness. This is bound to fail. Bangladesh of the year 2000 is 30 years old and has matured weathering many storms.

On August 15 the thought that should be uppermost in the minds of 130 million Bangladeshis is that the nation must never again face another 15 August.



May 12, 1974 ... Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi receives Bangabandhu at the New Delhi airport.

## Remembering Colonel Jamil Ahmed

by M Harunur Rashid

He could save his life if he turned back. Going forward meant meeting sure death. Colonel Jamil decided to go ahead in a bid to save the President of the country... Colonel Jamil fell dead in his red car as if to symbolize the saddest tragedy in history. Reminiscence

by Bangabandhu to become his military secretary. He gladly accepted the appointment and worked with great efficiency in that capacity until he was promoted and made the Director General of Defence Forces Intelligence. He would have become a Brigadier on Assumption of office as Director General. This happened only a short time before 15 August and Colonel Jamil was still living in his Ganabhaban quarters with his family.

In retrospect one may as well ponder why this brave soldier responded to his call of duty while others including the Chief of Staff of the Army did not dare to come out to save the life of the Father of the Nation. Only a handful soldiers carried out a pre-dawn operation while within two miles the whole Cantonment lay asleep. The soldiers and their commanders did not come forward. The Rakhi Bahini created Bangabandhu himself, created and put one of his trusted colleagues in charge of this special force failed to fire a single shot in defence of Bangabandhu and the threatened nascent democracy. What is appalling is that

the miscreants were not taken to task — everybody, even the most sincere members of Awami League did not raise their voice against the new government of Khandaker Moshataque Ahmed. The only exception was Kader Siddiqui who put up an armed resistance before going across the border to India.

It is a pity that no effort has been made to keep alive the memory of this brave son of the soil. Shaheed Jamil has not received any posthumous National Award — nor has any posthumous military award been given to him. During the last 25 years, no government has taken any initiative to honour him. No street has been named after him. No one visits his grave on 15 August except his family members. It is a shame that this nation has shown such utter neglect to a brave soldier who did not flinch from his duty.

May we propose that Sheikh Hasina herself looks into the causes of this neglect. There are several things she could do for the man who laid down his life for her father. The road in front of Bangabandhu residence could aptly be named "Shaheed Jamil Ahmed Sharak". The

National Museum could commission an oil painting of Shaheed Jamil and display it at a proper corner. He could be given a posthumous military award along with the highest National Award, the Swadhinata Padak. His life sketch could be published by both Bangla Academy and Shishu Academy for he should be a perennial source of inspiration to all of us, particularly



the children. The Defence Forces Intelligence office building could be named after him. There are several other things that could be done in his memory, provided there is a will to do so.

We, meanwhile, shall be waiting to see something happen. It would be a great pity if we fail to pay respect to this national hero who walked into the jaws of death while others shied away from their pledge and duty.