

As I look back

AMM SHAWKAT ALI

IN 1968, I completed my usual probationary period and was posted to Gopalganj as Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) in August. I could not immediately move from Dinajpur owing to floods that hit the district at that time. I left for Gopalganj sometimes at the end of October.

By 1968, Bangabandhu had become larger than life. As is widely known, he hailed from Tungipara village, which then formed part of Patgati Union Parishad. His uncle, Sheikh Musharraf Hossain was then an ex-chairman of Patgati Union. He was a respected man of the locality.

Sometime in July 1969, I was transferred from Gopalganj to Kurigram before I could complete my usual tenure of three years. I took all preparations to move to my new place of posting. Sheikh Musharraf saw me in my office in one of those days. He told me that Bangabandhu wanted to know if I was willing to stay back in which case he would speak to the Governor to cancel my transfer order. I replied in the negative saying that I did not want to get involved in any political controversy. The reason I said this was that everybody including the Deputy Commissioner of Faridpur, then late Abdus Samad, knew that I was transferred at the insistence of some Muslim League leader. Little did I realize then that this small little thing would be remembered by Bangabandhu in January 1973 when I was called to see him in his office then located in the Bangladesh Secretariat.

Before 1973, I saw Bangabandhu in 1972 during the visit of Indira Gandhi. At that time, I was Private Secretary to President Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. I also saw him at Bangabhavan when one day he came to call on the President. But that was all official. We never met before 1973. It was not expected that he would recognise me. But it always struck me then that he was full of affection and without any air. He would smilingly accept the respectful greetings of all and not only of the big guns.

When Indira Gandhi visited Bangladesh, there was a banquet at Bangabhavan. I distinctly remember a small incident of how affectionate the great man was.

After the banquet, he was about to leave. My wife asked me if it was all right if she requested him for an autograph. Shirin, wife of M R Osmany, also joined. Lo and behold, the two ladies rushed to the stairs where Bangabandhu was slowly moving to get into the car. My wife was carrying the printed menu of the banquet and a pen. She stretched it to him for an autograph. Bangabandhu said: You belong to this country and you would have occasions to get the autograph later. He said this affectionately placing his hand on my wife's head. One of the ladies probably said: "It would be difficult to reach you." Bangabandhu smiled and put his autograph.

In January 1973, I was in the Ministry of Communications. Mohammad Ali was Deputy Secretary, Establishment. He rang up one day and asked me to have a cup of tea. I told him that if it was a question of posting out, he could send me the order. He insisted that I must come. When I saw him, he told me that the Prime Minister wanted me to see him at his office. As I was ushered into the room of the

Prime Minister, he said "Shawkat, you were in Gopalganj. You were unjustly transferred and I wanted to intervene. You did not agree. Now I want you to take charge of Sylhet". He exactly remembered the small little incident that I have earlier referred to. People who knew him already, rightly used to say that he had a photographic memory.

Prior to the first ever national elections, all DCs, SPs, Commissioners and DIGs were called for a briefing. The venue was the Prime Minister's Office at Hare Road. All the Secretaries were there also. The Prime Minister sat on a chair in the verandah of the ground floor. We were all in front of him in the lawn. He asked us to hold the elections in a free and fair manner and all that kind of thing. Suddenly, he raised his voice and referred to the lack of magisterial control over police. He said: "I know, the authority of the DC to write annual confidential reports of SPs was taken away by Ayub Khan. Let all police officers present take note that the authority is restored as of now." As I reached Sylhet by road two days later, I got an amended notification of rule 75A of the police regulations restoring the authority of the DC to write annual confidential reports of SPs.

