BANGLADESH
A Legacy of Blood

Anthony Mascarenhas
Preface

This is a true story; in many ways a text book of Third World disenchantment.

On the 16th of December, 1971, the state of Bangladesh (population 70,00,000) was born at the end of a nine-month liberation struggle in which more than a million Bengalis of the erstwhile East Pakistan died at the hands of the Pakistan army. But one of the 20th century’s great man-made disasters is also among the greatest of its human triumphs in terms of a people’s will for self-determination. The united upsurge of the Bengalis to fashion their own destiny against overwhelming odds captured the imagination of the world. It brought with it an unprecedented outpouring of sympathy and aid from the international community. This ranged from active political and practical support to teaching individual acts of generosity and the Concert for Bangladesh by pop stars in New York in 1971 which became the model for Band Aid and raised relief to starving Africa. But the Bengalis gave more than anyone else; their lives in staggering numbers. Those were sacrificed to make a reality of the long-cherished dream of Sonar Bangla or Golden Bengal. This was intended to be a state based on equity, justice, social harmony and cultural efficiency, echoing the sentiments dear to the heart of every Bengali. But it was not to be. The sacrifices were in vain. The dream became a nightmare. Bangladesh got snarled in a legacy of blood.

Few men in history have betrayed the aspirations of their people as did the first leaders of Bangladesh—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Khandaker Mostaques Ahmed and General Ziaur Rahman. When each in turn was called upon to make good, he took the country further along the road to perdition. Once the darling of the independence movement ‘in whose magic name all things are done’, Sheikh Mujib as Prime Minister and President became the most hated man in Bangladesh within three short years of its founding. He and his family were killed for it. And the hatredingers. Ten years after Mujib’s death his daughter, Hassina, told me that she could not get the agreement of relatives and neighbours in their home village of Tungipara to erect a suitable monument over Mujib’s grave. ‘People react differently when you are not in power,’ Hassina said in what could be an epitaph for both Mujib and General Zia. Mostaques, who succeeded Mujib, has become a byword for treachery. General Zia, the next man, was once idolised by the army. But then he showed his true colours and became the target of 20 mutinies and coup attempts in five years. The 21st killed him. As public awareness of the general’s real role increased, Zia’s memory too has become an embarrassment to his friends.

This book is the unvarnished story of their times, essentially the sad history of the first 10 years of Bangladesh. It is based on my close personal knowledge of the main protagonists; on more than 120 separate interviews with the men and women involved in the dramatic events; and on official archives and documents which I had the privilege to inspect personally. The dialogue, wherever used, is a faithful reproduction of the words which my informants said they actually used during the events in which they were involved. Thus majors Farook and Rashid tell the authentic story of the Why and the How of the killing of Sheikh Mujib; and the mystery is revealed of the slaughter of hapless Tajuddin and his companions in Dhaka jail by the men who planned and executed it. General Zia is exposed by his friends and his critics. His assassins tell how they killed him. And throughout the narrative of the wasted blood of
the Bangladesh martyrs cries out the lesson that when hope is extinguished, accountability denied and the people have nothing further to lose, they turn to violence to redress their wrongs. Shakespeare said: ‘The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones.’ So it is with Sheikh Mujibur and General Ziaur Rahman who by their headstrong acts and selfish ambition left Bangladesh a legacy of blood. In these circumstances the focus of this book inevitably is on the wrong doing. I make no apology for it. The people must know the truth about their leaders; and may we all take lesson from their mistakes.

November 1985

Anthony Mascarenhas

List of officers convicted by General Court Martial and hanged for the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman:

1. BA-185  Brigadier Mohsinuddin Ahmed, Commander, 69 Infantry Brigade.
2. BA-200  Col. Nawzesh Uddin, Commander, 305 Infantry Brigade.
3. BA-212  Col. Muhammad Abdur Rashid, Commander, 65 Infantry Brigade.
5. BA-301  Lt. Col. A. Y. M. Mahfuzur Rahman, Personal Secretary to President from C-in-C Secretariat.
8. BSS-839  Major Rashidul Iazzat Bhuiyan, Brigade Major, 65 Infantry Division.
10. BSS-1070  Captain Mohd. Abdus Sattar, 6 East Bengal Regiment.
11. BSS-862  Major Kazi Monimal Huque, 2nd in Charge, 1 East Bengal Regiment.
12. BSS-1526  Captain Jamil Huque, 21 East Bengal Regiment.
13. BSS-1742  Lt. Mohammad Rafiqul Hussain Khan, 6 East Bengal Regiment.

I

Mujib and the Majors

Nobody understands what I do for my country.

—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

I'm going to do it on the 15th.
I'm going to knock off Mujib.

—Major Farook Rahman

Not one of the hundred or so guests at the Dhaka Golf Club on the evening of 12 August, 1975, is ever likely to forget the third wedding anniversary party given by the Acting Commandant of the Bengal Lancers, Major Farook Rahman, and his lovely young wife Farida.

Farook and Farida were a popular young couple, well-connected to the enduring upper crust of Bengali society, the polished old silver that gives the country its university chancellors, men of the Bar and senior civil servants. So their party was something of a social event. Even the heavens seemed to have taken note of it. Sunshine and a clear sky made a welcome break in the monsoons which had been soaking the city for weeks.

The party was a typical military bash since Farook was second generation army. Dozens of coloured lights strung between the acacias made a colourful canopy for the guests with their glasses of sherbet gathered in amiable groups on the lawn. The music came from the Army Headquarters band which set the mood with hits from the latest Bengali films. Inside the club house the buffet was a generous spread of lamb biryani, kebabs, an assortment of curries and more than a dozen bowls of fruit salad. There was enough to feed an army— and the army was everywhere.

The Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier Khalid Musharrat, who was Farook’s ‘Mamu’ (maternal uncle) was there. So too was Brigadier Mashoourd Huq, Military Secretary to President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Farook’s men, who had chipped in for an anniversary present, brought a handsome bedroom carpet woven from jute fibres. Friends and relatives had come with table lamps, vases and boxes gift-wrapped in the yellow, green and red kite paper favoured by the shopkeepers of New Market. But Brigadier Huq, who came later, upset them all. He brought a magnificent bouquet of monsoon flowers made up by the head mali of Gonobanan, Sheikh Mujib’s official residence. And he made a big thing of presenting it to Farida.

Three days later, with the benefit of hindsight, all those present would squeeze their minds searching every detail of the party for some clue that might have betrayed the momentous events which were to follow. And Brigadier Huq would silently thank his stars for his gallantry. Farida’s bouquet may have saved his life.

But on that anniversary night Farook gave not a hint of the dark secret he carried. He recalled that he was in an unusually expansive mood. ‘I told my
automatic slide projector for 3500 Takkas and blew it all on the party. For him it had an awesome finality. What he had set his mind on doing would either put him before a firing squad or indelibly carve his name in the history of Bangladesh.

'I decided to enjoy myself. That party could have been my last.'

When the guests had left, a small family group gathered on the lawn for a snack and coffee. The hosts had been too busy to eat. With the couple were Farooq's mother and father, Farida's mother who had come from Chittagong, and Farida's elder sister Zubeida, nicknamed 'Tinku' with her husband Major Khandaker Abdul Rashid who commanded the 2 Field Artillery based in Dhaka.

Farooq took his brother-in-law aside. 'I'm going to do it on the 15th,' he told Rashid. 'I'm going to knock off Mujib on Friday morning.'

Rashid was startled. He looked round nervously to see if anyone had overheard Farooq's bombshell. Suddenly the months of secret plotting had reached a conclusion. But Rashid was not ready. After a long moment of silence he hissed: 'Are you mad? It's too short notice. We don't have officers. We don't have equipment. How can we do it?'

Farooq stared at Rashid, a glint of steel shining through the tinted glasses he wore. 'It's my decision,' he told the other major. 'I have the tactical plan ready. I'm going ahead even if I have to do it alone. You can keep away if you want. But remember, if I fail they will surely hang you also.'

Another long silence from Rashid. He appeared to be very digesting Farooq's words. When their harsh meaning finally seeped through, the lanky artillery officer straightened out. 'All right,' he told Farooq. 'If it's got to be done let's do it. But we must talk. I need to bring in some more officers.'

In another part of the city Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was relaxing with a small family group in his modest bungalow on Road No. 32, Dharmasana, the landmark which was then the centre of the world of the Bangladeshis. The clan had gathered two days earlier for the wedding of Mujib's niece, the daughter of his younger sister, and many of them had stayed on to pay their respects and to get the great man's blessings. Once the obeisances were made Begum Mujib gently ushered them out till her tired husband was left with a selected few. One of those present was Abdul Rab Serniabat, Mujib's brother-in-law, and husband of his favourite sister. He was a minister with a string of portfolios—Food Control, Water Development, Power, Forests, Fisheries, and Livestock. Another was Serniabat's son, Abu Hasnat, who three days later would have a miraculous escape when disaster obliterated the rest of the family.

It was not unusual that the conversation that night should have as much to do with official matters as those concerning the family. Mujib's style made the two inseparable. In his world of suspicion and intrigue reliance was understandably placed on those nearest and dearest to him. And when he became absorbed with anything concerning his beloved Bangladesh, the family was inevitably drawn in. Tonight it was flood control.

Abu Hasnat recalled: 'Uncle was worried about the possibility of floods in the autumn months which could severely damage the rice crop. He told my father he should quickly press into service the dredger he was arranging to buy from India.' Mujib had a farmer's gift for anecdotes. Soon, in the manner of a village elder, he was framing the problem of the moment against a background of a personal experience deeply rooted in the soil of the delta country. The room filled with the aroma from his pipe. 'When I was a boy,' he told his listeners, 'I used to play football on the banks of the river with the Britishers from the dredger company. Then the war came and the dredgers were taken away to make barges for the Burma campaign. They never came back. Now there is no river where I used to play, only silt; and we have great floods every year.'

As he rambled on Mujib warmed to the idea of what he was going to do to solve the problem. 'I have no money for flood control, but I am getting my dredger,' he told the family. 'You will see how I comb the rivers. My BKSAL will do it.'

Then his mood changed, enthusiasm deflating like a man suddenly overcome by futility. Hasnat remembers the last words he would hear his uncle speak: 'Nobody understands what I do for my country.'

That remark is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's epitaph.

He was then nearing the end of a life-long love affair with the Bengalis. It was a tempestuous love-hate relationship which only intensely emotional and excitable people are capable of. They idolised him, calling him Bangabandhu, the 'Bengalis' friend', and they invested him with an unsustainable magic. And Mujib, the man and the idol, would relate to his people with a matching intensity—to their hopes, their joys, anguish and intrigues, to dailyplaced sycophancy and the demanding greed. 'My strength,' he used to say, 'is that I love my people. My weakness is that I love them too much.'

Since the birth of Bangladesh three and a half years earlier, Mujib had ruled them like a village headman, the guru who had suddenly—and a little awkwardly—been called upon to make good. He worked with unfailing zeal even if it was misplaced; and he had a secretariat full of good intentions. But then he also confused platitude with policies; he would grasp at simplistic solutions such as the solitary dredger on which he pinned such high hope; and he would intrigue. Inevitably the magic faded and the adulation turned sour.

Despite all these shortcomings even the cynics sipping pink gin in the Saqui bar of Hotel Dhaka Intercontinental grudgingly conceded that Mujib would somehow muddle through. To them, and to the others in Bangladesh, it was inconceivable that he would not. But on that August night the impossible was happening. The tumbrals had begun to roll. The majors were coming.

* BKSAL pronounced Bokshai, was the acronym for the Bangladesh Krishak Samiti Awami League, a one-party system of government announced by Mujib on 26 March 1971.
A False Start

If he had asked us to eat grass or to dig the earth with our bare hands we would have done it for him. But look how he behaved!

—Major Farook Rahman

A hotel room in central London, albeit a plush suite in Claridges, is an unlikely setting for the installation of the first president of the world’s newest and eight most populous state. Nevertheless on this grey winter’s morning Raziai Karim, the acting head of the London Mission, was quietly informing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the new role that destiny had designed for him. It was a little after 9 am on 8 January, 1972, a Saturday, exactly 23 days after the formal birth of Bangladesh was achieved by the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani troops to the Indian army in Dhaka. President Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto, who only a few days earlier had replaced General Yahya Khan as the new Pakistani head of state, had unexpectedly put Mujib and his former constitutional adviser, Dr Kamal Hussian, on a PIA Boeing for a secret flight to London. Why London? No one now remains to tell the full truth about this incident. But when the plane touched down at Heathrow airport at 6.30 that morning it brought to a happy ending the months of agonising uncertainty about Mujib’s fate.

Although he looked travel worn, Mujib felt gloriously alive as he waited for the jubilant crowds to descend upon him. He ambled compulsively from room to room, the potential Karim trailing behind. He admired the flowers. Now and then he flattened onto a deep cushioned sofa as though testing its comfort. But what attracted most were the big glass windows. He peered through them at the traffic on the road outside like a fascinated child. Mujib was savoring his first full day of freedom after nine months of solitary confinement within the shadow of the gallows in a Pakistani prison.

I had been tipped off about Mujib’s arrival by Nicholas Carroll, deputy foreign editor of The Sunday Times, who had heard it as a BBC news flash. Mujib was an old friend and, professional interest apart, I was delighted to meet him again after the trauma each of us had suffered in the preceding year in the struggle for Bangladesh. We had first met in 1956 in the Karachi residence of his political mentor, Husseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who later became prime minister of Pakistan. The friendship developed in the summer of 1958 when for almost a month we shared hotel rooms in Washington, Flagstaff (Arizona), San Francisco and Los Angeles during a tour at the invitation of the American government. I still have a photograph of us taken in Paramount Studios, Hollywood, with our host the great movie mogul Cecil B. De Mille, Mickey Rooney and Ava Gardner.

In happier time. Mujib was then very much a junior politician without the inhibitions of having to maintain a political image. It was alleged that he once was a million miles from home and let his hair down. In later years I used to tease Mujib that I knew him better than his wife. And once when things got rough

in Bangladesh in 1973, I told my exasperated friend, ‘Why don’t you give it all up. You can make a better living at cards.’ Indeed he could. If I could locate where three Indonesian journalists would confirm this.

We were on the night train from the Grand Canyon to Los Angeles and after dinner got together with the Indonesians for a game of Flush, the three-card poker popular in the East. The opening rounds were even. Then we began to lose steadily. Soon it became obvious from the way the cards were running that we were being sharked. I suggested to Mujib that we stop and cut our losses. Mujib silenced me. He asked the Pullman attendant for a new pack, shuffled the cards and began to deal. Abruptly the ‘luck’ changed. Try as they might all through the long night the Indonesians were never able to make it again. When we pulled into Los Angeles next morning Mujib and I were richer by $386, a wrist watch, a Parker 51 with a gold cap, and a thin gold ring in the shape of a snake.

I asked Mujib how he did it. His answer is seared in my memory. ‘When you play with gentlemen, you play like a gentleman. But when you play with bastards, maybe you play like a bigger bastard. Otherwise you will lose.’ Then he added with a laugh, ‘Don’t forget I have had good teachers.’ It was a startling glimpse of this earthy, gut politician and the intrigue and the violence to which he was bred. Later, when his star soared and he began to make headlines, I would recall these words and have no difficulty predicting the response he would make to the crisis of the moment.

