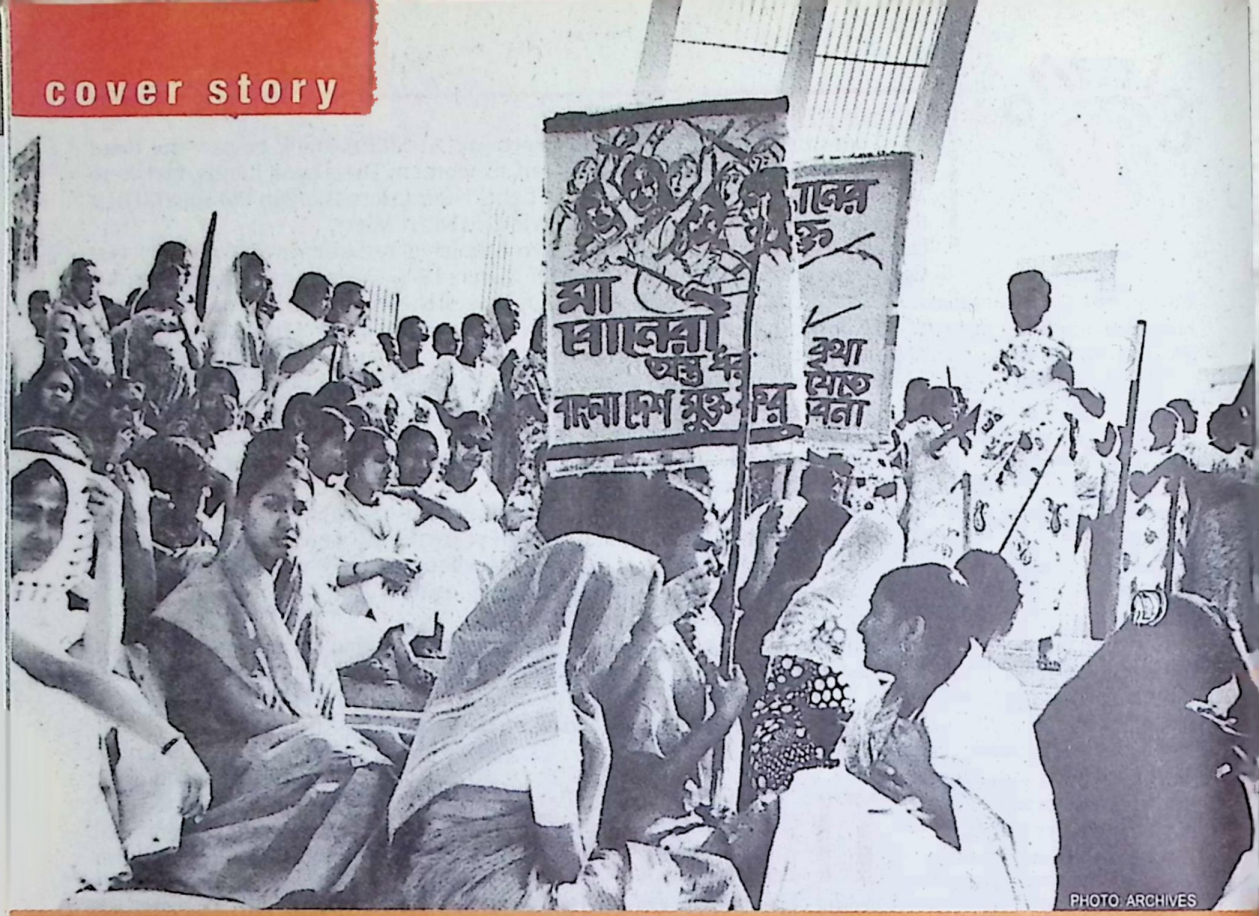


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THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Bangladesh seems to be a nation of strange contradictions. A country where women constitute around half of its workforce and where two women have continuously ruled over its democratic governments also has one of the highest rates of violence against women. Add to that the centuries-old patriarchal society that has created formidable barriers for women to move forward. It is not just physical restrictions - and there are innumerable - that they must contend with - but psychological brainwashing that pulls women back from speaking their minds and demanding what is rightfully their own. Society, family, practiced religious norms - everything seems to constrict women's freedoms, expecting them to be conforming robots with specific, 'useful' functions. Yet against such impossible odds women of this country have shown again and again their superhuman ability to survive and to play crucial roles in every national movement this country has known. It reveals the inherent urge of women to fight against injustice and oppression of their people, no matter what the consequences.

In February 1952 women, most of them schoolgirls, were the first ones to defy the Section 144 curfew and continue with their movement for their mother tongue. On February 29, Momtaz Begum, a headmistress of a girl's school in Narayanganj, organised one of the largest women's demonstrations in the country to protest the shootings of Feb-