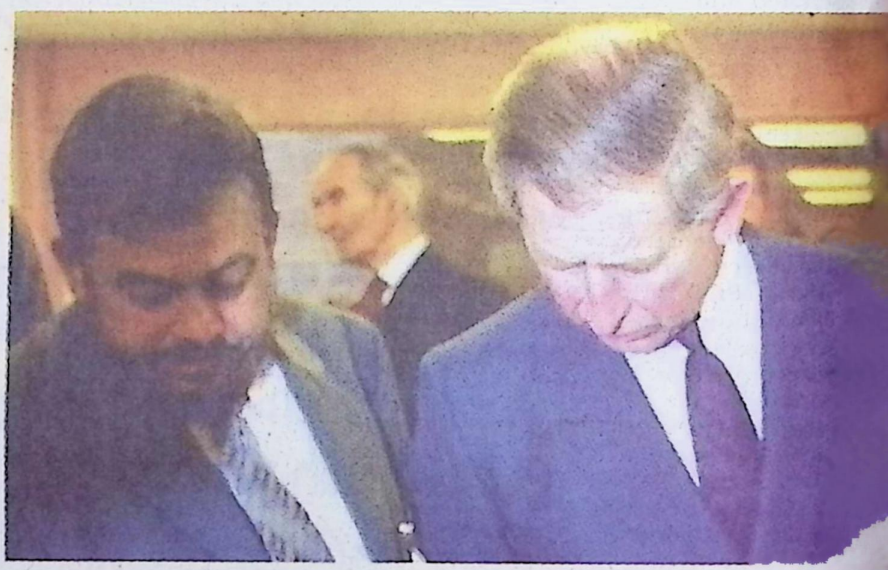
Encounters of the Dark Kind

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

Let us talk about Razakars today. And we need to do that because of all the nonsense Chowdhury Mueen Uddin has lately been spewing about a country he betrayed back in 1971. The man, accused of having led some leading Bengali intellectuals to their death only days before the collapse of Pakistan in Bangladesh, now lives in Britain, safe in the knowledge that he might never be caught for his crimes, might never have to face trial in Bangladesh. Yes, of course, we in this country are doing all we can to have him brought in from his safe haven in London and grill him over his criminality in 1971. If we succeed in doing that, nothing could give us a greater degree of pleasure.



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You might find it rather surprising to hear it from me, but the fact is that at one point in the late 1990s, early 1997 to be specific (and John Major was yet British prime minister), Mueen Uddin bumped into me or I ran into him. And that was at a gathering organised at London's Regent Park mosque. Diplomats from a number of Muslim countries were there. Since the Bangladesh High Commissioner and I had both been invited to the programme by the mosque committee, it was decided that as minister press at our mission I would represent Bangladesh.

And so it is that I walk into the mosque. I notice that a man who looks every inch a Bengali approach me with a smile. He comes toward me with an outstretched right hand and tells me, in Bengali, that it is good to meet the new Bangladesh diplomat — that is me. A glance at the lapel of his coat gives me the certainty of where I have seen him or his image earlier. The name on the lapel gives him away. It is 'Chowdhury Mueen Uddin'. By then he is already shaking hands with me. I tell him, as politely as I can, that I know him. He is curious to know how. "I remember seeing your picture in our newspapers after 16 December 1971", I tell him. He quickly moves away. For the rest of the evening, as I exchange pleasantries with other diplomats and with the British Home Secretary (who was chief guest on the occasion), there is no sign of Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin.

Move on to mid-1999. At my High Commission office at Queen's Gate, a packet of journals comes to me from the Muslim Council of Britain. As I flip through the pages of the journal, I notice