Now we were together again, friends/professionals, in London, with Mujib about to start the most momentous game of his life. We talked, and I sat and listened while he talked to the others. And when I finally left to write my story it was with the unsettling impression that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will galvanize Bangladesh. President and Bangladesh’s man on a white charger, at the moment of taking up his stewardship had only the foggiest notion of what it was all about.

What’s more, he was secretly nursing a tentative deal with Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto which would have maintained a ‘link’ between Pakistan and its breakaway province, Bangladesh.

I got a glimpse of this unsavoury deal, which was totally at variance with the Bangladesh mood, when Mujib confided to me: ‘I have a big scoop for you. We are going to keep some link with Pakistan but I can’t say anything more till I have talked it over with the others. And for God’s sake don’t you write anything till I tell you.’

Apparently Bhutto, during the course of some lengthy private conversations with Mujib in a government rest house on the outskirts of Rawalpindi just before he sent him out to London, had talked him into an understanding for a ‘link’ with Pakistan. Thus the astute Bhutto hoped to inveigle Mujib into a concession that would have had the effect of turning the clock back and negating the Bangladesh freedom struggle. What exactly the formula was, Mujib did not tell me. But my own instant reaction to the disclosure was one of horror. ‘Are you mad?’ I told him. ‘Don’t you know what’s happened in Bangladesh? After the people have gone through they will lynch you on the streets of Dhaka, Bangabandhu or no Bangabandhu, if you so much as utter one word about a link.’

Mujib did not have time to answer me. We were interrupted by the Indian High Commissioner, B. K. Nehru, who wanted a private word with him. Mujib’s re-education had begun.

Mujib’s isolation in prison had been total during the nine months Bangladesh
temporary capital of Bangladesh. By that time also it was painfully clear to Mujib that if he did not get to Dhaka very quickly there was grave danger of the new government falling apart and the risk of civil strife. The war was over.

The inflight, the jostling for power in the Awami League had begun. Bangladesh, a dispatch from Dhaka to the Times, London, painted a gloomy picture of the situation in the city. 'As the euphoria of victory begins wearing thin, the sense of jubilation is rapidly being replaced by a national mood of suspicion and resentment against the outsider... There are also signs that the liberation movement is becoming disillusioned with the Awami League's leadership... Even the map of the country that one held together is the charisma surrounding the one and only man who counts in the country today, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.'

The Awami League government, headed by prime minister Tajuddin Ahmad, ensconced in Dhaka was little more than a government in name. Its legitimacy was not questioned, but parochialism, its right to lead was. During the Bengali upsurge against the Pakistan army's campaign of genocide in East Pakistan in 1971, the Mujibnagar Government, as the government in exile in India was known, served as an umbrella for resistance. But Mujibnagar, true to its name, failed to live up to the expectations of the Bengali people. In the words of the Indian prime minister Mrs Indira Gandhi, said of him, 'You have become a symbol of the voice of the oppressed...'

It was not the first time that imprisonment had made a demi-god of a national hero. But in Mujib's case the embodiment of the legend was a Bengali phenomenon, an exaggerated emotionalism which would become almost unbearable after its application was abruptly reversed the day Mujib was killed. Now, however, the headlines roared 'Mujib is a magic word. Mujib is a miracle man.'

Setting the scene at that time in Dhaka, Martin Woolfscott said in a cable to the Guardian: 'Bengalis are awaiting the return of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in reverential, near religious mood. The legend is about to be made flesh... (Ordinary Bengalis have mentally invested the Sheikh with extraordinary powers). Little credit goes to the Bangladeshi government or to the Indian government for the successful liberation of the country. All belongs to the Sheikh, who controlled events even from a prison cell thousands of miles away.'

Man had been made mountain and now the mountain was being asked to move. Mujib, however, on that winter's day in London was not in a mood for miracles. The strain of 'the long journey to light' had begun to tell. 'I need some rest,' he told me. 'I want to relax in London for a few days. Then I will go back to my people. I will not do anything till I have visited every district and seen every face.' These were Mujib's plans—until the telephone began to ring.

The first call came through at 10.30. It was the Bangladesh Mission in Calcutta. Answering the squawks from the other end of the line, Mujib said: 'Don't worry. I am safe. I am alive and in good health. Please tell them all—I am alive and well—I endorse what has happened. Bangladesh has come to stay. No one on earth can change that fact. That was their only intention. They all began ringing together. Razia Karim picked one up. 'Sir,' he called out, 'Dhaka on the line. The Prime Minister (Tajuddin Ahmad) would like to talk to you.' Another phone rang. 'Sir, you are wanted by Calcutta.' Then more calls from Dhaka and Calcutta, one from Mrs Gandhi in New Delhi and another from Edward Heath, Britain's Prime Minister, and they all rang again. And there they were, on No. 10 Downing Street. By 11 o'clock Suite 112 in Clarendge had become the
Sheikh Moni, Nurul Alam Siddiqui, Tofail and Siraj whose attitude to the government was both militant and recalcitrant. They swore they would obey only Sheikh Mujib's orders. In these circumstances it is understandable that the Awami League ministers and politicians should burn up the telephone line to London demanding Sheikh Mujib Rahman's immediate return to Bangladesh. He had no alternative.

The panoply of a state welcome is an impressive spectacle. The flags, massed bands, the cadence of the slow march of a Sovereign's guard of honour, the 21-gun salute: they are all carefully designed to impress, India, with its time-sapped, overpopulated crowds gives the show a monumental dimension. When New Delhi rolled out the red carpet for Sheikh Mujib Rahman it was with a fervour that those present will always remember. While flying from London to Dhaka, Mujib had made a brief stop-over in New Delhi to thank India for the assistance it had given his people (The people of India are the best friends of my people, I said to him at Palam Airport on the morning of 10 January 1972, were the President, Dr. V. V. Giri, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Chiefs of the three Indian Defence Services whose prowess had underwritten the creation of Bangladesh, the Cabinet ministers and members of the Indian Defence Corps. Even more memorable than this glittering receiving line, I was told by one of those present, was the vibrant intonation of uncounted millions of faceless Indians—who the people who had supported the Bangladesh struggle for independence—who joined the welcoming through All India Radio's broadcast.

The heart of India was in New Delhi that morning. My friend, Narayan Swami, who is normally very cynical, recalled with awe: 'It was as if the radio had not only taken the ceremony to the people but by some strange mystique had also brought them to the spectator stands. You could feel them there!' Mujib moved it all. Until then a flag car was the most he had rated by way of official protocol, and that too very briefly during short spells as a provincial minister in East Pakistan. Now, he was to tell his family: "India itself turned out to do me honour.' The transformation to demi-god was completed a few hours later when Mujib was driven in the Daimler car to his reception at the airport. Thousands of people crowded every vantage point in the airport terminal building. Many hundreds of thousands more linked the roads all the way to the airport. And when Mujib reached Suhrawardy Udyan, the sprawling old race course where he had last spoken to the people at the height of the civil disobedience on 7 July of the previous year, it was as if a human sea had been packed into the three square mile area. Nothing like this had happened ever before in Dhaka. There's been nothing like it since then. The frenzied cheering, the extravagant praise, the public worship and obeisance were beyond the wildest dreams of the greatest dreamer. The day's events would leave a lasting impression on Mujib because, if anything, he was an impressionable man and very vain. In his mind's eye there would henceforth always be cheering crowds and flags. But the trouble was that even before the last echoes of the cheering had faded, Mujib the demi-god, was bought face-to-face with an overwhelming reality. 'My heart sang to be home again and among my people' he told me at our first meeting in Dhaka after London. 'But then I was brought face-to-face with the greatest man-made disaster in history. I could never imagine the magnitude of the catastrophe. They have killed more than three million of my people. They have raped our mothers and our sisters and have butchered our
children. More than 30 per cent of all houses have been destroyed. Bangladesh has been flattened. There is danger of famine. We need food. My friend spelled out his nightmare problem with a series of questions he threw at me: 'What do you do about currency? Where do you get food? Industries are dead. Commerce is dead. How do you start them again? What do you do about defence? I have no administration. Where do I get one? Tell me, how do you start a country?'

Mujib's outburst was only temporary. There was another quick shift in mood, confidence returning with every sweep of his hands as though plucking it from the air. He was the demi-god again. 'I tell you I can do it; I will do it with these hands."

Mujib's return to Dhaka had averted the threat of civil war in Bangladesh and given the government the substance and authority it had hitherto lacked. But this did not mean an end to the intrigue and in-fighting within the cabinet nor the extinction of the armed bands operating as a law unto itself in the countryside. Only now Mujib's presence had temporarily put a lid on them. But exit did exist in various shadowy forms which were for the moment tolerated by Mujib so long as the combatants made both public and private obeisance. But the internal pressures did influence his style. He conducted himself as the 'father of the nation' as it was as chief administrator, but rather as the President of the Awami League. He played politics with his henchmen. He got embroiled in their intrigues. The savage in-fighting only heightened his natural instinct to retain all power for himself. That's why he chose to be Bangladesh's first Prime Minister, not as its all- servo President.

As mentioned earlier, the President's throne had been kept vacant for Mujib. Indeed he had been hailed as President of Bangladesh on reaching London and it was universally assumed that he would continue in that role. But being Head of State in a Westminster-style government meant Mujib should allow the Prime Minister executive authority to vest in the Prime Minister. Here came the rub. Mujib's perceptions were too narrow. He had a one-track mind in the matter of power. If the system required the Prime Minister to hold the reins of authority, then Mujib would be Prime Minister. But if instead supreme executive authority was vested in the President, then Mujib would be the President. His family and his shallow, sycophantic advisors would urge him on for the elementary reason that the more executive power he wielded the closer they would be to the fountain of patronage and wealth.

A compromise for Mujib's decision— which was privately made much of at that time—were the anomalies there were about Tajuddin's position. In the absence of Prime Minister. No one questioned Tajuddin's ability to run the administration. His authority, however, was never fully accepted by his senior colleagues. Even during the 'Mujibnagar' days they had resented his elevation with Indian help to top jobs. In their eyes Tajuddin, despite his ability, remained almost an upstart. He had been general secretary of the party's working committee, given a relatively junior position, when the independence struggle began in March 1971, and there were several others holding 'national' office who considered themselves higher in the party's pecking order. Moreover, rightly or wrongly, Tajuddin had been lumbered with the pre-Indian label. In the circumstances this was a major impediment since it was generally recognized at that time that Bangladesh's entanglement with India should be speedily ended in favour of a 'regularised relationship' which would eliminate international objections to the recognition of the new state.6

Mujib kicked Tajuddin sideways and became Prime Minister. But at the same time he made sure that the Head of State would in fact be a sinecure and never give the impression of trying to wield in any way the most inoffensive man he could find, Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury, who had shot to prominence as the international spokesman for the Mujibnagar government. President Chowdhury was admirably docile. And so that there should be no misunderstanding about his role he sported a large Mujib badge on his coat.

The scene in Gonohaban in the early days of Mujib's rule was a 20th century parody of a Moghul court. Mujib had an office in the secretariat but he spent only a minimum amount of time there, preferring to function from his official residence which he used as a private office. Its relaxed atmosphere was more to his taste. In the evenings he would hold court for his cronies, for guest men and women who like bees to a honey pot gravitated to Dhaka with outstretched hands. They would descend on him in big groups and small. When ushered into the presence they would garland Bangabandhu, touch his feet, weep loudly. He would burst into song—the folk-song, and Mujib, eyes opaque with emotion, would join in. In between he would have a quiet word with one of his ministers, instruct a civil servant about some urgent matter of state, and receive visiting reporters and VIPs who came to see the uncrowned king of the world's newest state.

Everyone went away with a promise of action. Mujib would grab the paper from the outstretched hands of a petitioner, pat him on the cheek, then wave him on. 'Go. I will see to it.' That was the last the petitioner, or Mujib, would hear about it. Later, when commenting on Mujib's assassination, my friend, Abu Sayed Chowdhury, the first Prime Minister, journalist, would tell me: He promised everything and he betrayed everyone.

Soon the dual roles he had undertaken began to show up the folly of the arrangement. As prime minister, Mujib was forced to inject harsh discipline into the government, to reconcile a country from scratch along orderly lines. Mujib's initial attempts to sustain and guide the power channels of national life by his own grandiose and tremendous patriotic fervour that galvanised the people in 1971. Mujib could do none of these things. As Bangabandhu, the friend and father-figur, Mujib had to be magnanimous, forgiving and helpful. This role was more suited to his nature, for Mujib was large-hearted, a kindly man, generous to a fault and one who never lost his friend. But Mujib did not have the capacity to compartment his hats. Every moment of the day he was simultaneously Prime Minister and Bangabandhu. The contradictions inherent in this situation inevitably led to chaos.

An example of the shape of things to come shortly after Mujib had been sworn in as Prime Minister. Just before the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Azha, Bangabandhu, it transpired, had ordered that the workers of the Adamjee Jute Mills near Narayanganj be given one month's wages immediately in settlement of arrears. This was heaving news for the starving workers of the jute mills. But it was the President's province. Adamjee Mills went on strike as a grinding halt with the outbreak of the India-Pakistan war the previous month, leaving thousands of workers not only unemployed but also unpaid for the work they had done. The owners had abandoned the mills with the advent of Bangladesh. There was no enough money to meet the payroll. Now the great festival, the first since independence, was approaching. Bangabandhu's intervention was therefore joyfully received.

When I called at the mill at 9.30 the next morning, I found at least 3000 people queued up outside the gates in a buoyant mood. Inside the mill the paymaster was well organised. A dozen tables had been placed in the com-
pound. Each had a tally clerk, a ledger, tin moneybox, pen and inkpot. The only thing missing was the money. 'They money is coming from Dhaka' he told me. 'We are waiting for it.'

They waited and waited and waited. By 2 pm there was still no sign of the money. But that time angry cries and stones were coming over the wall from the seething crowd outside. The workers were demanding their wages. 'by Bangabandhu ordered', the pagemaker, who had become a nervous wreck, had sent an SOS to the Deputy Commissioner, who in turn had arranged for an armed contingent to reinforce the police guard to prevent the gates being battered down.

Before things got worse, someone had the bright idea of rushing a message to Bangabandhu 'to appraise him of the situation.' Accordingly a young officer was drafted for this purpose. Since he planned to sneak out by way of the river, I decided it would be the better part of valour not to stay behind. Two hours later we were in Gonobadab; Mujib's official residence. The young officer was explaining the problem. Mujib was furious. He couldn't believe the orders had not been carried out after he had made a public commitment. 'Why have they not been paid?' he bellowed. 'I gave orders it should be done this morning. Who is responsible?'

His temper sparked a flurry of activity. Assistant Secretaries and PAs rushed up and down the crowded corridors looking for someone. When the offending officer from the Finance Ministry was finally brought before Mujib he explained that under the new regulations the mills could not draw more than 100,000 Takkas from the bank without special sanction from the Prime Minister. Mujib had all day been receiving a flood of visitors: party workers, old friends, relatives, senior civil servants with files and ministers wanting a quiet word in his ear. The officious guardians of the Prime Minister's door had apparently thought the matter of paying 2000 workers not important enough to 'disturb' him and the officer requiring authorisation for money had been kept out. Mujib scolded them. He ordered a senior Awami Leaguer to 'proceed to Narayanganj immediately and promise the workers that Inshah Allah, they definitely will be paid tomorrow.'

