

For the full version of the excerpted articles, and more, please read Forum, available with The Daily Star on Monday, March 3

## Missing the opportunity to free the Royal Bengal Tiger

MD. ANISUR RAHMAN

ON 1/11, the country was saved from being torn apart by the savage pull of opposing power and wealth-hungry political forces by the calling of emergency and formation of a new caretaker government with the backing of the armed forces.

The new CTG is trying to install good governance by its bold campaign against some big

corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, and is preparing the ground for impartial national elections by overhaul of the Election Commission. Among other measures, a great step has been to set free the judicial system as an independent state organ.

If all ends well according to the plans of this government (i.e. if a new elected government comes into power through a decent election and if peace

prevails in the country thereafter), the elite of the country whose vocal leadership is being given by the so-called "shushil shamaj" and also, perhaps, the ordinary middle class of the society, may thereby enjoy a better life, and a congenial climate for expansion of industry and trade by both national and foreign entrepreneurs may also reign.

But it is uncertain how much these reforms will benefit the

downtrodden of the country struggling to live with dignity, those whom I shall call "dukhi manush" in the language of the architect of our national struggle for self-determination, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

If these reforms are successful and if peace reigns in the country for an extended period, some kind of "development" will advance in the country, giving certainly some "trickle-down" benefits to some of the dukhi manush.

But such development will also increase economic and social inequalities -- the kind of development that the nation has experienced since its independence. Such development may also reduce the proportion of people below the poverty line drawn by the dollar-a-day type of count, but a large proportion of such people will remain deprived of the benefits of this kind of development, and many will even roll downwards by the sweep of such development.

The country has actually been experiencing this kind of development since its independence at various rates, at the same time that millions of its dukhi manush are ending their lives remaining dukhis, and many, many are becoming dukhi anew.

(For the full version of this article, please read this month's Forum, available with The Daily Star on Monday, March 3.)

Prof. Md. Anisur Rahman is Member, First Planning Commission.



