ruary 21. She was arrested and taken to jail although the police found it hard to take her away as hundreds of people of her area obstructed them by creating road blocks by cutting trees. She was later labelled 'communist' and jailed for over a year. When she came out of prison she had lost her job and her family - her husband had divorced her and refused to let her see her daughter. She died in her thirties, alone and in hardship, but she had given her countrymen a glimpse of what courage and patriotism could accomplish. She had also shown like many others during this tempestuous period and at other momentous times in history before her, that women had a fire within them, one that is ignited spontaneously and requires no preparation, only the natural instinct to protect, preserve and uphold what is right and true.

Nobody displayed this fiery spirit more than the young woman who earned the appellation of 'Agni Kanya' (daughter of fire) for her blazing speeches against the unjust policies of the state. Matia Chowdhury (now Agricultural Minister), then a university student and member of the Bangladesh Chhatra Union (Bangladesh Students' Union), took part in all the movements leading up to the Liberation War, regularly defying state prohibitions. Even in later years she was always at the forefront of anti-establishment protests, the most significant being the mass upsurge against military dictator Ershad that ironically was the only time that brought archrivals Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina together.

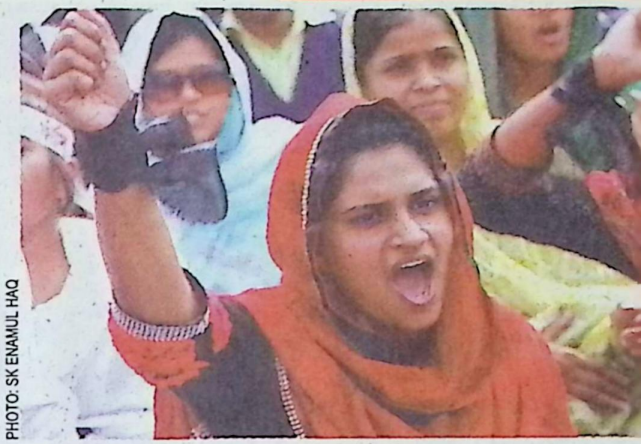


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

The spirit of resistance lives on...



PHOTO: EMANUL HAQUE

Thus it was the unbridled courage of a few women that helped to create the wave of resistance against injustice among other women, a contagious determination that defied societal disapproval and conventional thinking. Prithilata Waddedar became a legend when she joined Surya Sen and headed an operation that blew up a club that had a sign saying 'Dogs and Indians not allowed', later killing her-

Women, along with their fellow countrymen have rekindled the demand for maximum punishment of war criminals.