The young officer from the mill was shattered by the experience. When I took him out for a belated lunch, he told me: 'Bangabandhu commands there shall be rain and he cannot understand why the rain does not fall. God help us'.

The Prime Minister's house was a long way from Tungipara, the tiny village in Faridpur district where Mujib was born on 17 March, 1920, one of six children in a middle-class family of modest means. His father, Lutfur Rahman, was an official of the local district court. When Mujib went to the mission school in Gopalganj his studies were interrupted for a while by an attack of beri-beri which permanently affected his eye-sight. He finished high school when he was 23.

At an early age he displayed the qualities which would one day make him the central figure in the politics of the India sub-continent. One was a hyper-active social conscience; another an over-riding passion for politics. When ten years old he was caught distributing rice from the family supplies to tenant farmers who worked the property. Mujib told his father: 'They were hungry, and we have all these things.' Nineteen years later while a law student in Dhaka University, Mujib received a two and a half year jail term for championing another underdog, this time the university's menial workers. He grandly explained: 'I did not come to the university to bow my head to injustice.' But before that, when he was 17, he was caught in the front line of an anti-British demonstration and spent six days in jail. The experience only whetted his appetite for politics.

The tumultuous events of the early 1940s when the demand for Pakistan as a separate state by the Muslims of the sub-continent was pressed by the Muslim League, came as food and drink to the young Mujib. He was then a student of history and political science in the Islamia College, Calcutta. Mujib flung himself into the Pakistan movement. Within months his great talent for political organisng began to be noticed and he moved up rapidly in the hierarchy of the Muslim League. When graduation coincided with the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Mujib moved to Dhaka the capital of East Pakistan province, and enrolled as a student of law in Dhaka University.

One day in March, 1948, he joined thousands of other Bengalis in the Palton Maidan to hear Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, deliver his final address to the East Indian parliament. They had gone to cheer the Quaid-i-Azam or 'great Leader', but Mr. Jinnah stunned his audience when he bluntly told them 'Urdi is going to be the lingua franca of this country... Anyone who says anything else is an enemy of Pakistan.'

But believing in nothing without their culture and the language is its greatest manifestation. The support of the Bengali Muslims for the Pakistani cause had been fundamental to its success. Even at that time they constituted more than half the new state's population. Yet here was the Pakistan Head of State asking them to forswear the Bengali language in favour of Urdu and the arenaceous cult of Islamism. The idea was rejected with indignation, and the establishment religion of Pakistan. Mr. Jinnah's remarks therefore came as a slap in the face of the Bengalis. It was doubly galling to the students in the vanguard of the language movement. Apart from language and culture, it was an economic proposition which would put the young Bengali at a serious disadvantage in the West Pakistan labor market. A man would automatically have command over Urdu since it was widely spoken there. The Bengali student would have to learn an additional language, Urdu, along with the burden of his regular studies in order to qualify for a decent job in the government or outside.

The angry students at the meeting, Mujib among them, immediately rose in protest. They carried the agitation to the streets. From there it quickly spread to the rest of the province to become the first step in the Bengali disenchantment with Pakistan. Meanwhile Mujib, as one of the ring leaders, was clapped into jail for seven days. It was his first taste of solitary confinement.

The language agitation marked the turning point in Mujib's life. Henceforth he would turn his back on sectarian politics, which he condemned as divisive, giving himself fully to a relentless crusade against the economic and political exploitation of the Bengalis by their compatriots in West Pakistan.

Mujib's strength—and success—lay in an elemental ability to fathom the full measure of his people's emotions and to arouse and articulate them with a resounding eloquence. He had a fantastic ability to relate to crowds. Because of this his opponents would deride him as a rabble rouser. However, that may be, time and circumstance put a high premium on his talent and as a crucial moment he became the symbol and supreme spokesman of a gigantic human upsurge against discrimination and tyranny. For his pains Mujib was cruelly hounded, spending 11 years of the next 20 in Pakistani prisons. Martyrdom, however, only served to enhance his image. 'He was a great man before,' someone once said, 'but those bastards made him even greater.'

Mujib only briefly savoured the fruits of ministerial office. He had neither
the taste nor the talent for it. In his second short spell as a provincial minister (in 1956 when he held the portfolios of Commerce, Labour and Industries, and Anti-Corruption in Ataur Rahman Khan's Awami League government), Mujib couldn't stomach the routine. So he requested permission to bow out and devote his restless energy to reorganising the Awami League. Field work, his first love, remained his force and took him to the top. But this apostle of agitation was never able to overcome the fundamental flaw that bedevilled Bangladesh movement because of the support it was receiving from India. Others found excuses to play it safe and not to risk jobs and property. Some—and a lot of policemen fall into this category—even distinguished themselves as instruments for the repression of their own people. When Mujib became independent on 16th December, 1971, the whole country jumped on the bandwagon, proclaiming their new-found nationalism as loudly as they had denied it the week before. For these turncoats were derivative dubbing the '16th Division'.

M. R. Akhtar (Mokul) in his book 'Mujibar Rakta Lal', trenchantly observed: There is no parallel in the history of any country where after a protracted and bloody liberation war the defeated bureaucracy and the military officers were not only given continuity of service but were also accepted in the new regime with great respect while the patriots were excluded.' I am not one of those who advocated a witch hunt of collaborators. Far from it. As we will see later, there were obvious pitfalls in that direction since in the circumstances the charge of collaboration could be—and was—used by knaves to pay off old scores or to demolish political opponents. The objection was to place in the most sensitive and influential positions men who had no imperialist sympathies and only an accidental loyalty to the new state. During the crucial days of 1971 some of these provincial civil servants had shown themselves to be utterly selfish, opportunistic and alienated from the mainstream of the national upsurge. It could hardly be expected that they suddenly, overnight, become selflessly dedicated to the uplift of Bangladesh or, in the circumstances, be given access to the immense opportunities for aggrandizement their pivotal positions offered in a state starting from scratch.

A Yugoslav delegation, conveying greetings from President Tito in January, 1972, exhorted Sheikh Mujib at that time to give those involved in the freedom struggle a place in the Bangladesh administration, 'The Congress Party is inexperienced and makes mistakes,' the Yugoslavs told Mujib, 'But their hearts are in the right place. They will learn quickly and they will push the country forwards.'

Mujib, however, did not see it that way. He was persuaded that the former East Pakistan bureaucrats, by their training and experience, were indispensable in the context of the overall shortage of qualified civil service alternatives. Another suggestion—and this appealed to Mujib's vanity as Bangabandhu—was to 'forget and forgive'. After all, it was argued, the government had to accommodate this sizeable group somewhere. So why not in the empty Bangladesh secretariat?

This was a woefully hollow argument. If, indeed, training and experience were the criteria for the appointment of Bangladesh's new senior bureaucrats, then the obvious place to look for them was the pool of talent made up of some of the Bengali members of the elitist Civil Service of Pakistan. In talent, training and experience they were head and shoulders above most of the provincial officers. But in most cases their sin was to be in the wrong place—i.e. West Pakistan—when Bangladesh came into being in December 1971. The Bangabandhu charitable concept of 'forget and forgive', if at all
necessitous since most of them had not collaborated, should have applied to them also. But it never did. The East Pakistan bureaucrats were in the right place at the right time and with the help of their relatives and Godfathers in the Awami League, grabbed all the best positions.

If the clock was turned back, it would not be Mujib alone who was guilty. Later hangminder Moshattaque Ahmed, who was put in power after Mujib's assassination, and General Ziaur Rahman who followed him, put the seal on it all. This—resulting in corrupt, irresponsible and effete administration—had had the most disastrous consequences for Bangladesh.

Another blunder closely connected with Sheikh Mujib's misguided efforts in creating a civil service was his public policy towards the freedom fighters. On the one hand he virtually excluded from the new Bangladeshi secretariat all those FFWs who were not already civil servants. On the other hand, he took pains to identify the FFWs as a separate group—even more, a separate class—actively fanning, as the political gain required, their demands, hopes, ambitions and ultimately their frustrations.

A senior functionary of the Mujibnagar Government and a staunch supporter of Sheikh Mujib, estimated that there were approximately 300,000 Mukhti Bahini guerillas actively engaged against the Pakistani forces in 1971, both inside and outside Bangladesh. Nevertheless, in 1972, Sheikh Mujib Rahman's government, as a sop to public demand, issued as many as 1,100,000 certificates designating their holders as 'Freedom Fighters in the War of Liberation'. With each certificate went the implied entitlement to a host of privileges ranging from two years seniority in government service to preference in the matter of jobs, university admissions, cash grants and the hopes of a pension. The tragedy is that, like everything else, the FFW certificates became instruments of political patronage and corruption. And not all the real Mukhti Bahini got them. Those who did, quickly discovered that their certificate served only a decorative purpose unless it was backed up by access to the patronage being funnelled through the Awami League old-boy network. Thus a whole new embittered and emotionally-hungry class was created, both in civilian life and the armed services. Over the years it became a key element in the continuing violence in the country. This is particularly true of the armed services.

In December, 1971, on the attainment of independence all Bengali army, navy and air force personnel and members of the East Pakistan Rifles (now East Bengal Rifles) serving with the Mukhti Bahini were designated 'Freedom Fighters' and given two years seniority in service. For the first 18 months they served as the nucleus of the new Bangladesh defence forces until their less and troops, all professional soldiers, who had been posted in West Pakistan in 1969 and 1970 and had been stranded there when the Liberation War started in March, 1971. A handful of officers, among them Major Mohammad Abul Manzoor (later Major General Manzoor, the man behind the coup that resulted in Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981) managed to escape across the Kashmir border into India to join up with the Mukhti Bahini. All the other officers and men stranded in West Pakistan were subjected to the humiliation of being disarmed by the Pakistanis and kept secluded and secure in well-guarded camps. Though never formally designated as such by the authorities, in the absence of any alternative, they were in effect prisoners of war suffering from acute adversity, tension and trauma. Undoubtedly they suffered for the independence of Bangladesh.

Major Rafiq-ul-Islam, the distinguished freedom fighter who led the Bengali troops of the East Pakistan Rifles in a courageous stand against the Pakistan army in Chattagong in March, 1971, underscores their trauma in his book, A Tale of Millions. 'The situation for the Bengali army personnel stranded in West Pakistan was too ghastly to contemplate,' he said. 'They were driven out of their homes, their properties taken away, their families, herded into concentration camps, mistreated, humiliated, abused and insulted, and some were even tortured beyond imagination. Medical facilities were withheld, other amenities virtually cut off. They were forced to sell their valuables, specially gold ornaments at throw-away prices, only to buy essential items like food. They were left with no option. It was almost impossible for them to escape. Yet they tried. Some succeeded; others were caught, taken prisoner, isolated and tortured. The attempts of the few symbolised the spirit of all of them. Their passage through the seemingly unending days of humiliation and agony was silent and memorable. Their sacrifice is equally great...'.

All this was forgotten when the 35,000 Bengali officers and men were returned to Bangladesh in 1973 in an extended repatriation programme. Where the appellation 'FF' was considered a badge of valour, the word 'repatriate' became an expression of horror for these unfortunate men. This was an attempt to slander of men whose only sin—if it can be called—was the accident of geography which found them against their volition on the wrong side of the sub-continent when Bangladesh was born.

Not only were the 'repatriates' superseded or passed over for promotion, but they were kept hanging around on the 'attached list' of the army. All their appointments were 'ad hoc'. As such for over two years and in some cases three, none of them could get their promotions, seniority and the regularisation of their service. Thus uncertainty about jobs, promotions and appointments undermined military morale terribly.

The differentiation between the FFs and 'repatriates' also politicised the defence forces and riddled them with factionalism and indiscipline. Ultimately it would lead to the killing of Sheikh Mujib, the Jai Four and President Ziaur Rahman. They were all 'FFs' and, ironically, it was the 'FFs' who were responsible for their slaying.

Towards the end of March, 1972, according to a hot rumour making the rounds in Dhaka, Mujib was grossly overworked and 'in the interests of health and administrative efficiency' was about to reappoint Tajuddin Ahmad as Prime Minister. As)&#34; the news spread, the leader of the Awami League and act the Father figure. When I asked Tajuddin about it, his answer was precise and telling: 'Someone is trying to cut my throat'! Mujib's own reaction to my inquiries was equally fervent. 'Nonsense,' he told me, 'do they think I was not capable of running the government'? The rumour was obviously inspired by interested quarters, had the desired effect. Henceforth Mujib was all the more suspicious of Tajuddin and had him carefully watched.

Mujib was to soldier on in the hot seat and obviously he was not as happy as he pretended to be. All his life had been spent in the field, face-to-face with the enemy. Now he was isolated from them. The official restraints that managed to impose on him, the demands on his time by matters of state, and the high fence that surrounded him at all times were indeed galling. He would sometimes complain about them. But then this complex personality would also be gloriously back in the spotlight at the centre stage, savouring every nuance of the protocol and all the perks that went with it—his personal and official honour guard, the foreign dignitaries coming to court, the long black limousines. Once I rashly asked him why he didn't drive a smaller car, setting an
example of the austerity to which he exhorted his people. Before answering Mujib gave me a long, dirty look. When he saw no malice was intended, he smiled and told me: "Surely the Prime Minister of Bangladesh can afford to drive in a Mercedes!"

Mujib never fully awakened to the realities of the new dispensation over which he presided. The dramatic events of the nine months preceding the birth of Bangladesh—and all the trauma and patriotic fervour that it generated—would remain a blank spot in his consciousness. He would never fully know it because his vibrant personality had not experienced it. Mujib, after all, was essentially a projectionist, a prism translating light to rainbow. Total isolation in prison had been an obliterating experience. Time stood still for him while the people moved on to a new life and new hope. So when he emerged from the 'darkness to the light and the sunshine of a million victorious smiles', Mujib, true to form, continued exactly from where he had left off. He did not have the capacity to catch up. Nor did he try. His record in office underscores the dismal fact. He blundered terribly. Thus the formative days of Bangladesh were distorted. Within six months disenchantment set in.

Recalling these events, Major Farook told me: 'If he had asked us to eat grass or to dig the earth with our bare hands we would have done it for him. But look how he behaved!'

Rip Van Winkle had not only risen from the wrong side of the bed but had also got off to a false start.

Notes
2. Yashwant Bhatnagar (quoted by S. S. Sethi, The Decisive War, New Delhi, p 155).
8. D. R. Mackellar, Pakistan Cut to Size, New Delhi, pp 139/140.
10. ibid.

III

The Decline of the Demi-God

The army will not fire on the people; but if you press it, it might take action against you and the ruling clique!

—Abdur Rab


Eight months after he had taken over as prime minister, the tide of popularity had begun to run out for Mujib. The great agitator, the champion of the people’s grievances, the beloved Bangabandhu on whom the most fulsome praise had been lavished, had now become the target of criticism from an outraged public.

