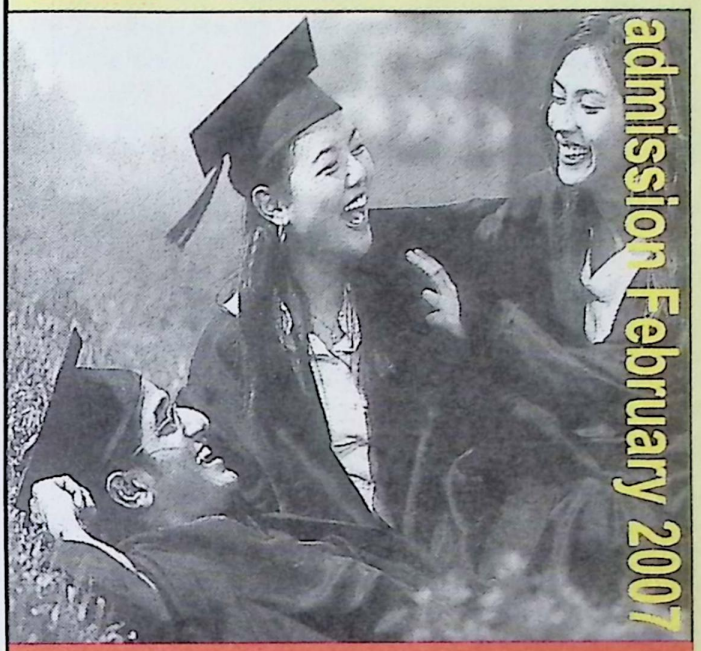
around the world, you know the time has arrived for you to let a bit of philosophy into your life. You have made me endless, Lord, sang Tagore long ago. Does the endlessness come with the end of a life, at the very moment rigor mortis sets in? Are memories symbolic of the endless life we sing about? These and similar questions will flit around your imagination. The answers will be hard to come by.

I have often wondered about the shape Bangabandhu's body must have taken in his grave in Tungipara. He was riddled with bullets on that sinister August morning over three decades ago. No surgeon took those bullets out. It may well be that the bullets now lie beside the bones that once constituted his wholesome corporeal being. Back in 1936, Abraham Lincoln's coffin was retrieved from his grave when it was decided that the grave called for proper refurbishment. When the coffin was opened, it was observed that the Civil War era president had acquired a deeper shade of dark on his face. There was a black spot on his tie. Everything else was just the way it had been when Lincoln was buried on an April day in 1865. That was a discovery. Would the discovery be repeated if someone were to reopen his coffin in these present times? One can only let the imagination flow, for it is not in the nature of men to open graves and commune with the dead in the depths of the night.

There are lonely graves scattered across the world. The deposed Shah of Iran went frantically from one country to another looking for a home in his final days. The old imperiousness was gone and fear was in his eyes. It was Anwar Sadat who would give him refuge in Cairo. Today dried leaves and dust coat the Shah's grave in the Egyptian capital. Sadat, murdered by his soldiers in 1981, lies buried in his native village Mit Abu el-Kom. There are some of the saddest stories ever related to men that come alive when you recall the misery in which Bahadur Shah Zafar died. William Dalrymple recreates those tales in his new book. When Iskandar Mirza died in 1969, the Pakistani regime of General Yahya Khan would not let him be buried in his country. It was in Tehran, beside the resting place of Reza Shah, that he found a spot for burial. A decade later, adamant that nothing of Iran's spurious royalty would remain, the ayatollahs razed all the graves there --- and cheered themselves.

You read. And you wipe your tears. ■

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