Are nationalists ever democrats?

That Mujib was a great champion of rights, but after 1971 he never considered them important, is another charge -- but being a nationalist leader doesn't come with a pro-democracy clause built in. He fought for the rights of the Bengali people in general, and Bengali Muslims in particular, and he fought by fair means or foul. There are few staunch nationalists who are also imbued with the democratic spirit.

In fact, nationalism is, almost by definition, of insignificant democratic content. Nobody will deny that the various groups fighting all over the world have strong nationalist content, but most are not only chauvinist, some are fascist too. That is the nature of nationalism. What made Mujib significant was also what made him so ruthless.

The Left of the many shades, except the old pro-Soviet guard, has often complained that Sheikh Mujib was violently repressive of the leftists. This argument is the least understood of the lot, because Mujib never showed any love for the Left in his entire political life.

For a period of time, there was a possibility of convenience, such as his overtures to the Communist Party on organising a joint movement for independence, but that fell through. The closest proximity came when BKSAL was formed, and, while this, to the Soviet followers, was a gain, it seems to Mujib that it was a convenient gathering of more supporters, who, given the framework of politics at that time, ensured Indian and Soviet support.

One may cite the constitution passed under Mujib as a sign of his commitment, but both the Fourth Amendment and the Special Power Act would prove how fragile this commitment was. The Indo-Soviet influence was a major issue here and the Indian government certainly didn't hesitate to throw its weight around when it wanted.

This wasn't just during the war period when relations often seriously dipped. India fought its own war, and so did Bangladesh, and there were points of convergence, but it wasn't the same war. As the host country to the Bangladesh war effort, it pushed through many decisions, the acme being the formation of the Mujib Bahini, but it didn't fight the Bangladesh war on behalf of the Bangladeshi people.

In my interview of Mujibnagar officials, many spoke of their determination to take charge of key installations like the Chittagong port, the airport, etc before Indians did as soon as the war was done. This is not hostility, but the spirit of a newly independent people who didn't see this as a joint war, but a war of their own which India had supported.

Indians were not very sensitive to this point, or were more absorbed in their own war. Those old enough to remember December 1971 will recall that a number of Indian officers were announced to