More than 100,000 people had gathered to hear another powerful rabble rouser bitterly denounce the prime minister for betraying the Bangalis and failing to fulfil pledges made before independence. He was Abdur Rab, the student leader and former Mukhti Bahini freedom fighter who was once one of Mujib’s staunchest supporters. Now Rab was telling the crowd: ‘Mujib said no one would be allowed to die of starvation after independence. Now people are dying for want of food.’ Egged on by the irate gathering Rab ticked off a long string of grievances—sorrows prices, water, education, health—beyond reach of the people, shortages, market manipulation, official corruption, nepotism, mounting unemployment, mass arrests and beatings by the police, an irresponsible government, a muzzled press. ‘The Awami Leaguers are more corrupt and much worse than the Pakistanis ever were,’ Rab declared, in a punchy summation of public sentiment that brought the crowd screaming to its feet. ‘You have been arresting us and using all sorts of violence against us. In your speeches you have used the metaphor of weapons. But have you ever used a gun? We know how to use real weapons.’ Then calling for the disbanding of corrupt cabinet ministers and officials and the formation of a national government, Rab prophetically warned Mujib: ‘The army will not fire on the people; but if you press it, it might take action against you and the ruling clique!’

The wheel had turned full circle for the Bangalis. Once more there was an outcry against exploitation and repression. Only this time, ironically, Rab was echoing the charges Mujib had hurled against the Pakistan government eighteen months earlier.

For Mujib it was an especially bitter pill. Three days earlier he had returned from an extended visit to London where he had undergone a painful operation for the removal of gall stones. He was still a sick man and very exhausted. A ten day convalescence in Geneva, away from the crowds of importuning Bangalis who had descended on him in London, had failed to improve his disposition. During his enforced absence the government was formally headed by Syed Nazrul Islam, the deputy prime minister. But he had neither the intelligence nor the political muscle to assert himself. The savage in-fighting among
the Awami League leaders had re-surfaced. Cabinet ministers, like so many defiant warlords, went their separate ways. In London in December 1972, Mujib had once more been overwhelmed by panic calls from Dhaka. For seven weeks Bangladesh was at the mercy of God and the telephone. Now Mujib was back and after an orchestrated welcoming, was publicly pilloried on the Paltan Maidan.

It all came as a nasty jolt to his ego: but for Mujib there was no contrition, only a shifting of blame from the master to his dog. 'I'm with the people,' he declared on his return as though disassociating himself from the party. He turned on his party men, dismissing 19 members of Parliament for 'smuggling, nepotism and corruption'.

This unprecedented purge of the ruling party was well received. When Mujib wrathfully announced 'Nobody will be spared; I will take action against anyone who is guilty', many saw this as an indication that the old dynamism of the hussings had returned and they ardently believed that given the opportunity Mujib would yet vindicate the public trust. A Bengali写着万方的 readership, sole to control epidemics of smallpox, cholera and typhoid. There were hundreds of East European engineers repairing war damage. An American specialist working entirely with local dock labour and the most primitive equipment set a record for clearing food ships in Khulna. French and Japanese technicians helped to rebuild.

Correspondents wanting a quick rundown on the way things were shaping would make a bee line for UNRRO headquarters where the amiable Director of Information, Fernando Jaques da Silva, would provide instant answers. This remarkable man of the state did not collapse within the first few questions as many of his colleagues did, but calmly and with his guitar, did much to keep the massive rehabilitation effort in perspective.

While spelling out what the UN specialists were doing, he would quietly promote the idea of close cooperation between UNRRO and the Bangladeshi government and in no way discount the latter's overall responsibility. Thus, to the inevitability of red tape, he would respond with the magnificence of the Bangladeshi achievement whereas UNRRO in fact was doing all the pushing and most of the running.

One evening during an informal conversation over dinner, Dr. Umbricht approached him with the question he had earlier in the day in the Bangladesh Foreign Office. 'I can't understand why,' he told me with a slightly exasperated, if the government is so anxious to join the United Nations and receive international recognition, it is refusing to attend a UN-sponsored conference.' It transpired that Bangladesh, though still far from being admitted to membership on the ICRF, had intended an official invitation to participate in the conference on the environment in Stockholm. The invitation was unconditional and would have marked Bangladesh's first appearance on an international forum. Nevertheless Dr. Umbricht, as the UN representative in Dhaka, had been called to the Foreign Office that morning and given a letter expressing the government's official attitude, but that it was not fully geared to participate. Dr. Umbricht had been privately informed about the real reason. Apparently, the German Democratic Republic, which had pushed in to open the first diplomatic office in Dhaka and like Bangladesh, was not overly friendly to the United Nations, had also been invited to Stockholm but only as an Observer. Because of this qualification, the GDR refused to attend. So it had been suggested to Bangladesh by its East European friends that as a gesture of solidarity with the countries which had given ardent support to the struggle for independence, it should also refrain from attending. The Foreign Office at that time was presided over by Abdus
Samad Azad, the man with the 'pro-Russian' label who had summarily replaced Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed. Azad decided to make the gesture to the East Europeans and after issuing the required directive, the prominent head of the Foreign Office, S. A. Karim, flew off on an official visit to Nepal.

Next morning, which was a Sunday, I walked over to Bangabazar for a quiet chat with Mujib and casually brought up the question of the rejected invitation without mentioning my source. Mujib was in an upstairs bedroom chatting with Law Minister Kamal Hussein while his ayahs massage massaged his legs. That was Mujib's way of relaxing. My question seemed to disturb him. Abruptly sitting up on the bed Mujib told me with unconcealed irritation: 'What nonsense are you talking? Have you also started picking up bazaar rumours? We have not received any UN invitation and for that matter, was rejected. Properly chastened and smarting from the outburst, I wondered why. Dr. Umbricht was trying to sell me a line. In that mood I looked him up on my return to Hotel International. He was both annoyed and puzzled by the imputation of Mujib's denial. To prove the point he had made earlier, he showed me a copy of the politely worded Foreign Office report.

I went back to Mujib that evening and told him that far from being bazaar gossip I could prove that the great prime minister was not aware of what was going on under his very nose in the Foreign Office. The upshot was that Mujib sent for the Foreign Secretary and after establishing the truth of the matter, reversed the decision. Dr. Umbricht was warmly received by the Prime Minister and told that the Bangladesh Ambassador to Stockholm had been instructed to attend. Two days later when Mujib confronted the Foreign Minister on his return from Nepal, Abdul Samad Azad hotly denying having issued the order. Mujib knew this to be a barefaced lie. Nevertheless he accepted Azad's contention that Foreign Secretary S. A. Karim had acted without his knowledge. The latter, in disgust, asked to be relieved of his post and went to New York as the Resident Observer at UN headquarters.

By the summer of 1972 everything was going wrong for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Rice is the staple food of the Bengalis and its price is always the definitive indicator of the public mood in Bangladesh. When the price is low the administration, however unpopular it may be in other ways, can hope to muddle through. When the price is high all the danger signals start flashing and it is generally assumed that the government is out to way out. By June 1972, the price of paddy, the unhugged rice, had soared to 120 Takkas per maund (80 lbs) in the 'hats' or country markets. That was almost double what it had been under Pakistani rule and well above the crisis level for Bangladesh. Mujib was gravely embarrassed and tried to explain away the consequences of the war. But hungry villagers would not be fobbed off with such an excuse when other essentials such as paraffin, cooking oil, salt and soap were also difficult to come by because of the outrageous market manipulation. The country was in the grip of a severe money famine since unemployment, which had been spectacularly during the liberation war, saw a continuation during the peace. In the public mind the Awami League government was not merely corrupt. It was considered to be totally degenerate. And, adding to the overall distress there was a pervasive lawlessness and violence. Armed gangs openly plundered and killed. It was a common sight in the districts to see groups of bare-footed young men in lungs and 'gangis' or undershirts, sporting military caps and rifles, ambling through the market place. They had their will — be it eggs, fish, vegetables, cash or jewellery. Even Dhaka, the capital, was not immune to their depredations. Longhaired boys with green or black berets, dark glasses and Castro beards would tear through the streets in popular jeep cars. The number plates were only casually put on if they ran mad. Sometimes they carried rifles andsten guns. Sometimes not: but if they didn't get their way when demands were made in shops or houses the intended victims knew they would return with hard with the guns.

Mujib had dismayingly failed to retrieve the vast quantities of arms and ammunition which had remained in private hands in the aftermath of the war. His efforts in this direction had been inept from the start.

A little more than a week after taking over as Prime Minister and obviously acting on the advice of his non-combatant Awami League cabinet ministers and the bureaucrats of the '16th Division', who both feared the freedom fighters, Mujib suddenly issued a public directive that all unauthorized civilian arms should be surrendered within ten days. It was another case of the semi-god commanding 'let there be rain'. The folly of the order was immediately evident. Apart from the fact that the government was then incapable of enforcing its will, the '16th Division' and the amnesty period coincided with the festival season of the Muslims, which Azha when the country is shut down for at least three days. In this case it was the first Eid after independence and there was an immense pressure on everyone to return to their village homes for the festivities. Consequently the skeletal administration had to slow down. Even if it had wanted to, the government was not able to get the message effectively circulated in the countryside or for that matter arrange for the collection of arms that had been forthcoming. The timing was all wrong. Mujib was compelled to extend the deadline to the end of the month.

But there was a deeper reason for the directive being ignored. The proud, patriotic young freedom fighters of the Mukhtahi Bahini were willing to fall behind Mujib's leadership if they could be assured of responsible positions in the new state they had helped to create. But their willingness and goodwill were undermined by Mujib's own actions. First, he had imposed his Awami League candidates who had little or no part in the fighting, as the eyes and ears of government authority in the areas which the freedom fighters had controlled for several months. Guerrilla leaders, operating under covert, had 'governed' sizeable chunks of territory during the liberation war. They advised the government on resistance tactics, collected 'taxes' to sustain the struggle, even presided over 'courts' where justice may have been rough and ready but invariably evenhanded. Now they found themselves supplanted by Awami Leaguers whose role in the freedom struggle had been minimal, if not suspect, and who now flaunted themselves as the local barons.

Secondly, he was adopting en masse the old East Pakistan bureaucracy — the notorious '16th Division' — as the administration of Bangladesh. Mujib did not only shut the door on the freedom fighters. He also laid them open to victimisation by the turncoat police and district officers who had only recently been the targets of the guerrillas. Mujib, of course, did offer to absorb the Mukhtahi Bahini into the armed forces, the national militia and police or to turn grants to those who wished to return to their studies. Some did take up the offer. About 8000 of them were absorbed in the national militia. But by and large the freedom fighters found these options, which were never clearly spelled out, absurdly uninviting. At best they seemed to imply subsistence level jobs for them, the true blues, while the plums went to others less deserving. So they clung to their guns. If nothing else they were the best form of reassurance in uncertain times.

Before the deadline ran out Mujib's political advisers after a great deal of negotiation, persuaded some guerrilla groups to ceremonially hand over their
weapons to the Prime Minister. Two TV spectaculars were organized for this purpose. The most impressive of these was in Tangail, where Kader Siddiqui, the 26-year-old guerrilla leader nicknamed 'Tiger'. He had won great distinction during the liberation war. It was a day to remember. Ten miles into Tangail the road on either side of Mujib's motorcade was lined at regular intervals with elements of the 'Kader Bahini'. They were Tiger's men, each in a khaki uniform, armed with a rifle and standing stiffly in the town and in the vast grounds where the ceremony was held the force and the discipline were equally impressive. This was the Tiger's territory and he was making sure Mujib got the point.

Wearing khaki uniform, his long, bushy hair standing out on either side of his high cap, Kader Siddiqui ceremonially escorted Mujib past a long display of rifles, slugs, and a least a dozen mortars. He picked up an automatic rifle and laid it at the Prime Minister's feet in a gesture of disarmament. Then taking rice from an aide, Mujib knelt before Mujib, a feudal lord pledging allegiance to his king. He swore he would be loyal to Mujib as long as he lived. Many others had taken the pledge before him; many since then. Only Tiger Siddiqui has kept the faith. He is now an outlaw.

Mujib, who was overcome with emotion, and the officials who accompanied him would remember that day for another reason. The massive display of firepower, discipline and dedication to a man or cause is what would haunt them in the days to come. The sycopants would pour poison in Mujib's ears and make more fearful than jealous, would try to crush the 'Bahini'. But this would only push them underground. The surrender ceremonies had more propaganda effect than practical value. Five thousand guns were handed in, 70,000 less than the government expected. Neither Mujib nor Khandaker Meshtaque Ahmed and General Ziaur Rahman who followed him were able to mop up the rest.

Another reason for the chaos in the country was the manner in which the Collaborators' Order was implemented. Promulgated on 24 January, 1972, the Order was intended to bring to book those who had actively collaborated with the Pakistan army and government during the nine months of 1971 following the army crackdown. In the circumstances obtaining at that time it was almost a merciful alternative to uncontrolled blood-letting in the aftermath of the liberation war. No one can fault the Bengalis for seeking to punish those who assisted the savagery perpetrated on their people. The Israelis are still doing it 40 years after Hitler. What is inexcusable is the way in which an understandable, even justifiable, emotion was allowed to deteriorate into a capricious witch-hunt and the paying off of old scores.

The main thrust of the Order was directed against Bengali politicians who had cooperated with the Pakistan authorities (such as the former Governor of East Pakistan, Dr. A. M. Malik, and his law minister Jasmuddin Ahmad) and the pro-Pakistan armed gangs such as the Razakars and the notorious Al Balad and the latter had been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice.

As the violence continued to escalate in the summer of 1972, at least 36 people were officially reported killed and another 80 injured in a riot in the port of Khulna. (Unofficial estimates, which were closer to the truth, put the death toll over 20,000.) The incident is noteworthy because it involved the first of Mujib's experiments with private armies. This was the Lai Bahini, a para- military force composed of supporters of the Prime Minister's henchmen to 'control' the industrial areas. They became too officious in their task and the riot was a result of the confrontation with the police.

Not long after that Mujib, again in typical Bangabandhu fashion, issued another two-week ultimatum. This time it was to hoarders and smugglers in Dhaka to surrender illegally-held food stocks and arres. After the ultimatum ran out without noticeable result, checkpoints were established at cross roads. Police and militia searched motor vehicles and pedal rickshaws. Others raided shops and warehouses for hidden food stocks and stolen goods. The results were disastrous, with a lot of small fry was netted but the big fish got away.

At the same time the Awami League found the Order a convenient instrument to pay off old scores against political opponents and to silence the opposition. At the end of November, 1972, the Chief Whip of the Bangladesh National League, Shah Mozammam Hussain, complained that those who were trying to oppose the party in the forthcoming general elections were the same collaborators who had sided with the Pakistan army junta. Even some '16th Division' officers seized the opportunity to hit back at unfortunate individuals who had crossed them. This did not happen. All they had to do to ensure an opponent's ruin was to denounce him as a collaborator. The government did not resist. The rest was History. His property was seized—all before the charge was investigated. Understandably some tried to defend themselves against this misleading charge. And since guns were readily available, the violence spread. Soon the jails began to fill. On 3 October, 1972, the Home Minister publicly stated that 41,800 people had been arrested under the Collaborators' Order.