SHAFIQ ISLAM/DRINK NEWS

## Handle with care

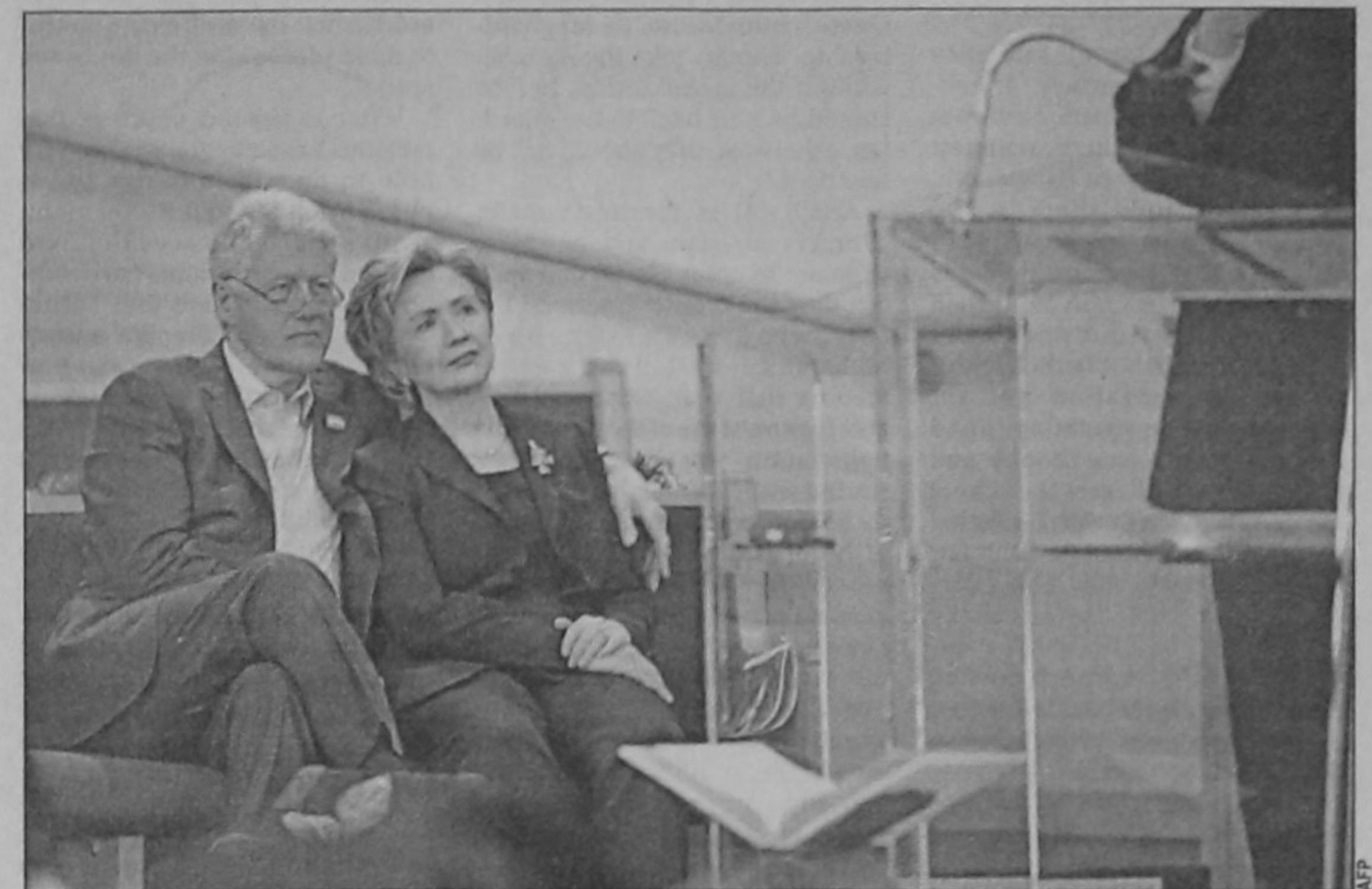
MAHMUD FAROOQUE

IN late December, our progressive chattering classes -- in political addas, opinion pages and the blogosphere -- recoiled in disgust and disbelief almost instantaneously upon learning that 19-year old Bilawal Bhutto was designated to succeed his assassinated mother at the helm of Pakistan People's Party, leaving the leadership of the party in the hands of three successive generation of its founding family.

However, a comparable outrage by the same group was remarkably absent in considering the implications of a Hillary Clinton candidacy, which, if successful, would keep a Bush or a Clinton on the US presidential ballot for twenty eight years and counting. There is an internet site called Bush-Clinton forever that charts a possible roadmap of keeping a Bush or a Clinton in the White House as far as 2057!

So why does the prospect of a Hillary Clinton presidency not raise as many eyebrows among our progressive opinion-makers as does the prospect of a Bilawal Bhutto prime ministership?

When asked, a vast majority of them point to the process, and argue that in the US case the outcome was merely the product of chance and not something determined



through an autocratic decree or institutional design. Notwithstanding the disputed results in Florida, there would have been a first Gore than a second Bush in the White House in 2001 had the 4 electoral votes in the state of New Hampshire gone into the Democratic column.

Hence the principal arguments against dynastic politics stems from the lack of institutional safeguards designed to prevent concentration and transfer of power based on family lineage rather than due process, equal opportunity and political achievements.

These considerations have recently and rightfully entered

into the national discourse about political reform in Bangladesh, where its most recent 16-year experiment with democracy failed to wrestle power away from two dominant political families. Rather than risking a further continuation of this cycle, steps have been contemplated to leverage legal and institutional means to weaken, if not completely sever, the links between the two major political parties and the two families that have successfully led them to alternating victories in the national elections.

The idea is premised on the conventional wisdom that the strangleholds of these two families are standing in the

way of internal party reform, without which it is impossible to rein in pervasive corruption, deteriorating law and order situation, and political stasis which have been stifling economic growth, social developments and large scale empowerment of the general citizenry. Hence the argument that removing these two obstacles is among the absolute and essential ingredients for bringing about lasting democratic reform in Bangladesh.