In 1974, there were floods in Sylhet, Comilla and other districts. One day, I just returned from Habiganj after visiting the flood-affected areas. Back in Sylhet, I received information through wireless that the Prime Minister would be visiting Habiganj. I rushed to Habiganj again. The Prime Minister reached Habiganj in the morning by a helicopter. We moved in a jeep for a drive along Habiganj-Shaistaganj road. At a certain point in the road we had to stop because of heavy on rush of water. The Prime Minister alighted from the jeep and was looking at both sides of the road. One of his political aides, then very young, requested the Prime Minister to appeal for international assistance. The Prime Minister kept mum and was still looking at both sides of the road. As if to further persuade the Prime Minister, the young aide said: "Don't you see all the crops on both sides of the road have been destroyed."

Suddenly, the Prime Minister looked at me, probably for my reactions about the damage to crops. I had seen the crop fields, before the onset of floods. It was all empty. The area was a late Aman area. I mustered my courage to contradict what the young aide had said. The contradiction evoked sharp reaction, not from the Prime Minister, but from his young political aide. The aide said angrily: "You officers, what do you know of crops? You just travel by government vehicles." The Prime Minister again looked at me. I kept my cool and asked one of the accompanying peons to get some soils from the field which was submerged. It was done. There was no trace of paddy crop. The Prime Minister said: "Let us go."

We all flew in the helicopter for Sunamganj and finally to Sylhet. After quiet lunch at the circuit house, some leading citizens of Sylhet town came in a delegation to meet the Prime Minister. They handed over a written petition and the Prime Minister asked them to explain what it was all about. They explained that Hazrat Shahjalal was given 'Lakhiraj' land by one of the Mughal emperors. The whole of Sylhet town should be 'Lakhiraj'.

The Prime Minister looked at me and asked what was 'Lakhiraj'. I promptly replied it meant

rent or tax free land. He smiled and told the delegation that the proposal was unacceptable. All affluent people living in towns must pay taxes, was what he told them further. The delegation started arguing. The Prime Minister kept on listening but without nodding his approval to the proposal made.

I knew the background of the case. Such claims go back to history. The two Land Revenue Commissions/Committees of the fifties rejected this proposal on the ground that only three acres of land were made rent-free and not the whole of Sylhet town. Suddenly, I remembered that there was a litigation pending in the High Court. I mentioned this to the Prime Minister. He asked me to send him a complete report on the issue, which I did.

The above two incidents clearly showed that in matters of executive decision making, he was not given to take spontaneous and on the spot

decisions as many politicians would like to do. He would lend his ears to everyone relevant and weigh the pros and cons before taking any decision.

I witnessed another scene at the airport, which confirmed that the Prime Minister had a photographic memory as earlier stated. Thousands came to see him off. The airport tuned into a sea of human heads. He was talking and smiling to everybody who could come near him. Suddenly, he spotted an old man from Zakiganj. Immediately, he uttered his name and the man confirmed his identity. The Prime Minister embraced him with deep affection and then said: "Do you remember, we worked together in 1947 to prevent transfer of Zakiganj to India". The man was in tears and narrated how movements were organized by Sheikh Mujib of those days on this issue.