The first collaborators' trials were held in Jessore. M. R. Akhtar ('Mukul') relates an interesting incident in his book 'MujibRakta Lal'. The man in the dock was accused of being a Razakar. He said that when the magistrate repeatedly asked him, 'Are you guilty or not guilty?' In exasperation some lawyers in the court shouted at him, 'Why don't you plead?' The man finally answered: 'Sir, I'm thinking what to say.'

Magistrate: 'What are you thinking?'

Accused: (pointing to the presiding officer) 'I'm thinking that the person who occupies that chair is the one who recruited me as a Razakar. Now he has become a magistrate. It's a cruel twist of fate that I am in the dock and he is conducting my trial.'

Another interesting comment comes from Robert MacLennan the British MP who was an observer at the trials. 'In the dock the defendants are scarcely more pitiable than the succession of confused prosecution witnesses driven (by the 88-year-old defence counsel) to admit that they, too, served the Pakistan government but are now ready to swear blind that their real loyalty was to the government of Bangladesh.'

The whole thing was a mockery of justice. The government finally put an end to it but not before the disorder intensified.
country and set about devouring anything that offered the slightest margin of
profit. And since Bangladesh was starting anew, there were endless oppor-
tunities for aggrandizement.

Instances of corruption could fill several volumes. They range from petty
cupidity to outrageous criminality. It's a matter of record that a certain head
of a Bangladesh diplomatic mission, who had made a great display of his
piety, solemnly swore an affidavit that his grandson was his son in order to
claim an additional family allowance of about £50 a month. Another diplomat
charged a flat 5% on all government purchases made through his Mission.

One of Mujib's senior officers was so adept at manipulating the food market
that he arranged, first a shortage of salt, and then a famine of chickens. He
flooding the market with imports of these items bought in by his own cargo
vessels. Others manipulated the rice trade, the edible oils market. Still others
organised the smuggling of jute and rice to India, and through agents in
London and Singapore controlled the fantastic Bangladesh black market in
foreign exchange. Corruption was not the preserve of the Awami Leaguers
and their bureaucrats, but these two groups were ideally placed to make immense
fortunes because they were the government. Some operated through relatives;
some flagrantly in their own names. Others saw no harm in getting the Public
Works Department to convert their modest village homes into well-equipped
mansions.

Mujib, who had a proprietary attitude to the country, had no need for
money. His preoccupation was power. No one has produced evidence to
substantiate rumours that he had amassed a vast fortune abroad. But it is
known that some members of his family, particularly his son Kamal, were not
immune to helping themselves to the substantial gifts that came their way or
to get investment-free partnerships in trading ventures which seemed to attract
lucrative import business. After Mujib's assassination Brigadier Manzoor,
the Chief of the General Staff under General Zia, citing examples of corruption,
told me Mujib's brother had rapidly built up an immense fortune by cornering
large numbers of barges and other river craft. But let it be said that in this
respect Mujib's family did not distinguish itself any more than the scores of
prominent Awami Leaguers, Cabinet Ministers and senior civil servants.

Corrupt, money-grabbing people were to be found everywhere. The younger
some of the retired majors involved in Mujib's killing. Whenever one of
them pointed a finger at those who took more. In such a convoluted society wrong-
doing was not in question; guilt was a matter of degree.

The fault lay as much in the system as in the quality of men who had come
to prominence in Bangladesh. Since the country had to be re-started from a
collapsed position after the war, the government had to perform to control almost
every aspect of life in Bangladesh. It soon developed into a system of licences
based on an economy of want. Those who at the various stages controlled the
issue of licences were therefore in a pre-eminent position to make their dem-
ands. Graft soon became a way of life. As my Bengali friend said: "If you want
to succeed you must pay." Things got out of hand when those who controlled
the system used the licences themselves to multiply their profits
many times over.

In the matter of personnel, the Awami League did not have a creditable
record. In face some ministers in Prime Minister Suhrawardy's cabinet which
ruled Pakistan in 1957 had shown themselves to be more corrupt than anything
known in Pakistan till that time. When the party was installed in power in
Bangladesh it was inevitable that old habits should be given full play. The
doors to corruption were opened wide when Mujib installed Awami Leaguers
as his eyes and ears in every district, sub-division and 'thana' (group of
villages). The intention obviously was to keep a tight grip on the country.
But the party men had to be paid off in patronage. When this took the form
of distribution outlets for food, consumer goods and industrial raw materials,
everyone took a cut.

Then again, Mujib, rather curiously, reinstated several senior officers with
established reputations for corruption who had been dismissed from the
Pakistan civil service. Some of them were placed in positions of influence near
the throne. It would, however, be unfair to single out these men for blame. As
pointed out earlier, many other officers had little or no commitment to
Bangladesh. As they say in London pubs: they were only 'here for the beer'-
and made no bones about it.

Closely intertwined with the official corruption was the colossal smuggling
of food and jute out of the country into India. The practice existed long before
the Bangladesh government. With more than 1000 miles of border cutting through
swampland, dense jungles and winding rivers of the delta country, smugglers
operated with impunity from the early days of Pakistan. Merchants in the rice
and jute growing areas of East Pakistan, where prices were low, were attracted
by the Indian high-profit markets in metropolitan Calcutta and its industrial
suburbs. After Adulul Rashid, one of the two ring leaders of the coup
against Mujib, had evidence of this when, as a Pakistan army captain, he was tem-
porarily posted to border patrol duties with the East Pakistan Rifles in 1959.
Rashid found his fellow officers deeply involved with the smugglers and when he
began to probe one of them he was summarily returned to his old regiment in
West Pakistan. When Bangladesh came into being the smuggling operation greatly expanded, one reason being that border vigilance had become
very relaxed because of the cordiality between the two countries.

Tom Hagen, at one time head of UNRRO, reported early in 1972, that
'Bangladesh is like a seve suspended in India.' Many merchants found it more
advantageous to export the rice across the border where they got almost half
as much again for their crops. 2 Not long after that Dr. K. U. Ahmad, a
Bengali lecturer in Brunel University in England, after making a detailed study
of the problem came to the conclusion: 'Food prices are soaring in Bangladesh
while the prices of rice supplies sent in from abroad to relieve widespread hunger
are being smuggled out to the Indian market by Bangladeshi traders aided by
corrupt government officials.' 3 After Mujib's assassination the Bangladesh
government itself said that 'smuggling of goods across the border during the
three preceding years of independence cost approximately 60,000 million
Takas' (2000 million). The goods smuggled out of the country were mostly
jute, food-grains and materials imported from abroad. 4

To the government's own estimates of smuggling (2000 million sterling)
must be added the vast sums funneled out of the country through the black
market in foreign exchange and the 'side money' (commissions) skimmed off
the large purchases of rice, sugar, cement and other commodities made on
account. Corruption in Bangladesh was therefore of a magnitude
exceeding anything known anywhere.

It was fashionable and politically expedient for Bangladeshis to blame India
for its economic ills. Anyone who had access to the inner workings of Ban-
gababand know that while Mujib and his ministers publicly extolled the
close ties with India, they also privately made it the scapegoat for their own
inadequacies. The Indians cannot be absolved of blame for some of the inci-
dents that have vexed relations between the two countries, and it is a fact
that Indian merchants benefited enormously from the clandestine trade
with
Bangladesh. But it is also a fact that the Bangladeshi themselves did the actual smuggling and had a proportionate share of the loot. The point was underscored at a cocktail party given by a Western diplomat in Dhaka in February, 1974. There were some local editors and journalists present and one of the latter was waxing hot about how the Indians were being 'robbed clean'. Finally our host had had enough. 'Tell me,' he asked this man, 'do the Indians come all the way into Bangladesh and carry off the rice and jute or do the Bangladeshi carry it out to them?' That was the end of the argument.

From the start the governments of Bangladesh and India had worked to prevent the business houses of Calcutta from dominating the economy of Bangladesh. To this end they signed an agreement in January 1972, putting all trade and economic exchanges on a state-to-state basis. Thus any unacceptable encroachment could have been probed off at the start had it been found necessary. But there were some drawbacks and, as pointed out earlier, it was the cordiality making for easy movement across the border which ultimately undermined efforts to control the flow of commodities from Bangladesh to India. Clearly the flood of goods smuggled could not have developed if it was not supported, in the first instance, by corrupt politicians, officials and traders in Bangladesh, and secondly, by corrupt politicians, officials and merchants in India.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in a moment of introspection, publicly put the finger on the malady: 'Who takes bribes? Who indulges in smuggling? Who becomes a foreign agent? Who transfers money abroad? Who resorts to hoarding? It's being done by us— the five percent of the people who are educated. We are the bribe takers, the corrupt elements... It seems that society is in a moral infestation.'

Nevertheless Mujib adopted a cavalier attitude to all this corruption. Once when a leader of another political party drew his attention to a particularly seamy scandal involving one of his ministers, Mujib shrugged it off with the remark, 'Yes, I know he is a greedy bastard.' This makes clear that it was not the lack of accountability that allowed corruption to spread, but the fact that Mujib 'did not enforce this accountability. It's the price we paid to hold on anyone he thought to be dangerous to his own position. Mujib knew which minister and which officer took bribes, who manipulated the markets and who were the king-pins behind the smuggler gangs and currency racketeers. His intelligence services kept tabs on everyone. To their reports was added the gossip and tattling that poured down through the grapevine. In Gonobabon, Mujib carefully noted it all and used it when necessary to silence the guilty ones. Once a man became vulnerable he ceased to be a threat and he was tolerated as long as he kept in line. This tactic is as old as politics itself and no different from what is practised in varying degrees elsewhere, and in Bangladesh itself, after Mujib's death. But while it did give Mujib a hold on people it did not guarantee their loyalty. Those who made money resented the idea that others were allowed to make a lot more. Thus no one was ever entirely satisfied and they all eventually turned on Mujib.

The haemorrhage of national resources almost killed off the new state at its founding. By the end of 1973 Bangladesh was bankrupt, though more than two billion dollars in international aid had been pumped into it. The tragedy is that the haemorrhage was not stanchured after Mujib's death. Some corrupt politicians were removed from positions of influence but they were replaced by influence-peddlers of another kind. Corrupt civil servants to a large extent remained untouched; so also did the well-heeled business sharks operating on the periphery of the palace. Like the rivers, they seemed to go on forever. And if smuggling was halted temporarily it was only because the new tensions between Bangladesh and India made for extreme vigilance on both sides of the border. Mujib's successors were hardly in a position to point the finger at them. Their attempts at cleaning up have at best been cosmetic.

The Greeks and Romans used to say a god is nothing without worshippers. Mujib, the demi-god, had these in abundance. They clung to him like scabious leeches, greedily sucking all available patronage while at the same time isolating him from reality and the people. There were all kinds of 'durbars'. Some were inoffensively boisterous, their only purpose being to demonstrate they were on the right side of the fence. Others were outrageously servile and profligate. They flattered Mujib, indulged his every mood and instantly echoed each utterance from the lips of the Leader. They aped the way he dressed. Mujib-style jackets over white cotton pyjamas became the uniform of the 'in' group. Mujib's picture blossomed on postage stamps and on currency notes; dars, desk ornaments and daily newspapers on the front pages of almost every newspaper.

A bust of the Bangabandhu would also have adorned a cell in the Dhaka jail had not the 'durbars' intervened. During his long career in the opposition, Mujib had spent more than ten years in solitary confinement, most of them in a condemned cell in the Dhaka central jail. He proudly called it his 'God-given home'. In 1974 a senior officer of the Jails Department came up with the idea that it would be a fitting tribute to the Bangabandhu to place a bust of him in the cell. Accordingly one of Bangladesh's well-known sculptresses, Shamin, was commissioned to do the bust of Mujib for a fee of 20,000 Takkas (about £750). She came up with a large, very presentable work in bronze. The jail authorities spent another large sum building an appropriate pedestal and preparing the cell for the great occasion. Then they invited Mujib to the formal unveiling. When the invitation reached Gonobabon, Mujib was greatly touched by the care. The sculptors, however, were indignant. It would be considered 'insulting and insipidous', they advised Mujib, 'to have Bangabandhu put in jail'. Mujib began to waver. When his family joined in opposing the idea, the bust was quietly removed from the cell and placed in storage.

The first set of advisers were among Mujib's closest friends and ministers. Among them were Tufail and Sheikh Fazilul Huq Moni, Mujib's nephews who would also die with him. Most prominent of the latter was Tahiruddin Thakur, the Minister of State for Information. Thakur was once a journalist, who could later play a shadowy role in Mujib's assassination. He gathered the entire government information machinery, TV, radio and press to extolling the virtues of Mujib. He also distinguished himself by extreme public obeisance to his fiat.

Thakur's attitude so revolted some of his officers that one of them, an expert in Bangladesh TV, once asked the occasion hit on the idea of the camera focusing on Thakur as he bent down to touch Mujib's feet in a gesture of fealty at Dhaka airport. That night TV viewers in Dhaka were regaled with this spectacle of ministerial obeisance. But it is a measure of the national degradation at that time that instead of showing up this nauseous personal display of servility, it was intended, the touching of feet henceforth became the form for the 'durbars'. It inflated Mujib's ego—to the point where he took severe note of those who dared not to touch his feet.
Only one minister, Tajuddin Ahmad who was in charge of Finance, had the courage to stand up to Mujib publicly. In November 1974, on his return from an international conference, Tajuddin publicly criticised the government for incompetence and mismanagement. In the circumstances it was akin to political suicide and probably reflected the desperation he felt. On being summarily dismissed, Tajuddin immediately announced his retirement from politics. One other minister, General M. A. G. Osmani, who successively held the portfolios of Defence, Civil Aviation and Shipping, was never comfortable in Mujib's Cabinet; and in July, 1974, asked to be relieved of his portfolios. The other ministers, whatever may have been their private opinions, did not show hesitation in falling into line behind Sheikh Mujib whatever he did. The same is true of some senior civil servants and military officers. They had no reason to take sides, but took sides they did for rapid promotions. The numerous turncoats in evidence after Mujib's assassination underscores this sad story.

In their own way each of his principal political advisers made notable contributions to the Mujib legend. Tufail was the first to give him the grandiose title of Bangabandhu, the Friend of the Bengalis. That was during the Bengali upsurge against Pakistan and Tufail's influence with the emotional leader was carried over when Bangladesh became a reality and Mujib the Prime Minister. He was appointed Mujib's political secretary and in that capacity was one of the most powerful shadows behind the throne. The other adviser, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, was the author of 'The Four Pillars of Mujibism—Nationalism, Socialism, Democracy and Secularism.' These were bombastically enshrined in the constitution as the 'Fundamental Principles of State Policy.' But in actual terms of guiding concepts they remained illusory, if not grotesquely debased by contrary practices. For propaganda purposes the Four Pillars of Mujibism were eminently suitable as banners for the long march to 'Sonar Bangla' or the Golden Bengal. But Bangladesh in fact was going nowhere and thus they assumed merely a decorative purpose. In his time Mujib would shoot down every one of the 'pillars' and Moni and Tufail would cheer him on. But this did not deter the durbaris from taking up the chant.

