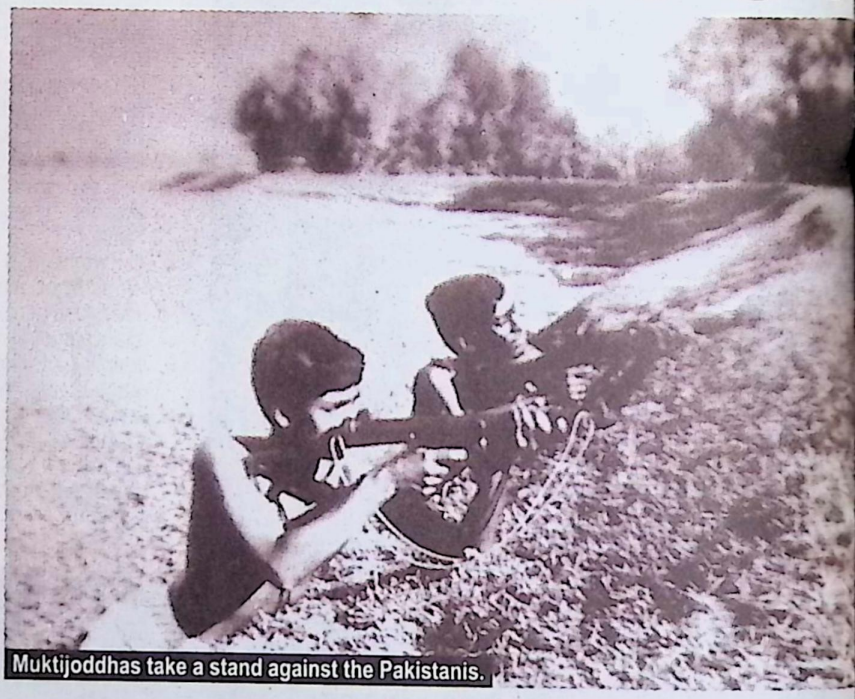
One Off

Yesterday, once more!



ALY ZAKER

The title of this column is borrowed from a very popular song of years ago that we all hummed all the time. It was a rhapsody of personal emotion, of memories, of nostalgia. Yes, nostalgia. The Webster dictionary describes nostalgia as a longing, usually sentimental, to experience some former pleasure again. The word 'sentimental' these days has a connotation that is not very positive to say the least. And what is more, nostalgia is seen as a state of mind that has to do with the ageing process. Well, I believe that age is a state of mind than anything else, so I am not intimidated by it. I have been nostalgic from as long as I can remember. I have been nostalgic about the day before, the day after.



Muktijoddhas take a stand against the Pakistanis.

I remember that when we were children my siblings, four in number, each and I had amongst our personal possessions various objects of daily use. I had a blue towel of my own, a comb, a separate glass made of brass to drink water, a brass plate to eat breakfast on etc. The memory of the blue towel still haunts me. We were once going to Calcutta (now known as Kolkata) by train. My blue towel was almost like my Linus's blanket. I had it around me even when sleeping. So there I was sleeping in the upper berth of the train compartment. My mother woke me up. She was looking for the towel. I was very annoyed and with eyes half closed threw the towel towards her. It must have been a mighty throw, for it flew through the window and was swept away by the relative speed of the wind. I was so shocked by the turn of events that I became fully awake. Though mother was not very disturbed I asked her if I should pull the chain to stop the train and retrieve the towel, which might have travelled miles by then. She told me it was not worth it and that I should forget about it. But till today I have not been able to forget my favourite blue towel. I still feel like rewinding time to the day the towel swished out the window, so that I could pull the chain of the train and go looking for it. I miss my towel. Would you call it nostalgia or could it be described as something else? Call it in whatever name you like, certain memories die hard because they matter to you.

Writing for this issue that'll appear in The Star on the 27th of March, yesterday, March 26th comes back to me much more strongly, in a larger than life dimension. It comes back to me every year and more strongly than the preceding year. As the world around me becomes more averse to plurality, more prone to violence, more restive and, most of all, more indifferent to impunity I go back to the day that inspired me to launch myself to the glorious war that brought us our freedom. 'Yesterday that was' 38 years ago had ended with awe and anguish bringing in its wake a sense of anger and retribution. That evening thirty-eight years ago was no different from the evenings before. In fact it was more or less the same every day and night since February, becoming ever so turbulent since the 21st. After the days' chores, the political rallies and all were over, we used to converge in a room of our friend Benoo, a very young teacher of Statistics and a famous singer, at the ground floor level of what was known as the Science Annexe building of the Dhaka University in those days. We drank tea that Balai, the owner of the canteen in that building used to very kindly serve us long after the usual University hours. We drank tea, discussed the day's political events and played chess. Right across the road, in the Shaheed Minar various cultural groups used to perform musical soirees, plays or ballets every evening since the beginning of March. Each of these programmes talked about Bangladesh's independence. On the night of the 25th, the evening was the same. A