

A waterfall with pristine beauty

Porikundo lies tucked away behind Moulvibazar hills

MINTU DESHWARA, back from Porikundo

Riding on the back of rumbling thunder, the moist wind carries the monsoon notes down the green hills of Moulvibazar. As their whispers reach the earth, a spa for fairies -- hidden from human eyes -- comes to life at Porikundo waterfall.

"As a child, I saw fairies, in my dreams, bathing in Porikundo," says 90-year-old Sila Lyngdohkiri, a resident of Madhabkundo punjee, a Khasi village in Barlekha upazila of Moulvibazar.

The village of indigenous people has many more stories about the secluded waterfall. The fall gets its name from the words "Pori" meaning fairy and "Kundo" meaningspring.

If visitors walk a kilometre down from the tourist attraction of Madhobkundo waterfall, they will find this mystical piece of heaven on earth.

"Madhabkundo waterfall is open for all but not Porikundo," says the oldest woman of the village, 95-year-old Dabi Khain in Khasi language.

"It is only for fairies," she said as if revealing an age-old secret.

"A large number of fairies come and bathe in the falls. It is their area."

Local do not visit the area often to avoid "disturbing fairies" as advised by elders for generations.

Dabi claims that the fairies come down to earth at the fall only during the rainy season when the fall water becomes pure and virginal, springing out of the earth with renewed splendour during the monsoons.

"During the dry season, it remains dormant," she said.

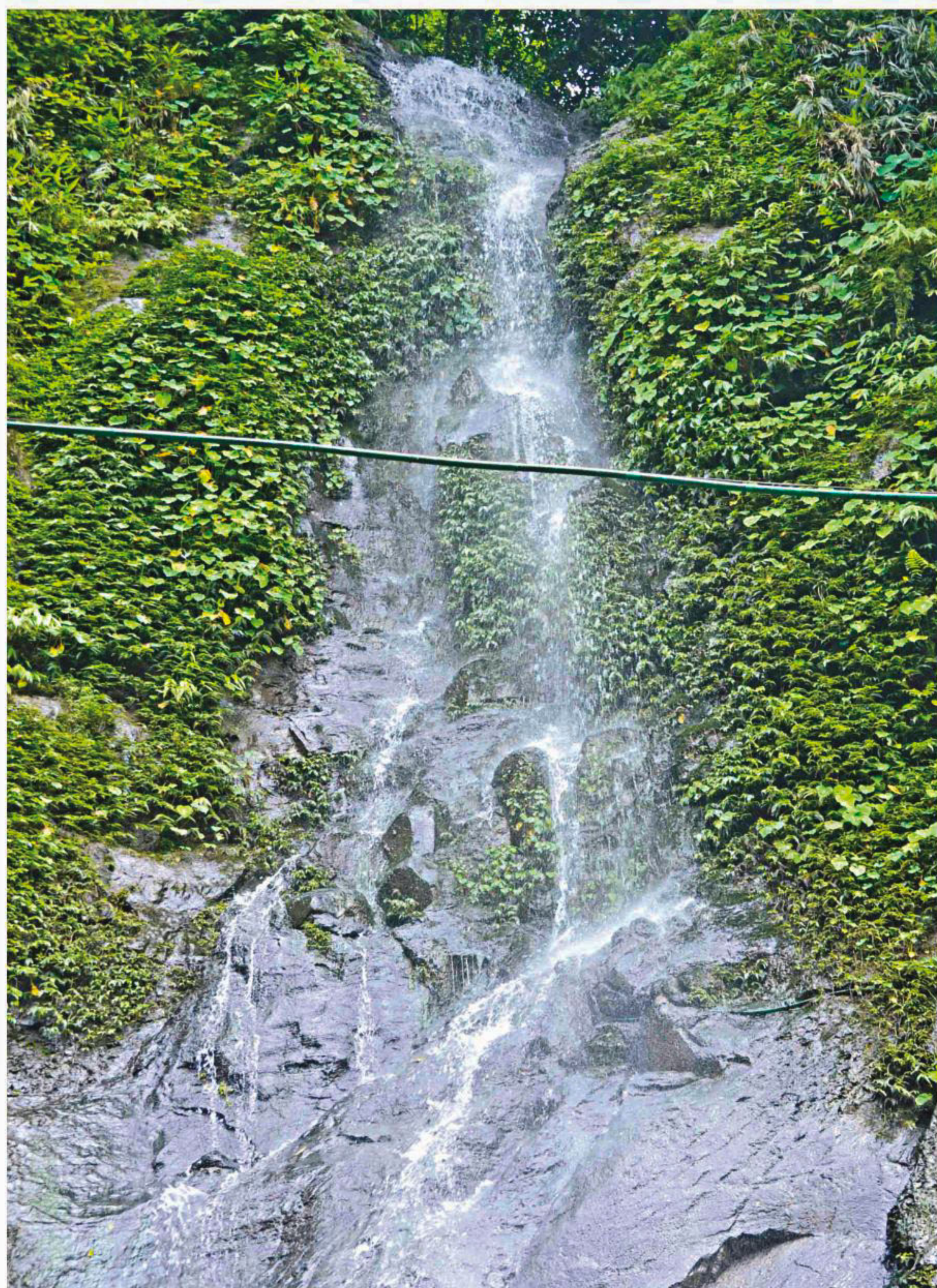
"Our ancestors believed these fairies have powers and so were revered like gods. And so they forbade us from visiting Porikundo," said Wanbor Lyngdohkiri, montri (headman) of Madhabkundo punjee.

