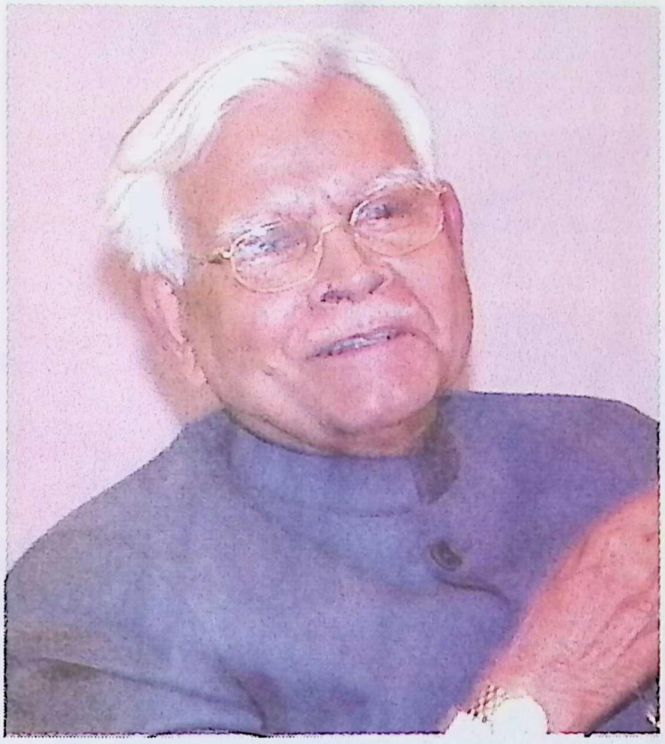
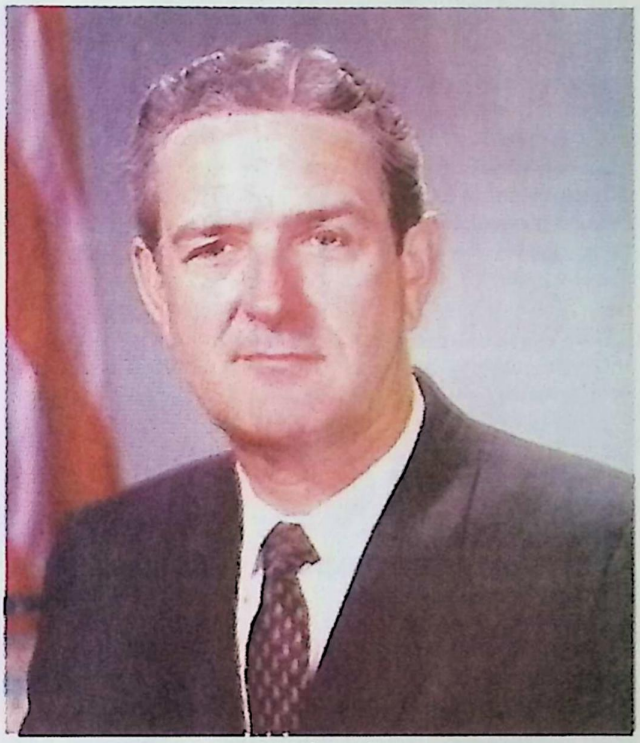


Natwar Singh



John Connally

In 1988, a fairly good number of Bengalis were disappointed when ASM Abdur Rab seemed to be relishing his role as leader of the opposition in a parliament where Bangladesh's mainstream political parties were absent. He had been a fiery student leader and one of the more radical founders of the Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal, a party that had defied the superman that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was. When Rab gave legitimacy to the Ershad regime, we found the act inexplicable. In similar fashion, when his fellow radical student leader turned JSD politician Shahjahan Siraj ended up joining the clearly rightwing Bangladesh Nationalist Party, we knew the anti-climactic had happened. And the good freedom fighter Major MA Jalil, if you recall, made his foray into politics as a purveyor of scientific socialism, whatever that meant. By the time he died (and that was a sudden happening in Islamabad), he had veered to the extreme right in his new avatar as an Islam-oriented politician.

When you remember the many times in which some otherwise good people have caused bad tremors to flow through your sensibilities, you will be inclined to the melancholic.

There have always been peripatetic men in the world of politics. We have been appalled by some, enlightened by quite a few others. John Connally was Democratic governor of Texas on the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in 1963. Years later, he turned into a Republican, joined President Nixon and even entertained presidential ambitions of his own. And then he went into the twilight, nearly forgotten. The more enlightening ones have been Andre Malraux and Melina Mercouri. They came from different backgrounds and then ended up doing similar things in politics. Malraux served as Charles de Gaulle's minister for culture. In her native Greece, Mercouri acquired the same position following the restoration of democracy in 1974. Both have done a good job, which is not what you can say for sure about Arnold Schwarzennegger in California.

And Italy's Ilona Staller, a.k.a. Cicciolina? The porn star made a revealing entry into parliament, whipped up bits of frenzy here and there and at the end of it all made not much of a difference. But Britain's Glenda Jackson did, to our intense satisfaction.