The 'principles' were developed into the cult of 'Mujibism', complete with badges, books, essays and newspaper articles proclaiming and explaining the 'new philosophy'. Even Mujib was embarrassed by what was done in his name. When the author of a voluminous treatise on 'Mujibism' ceremonially presented him with a copy, Mujib self-consciously accepted the book with the remark, 'Yes, I'm sure I'll find it very interesting.'

Some people got hopelessly tangled in their enthusiasm. On 25 September, 1974, Shahidul Haq, the Editor of Bangladesh Times cabled this despatch to his newspaper from New York:

'It seemed all so incredible yet so convincing. The moment of triumph for Bengali nation and more particularly for Bangabandhu came at 3.30 pm today when UN General Assembly reverberated to an impatient appeal for universal peace by him.

'It was the first time that someone spoke in Bengali in the 29-year history of UN. And it was only in the fitness of things that the speaker was Bangabandhu. As a leader of a delegation put it, the parliament of man was "totally captivated by the sound melody, serenity, onrush and aural majesty of language and delivery" of which most members did not know a word of ...

Mujib's isolation was completed by his own Awami League party. When he took over as Prime Minister in January, 1972, Mujib installed his party men everywhere, making them his eyes and ears and hoping they would open up a two-way channel of communication. But in their outright scramble for perks and patronage and by their excessive sycophancy, the channels got clogged and the system broke down. Mujib was only made aware of the people's distress when trouble broke out somewhere. And then the sycophants quickly denounced it as the work of 'trouble-makers' and 'anti-state elements.' Thus, like the Greek gods of old, they made him mad and destroyed him.

Bangladesh's showing in the first year of independence was aptly summed up when on that anniversary day a 31-gun salute intended to grandly mark the occasion petered out after five rounds and had to be replaced by rifle and automatic fire.

Notes
Mujib’s Military Nightmare

I don’t want to create a monster like the one we had in Pakistan.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

The year 1973 started auspiciously for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. His first year in office had been one of frenetic effort and gloom relieved only by a single golden success. That was Bangladesh’s first Constitution. An imposing document enshrining the noblest values to which an emotional people could aspire, the Constitution had been drafted by Mujib and piloted by him through the National Assembly. The task was completed on 4 November, 1972, clearly a record for newly-emerged Third World states. After it was handwritten by a master calligraphist, the Constitution was signed and sealed by the middle of December. Bangladesh may have been ruled by a lame-duck administration, but it had a Constitution which any country could be proud of.

Mujib was certainly proud of his handiwork. He had thereafter taken the next logical step on the road to orderly government. Elections had been set for 7 March, 1973. It should have been a happy time for Bangabandhu and Bangladesh, but suddenly on New Year’s Day there was unbelievable violence on the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna were also shut down by rampaging students. Crowds were stomping the streets of the three main cities hurling abuse on Sheikh Mujib. It had started as a student demonstration in Dhaka protesting the US bombing of Hanoi during the bloody days of the Vietnam war. A large crowd gathered outside the US Information Centre and Library in downtown Dhaka. They were agitated but no one anticipated a breach of the peace. It was generally assumed that the students would move on after they had shouted their protest. Suddenly, however, someone provoked them to attack the building, and within minutes the crowd was involved in a fierce battle with police reinforcements who were hastily called in. The police opened fire, killing two students and injuring at least six others.

In the circumstances it was a disaster for Mujib.

There is a special sanctity attached to students in Bangladesh because they have in the past been in the vanguard of the struggle for the people’s rights. Mujib was one such student who had risen to leadership on the shoulders of the young men and women who had championed Bengali causes over the years—language, political rights, economic justice and, finally, total emancipation from Pakistan. It was therefore inconceivable that barely a year after the founding of Bangladesh students should be killed in Dhaka by Mujib’s police.

The event was doubly significant in that it also marked the first outbreak of mass violence in Dhaka since independence. There had, of course, been a public airing of grievances in the capital four months earlier when Abdur Rab, the left-wing student leader, denounced Mujib for betraying the country.

Mujib had dismissed it as a political stunt. The violence and shooting in the streets now was something more ominous. Mujib’s instincts warned him that it was an attempt to undermine his position and he became convinced of a plot when the trouble rapidly spread to Chittagong and Khulna, and left-wing student leaders, in an obvious attempt at a showdown, called for a general strike.

Mujib decided to take up the challenge. He may have been hesitant and unsure of himself in the secretariat, but the streets were home ground to him. Accordingly he took the fight to the students. First he shut the door on criticism by ordering a judicial inquiry and making plain that he would not shirk his responsibility to protect foreign Missions. Then, in a clear reference to the Soviet Union, he ordered his people to crush the agents of a foreign power who were trying to push this country into a certain bloc. The results were stunning. Within hours at least 100,000 villagers armed with sickles and bamboo staves crossed the river to join up with members of the Awami League’s student wing in Dhaka. Together they routed the left-wing mobs first from the students’ hostels where they were entrenched, and then from the streets of the city. The defeat was so complete that Maulana Abdul Hamid, the ageing Chief of the (Marxist) National Awami Party hurriedly called off his own protest meeting and fled to the seclusion of his village.

The left-wing leaders had badly miscalculated in attempting a head-on clash with Mujib. They had not realised that however much the people suffered, there would remain in the Bangladesh peasantry a reservoir of affection for the Bangabandhu. In a delta country subject to floods, cyclones, famine and pestilence people have learned to live with disaster. They take a lot of punishment so long as it does not intrude against their simple values such as culture and lore, the sanctity of the family, Islam and their religion, and their pride in being Bengalis. The Pakistanis did not understand this in 1970 and 1971. When the Pakistanis denigrated the piety and the pride of the Bengalis and hunted down their youth, they provoked the heart of Bengali nationalism and were thrown out. In all this Mujib had become the symbol of Bengali hope and pride, albeit in abstruse terms, and would remain so for a long time even though his policies were shattering the state. Mujib used this feeling with characteristic agility on this occasion to turn disaster into a resounding victory.

The day’s events had two significant results. First, it drummed into the heads of Mujib’s opponents that they could never hope to topple him in a straight fight. Ultimately such an assessment would be fatal for Mujib. Major Rashid, when asked why Mujib was killed and not deposed, replied: “There was no other way. He had the capacity for mischief and given the chance he would have tu disaster for us.”

The second had happier consequences for Mujib. Having demonstrated his strength by demolishing the opposition, he sailed through the elections three months later to a landslide victory. His Awami League won 307 of the 315 seats in the National Assembly. The other parties could not muster enough strength between them to be formally recognised as the Opposition in the House. There were, of course, allegations made by some defeated candidates that the election had been rigged against them. Professor Muzaffar Ahmad said his faction of the National Awami Party would have won 25 seats but for intimidation, false votes and other malpractices. Apart from one well-chronicled incident where one of Mujib’s ministers, Mr. Mannan, unaccountably had an upsurge of votes at the close when the count had been going against him all day, these charges were not taken seriously by independent observers in Dhaka.
Maulana Bashani, an astute political weather vane who had earlier come out against Mujib, after the election quietly fell into line behind the government with the remark that the election result 'was the signal for the arrest of undiluted socialism in Bangladesh'.

Sheikh Mujib understandably took the election result as a personal triumph and a vindication of his policies. 'The result shows that my people love me as I love them,' he told reporters. Thus not only were they prepared to perform bravery, but Mujib and the Awami League also saw their election victory as a licence to press on with their objectives. The tempo of the Mad Hatte’s dance in Bangladesh picked up perceptibly.

One significant facet of the elections not made public at that time but which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his advisers took careful note of, was the pattern of voting by the troops. The government was disturbed to find that the votes recorded in the military cantonments had gone overwhelmingly against Mujib’s Awami League candidates. I had heard a rumour to this effect during a visit to Dhaka in February, 1974, but it was not till December that the following year, after Mujib had been killed, that I was able to pin it down. General Zia and Brigadier M. A. Manzoor told me that a little more than 80% of the troops had voted against the Awami League.

Among the troops was a sizeable proportion of men who had been in the forefront of the independence struggle when Mujib was both flag and father to his people. Now 15 months later they constituted the biggest single bloc against him. The reasons for this disenchantment have been advanced by Majors Farook and Rashid, by Brigadier Manzoor, some other officers and jawans and by Major General Ziaur Rahman, the Chief of Army Staff, himself. In an interview, on 11 December, 1974, in his quarterly review of political activity, he was asked by correspondents what he would do if Zia had told me: ‘We were really not an army and did not exist on paper. There was no legal basis for the army. There was no T.O.E. (Table of Organisation and Establishment). Everything was ad hoc. The army was paid because Mujib said it should be paid. Our existence depended on Mujib’s authority. Our troops went to war, fought and they suffered but did not complain because they were involved in serving the country and were willing to make whatever sacrifices that were necessary.’

On the same day Brigadier Manzoor, Zia’s Chief of General Staff (CGS), said: ‘This is a voluntary army. The officers and men of the army are volunteers because they chose the army as a career. What were they given in return? They were ill-fed, ill-equipped and ill-administered. I tell you they had no jerseys, no coats, no boots. They stood on guard duty in the cold at nights in their slippers with blankets wrapped around them. Many of our troops still are in their lungis and without uniform. I explained to Manzoor said: ‘Our men were beaten up by the police. The bureaucrats, as they had been in Pakistan, hated the army and they carried over their hatred when they came to Bangladesh. Once some of our boys were kicked ... two jawans (private) ... and we went to Mujib and asked that they should be punished. He promised to look into the matter. Then he informed us that the jawans were killed because they had been collaborators!’

According to Manzoor, Mujib had done his best to destroy the army. He had also adopted the policy of divide and rule, getting rid of anyone who was suspected to be a threat to him. ‘It was he who divided the people into several groups,’ Manzoor said. ‘He called them separately, giving one a promotion, another a perk. Things were done without reference to the Chief of Staff’. General Zia and Manzoor and some other officers I talked to suspected that Sheikh Mujib had been grooming his second son, Jamal, for a senior position in the army. According to Manzoor, after putting Jamal in the army, Mujib immediately sent him off for training at the Yugoslav Military Academy, Jamal, it seems, couldn’t cope with the studies there and to Mujib’s great disappoint- ment returned to Dhaka. Thereafter Mujib wanted him sent to Sandhurst. He, in fact, peremptorily telephoned General Shafiquullah (who was then the Chief of Army Staff) insisting that Jamal be appointed a cadet at Sandhurst. This created a difficult situation all round.

In the first place, cadets for Sandhurst are chosen by an exhaustive selection process and there were many other candidates brighter and more suitable than Jamal. And it was thought that Jamal would not be able to meet the standards required by Britain’s premier military academy. Secondly, Sandhurst did not cater for ad hoc appointments. But since Mujib insisted that he be admitted, they agreed to accept Jamal as a special case on payment of a £6000 training fee. This was immediately agreed to, and, according to Manzoor, the money was remitted secretly through army channels without the knowledge of the Finance Minister.

Jamal was a likeable lad, and, unlike his abrasive older brother, Kamal, was well-behaved and respectful. Not long after returning from Sandhurst—and within a month of his wedding—Jamal was gunned down with the rest of the family when Mujib was assassinated by the Majors.

Mujib had an understandable hatred for all things military. He had suffered grievously at the hands of the country’s two military dictatorships, Field Marshal Ayub Khan and General Yahya Khan. Ayub had arrested Mujib on 7 October, 1958, the day he seized power. During the next 10 years of Ayub’s dictatorship, Mujib had been jailed for long periods in solitary confinement. Then in 1968, while once more in confinement, he was put on trial and sentenced to death for his part in the plots against Zia and the principal accused in the notorious Agartala Conspiracy trial in Dhaka. He had escaped the death penalty and was imprisoned in Paturia in the north. Mujib was exiled to the United Kingdom in 1958, where he was given asylum by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. He lived in London for a number of years. He was then allowed to return to Bangladesh via London. He never forgot the jailing or the sale of his life. In June, 1974, when President Bhutto visited Dhaka, Mujib invited this man along as his personal guest.

Mujib carried his hatred of the army with him to the grave. This attitude...
was shared by his ministers and other senior Awami Leaguers who had also escaped death at the hands of the Pakistani army in 1971. To their basic hostility of things military was added, after independence, the fear that the Bangladeshi army might try to supplant them. This anxiety was made worse by the fact that the Bengali military men had been in the thick of the fighting during the independence movement while the Awami Leaguers stayed safely in Calcutta out of the line of fire. As such it would have been understandable if the army men with the other freedom fighters had insisted on positions of influence in the new state. The army as an institution at least did not make this demand. It was content to let Mujib rule and in the first two years of independence gave him loyalty and support.

Mujib and his ministers, however, from the very start deliberately exaggerated the role of the Defence Forces. Before he was one month in office of Mujib took the first step in this direction by signing a 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with India. The Indian army had helped to create Bangladesh and it was to India that Mujib now looked to protect it from external aggression. The treaty thus obviated the need for an effective fighting force and the country's defence establishment was reduced to a police-keeping and largely ceremonial role.

Sheikh Mujib himself told me in February, 1974, that he was against a powerful military force. 'I don't want to create another monster like the one we had in Pakistan.'

Mujib wanted the army to wither on the vine—but almost by accident it didn't happen that way.

During the Arab-Israeli war in October, 1973, the Bangladesh government, anxious to make a show of support for the Arab cause, decided to make a gift of a plane-load of the finest domestic tea to Egypt. In the absence of more tanks to show its support with money and arms, the tea was at least a token gesture. But it did have the exoteric virtue of providing the hard-pressed Arab troops with refreshing rounds of the cup that cheers. The government was delighted when Egypt gratefully accepted the offer. Accordingly, a Bangladesh Biman 707 with the fragrant cargo took off from Dhaka on 27 October, and after attempting a landing at Cairo airport, which was closed, was diverted to Benghazi in Libya where it off-loaded the tea.

Coincidentally the discharge of the cargo was watched with considerable interest by two of my colleagues from The Sunday Times who were travelling at Benghazi airport. Tea was the last thing on their minds but they wanted a lift to London and they had heard that the plane would soon be headed in that direction. Captain Bill Macintosh, after checking with Libyan authorities, was happy to oblige.

No one, least of all Sheikh Mujib, could have guessed at that time that the gift would rebound with the most tragic consequences for him and Bangladesh.

As it happened President Anwar Sadat after the war remembered Bangladesh's unusual gesture and decided to make a handsome gesture in return. He knew Bangladesh had no armaments worthy of the name and there were any number of T-54 tanks parked in the desert sands outside Cairo. President Sadat decided to make a gift of thirty of them to Bangladesh. The offer was conveyed to Mujib in the spring of 1974. It dismayed him. He was alarmed at the prospect of having such military equipment in Bangladesh and he did not want tanks. They did not fit in with his ideas about the army. The Foreign Office and his ministers, however, persuaded Mujib that he could on no account refuse Sadat's gift.

The thirty T-54s with 400 rounds of tank ammunition arrived in Bangladesh in July, 1974, making a very welcome addition to the army's strength which was then built up all of three vintage ex-Pakistan army tanks left over from the 1971 war. When they were ceremonially handed over to the 5th Lancers, Bangladesh's only 'armoured' regiment, one of the officers taking delivery of the tanks was Major Farook Rahman. Though officially second in command of the regiment, he was the most experienced armoured corps officer and the tanks came effectively under his control. Thus man and weapons were brought together—all because of a gift of tea. One year later Farook Rahman took the tanks to Mujib's house and changed the course of the army.

