feet swollen with the effort. He was arrested soon but not before he had told Moazzem that the Indians probably didn't take them seriously.

Many years later on the night of March 25, 1971, as Dhaka was already burning, Moazzem Chowdhury, one of the last to see him before his arrest, asked Mujib to flee to India and lead the movement from there. He could easily arrange this, he was still in touch with the Indian intelligence, he said. Mujib looked at the burning skyline and said: "If they don't find me here, they will burn every home looking for me. And don't you remember what happened the last time. I don't trust them fully."

The unknown militant

1962 was an iconic year in Bangladesh's history. That year, many events occurred as the idea of an independent country began to leak into the mainstream political soul. It was the period when the nationalist and the leftist politicians came closest to discussing movements for a new state.

The martial law in 1958 was the last knell of the bell. In Jamalpur that year, a group of young people led by one Ali Asad formed a group to establish an independent country. This clandestine group, factually speaking, was the first group formed on Bangladesh/East Pakistan soil for this purpose.

This effort grew in that area, attracting young men from both Awami League and the National Awami Party (or erstwhile AL cadres). By several accounts, more than 30 people were members, including the late classical music singer Ustad Fazlul Haque, politician Abdur Rahman Siddiky, and others.

This group decided that they must seek the support of the major leaders including Bhashani and Mujib. They met Abul Mansur Ahmed, who promised to deliver their message to Mujib, and they also met other leaders like Tofazzal Hossain (Manik Mia), editor of Ittefaq.

They were not, however, a part of the Awami League, and didn't see the party embrace their mission. They were told to contact the authorities in India, and so they trekked there, without resources or contact.

Their effort to meet Indian leaders failed, but they met some Indian Communist Party members who came from their area. These sympathetic *deshi bhais* raised money, and with that they printed posters and leaflets. They made their way home and put them up in prominent places or threw them in darkened cinema halls to startled audiences. Within months, however, most were caught.

This attempt was not well known and has been lost from public memory. When I first discovered details of this attempt on the pages of a pile of derelict secret files, I was thrilled, because in 1978 I had never heard of it before.

However, right in our office -- the 1971 Dolilpotro Project -- Imamur Rashid, also from Jamalpur, was close to them. Oli Ahad's book also refers to them in jail. Later, I came to know them, and interviewed those still around. Most were dead, and the whereabouts of the mysterious leader of this group, Ali Asad, has never been known. The last anyone knows is that he was waiting to take a flight from Calcutta to Delhi. How many know of this militant nationalist?

Much of what we know about this group comes from Pakistan's Home Ministry files and the observations therein. The investigating officer's sense of shock was high. How could East Pakistanis tolerate these sorts of posters? Why was there no protest even when they were plastered on the walls of the Secretariat? Had these posters and leaflets been distributed in West Pakistan, people would have protested loudly, but not here: why?

It was a question that they were not astute enough to answer, because the disease of political blindness had set in deep. The very policies that were pushing or had pushed the East Pakistanis away didn't seem unfair to those executing them.

Mujib and the communists

In 1962, Sheikh Mujib was sitting down with Khoka Roy of the Communist Party of Bangladesh -- the old-fashioned pro-Soviet variety -- and discussing ways to set up an independent movement. It was a big shock to the commie boys, because, as Khoka Roy writes, Mujib was known as Suhrawardy's man. The words of Mujib that "we can't stay with Punjabi big business anymore" were a revelation to them. Mujib was being ultra-radical, they thought, and they weren't sure what Moscow would say. They counseled caution, democratic struggle, and promised to support him in his fight, which they did all the way to one-party rule in 1975. However, in essence, they turned Mujib down. Whether it was too much for them or it wasn't their style is not known.

It was soon after that meeting that Mujib traveled with Moazzem Chowdhury on the fateful trip to Sylhet.

But in 1962, most of the parties seemed to be contemplating independence of one sort or another, including Kazi Zafar and his young leftie friends, and they were in touch with Mujib, too. So were a gaggle of other groups, and to all he was the man who symbolised the spirit of the independence struggle. Pakistani documents of the time mention that there were two dangerous men in the country: Moulana Bhashani and Sheikh Mujib -- and all seditious souls went to them.