According to 55-year-old Saidul Ahmed, security guard of Madhabkundo waterfall, Porikundo is more beautiful.

"Visitors don't go there because they don't really know about it," he said.

Sexagenarian Mihir Ghagra,

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Nestled in the midst of a deep forest in Moulvibazar's Barlekha upazila, this waterfall is known as Porikundo. There are many stories and myths centring the waterfall. *Bottom left*, large stones lay on the path that leads to this lesser known but captivating waterfall. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

18 BNP men held in Ctg

They gathered to celebrate Khaleda's birthday, say police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police detained 18 BNP activists from the port city's Halishahar yesterday afternoon when they gathered there to "celebrate the birthday of party chief Khaleda Zia".

Pranab Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Halishahar Police Station, said they conducted a drive in Barunighata Golachipapara area of Halishahar around 5:00pm and detained the BNP men.

The detainees were being interrogated.

"Local BNP activist King Ali alias Mamun, 35, called fellow party men in his office," the OC added.

He claimed police seized a banner and a cake from the office.

Six killed

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identity of a female victim is still unknown, according to police.

The collision occurred at around 6:00am when the auto rickshaw, attempting to pass another auto rickshaw, ran into a sand-laden truck at high speed at Kashinathpur intersection.

Kamal Hossain, chairman of Ahmedpur union parishad, said, "The three-wheeler, with five passengers on board, was headed for Kashinathpur bus stand from Ahmedpur. It smashed with a Pabna-bound speeding truck, loaded with sand, near the saw mill before reaching the Kashinathpur bus stand."

Five of the victims including the driver of the auto rickshaw died on the spot while another victim, Panna Khatun, died after she was taken to Bera Upazila Health Complex, Tazul Huda, officer-in-charge (OC) of Aminpur Police Station, said.

Police and fire fighters rushed to the spot and rescued the victims, Tajul said, adding that the driver of the truck had fled the scene after abandoning the truck.

Upon request of the family members, the bodies of the victims have been handed over to their relatives without autopsy, he said.

Bangabandhu: a forbidden name for 16yrs

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Full texts of the reports mentioned nothing to indicate why AL planned and observed the programme to mark "its mourning day" and for whom "a special prayer" was offered.