In mid-1974, I was transferred from Sylhet to

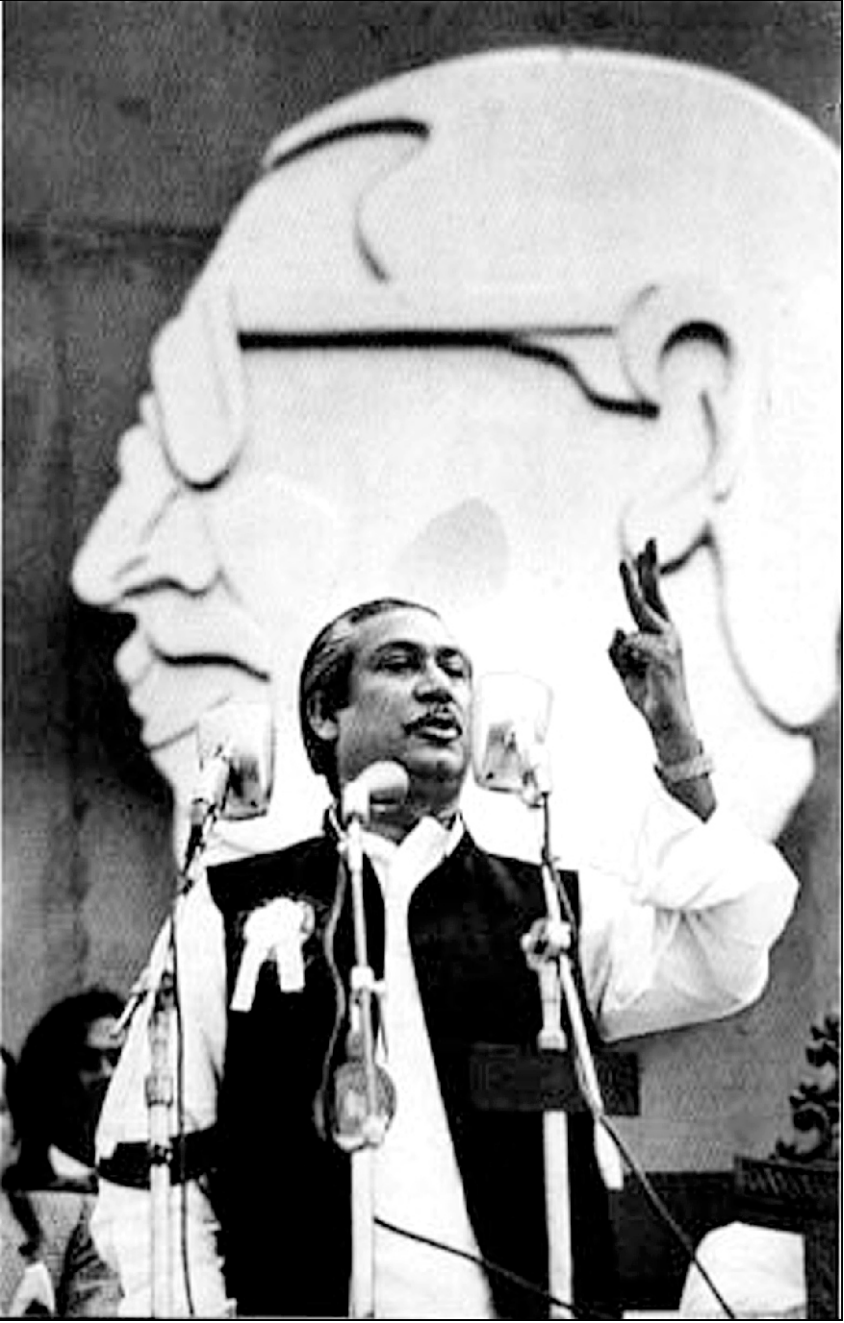
Dhaka in the Secretariat. I left Sylhet without waiting for my successor to join. Margub Murshed, then Additional Deputy Commissioner, held the fort. One day, I got a call from Quazi Habibul Huq, then Joint Secretary, Prime Minister's Secretariat. He told me that I was proposed for posting to Chittagong as DC. I requested him to stop it. Hardly two months ago I was in Sylhet. He advised me to come to Ganobhavan. I rushed. I was allowed to see the Prime Minister. He told me to take over as DC Chittagong. I marshaled courage, knowing his affectionate nature, to say that I just came from Sylhet and I wanted to gain some experience in Secretariat work Luckily for me, the Prime Minister agreed.

A few months later my transfer order was approved in the file. This time it was Barisal, the district as it was then, to which I belonged. Emboldened by my previous experience, I could manage to see the Prime Minister. I explained to him that I could not be posted to my home district. The Prime Minister said: "I always thought you are from Dhaka". He then asked the village I belonged to. As I named the village, he immediately started identifying some of the rivers and bazaars of the area. The order of transfer was not issued. As I was leaving his room, he said "You must be posted as DC, may be I'll make you DC, Dhaka". It is a strange coincidence that I did become DC, Dhaka in February 1976.