The Jatiyo Rakhi Bahini, which roughly translated means National Security Force, was an elite para-military force whose members were to take oaths of personal loyalty to Mujib. Despite its high-sounding name, it was a sort of a private army of bully boys not far removed from the Nazi Brown Shirts. It was formed originally as an auxiliary force—a group of 8000 hand-picked men from the old Mukhri Bahini—to assist the police in the maintenance of law and order. As opposition to Mujib increased, found a convenient alternative to the army, which he mistrusted, to be brought in wherever necessary to aid the civil administration. The Rakhi Bahini was raised to 25,000 men who were given basic military training, army-style uniforms, steel helmets and modern automatic weapons. Its officers were mainly political cadres and it was freely used to crush opponents and critics of Mujib and the Awami League. In time it completely terrorised the people.

There are several documented cases of murder and torture committed by the Rakhi Bahini. In May, 1974, after a 17-year-old boy was found to have 'disappeared' after four days of torture, the Supreme Court severely castigated the Rakhi Bahini for 'operating outside the law'. The Court found that Mujib's storm troops had no code of conduct, no rules of procedure and no register of arrests and interrogation. Mujib's answer to the Court's censure was to strip it of its powers to intervene in such cases.

A feature of 1973, the second year of independence, was the expanding violence in Bangladesh. The upsurge of violence was in direct proportion to the increase in corruption, nepotism, manipulation, smuggling and political repression by the cohorts of the Awami League who were savouring their electoral victory. The people fought back with guns carried over from the liberation war. Gangs of dacoits roamed the countryside at nights, looting granaries and village shops for food and everyday necessities. Mujib countered with the Rakhi Bahini and by liberally arming his party men, many of whom were allowed to carry prohibited bore rifles and automatics. According to Brigadier Manzoor, who was Brigade Commander Jessore at that time, the profusion of arms was causing as much by illegal arms cache after the war as by the Awami Leaguers' free access to the government armories. He said he was able to recover 33,000 weapons and 3.8 million rounds of ammunition from the six districts under his command. By the end of 1973 the total of politically motivated murders in Bangladesh had crossed the 2000 mark. The victims included some members of Parliament and many of the murders were the result of intra-party conflicts within the Awami League.

Most of the MPs and senior Awami Leaguers had their personal bodyguards. One of them, according to Dhaka journalists, was so insecure that when he went to his village he not only ringed the house with armed followers,
but also stationed others, in every room. 'The bloody fellow even has a bodyguard in his bedroom!' I was told.

Dhaka, the capital, was not immune to the violence. An unofficial curfew was enforced after midnight when rickshaws, taxis and private cars were checked and searched by the Rakhi Bahini and police. One such incident, which vividly describes the scene in Dhaka in those days, nearly resulted in the death of Mujib's eldest son, Kamal.

Kamal was a hot-headed, very abrasive young man who, like his father, had a proprietary attitude to Bangladesh. Criticism and opposition, in Kamal's book, meant 'anti-national activity' and Kamal was not above using a heavy hand to crush it. Sheikh Mujib perhaps did not like some of the things Kamal did—but nevertheless allowed the young man a free hand. A particular target of Kamal's venom was Siraj Shikdar, the leader of the Maoist Shobhobhumi (proletarian) party, who had fought the Pakistani army during the liberation war in 1971, and had then come out against Shikdar and his men used to observe 16 December, the anniversary of Bangladesh's liberation, as a 'Black Day' because they resented what they felt was a gift of independence by India. In 1972 Siraj Shikdar and his men had plastered the capital with anti-Mujib posters and graffiti and had set off bombs in police stations to mark the occasion. This year when intelligence reports indicated they would repeat the performance, Kamal decided to prevent it. On the night of 15 December he and his cronies, armed with sten guns and rifles, went out in a microbus 'hunting' Siraj Shikdar.

They were not aware that the 'Special Branch' of the Dhaka police, under Superintendent Mahboob, had received similar orders from their Chief. Their paths crossed during the course of the hunt. The police squad under Sergeant Kibria in an unmarked Toyota car noticed the armed group in the microbus and decided to follow it. Kibria thought he had come upon the Shikdar gang. Kamal, in the microbus, for his part thought Shikdar's men were in the Toyota.

The showdown came opposite the Bangladesh Bank headquarters in the Motijheel area of the city. In the exchange of fire Kamal was hit in the neck, the bullet narrowly missing his wind-pipe and jugular vein. While falling from his horse he jumped from the microbus shouting 'Don't shoot. I'm Kamal. I'm Kamal.' When they realised their mistake, some of the policemen rushed him to the Postgraduate Medical College Hospital. The panic-stricken Sergeant Kibria meanwhile fled to the bungalow of the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka, Mr. Abdul Hayat, where he told him 'we have made a terrible blunder and brought heaven down upon our heads'.

Hayat was an experienced officer and realised that heads would roll because of this blunder. After making sure that Kamal was still alive, he lost no time to drive to Bangabhaban for an immediate audience with Bangabandhu, perhaps the greatest importance, 'Mujib's reaction on hearing this was sur

Among the angry young men in the Bangladesh army were two young Majors who took immense pride in their professional competence and who now feared their careers on the rocks because of Sheikh Mujib's studied neglect of the armed forces. One was Farook Rahman, second in command of the 1st Jagir Lancers, the country's only tank regiment which till the mid-1974 had only three obsolete tanks in its armoury. The other was Khandaker Abdur Rashid, the Commanding Officer of the 2 Field Artillery, also based on Dhaka.

Farook and Rashid, both born within a month of each other in 1946, were good friends and brothers-in-law since they had married the daughters of Mr. S. H. Khan who belonged to Chattagong's leading industrial family. (Mr. Khan's older brother was A. K. Khan, a former Industries Minister in the Pakistan Government.) A single wall separated their bungalows in Dhaka caniunament and in the evenings the sisters and their husbands would often get together, as they put it, 'to pass the time'. It was this family ties that allowed them to confide in each other about their disenchantment with the way things were going in Bangladesh. The two Majors were otherwise poles apart in terms of personality and came from very different backgrounds.

Farook—his full name is Dowan Esheratullah Syed Farook Rahman—comes from the upper crust of Bengali society and claimed that on commissioning he was the first second-generation Bengali officer in the Pakistani army. His father's family are known as the 'Pari' (religious leaders) of Rajshahi, claiming direct descent from Arab Syeds who had settled on a modest estate in Nauga. His mother belongs to a land-owning zamindar family of the Jamalpur/Islampur area of Mymensingh who claim descent from Turkish soldiers of fortune under the Moghul emperors. Between them Farook was closely related to Dr. A. R. Mullick (former Finance Minister and University Vice Chancellor), Syed Nazrul Islam (Acting President of Bangladesh while Mujib was in jail), Syed Ataur Rahman Khan (former Chief Minister of East Pakistan and Prime Minister of Bangladesh) and Major General Khalid Musharraf who was very briefly Chief Staff of the Bangladesh army in November, before being killed in the seqoy mortar.

Farook's father, Major Syed Ataur Rahman, was an Army doctor and Farook's education reflects the pattern of his postings. He criss-crossed the sub-continent six times in thirteen years starting off in the Fatima Jinnah girls school, Comilla (Farook jokes about his 'one and only time in a convent'). He went to Abbottabad (Burnhall), Dhaka (St. Joseph's), Quetta (St. Francis Grammar School), Rawalpindi (Station Road school where Field Marshall Ayub Khan's daughter Naseem was also a student), Dhaka (Adamjee College), ending up in a college in Kohat for a crash course in maths.

Farook was the eldest of the three children—he has two sisters—and it was not intended that he should go into the army. His love of flying got him a solo
licence at the age of 17 and he had unsuccessfully tried to join the Pakistan Air Force. So the family got him admitted to Bristol University for a course in aeronautical engineering and he would have gone to the UK in 1966 but for the intervention of hostilities with India in the spring of 1965 over the Rann of Kutch.

Caught up in the prevailing patriotic fervour, Farook, on his way to college, stopped off at the Inter-services Selection Board office in Lahore and volunteered for a commission. A week later when the call came there was initial disappointment from his mother who didn’t want to lose her only son to the army. But Farook, with his father’s consent, finally made it to the Pakistan Military Academy at Risalpur where he quickly distinguished himself as the outstanding cadet among over 300 young men. When when he graduated fourth of three hundred coming battalion sergeant major. When he graduated, he was given a commission in the armed forces. Farook chose the armoured officer course, he was given his choice of service. Farook chose the armoured officer course because he was interested in the tactical armoured combat which he topped with B+.

In October, 1970, Captain Farook Rahman received a note from his CO informing him that he had been selected for secondment to the oil-rich Sheikhdom of Abu Dhabi. Pakistan was involved in an urgent operation of The United States Army. The operation was to support the Afghan insurgency against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The operation was code-named Operation Enduring Freedom. The operation was launched in 2001 and was initially planned to last for six months, but it was extended multiple times and continued until 2013. It was a significant part of the war in Afghanistan and had a profound impact on the region and the world.

Farook found himself a squadron commander in the Abu Dhabi armoured regiment based near the oil port of Jabaladnaha. It was a happy time for the young tank commander. Military duties, in which he excelled, took up only a portion of his time. He had lots of it left for his other loves—reading volumes of military history and tactics, driving fast cars, and music. Farook bought himself the best stereo system he could find and an Opel Commodore GS in which he would travel to Abu Dhabi and back at 100 miles every week. He was billeted in the British Officers mess and it was there that in the middle of June, 1971, he found a bundle of British newspapers, among them Sunday Times featuring my massive expose of the Pakistan army’s campaign of genocide in Bangladesh. He marked the turning point because I was selected for the second commission in the 2 Field Artillery and then commissioned to the 2 Field Artillery then based in Bannu in the North-west Frontier Province.

In 1968 when promoted to captain, Rashid went to Dhaka on a short holiday and lived with an uncle, his wife, and her sister. The uncle was an eligible bachelor and his uncle’s friend had a very eligible niece, Zohida ("Tinka") who was the daughter of S.H. Khan, a Chittagong industrialist. The match was arranged and Rashid took his bride back with him to Bannu where the first of their two daughters was born.

For a brief period in 1970 he was posted to the East Pakistan Rifles and stationed in Chittagong where he was employed in policing the border with India. One day he caught an NCO with Rs 100,000 in his pocket. The man had evidently obtained a big bribe from the smugglers operating in the area. Rashid promptly arrested him. His action was not appreciated by his commanding officer who said this man, a Punjabi, was also involved in making money from the smugglers. Later when he was in London, Rashid surprisingly found himself back to his Artillery unit. The excuse was, he was to learn later, was a secret report by his CO that he had ‘developed parochial tendencies’. In the military jargon of that time this meant that he was a Bengali nationalist. It was a bad certificate for any Pakistani army officer.
When the Pakistan army cracked down on the Bengalis in March 1971, Rashid's unit was stationed in Hajira on the Pakistan side of the cease-fire line in Kashmir. It was a trying period for the young Bengali officer. The radio reports he was picking up from different parts of the world gave horrifying stories of the trauma in East Pakistan. Rashid decided to defect from the Pakistan army.

Explaining his reasoning he said: 'I thought that once the movement had started, whatever the cause may be, and right or wrong, it had to be seen through to the end. If we failed to liberate our country then we would have been tremendously subjugated by the Pakistanis. They would never have treated us like human beings again. We therefore had no choice. It became a duty of every Bengali to fight for his country's liberation so that we could live independently with honour and respect.'

Like millions of other Bengali women at that time, Tinku rallied bravely behind her husband. 'The country comes first,' Rashid recalls her saying 'other things are not important. We must go'. To break out of their isolation in Hajira, Rashid applied for a 10-day furlough on the excuse that his parents were ill and he had to see them. After an agony of waiting his request was granted and on 2 October, 1971, he took Tinku and her baby daughter to Dhaka. Rashid sent his wife and child to her parents in Chittagong and himself tried to cross the border into India at Agartala. Twice he was nearly caught in the cross-fire. The third time, on 29 October, he slipped through.

He re-entered East Pakistan through Sylhet at the beginning of December with a Mukhti Bahini howitzer battery attached to Ziaur Rahman's 'Z' Force. After independence this battery was raised to a regiment, the 2 Field Artillery, and Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid became its Commanding Officer.

Farook and Rashid, like the other Bengali officers and men involved in the liberation movement — the Bangladesh army itself — had high hopes for Bangladesh after its creation. They were proud of their country, extremely nationalist and the fact that they were willing to take a back seat in the first years of independence clearly shows that they had no political ambitions. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, however, did not see it that way. His bitter experiences in Pakistani jails made him suspicious and hostile to all things military. In his anxiety not to re-create the 'monster' he had known in Pakistan he ended up doing that very thing — and it destroyed him.

Notes
with barbed wire and guarded by the Rakhi Bahini. The authorities had provided a few latrines and water pumps. Each family was also given a 19' x 27-foot plot of land for a hut but no building materials. There were also no medical supplies, no means of income for the people and only a meager ration. The four-bed 'hospital' was used as a dormitory for the camp officials.

An old man told visiting journalists, 'Either give us food or shoot us.' According to Grace Samson, a Dutch Salvation Army volunteer, the tragedy was brought upon by God, but an act of government; a man-made desolation. It is not known how many perished in these camps. But it marked another turning point, for the people now not only cursed the government but also Sheikh Mujib himself.

He had till then generally managed to escape the public odium for the mess in Bangladesh. People blamed Mujib's ministers and the officials around him, rather than him personally. This may have been for emotional reasons because many still had lingering hope that Bangabandhu would ultimately live up to public expectation. Mujib for his part did not miss any opportunity to blunt criticism by giving him credit in any of his speeches.

M. R. Akhtar ('Mukul'), who was close to Mujib, tells an interesting story of how on one occasion this was done. According to him, at the beginning of March, 1975, Sheikh Mujib was secretly in touch with some leaders of the opposition Jashod party who were supposed to be underground at that time. The body, which rightly or wrongly had the reputation of being a pro-Indian party, wanted to refurbish its image with a big demonstration against the government, including an assault on Bangabandhu. According to Mukul, Mujib persuaded them to march instead on the house of the Home Minister, Mansoor Ali. A deal was done. So on 17 March after a big protest meeting at the Bahadur Mahal, the mob was led to Mansoor Ali's house, which they attacked. The minister, rather conveniently, had gone out of town with his family for a few days. The affair ended when the Rakhi Bahini opened fire on the mob, killing eleven people. Thus according to Mukul, the Jashod's image improved without any real damage to Mujib's. Mujib had another cause for celebration that day, 17 March, as it was his 53rd birthday.

The violence continued to mount. Mujib himself at the end of 1974 claimed that almost 4000 Awami League party workers, including five Members of Parliament, had been killed 'under cover of darkness' by opposition groups. Brigadier Mohd. Nazrul Islam said that much of this killing was that of local party squabbles. Khandaker Mostaque Ahmed, who succeeded Mujib as President, told me that sometimes in the old quarter of Dhaka the nights were made hideous by the wailing of women whose husbands and sons had been dragged away by the Rakhi Bahini on Home Minister Mansoor Ali's orders. Mostaque claims these unfortunate people 'just vanished'.