There is no mention that AL observed the second death anniversary of Bangabandhu that day who, along with most of his family members, was brutally murdered in the early morning of August 15, 1975.

The reports published in Ittefaq are examples of how Bangabandhu became a forbidden name in the aftermath of August 15, 1975.

Dainik Bangla, daily Sangbad and daily Azad did not even publish any news of AL programmes, let alone publish their own reports of Bangabandhu's second anniversary of death.

Daily Sangbad however published a news item on the statement of Bangladesh Jatiya League leader Aatur Rahman Khan. The headline on the front page on August 15, 1977 was "Shok dibos noy, nazat dibos"[Not a day of mourning, but salvation day].

Senior journalists say newspapers were not confident of their journalistic duty to publish news on his death anniversary, not to mention any write ups on Bangabandhu over the years.

The situation did not change much during the second martial law regime led by Gen Ershad.

"There was unofficial pressure by the then martial law regime," Syed Abul Maksud, a senior journalist, worked for the state run news agency BSS in those years, remembers.

"It pressured the press not to publish any news item on the death anniversary of Bangabandhu," he told The Daily Star.

He said officials of the government's Press Information Department also discouraged the media from running any news on his death anniversary.

"If journalists were bold enough and united, then news on Bangabandhu's death anniversary could have been published properly. But many senior journalists, editors and leaders of journalists' unions were engaged in sycophancy of the then military regimes to bag foreign tours and lands and many other benefits," he added.

In his view, the journalist community had utterly failed in their professional duties.

Editor of The Financial Express, Moazzem Hossain said fear factors—real and perceived—held back the journalists during the military regimes.

"Journalists could not write objectively about Bangabandhu for this fear factors," said Moazzem, who worked for the Bangladesh Observer and the New Nation during the regimes of Zia and Ershad.

PROPAGANDA RAN HIGH

Immediately after the gruesome murder of Bangabandhu, the killers asserted their control over the newspapers and the state run radio and television.

Ironically, it became easier for the regimes to intimidate and abuse the press because of Bangabandhu government's decision to allow only four newspapers to exist, taken a few months before August 15, 1975.

Propaganda became the main content of the four dailies the next day, controlled by the killers and their men in the new government.

Ittefaq, Dainik Bangla, Bangladesh Observer and The Bangladesh Times lauded the bloody changeover in reports published on August 16, 1975.

Dainik Bangla and The Bangladesh Times, both government-run newspapers, had identical first paragraphs in their lead reports: "The armed forces took over power in the greater national interest under the leadership of President Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed..."

Daily Ittefaq and The Bangladesh Observer, the other state run dailies, ran the same report on the August 15 gruesome murders and changeover of power.

Like Dainik Bangla, Ittefaq also published a special editorial on the front page, terming the changeover a "historic new beginning."

LITTLE CHANGE

Grabbing state power, Khandaker Mushtaque cancelled the Baksal government regulation on newspapers, allowing some newspapers including Sangbad and Azad to resume publication alongside Dainik Bangla, The Bangladesh Times, The Bangladesh Observer, and Ittefaq.

Gen Ziaur Rahman, who became chief martial law administrator in November, 1976 and later the president in April 1977, desired to get legitimacy for his illegal rule and to transform himself into a civil leader.

With this in mind, he allowed political parties to resume their activities, though only indoors. No party was allowed to have any function in the open.

This gave AL a chance to observe Bangabandhu's second death anniversary in 1977 with some indoor programmes.

Ittefaq was the first among the major national dailies to publish the news item on AL's programme to mark Bangabandhu's second death anniversary on August 15, 1977.

Next year, in 1978, Sangbad ran a news item on AL's programme under the headline "Awami League er udyog aaj jatiya shok dibos" [Today is the national mourning day organized by AL] in its front page on August 15.

Ittefaq ran a news item based on AL's programme to mark the third death anniversary of Bangabandhu in the column titled Political Activities.