I met him for the last time again in towards the late part of 1974. I was then in the Bangladesh Water Development Board. The Joint Rivers Commission was to go to India for talks on water sharing. Abdur Rab Serniabat, then Minister for Water Resources, desired that the Chairman and Members of the Board should also be present when the Commission goes to brief the Prime Minister before leaving for Delhi. We all lined up in the lounge. When Prime Minister came, the Minister started introducing the members of the Board. When my turn came, the Prime Minister said "I know him, I know him. You have some good officers in your outfit". I was deeply touched by his remark. In course of the briefing, some of the people present suggested that the Prime Minister might like to talk over phone to his Indian counterpart emphasising the urgency of resolving the water sharing issue. It was in our national interest that demanded top level intervention. Bangabandhu immediately said, "At political level the problems are less than at the technical level. Since the Commission is going for bilateral talks, it should first narrow down the differences at that level. Mrs. Gandhi would definitely also get briefing from her technical experts".

Looking back, I sometimes wonder why Bangabandhu decided on more occasions than one to post me as DC. One probable reason could be I had to be pulled out of Sylhet before I could complete the normal tenure of three years. As I learnt later, this was done at the instance of a senior Minister who belonged to Sylhet. Of all the great qualities of head and heart that Bangabandhu was endowed with, it is his deeply affectionate nature that I always cherish in my memory, as indeed millions at home and abroad do.

The writer is former Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture



Status of Bangabandhu Murder Case

Interview with Supreme Court Advocate Anisul Huq

The Daily Star (DS): Let's start with your own connection to the case:

Anisul Huq (AH): My father, the late Serajul Huq and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were childhood friends. They grew up together and studied together and even stayed together in Calcutta for some time. They were also close politically since the time of the formation of the Awami League in the late 1940s. Furthermore, he was Bangabandhu's personal lawyer. These were the personal connections that led to him being entrusted with the case. I too was part of the prosecution team.

DS: When did the prosecution begin?

AH: The prosecution commenced on March 12, 1997. The prosecution was forced to remain dormant because of the Indemnity Ordinance which was passed on November 8, 1975. No government of Bangladesh prior to the Awami League government that came to power in 1996 attempted to repeal that law. The first task, then, was the repeal of the law, which was accomplished in 1996. It was only then that the case could proceed.

DS: So no one took any steps to repeal the Indemnity Ordinance before then?

AH: Not at all. No one. The law was enacted during the time of Khandaker Mostaque Ahmed, and subsequent to that, neither General Zia nor Ershad took any steps to repeal the law. You could say that until 1990, for the leaders that ruled the country played with the Constitution -- the Constitution took a backrole.

DS: Moving on, what were the specific charges?

AH: Charges were brought of conspiracy and murder.

DS: And how many total murders came within the purview of the prosecution?

AH: On August 15, 1975, there were three occurrences.

In addition to the killings at Road 32, there were also killings at the house of Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, the Secretary of BAKSAL, and the house of the Minister for Flood Control, Abdur Rab Serniabat.

The other two occurrences are also being prosecuted. But the Bangabandhu Murder prosecution that I was involved with dealt with the killings of the 13 people at Road 32, mostly family members of Bangabandhu.

DS: And how did the case proceed?

AH: A criminal case must be initiated by lodging a First Information Report (FIR) with the thana. In the Bangabandhu Murder case, the FIR was lodged on October 2, 1996. That's a delay of over twenty-one years before the FIR was even issued!

The next step is investigation and submission of a charge-sheet based on the investigation. The charge-sheet was submitted on January 15, 1997.

The FIR named twenty-three people, of whom four were dead by the time the charge-sheet was prepared. So charges were lodged against nineteen people, of whom twelve were absconding, and seven left to face trial.

DS: When did the trial commence?

AH: The trial commenced on March 12, 1997.