(For the full version of this article, please read this month's Forum, available with The Daily Star on Monday, March 3.)

Mahmud Farooque writes from Indiana, US and is a member of Drishtipal Writers' Collective.

## The making of Muktir Gaan

CATHERINE MASUD

IT was in the fall of 1990. Tareque and I had been in the US for about one year. We didn't really have any particular plan in mind at the time for staying in the states. Rather, it was a "de-compression" of sorts, after a hectic period in Bangladesh and India when we had struggled to complete "The Inner Strength," Tareque's documentary film on the life and art of the painter S.M. Sultan.

In New York, Tareque was working in a famous used bookstore called the Strand, and amassing an enormous collection of books on film and Indology in the process. I was an executive in an advertising agency, half-heartedly climbing the corporate ladder. We were both looking for something inspiring to throw ourselves into, but weren't quite sure how and where to start.

At that time, we were spending almost every weekend with my brother Alfred, who was complet-

ing his post-doctoral work in physics in Princeton, New Jersey. One day he was stopped on the street by a South Asian-looking woman who needed directions to the physics department. They began to chat -- she said she was originally from Bangladesh, and Alfred said his sister was married to a Bangladeshi.

One coincidence led to another -- it turned out she was the wife of Tarik Ali, an old friend of Tareque's first cousin Benu. The Alis lived in

the neighbouring town of Lawrenceville, and the following weekend found us sitting cozily in Tarik bhai's living room, exchanging stories of Dhaka and dreams of return.

The conversation drifted to the Liberation War. Tarik bhai and Tareque's cousin Benu bhai were together at that time, singing in a cultural squad of refugee artists. Tarik Ali recalled that an American film-maker and his crew had traveled with them for some time, documenting their experiences during the war. Tareque vaguely remembered that in the early 1970s, Benu bhai had often mentioned this film-maker in passing during reminiscences of the War. His name, according to Tarik bhai, was Lear Levin. We were immediately intrigued. What an unusual name: Lear. It conjured up images of grandeur and tragedy. What had become of his footage? Perhaps it was a journalistic catalogue of events of the war. Certainly Lear no longer lived in New York. Perhaps he was long since dead.

Over the next week or so, Tareque and I gradually forgot about Lear Levin. But the following Saturday, I was suddenly inspired to pick up the phone book and look through the Ls. There were pages and pages of Levens. But suddenly, there it was. Lear Levin. And Lear Levin Productions. I am always nervous about phone calls, so I

handed the phone to Tareque. He called the production office -- it was the weekend, but he could leave a message. But someone picked up the phone.

Tareque: Yes, I was trying to reach a Mr. Lear Levin.

Lear: This is Lear Levin.

Tareque: Oh ... were you by any chance in Bangladesh in 1971?

Lear: Yes.

Tareque: You did some shooting then?

Lear: Yes.

Tareque: Well, I wanted to talk to you because I'm also from Bangladesh, I'm a film-maker, my name is Tareque Masud. Mahmoodur Rahman Benu is my first cousin. Do you remember Benu?

At the sound of Benu's name, Tareque could almost feel, through the telephone line, a rush of emotion overtaking Lear.

Lear: Of course I remember him. Well, in 1971 I was a young man, thirty years old. I went to Bangladesh to make a film about the Liberation War. I put a lot of myself into that film, a lot of money and time, but eventually I had to abandon the project. And now, you have called. I've been waiting almost twenty years for this phone call.

(For the full version of this article, please read this month's Forum, available with The Daily Star on Monday, March 3.)

Catherine Masud is a film-maker.



## Banker, Trader, Soldier, Spy

SIKDER HASEEB KHAN and PERVEZ SHAMS

OVER the past few decades, a quiet economic transformation has taken place in Burma and Pakistan. In the absence of accountability and transparency, the extent of "security interests" in the economy has increased significantly, compromising the long-term prospects for democracy and economic development.

Barons of Burma

In Burma, military control over the economy has expanded over the last forty years, but in two distinct phases. In the first phase, begun in 1962 and lasting until the late eighties, Burma was made to follow a socialist path toward development. State-owned enterprises controlled the economy, from industry to foreign trade to agriculture to even tourism and services.