Dainik Bangla, a state run newspa-

per, did not publish any news item on August 15 of 1978. Next day, it published a news item based on a speech of Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury who was leading a faction of AL. Mizan gave the speech at a discussion to mark the death anniversary of Bangabandhu.

SANGBAD MADE A DIFFERENCE

In 1979, Sangbad gave prominent coverage to Bangabandhu. It published a news report from its reporter and a double column photograph in the front page. In the beginning of the report, the daily termed Bangabandhu the founder of Bangladesh and the father of the nation.

In double column in its front page, Sangbad published a separate news item of a seminar organised to mark the national mourning day under the headline "Seminar on national mourning day: determination to resist reactionary force."

The changing political situation might have encouraged Sangbad to take the initiative. Military ruler Gen Zia had already withdrawn martial law and AL had emerged as the main opposition in parliament by contesting the general election held earlier in 1979.

But Dainik Bangla did not publish any news on Bangabandhu's death anniversary in 1979.

It however prominently covered the news of imposition of section 144 at Dhanmondi road-32, banning any gathering at Bangabandhu's residence on the occasion of his death anniversary. AL had announced that they would visit Bangabandhu's residence to pay tribute.

ERSHAD FOLLOWED ZIA'S FOOT STEPS

The changeover of power in March 1982 brought challenges for newspapers again. The anti-Bangabandhu strategy continued during the regime of Gen Ershad who grabbed state power in March 1982 and declared martial law.

Freedom of the press was curtailed again. Self-censorship was also in force among the journalists.

Major newspapers including Ittefaq and Sangbad published reports mainly on the day of the death anniversary of Bangabandhu. They were tactful in doing so. Most of the reports did not mention how he was brutally murdered by some disgruntled army officers. In most of the reports, newspapers did not mention the names of the killers of Bangabandhu. However, they did not suppress news on August 15.

The then Ershad regime's attitude about Bangabandhu was apparent in one of his party's discussions on the day of Bangabandhu's death anniversary in 1987. Deputy Prime Minister MA Matin spoke as a chief guest of Jatiya Party's discussion programme titled "Significance of August 15."

He termed August 15 as the most important day in national life and said the country's independence and sover-

eignty were consolidated on this day. Dainik Bangla, the state run newspaper, published it in a double column front page treatment.

It gave single column coverage of AL's programme observing Bangabandhu's death anniversary under the headline "AL and Baksal observed Sheikh Mujib's death anniversary."

Dainik Bangla published a single column news of Freedom Party, right next to AL's news with the headline "Great salvation day of the nation" on August 16, 1987.

Along with news of Bangabandhu's death anniversary during the Zia and Ershad regimes, the newspapers continued to publish news on programmes organised by different parties in support of the August 15 changeover.

Freedom Party of Bangabandhu's killer Major Faruk, Bangladesh Jatiya League of Aatur Rahman Khan, Islamic Party and National Front among others held discussions on August 15 to express their support for the changeover. In their discussions, they criticised Bangabandhu's government and lambasted AL for observing the day as national mourning day.

In many instances, newspapers published their news with more prominence than the news of AL programmes to observe Bangabandhu's death anniversary. This trend continued more or less until the fall of Ershad in December 1990.

WIND OF CHANGE

From 1991, the situation changed significantly when several new newspapers, including The Daily Star, Ajker Kagoj, Bhorer Kagoj, Prothom Alo and Janakantha, were published. Major newspapers including The Daily Star started publishing extensive reports, write-ups and articles on Bangabandhu.

But the word Bangabandhu was forbidden in the state run media—Dainik Bangla, The Bangladesh Times, Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh.

No video footage of Bangabandhu was broadcast on Bangladesh Television for a long time after August 15, 1975. Bangabandhu returned to BTv only after AL returned to power in June 1996. His historic March 7 address was broadcast immediately after Sheikh Hasina took oath as the prime minister on June 23, 1996.