Because twelve of the accused were absconding, the formalities for trial in absentia had to be completed. Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world where if you are charged with a capital offense, even if you are absconding, the law requires that the state provides a defence. It took some time for the formalities to be completed and for state defence counsel to be appointed. On April 7, 1997, charges were framed and formally accepted by the court. This is when the accused receive the right to plead either guilty or not guilty.

DS: Please continue.

AH: As many as sixty-one witnesses were called. The final judgement was delivered on November 8, 1998. Of the nineteen charged, fifteen persons were sentenced to death, and four of the accused were acquitted.

DS: What can you tell me about the prosecution?

AH: One thing asked of us by many people was why no special tribunal was formed to try the case. We did contemplate such a thing at the time. Given the length of time between the killings and the trial, we would have been justified in convening a special tribunal. But our reasoning was that Bangabandhu had been a man of the people, and we felt sure that he would have wanted that everything be done in accordance with the law the common people enjoy. Nothing special.

This was the most important

consideration. He belonged to the people, and it would always have been his desire to be treated like the people.

We were also concerned about the acceptability of the trial to the international community. And we wanted to show the maturity of the legal system in Bangladesh.

We had the example of the Zia killing trial. It was conducted in camera (closed court) and people were sentenced to death just like that.

We wanted to be more transparent. We wanted the case to be watertight. At every step of the way, all the legal rights the accused could have were tested and endorsed by the superior courts.

Transparency and accountability were the most important issues for us.

I'll give an example. The wife of Col. Rashid was discharged by the court. The High Court endorsed almost all our legal steps, but not the charge against her. So we complied with the court's rulings. We gave all the accused every chance.

DS: What happened then?

AH: Well the next step in a case like this is that the judgement of the district and sessions court judge must be confirmed by the High Court. Even those who have been absconding and are fugitives from justice have this right under Bangladesh law.

So the case was sent for confirmation on December 14, 2000.

DS: If my math is correct, that's over two years after the judgement. Why did it take so long?

AH: It's a very unfortunate story, but as many as eight honourable judges were embarrassed to hear the case.

DS: Embarrassed? You mean they did not want to involve themselves?

AH: Embarrassed is the word and I'll stick to it. This was historically unprecedented. I have never heard of such a thing.

DS: So how did the matter resolve itself?

AH: Finally, Chief Justice Latifur Rahman intervened and a special bench was formed.

This bench delivered a split judgement.

DS: What was the split?

AH: Justice MM Ruhul Amin, sentenced nine of the defendants to death, one to life imprisonment, and acquitted five. Justice ABM

Khairul Huq convicted and sentenced to death all fifteen.

DS: So there was a split with respect to six of the defendants?

AH: Exactly. So the matter went to Justice Fazlul Karim, who acquitted three of the six and sentenced the other three to death.

DS: So at the end of the day, out of the nineteen charged, twelve were convicted and sentenced to death, and seven were acquitted.

AH: Yes. The final judgement was handed down on April 31, 2001.

DS: Did this confirmation exhaust the appeals process for the defendants?

AH: By no means. They still had the right to appeal to the Appellate Division within thirty days. But please note that to do so you must abide by the judgement and be present before the court. Therefore those who were

absconding did not file, and their time to file an appeal has run out.

DS: So out of the twelve that were convicted how many were absconding and how many filed for appeal?

AH: Eight remained fugitives and four appealed.

DS: What happened in the Appellate Division?

AH: The way it works is that to appeal you must file something called a leave of appeal that is an application for permission to appeal. Only when the Appellate Division grants you permission to appeal can you appeal.

The four in custody did file their leave to appeal application. It is this leave to appeal application that is still pending.

DS: But if the final judgement was delivered on ... let me see ... April 31, 2001 ... and they have to file within thirty days, that would

mean that it has been pending...

AH: Over three years. Yes.

DS: Is this unprecedented?

AH: Let's just say that I have never heard of it in my forty-eight years.

DS: Are you still involved with the prosecution?

AH: My father passed away on October 28, 2002, and I was removed from the prosecution on December 20, 2002. I was later reappointed to the prosecution team for the Jail Killings case.