As in many other countries, this drove out independent private investors and suppressed growth in key sectors. One telling example of this is rice. In 1868, Burma overtook Bengal to become the world's leading rice exporter. It remained in that position for the next century or so. After the military takeover in 1962, rice exports shrunk gradually to almost nil by the late 1980s. In the process, millions of Burmese farmers became impoverished, some rendered landless, some forced into unpaid labour, and many ended up fueling various



ethnic insurgencies that rage in the country.

The second phase started from the late eighties, when SPDC, the current military regime, began to liberalise parts of the economy, in keeping with the trend in the rest of the world to adopt capitalist ways. But a new law, enacted in March 1989, kept the best-growing sectors -- petroleum, natural gas, tea, gems and precious stones, seafood, and minerals -- under the preserve of SPDC. Outside these, many of the state-owned businesses began to be privatised in the style of Russia under Yeltsin, essentially sold dirt-cheap to those with connections to the regime.

Since then, two private conglomerates have emerged as the most influential in the economy:

Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH) and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC). UMEH shareholding is restricted to only the military, active and retired, and their family members. MEC too is set up to advance the "welfare" of the junta. It can conduct business in any sector, and it is authorised to do so outside the regular laws that apply to other private companies. Naturally, the savvy investors in Burma do business by forming joint ventures with one of these companies in order to get access and protection.

(For the full version of this article, please read this month's Forum, available with The Daily Star on Monday, March 3.)

Sikder Haseeb Khan and Pervez Shams are freelance contributors to Forum.

## Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro and Bangladesh's Declaration of Independence

MASHUQUR RAHMAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN JALAL

THE last message from Dacca Betar Kendro was delivered by announcer Nazma Akhtar.

She declared:

"The 75 million people of Bangla Desh, freedom-loving as they are, have been subjected to brutal genocide by the army. The people of Bangla Desh will shed more blood rather than forget the injury. We will never allow the sacrifice to go in vain."

Soon after the Pakistan army took over Dacca Betar Kendro in the early hours of March 26, 1971. The Pakistanis renamed the radio station "Radio Pakistan Dacca" and used it to announce martial