From 2001, several private television channels started broadcasting. Now a number of web news portals are in operation. Alongside newspapers, they all are making reports, features, articles, and documentaries on the life of Bangabandhu.

All these have been possible with the end of martial law regime and the restoration of democracy in the country.

Homage to Bangabandhu

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daughters of Bangabandhu could not hold back tears.

A smartly turned out contingent drawn from the three armed forces gave state salute while the bugle played the last post. The chiefs of the three services were present there.

Earlier in the morning, President Abdul Hamid and the premier paid tribute to the Father of the Nation at his memorial plaque in the capital's Dhanmondi Road-32.

Placing wreaths there, Hasina and Rehana spent nearly half an hour at Bangabandhu Bhaban that had witnessed one of the world's most brutal political killings in history and has been named Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

In silence they sat at the staircase where the great leader was killed. They spread rose petals there. Hasina also recited verses from the holy Quran.

The two sisters then went to Banani Graveyard where other slain members of their family had been laid to rest. They then flew to Tungipara.

On August 15, 1975, Bangabandhu along with most of his family members were brutally murdered by a military clique. The two sisters survived as they were in West Germany.

The day's programme started with hoisting of the national flag at half-mast and raising of black flags atop public and private buildings, including Bangabandhu Bhaban, to show respect to the martyrs of August 15, 1975 carnage.

As the sun rose, the pavement of Dhanmondi Road-32 was covered by wreaths and bouquets. Thousands of mourners wearing black badges and carrying black flags paid tribute to Bangabandhu.

After Asr prayers, Bangladesh Mohila Awami League arranged a milad and doa mahfil in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, which was attended by Sheikh Hasina.

Other members of her family also joined the prayers.

Laying wreaths at Banani Graveyard, Awami League presidium member and Health Minister Mohammad Nasim called upon all to forge unity to resist anti-state conspiracy.

"We all have to be united to root out militancy and terrorism from the country," he told journalists.

Veteran AL leader and Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said his government was trying to bring back the fugitives killers of Bangabandhu from abroad.

"A leader like Bangabandhu will never be born in Bangladesh in future," party's General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said.

A milad mahfil was also held at Darbar Hall of the Bangabhaban,

which was attended by President Abdul Hamid.

State-run Bangladesh Betar, BTV and private TV channels broadcast special programmes while newspapers brought out special supplements highlighting the life, struggle and achievements of Bangabandhu.

The AL and its associated bodies distributed food among destitute people across the country. Bangabandhu's speeches and patriotic songs were played on loudspeakers. Moreover, black billboards, banners and posters were put up across the country commemorating Bangabandhu.

Marking the day, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University provided free treatment to 5,675 patients. Some 200 specialist physicians gave the free service.

Bangladesh Bar Council at its office organised a discussion and a feeding programme for the poor.

Islamic Foundation at its auditorium at Baitul Mukarram organised a discussion and dua mehfil.

Addressing the programme, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the defeated forces of 1971 were still active and were involved in acts of terrorism and militancy in the name of religion.

"They [defeated forces] want to destabilise the country by unleashing terrorism and militancy. We all have to remain alert to their evil acts," he added.

The ruling AL would hold a discussion marking the day at Krishibid Institution in the city's Farmgate area today. Hasina, the AL president, will preside over the programme.

2 Bangladeshi

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Directorate of Civil Defense in Najran. Parts of the plant and some parked vehicles were damaged.

The two Bangladeshis are Nazibul of Brahmanbaria and Harun of Laxmipur.

Mokammal Hossain, labour councillor at the Bangladesh consulate in Jeddah, said the two worked at the water plant.

According to the SPA report, Houthi militias backed by Iran have been firing missiles and shelling targets in Saudi Arabia's southern border, causing hundreds of casualties since April last year when a Saudi-led coalition threw its support behind the government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi amid an offensive by Houthis and loyalists of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

On August 10, Saudi Arabian forces shot down two missiles launched from Yemeni territory and aimed at Abha and Khamis Mushait.