DS: So who is in charge of the Bangabandhu Murder case now?

AH: Nobody.

DS: Nobody?

AH: Well, nothing is happening, but the prosecution is always the state so therefore the Attorney General's office is in charge.

Why this controversy?

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

BY now we have known from eminent columnist Sardar Sirajul Islam in his mini serial in a vernacular daily that after being informed of Yahya Khan's departure from Dhaka on March 25, 1971, Bangabandhu sent a message on urgent basis through his neighbour Mr AKM Mosharraf Hossain (former Secretary, Industries and now minister of state of the present government) to Mr M R Siddiqui (Mr Hossain's relation) of Chittagong. The message was passed on to Mr Siddiqui over telephone. It conveyed this directive from Bangabandhu: "Liberate Chittagong, take over administration, proceed for Comilla." Mr AKM Mosharraf Hossain confirmed to Sardar Sirajul Islam in writing on his official letterhead vide his latter no: Sachib/Shilpa-63/90 dated 7-3-1990 stating: "The aforesaid message I passed on to Mr M R Siddiqui upon the directive of Bangabandhu". Hopefully and in spite of his party affiliation and natural obligation, Mr AKM Mosharraf Hossain, known to this writer as a person of immaculate moral integrity, will not go back on his words. In this regard the readers may correlate his truthful statement on 7-3-1990 to his bureaucratic position and status at the time when he didn't don any political identity.

Likewise, we may allude to the interview of the present foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury at page 59 of the documents on liberation war, given on October 20, 1973. Here, he was quoted in these words: "In the morning of 26th March we reached a place little away from Kalurghat. There we took rest and did the reorganisation. Thus 26th March passed that way. On 27th March Major Ziaur Rahman went to the Chittagong Broadcasting Centre and delivered a statement. On 28th March throughout the whole day I read out that statement from the radio station." Incidentally, it may be recalled that Mr Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury was then posted with Ziaur Rahman in the 8th East Bengal Regiment when the war of liberation started.

Again an old interview of Lt. General (Rtd) Mr Shawkat Ali, Bir Uttam, conveys a clearer impression on the controversial declaration of independence on radio. Expressing his tacit annoyance with such an unnecessary debate he said: "As far as I know, it was Hannan Bhai's voice the people heard first of all on Chittagong Radio. It could be at about two in the afternoon on March 26, 1971. But, since the transmission machinery

was of a very low capacity, the entire countrymen couldn't hear that voice. Therefore, if asked as to whose rebellious voice was first heard on radio then I will say that voice was of Hannan Bhai. Yet it is true that on the next day, that is, on 27th March '71 the war of liberation took a crucial turn after Major Zia's declaration was broadcast." What the general can say now when he finds so much twisting of facts and truth by his party men slandering even Ziaur Rahman himself? This interview was recorded in 1981.

Eminent University teacher, an acknowledged authority on Bangladesh history and absolutely non-partisan historian Professor Sirajul Islam says in his History of Bangladesh at page 634: "On March 26 Awami League leader M A Hannan read out the declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and on March 27 at 1930 hours Major Ziaur Rahman read out the declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu".

Another important colleague in the armed services during the War of Liberation in 1971 and now a BNP stalwart Col Oli Ahmed writes at page 97 of his book in Bangla "Jiboner Sheikh Nai" that it was March 27, 1971 on which date Major Zia announced from Kalurghat Radio Station Chittagong. Belal Mohammad, a radio staff confirmed at Page 58-59 of his book "Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra" that Ziaur Rahman was brought to the Radio Station at 5 hrs on March 27, 1971. None so far has challenged this information or contention of Belal Mohammad who was physically present at the station.

