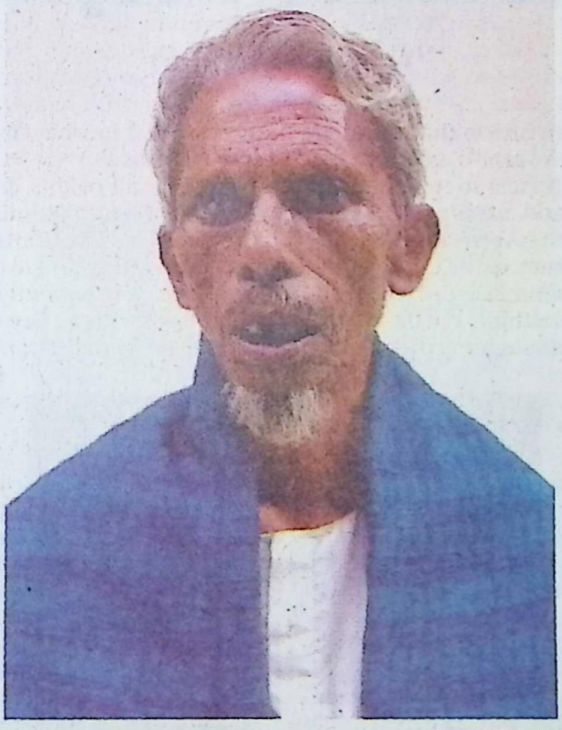
slum where Rebati lived. After shooting the men who were hiding among the bushes, they pushed all the women and children inside the huts and set them on fire. Defying fear, young Rebati broke the shacks and helped the women and children escape but herself got caught by the Pak Army. Dragging her under a tree they tortured her inhumanely but no one came to her rescue as Rebati screamed for help.

Bangabandhu had intended to honour the sacrifice of Rebati and thousands of women like her with the 'Birangana' title, however because of socio-cultural limitations and our own failure as well as the curse of our patriarchal social system, the word has lost its essence, said litterateur Selina Hossain. She added that she has requested many a government to recognise the contribution of women with state honour, but no one has ever listened. "We conveniently forget them when we are in power," she added, speaking as the special guest of The Daily Star's ceremony to honour the unsung heroes of or Liberation War, held July 07, 2013 at the daily's office in Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.



Abdul Mannan PHOTO: STAR FILE

Professor Emeritus Anissuzzaman, the chief guest of the occasion also emphasised that people who are responsible for the deaths of the unsung heroes must be brought to justice. "The Liberation War was in true sense a people's war. Hindus, Muslims, Bengalis, indigenous communities and people from all socio-economic classes participated in the war of freedom," he said. However, we have lost track and are compromising the spirit of the Liberation War, he added.

The programme honoured ten ordinary yet brave men and women, who contributed in different ways for the freedom of their motherland. Their stories have been published in The Daily Star since 2011. Among them only Abdul Mannan of Kharghar, Brahmanbaria was present in the ceremony in person. Mannan had given up his only asset, a small piece of land for burial of villagers massacred by the Pakistani Army on October 9, 1971. "When we returned we saw there wasn't any land to bury the villagers who could not escape the attack. Our graveyard was inundated too in the flood water of River Paglni. I told myself I could have been one of them. What would have I done with the land if I was killed too. I thought the Almighty will take care of me and gave them my land to bury the dead," he said recounting the day when he accepted the fate of a landless farmer.

Family and relatives of the other awardees accepted the crest, sash and Tk.20,000/- on behalf of their heroic parents and siblings. Ismat Ara, daughter of Karuna Begum, a female freedom fighter who fought in the Mukti Bahini camp of Nolchira., Gouranadi, in the disguise of a man and lost a leg in the war, said, "Mother never received any state honour when she was alive. I definitely feel very proud today."

Besides, Rebati the other the martyrs who were honoured Martyr Shahed Ali, the first person who guerilla attack against Pak Army's 21 cavalry in 23rd March 1971, Martyr Sofir Uddin Munshi, killed for helping the freedom fighters in Mymensingh, Martyr Mahtab Begg, killed for trying to rescue besieged Bengalis in Saidpur, North Bengal, on March 24, 1971, Martyr Hasan Ali, the account of whose heroic death was mentioned in Pakistani Major Siddique Salik's book, 'Witness to Surrender', Martyr Salahuddin, who was forced into the cage of hungry tigers by Pakistani major, Martyr Aminul Haque, a forced-labourer of Saidpur Aiport constructed in 1971, Martyr Anbarlal, a cleaner of Mirin Jilla, Old Dhaka, killed on November 21, 1971 for helping freedom fighters.

Special honour was conferred upon Lt Col Zahir, Bir Pratik, for collecting and compiling these stories that have remained in the shadows of history. Recognising his work Selina Hossain said, "For people like Zahir, we shall not forget history." Publisher and editor of The Daily Star, Mahfuz Anam, who chaired the programme said, "The Daily Star will not only cherish and uphold the spirit of the Liberation War but also continue to spread it."