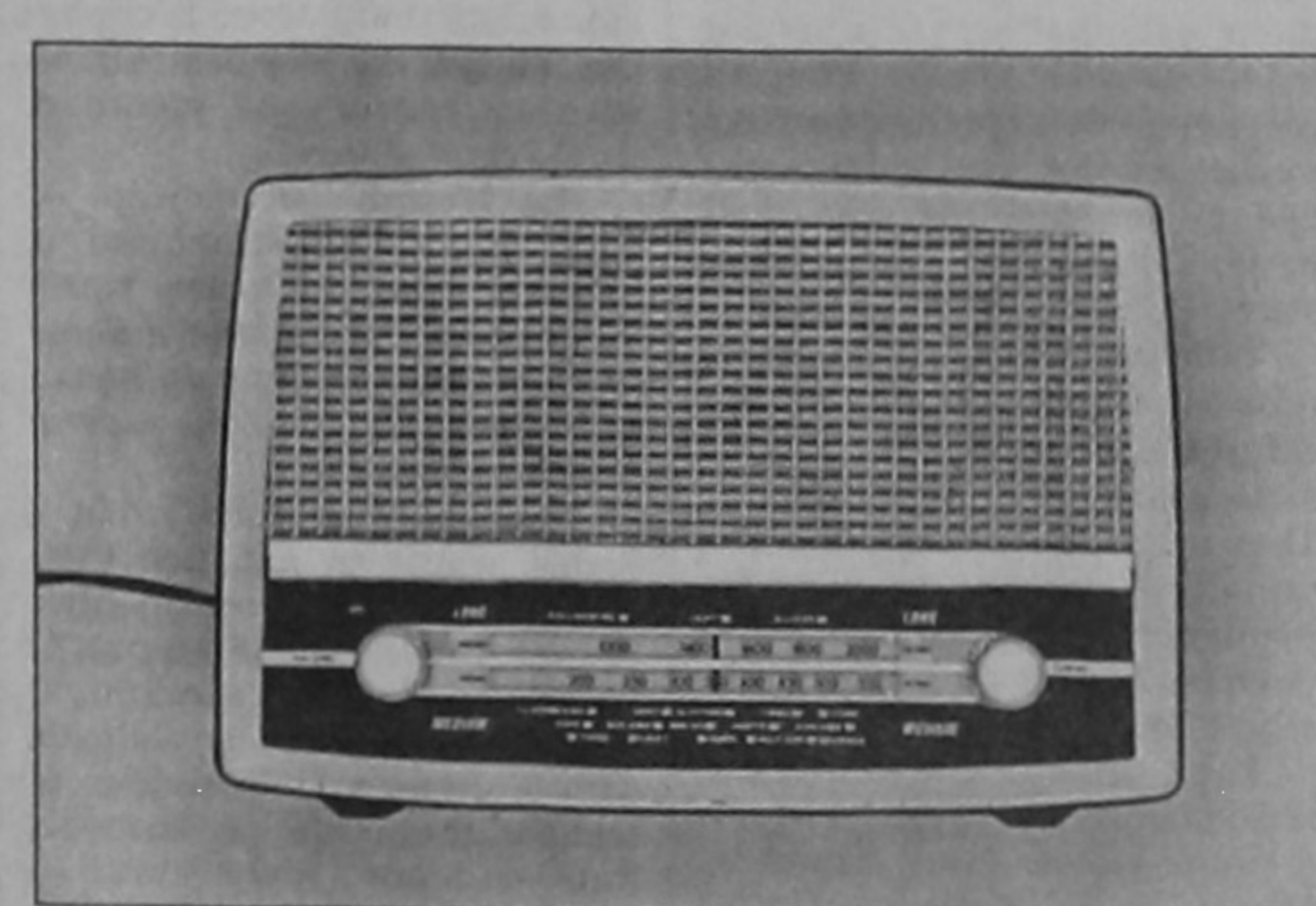
law orders. The Pakistan army's attempt at silencing the voice of the Bengalis had begun. Bengalis, however, fought back. The war of Bangladesh's Liberation had begun.

On the evening of that same day a small radio station started broadcasting defiantly in the face of the Pakistan military's bloody onslaught on the Bengalis. The clandestine radio station, located in Kalurghat, north of the city of Chittagong, declared to the world: "The Sheikh has declared the 75 million people of East Pakistan as citizens of the sovereign independent Bangla Desh." The station called itself Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro.

For the next four days the radio

station engaged in a propaganda battle with the Pakistan army. While the Pakistan army claimed all was calm in Bangladesh, the clandestine radio station declared liberation forces were marching on the capital and Pakistani soldiers were surrendering. While the Pakistan army claimed it had crushed the will of the Bengalis, the clandestine radio station declared that the Pakistani military governor General Tikka Khan had been assassinated. While the Pakistan army claimed the Bengalis had been defeated, the clandestine radio station claimed to have formed a provisional government of Bangladesh.

In those early days of the geno-



cide Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro declared to the world that Bengalis would not give up, that Bengalis would fight, and that the sacrifice

would not go in vain. And the world listened. The small radio station in Kalurghat in those five crucial days in March refused to be

silenced. It rallied the morale of the Bengalis and it frustrated the Pakistani army.

The men and women of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro and the men of the East Bengal Regiment who defended the station from attack, and announced to the world that an organised Bengali resistance was fighting back, ensured that Pakistani tanks and airplanes could not silence the voice of the 75 million people of Bangladesh.

(For the full version of this article, please read this month's Forum, available with The Daily Star on Monday, March 3.)

Mashuqur Rahman is a freelance writer. Mahbubur Rahman Jalal is an archivist of Bangladesh Liberation War documents.

For the full text of the excerpted articles, and more,



please read this month's Forum, available free with your copy of The Daily Star on Monday, March 3.