Now defunct and out of circulation weekly Bichitra published on March 22, 1974 an article entitled "Ekti Jatir Janmo" (Birth of a Nation) wherein Zia categorically mentioned "Bangabandhu, father of our nation." His historic declaration on Chittagong Radio Station in the evening of March 27, 1971 read: "On behalf of our great leader, the Supreme Commander of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, we hereby proclaim the independence of Bangladesh." It was in Ziaur Rahman's own voice. Besides, in the article in weekly Bichitra referred to above Zia clearly mentioned the historic speech of Sheikh Mujib in the erstwhile Race Course, now Suhrawardy Uddyan, on March 07, 1971 as "the green signal."

And following that invincible "green signal" Ziaur Rahman, despite his initial hesitation, jumped into action and of course into an abhorring

Bangabandhu in the eyes of an enemy

NAZRUL ISLAM

THERE is no dearth of people, including politicians and so-called literateurs, to impugn the character of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and deny his contribution in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh. A section of people claims that Sheikh Mujib had not done anything for the liberation of Bangladesh, but rather, fled the country on the night of March 25, 1971, deserting the common people. Some even demand trial of Mujib for the genocide committed by the Pakistani occupation forces. They try to bring the late President Ziaur Rahman into the limelight and make him the hero of the Liberation War.

Was there any contribution of Sheikh Mujib to our liberation struggle? This is an endless debate between two sections of people divided on political lines. Let us see an enemy's statement about him after more than 25 years after the Liberation War.

There was no doubt that General AAK Niazi was one of the topmost enemies of Bangladesh as well as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Niazi had no reason to conceal the misdeeds (in the eyes of Pakistani rulers in 1971) of Sheikh Mujib or other leaders in Bangladesh.

General Niazi, the Commander of Eastern Command and Martial Law Administrator of the then East Pakistan), wrote a book titled The Betrayal of East Pakistan where he briefly narrated the roles played by various leaders to break Pakistan into two pieces.

Niazi in his book divulged the names of enemies of Pakistan i.e. those who overtly and covertly made contributions to the birth of Bangladesh. Surprisingly, he mentioned a single name -- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -- as the enemy of Pakistani from the East although Mujib was in a Pakistani jail during the War of Liberation.

Historians say that the seed of independence was implanted in the six-point demands of the Awami League formulated in 1966. What was the assessment of the Pakistani rulers about six-point demands?

Niazi wrote: "President Ayub Khan called a Round Table to which all prominent political figures, including Mujib and Bhutto, were invited. Mujib was adamant in his six-point demands. Despite friendly persuasions by other politicians, he was not to be moved. Ayub Khan contended that the six-point meant confederation and not federation and would subsequently lead to the division of Pakistan."

As Sheikh Mujibur Rahman started a campaign across the country on six-point demands and people's response was unprecedented, the Pakistani rulers repeatedly sent him to jail. Finally, the Ayub junta threw Mujib in jail in 1968, implicating him and 34 others in Agartala Conspiracy case. But was it a conspiracy case?

As Niazi wrote: "Sheikh Mujib carried out overt and covert activities to meet his objectives. In 1966 the Agartala conspiracy was unearthed. Sheikh Mujib, in connivance with civil and junior military officers, had conspired with Indian agencies to bring about a revolt in East Pakistan. The Agartala Conspiracy was not a fabricated story created to implicate Sheikh Mujib."

After the overwhelming victory in the general elections in 1970, President Yahya convened parliament session in Dhaka on March 3, 1971. But realising Mujib's obstinate stance for his six-point demands, Yahya called off the session triggering violent protests in the then East Pakistan. Mujib called for a non-cooperation movement across the country paralysing all administrative functions.

As the situation was turning grave, Yahya along with other leaders of West Pakistan came to Dhaka on March 15 for talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the talks continued until March 25.

Many of Mujib's critics blamed him for appeasing Yahya Khan before the crack-down by the Pakistani army on the night of March 25. But what were the views of a patriotic Pakistani?

Niazi wrote: "Mujib was defiant, Bhutto power-hungry. Yahya tried to appease Mujib by proclaiming him future Prime Minister. Mujib was not swayed by empty words. He was not ready to accommodate Yahya, who was aspiring to stay on as president of Pakistan."

Many vested quarters today debate the declaration of war. In fact the liberation war had started much before March 26. After March 3, 1971, Sheikh Mujib had become the functional head of the government. Instructions were issued from his Dhanmondi residence for running the day-to-day work of the government.

"In the beginning of March, Mujib announced his plan to run a parallel government in defiance of Marshal Law," wrote Niazi. "The pressure against Armed forces continued to be built-up. The Awami League put into effect their plans spelt out as under:

Denial of all logistic support to the armed forces Disruption of all troops movements Disruption of water and power supplies to all cantonments Stopping all civilians employees from working for the armed forces Mujib declared (probably he referred to the Bangabandhu's speech of March 7): Pakistan as it stands is finished. There is no longer any hope of a settlement. I will break them and bring them to their knees. It was clear that Bangladesh had come into existence. Mujib had become the de facto ruler and his home had turned into the presidency. Orders from the central government were defied."

After the March 7 address of Sheikh Mujib, preparation of war against Pakistan forces started. Life in the entire East Pakistan came to a standstill. Student leaders had already made flag of Bangladesh and were hoisting it in various educational institutions and the house of Sheikh Mujib.

March 23 was the National Day of Pakistan. The day was observed as "resistance day" and none, even the state-run TV and some foreign missions, did hoist Pakistani flags in then East Pakistan.

Naiza wrote: "On 23 March, resistance day was observed in East Pakistan. The flag of Bangladesh was flown on Mujib's house. The British Deputy High Commission and Soviet Consulate also hoisted Bangladesh flags. Col. Osmani was appointed by Mujib as the overall commander of operation."

Niazi also praised the leadership quality of Mujib: "Mujib was an accomplished politician and an orator par excellence who could arouse the masses by his emotional speeches."

It has again been proved through changing the documents of liberation war that as a nation we are very small-minded. A nation having such mindset can't get respect from others. Everybody should give due respect to the national heroes. It's crucial for our national unity and prosperity.

Nazrul Islam is a journalist and environmentalist.

uncertainty. Nevertheless, he put in great efforts at mobilising his men and resources in 8th East Bengal Regiment risking his life. The rest is history and till his assassination in 1981 in Chittagong he himself didn't permit any overdoing of his valiance or underestimating the mammoth leadership and image of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was very much palpable that, in spite of his ideological differences with Awami League he remained meticulously faithful to his own words and conviction indeed and expression about the great leader till August 15, 1975. Even after he floated his own political party, true to his mental make-up, he used to be equally reserve in his opinion about Bangabandhu.

That's how many of the co-warriors fighting the enemies should to shoulder with Ziaur Rahman couldn't twist the truth about his participation in the liberation war, his declaration of independence on March 27, 1971 on behalf of Bangabandhu, or about the first message on radio by M A Hannan, Awami League leader -- Sheikh Mujib's first message passed through ERR, on March 26, 1971 around 2 PM.

Hasan Hafizur Rahman's edited history and documentation on our War of Liberation was, so to say, a personal project of late Ziaur Rahman. He evinced great interest in the compilation and it was naturally inconceivable that those involved in the project including Hasan Hafizur Rahman could have recourse to any deliberate twisting in the ultimate documentation. The late leader expressed his satisfaction with the ultimate recording. At least there is no record to suggest that despite being in the highest position of administration he did ever ask the men in the project to put him as proclaimer of independence all by himself and not "on behalf of". A very committed and loyal soldier as he was, he found glory in placing him at the command of the supreme commander Sheikh Mujib.

The present controversy over the reprint of the same documents which were gifted to the nation by Ziaur Rahman himself has been the mischief of some over-enthusiastic members of BNP to create disaffection among the people. They appear to have been successful in duping Begum Zia, who, in the past didn't indulge in such suicidal gamble. Because she knew what her husband said, what his recorded evidences had been.

Kazi Alauddin Ahmed is an industrial consultant.