Sheikh Mujib's reaction to the mounting crises caused by mismanagement and corruption was to launch a series of cosmetic operations. To him it was indispensable to blame them for the mess. He prosecuted some minor officials and party men and in a grand gesture ordered the army to clean up the smugglers and hoarders. This last act was one of a series of colossal blunders that year which hastened his end.

The soldiers, isolated in their barracks, had been only distant observers of the fading Bangladesh dream. Now they were brought face to face with all the gruesome details of the terrible rot afflicting the country. They did not like it. Inevitably some of them began to think it was a patriotic duty to save Bangladesh from the waywardness of the politicians. Thus the army was drawn into politics and it destroyed Mujib.

The army, under the cover of a show trial and the scaffold, stumped the rot. Mujib persuaded himself that it was not his policies that were wrong but the system of government. Apparently the parliamentary system was not suited to the requirements of Bangladesh.
of the 'in' set, but perhaps not so well in with Mujib as the brother of another guest at that wedding, Ghazi Gholam Mustafa. Apart from holding a very lucrative position as Chairman of the Bangladesh Red Cross, Ghazi was also the West Bengal Lancers' hard-hitting city boss in Dhaka. In the later capacity he was Mujib's right-hand man, very tough, powerful and free-wheeling.

According to those present that day, during the party Ghazi Gholam Mustafa's brother made some insulting remarks about Mrs. Dalim. In the altercation that followed, Ghazi's bully-boys are said to have joined in and ruffled up the army couple. Some say the thugs attempted to pounce on Dalim, but there is no confirmation of this. In any case Dalim's army colleagues decided to take immediate action. Accompanied by their troops they pried into two trucks, went hunting for the offending gang and ended up wrecking Ghazi Gholam Mustafa's bungalow.

Both parties appealed to Sheikh Mujib for redress, and he managed to temporarily soothe their ruffled tempers. Later, after another incident of 'indiscipline' was reported from Comilla cantonment, Mujib instituted a military inquiry into the young officers' misconduct. As a result 22 young officers were dismissed or presumed retired from service among them were Majors Dalim, Noor and Huda. As a gesture to the family Mujib rode to Dalim by assisting him in setting up a business venture. The hurt, however, remained. A year later the three ex-army officers would figure prominently in Mujib's assassination. Meanwhile the Dalim incident caused widespread resentment among the younger officers. They felt betrayed not only by Sheikh Mujib but also by their seniors in the army. Many of them began to carry side arms for personal protection whenever they went out with their families and they talked openly about their dissatisfaction. Military messes became centres of plotting. The intelligence services kept close tabs on all this and when their reports reached Mujib he made no secret of his intention to supplant the army with Rakh Bahini. The more he moved in that direction, the more he alienated the army.

But at that time the immediate threat to Mujib's life was not from the army but from a totally unexpected quarter.

It so happened that Siraj Shikdar, leader of the Maitoi Sharbhabo (proletarian) party and the man Mujib's son Kamal had once tried to hunt down, was finally caught by the police near Chittaong towards the end of December, 1974. According to his brother-in-law, Zackaria Chowdhury ('Zack'), Siraj Shikdar was arrested to Dhaka and taken to Gonobazar to meet Sheikh Mujib. Mujib tried to win him over, but Siraj Shikdar refused to compromise Mujib ordered the police to 'deal with him. Zack said Siraj was driven handcuffed and blindfolded to the police control room on the disused Dhaka racecourse and then taken out at night on a lonely road and shot. The official explanation given at that time was that Siraj Shikdar was shot dead 'while trying to escape'. His body was recovered, however, and Siraj Shikdar's wife, Zack, made the discovery. She noticed that the bullet wounds on Siraj's body clearly showed that he had been shot from the front six times in the chest, probably with a shotgun.

Whatever the reason, it was openly talked about in Dhaka that Siraj Shikdar was liquidated on Mujib's instructions. Shamin herself was convinced that her brother had died by Mujib's hand. So this 19-year-old girl decided to take revenge. 'I got a revolver from the Sharbhabo party and looked for an opportunity to kill this murderer' she told me. Shamin was banking on the fact that, as she was one of Bangladesh's best-known school-girls, she might have won the President's award for achievement the year before, she could get close enough to Mujib to shoot him.

She made several requests for an appointment with Mujib. Each time she was put off. Then she invited him to an exhibition at the Dhaka University's school of art. Mujib accepted the invitation but failed to turn up. 'I was getting desperate', she said, 'I know his little hard-hitting city boss in Dhaka. He couldn't be that far out of my shooting distance of him.' She never did. Fate intervened to save Mujib. Shamin fell in love, got married to Zack and left the country with his wife. Bravo Squadron of the First Bengal Lancers under the command of Major Farook Khan was to arrive in July 1974 from its base in Dhaka to Demra, just south of the capital. The move was part of a dramatic 'Operation Clean-up' ordered by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a grand gesture of public appeasement. Farook's command at first extended to the whole of the Narayanganj industrial complex. Later he was moved further south to Munshiganj. He took up his new assignment in an ebullient mood. 'Ah, very good' he told his troops, 'the Prime Minister has at last found out what his chaps have been doing and since he wants the army to fix them, let's do a good job.'

Farook went about his task in characteristic no-nonsense manner. Within days he had cleared up a particularly stuck spot near the roundabout on the Narayanganj Express which was infested with dacoits. The leading hand in the area was a 20-year-old man professing to be an Awami Leaguer. After being arrested by Farook he freely confessed to having killed 21 people. 'I asked him why he had done it?' Farook told me later, 'and the bloody fellow answered 'I did it on my uzadi's (chief orders). The 'uzadi' was Mujib. What the hell was I supposed to do?' The incident gravely disturbed the young officer. He was even more upset by the increasing political interference whenever action was taken against Awami Leaguers.

Elsewhere other army officers were having similar experiences in the course of their anti-bandit operations. Hundreds of people were arrested by them for smuggling, hoarding and intimidation and murder. Invariably, after a telephone call from Dhaka to the local police, charges were quietly dropped against the most prominent of these men and they were allowed to go free. 'It was a damned awkward situation,' Farook once told me. 'Every time we caught a chota dacoit we turned him out to be either an Awami Leaguer or a very staunch Awami League supporter. They were getting protection from the top and we were getting a whiff for doing our job.'

Farook said he received a general order in writing informing him that should he fail to act he would be acting on his own responsibility and his commanding officer and the brigade commander would not be answerable if anything went wrong. 'None of the senior commanders would accept responsibility because the Prime Minister had said if you take any funny action you will be hanged for it,' said Farook. 'It meant that we were supposed to act out corruption and murder. So we were supposed to stop short of the Awami League. The whole thing was a damn farce.'

At the same time Farook and the officers were being told to have no mercy on the opposition, particularly Nasaites (Maitois) and other leftists who got caught in the army's net. 'I was given orders to beat them up, get information from them and then throw them in the river' Farook told me. 'Colonel Shafat Jamil (then Brigade Commander Dhaka) said they were vermin and must be destroyed.' Farook said Shafat Jamil was reflecting orders from the top. 'As far as Sheikh Mujib was concerned he said 'the indirect orders to us were for leftists. It was his aide, Colonel Shafat Jamil, who had the orders to kill them.' Farook refused to comply with these orders. 'I was not deeply interested in Marxism,' he said "but what impressed me was that these chaps
did care for the country. They may have gone the wrong way ideologically but they had not so far done wrong to the country." So whenever he caught one of these men Farook quietly let him go.

One day during a combing operation in the Tongi area north of Dhaka, Major Nasser who was commanding another squadron of the Bengal Lancers, arrested three small-time thugs. In the course of interrogation one of the men broke down and told the army officers a story about a particularly gruesome triple murder which had rocked Tongi the previous winter. It transpired that a newly married couple travelling to their home in a taxi had been waylaid on the outskirts of the town. The bridegroom and the taxi driver were hacked to death and their bodies thrown in the river. The bride, who was carried off to an isolated cottage, was repeatedly raped by her abductors. Three days later her mutilated body was found on the road near a bridge.

Confessing to his part in the crime, the thug told the army men the police investigation was called off when they found that the ring-leader of the gang was his boss, Muzamil, chairman of the Tongi Awami League. According to Farook the confession so infuriated the interrogating officer, a boyish lieutenant named Ishaq who has since resigned and left the police, that he 'began kicking the chap so hard that he died of internal injuries.'

Muzamil himself was taken by Major Nasser to Dhaka for prosecution after he had confirmed from police records that the thug had been telling the truth. According to Farook, Muzamil offered Nasser 300,000 Takkas for his release. ‘Don’t make it a public affair,’ the Awami Leaguer advised him. ‘You will anyway have to let me go, either today or tomorrow. So why not take the money and forget about it?’ Nasser, who was affronted by this blatant attempt to bribe him, swore he would bring Muzamil to trial and make him hang for his crime. He handed him over to the civil authorities. Farook recounted in his book that Muzamil was all astounded a few days later to find that Muzamil had been released on Sheikh Mujib’s direct intervention. ‘I told you to take the money,’ Muzamil crowed. ‘You would have been the gainers. Now I have been released anyway and you get nothing.’

The incident shattered Farook and his colleagues. Tongi marked the turning point for them. ‘It seemed as if we were living in a society headed by a criminal organisation. It was as if the Mafia had taken over Bangladesh. We were totally disillusioned. Here was the head of government abetting murder and other extreme things from which he was supposed to protect us. This was not acceptable. We decided he must go.’

Major Farook wanted to kill Sheikh Mujib that very day. He recalled: ‘I lost my temper. I told Capt. Shariful Hussain “Shariful Hussain. This is absolutely useless. Let’s go and knock off this chap.” He said “Yes Sir. But think about it a bit more.”’

That’s all I could do, think about Sheikh Mujib and how to kill him. I had my troops with me, the solid hard core I who had trained in detail, how to handle weapons, how to shoot, how to ambush, to surprise. Mujib was being guarded by our troops (Lancers) at that time. I thought I should just drive the trucks in and tell the guards, Okay. Relax. Then go inside and shoot him up.

I then realised that that was a very stupid thing. I was not thinking. I was working on emotion. I had not developed that far. That’s why I trusted my troops so much. They knew my feelings. They did not beat me.

Explaining his metamorphosis, Farook continued: ‘Do you remember how we wept when we heard that Sheikh Mujib had returned?’ Remember the whole country, people mad all over? The man was almost made a god! In 1972 if he told us, “Alright you all round up the Awami Leaguers or the Brigade Commanders, tie them up and throw them in the river” we would have done it. Why? Because Sheikh Mujib had said it. What for? Nobody would have asked. We felt we had got a country, we have got a leader. We were prepared to do anything. We did not mind any problem. Soldiers, men, rank, nothing mattered. It was such an extreme emotion and it was not just one person, but hundreds of thousands of people. All differences had died. That’s why it turned so bitter. I say this chap (Mujib) has created the climate of the century by destroying the feeling of such a large number of people.’

Farook said the Tongi incident made a rebel of him. ‘After that I was just not interested in promotion, courses, career or anything. I only thought about one thing—how this government should go.

In Bangladesh at that time there were many others with the same fixation. There was a lot of quiet plotting going on all over, including those such as Mujib’s political advisers and ministers who daily fawned at his feet. Politicians used to meet with exaggerated casuistry at weddings, funerals and at the mosques after ’namaz’ (prayer) on Friday. They were extremely excited and in tune. There could be dangerous since sycophants among them had the habit of running off to denounce each other. There were swarms of Mujib’s intelligence men. But there was less restraint in the army. The Dalim incident followed by the retirement/dismissal of 22 young officers had not only created resentment against Mujib but had also thoroughly exposed the ineffectiveness of the senior army commanders. Thus with their careers in a mess and no one in the army to stand up to the politicians, the young officers and men could not have cared less about who heard them sound off.

Farook recalls: ‘Everyone was fed up. They were all talking about ideologies, coups, counter-coups, Marxism, communism, and the formation of cells. Everywhere there was talk about plots and counter-plots.’ Mujib’s intelligence services faithfully monitored everything. But the Bangabandhu, supremely confident of his ability to deal with the youngsters, dismissed it all as bravado. His main concern was how the commanders behaved—and he had tamed them.

During this period Farook missed his brother-in-law and confidant, Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid, who had gone to India earlier on a 14-month gunnery staff course at Deolali near Bombay. He began to discuss politics with his troops, carefully sounding out their own ideas and, where necessary, motivating them with his own. In Rashid’s absence Farook also talked to other officers, individually and in small groups. There were several young majors, a colonel from army headquarters and an air force officer who used to get together. Farook identified them as Col. Amin Ahmed, GI-OPs in army headquarters, Col. Hafiz (Brigade Major 46 Dhaka Brigade). On one occasion at the headquarters of the Artillery, Major Nasir, Major Ghaffar and Sec. Leader Liaquat. They met occasionally and not all were present on every occasion. ‘We used to meet by pre-arrangement at somebody’s house at odd times’ he said ‘but I soon found these chaps had long-term thinking and I wanted to act quickly. In the secret meetings, however, were productive in that they compelled Farook to undertake a self-taught, crash course in politics. His strictly army background had left him sorely lacking in this department. ‘We were thinking in national terms and suddenly I felt I had to read a lot because I found that I was blank.’

In the autumn of 1974 Farook read several dozen books, among them Guevara’s Diaries, some writings of Chairman Mao and a thesis on the political problems of South-East Asia. He was not impressed by the Marxist patterns. ‘The only conclusion I came to was that they had their own problems and had
tackled them in their own way. But this was not a solution for Bangladesh. There was nothing I could find in any textbook or anywhere which fitted our situation.

During the course of these researches Farook read about the Indonesian experiment and the overthrow of Sukarno whose political experiences bore some resemblance to Mujib’s. It led him to a crucial decision.

He recalls: ‘I asked myself should Sheikh Mujib be deposed like Sukarno and retire to a palace? I debated the idea for a long time. If we had the whole army or the whole population behind us, this would have been the best of all ways for Awan and me. But there were very few of us. If we took him prisoner, counter-forces would come out in his name and over-run us. I also knew he was depending strongly on India. There was always the possibility that someone would call in the Indians on behalf of Sheikh Mujib or the Indians would control to Mujib being deposed and send in their armies to support him. Even if he were killed at that stage it would have made no difference because by then Bangladesh would have come under India. This would have defeated my whole purpose. Bangladesh would have been in a bigger soup.

For this reason the killing nothing would happen in the country, at least there would be no cause for India to wave the flag and come in. In a way Sheikh Mujib signed his own death warrant because of his love affair with India. We could not put him away like Sukarno. I was convinced there was no alternative. Sheikh Mujib had to die’. Major Rashid concurred with this assessment. ‘Mujib had to die’, Rashid said, ‘because he was more experienced politically and if he lived we would not have been able to control the situation. He would have brought in outside powers, even if it meant a civil war. And he would have turned the tables on us’. Deciding that it was in December 1974 Major Farook Rahman told his fellow plotters of a plan to kill Sheikh Mujib. It was the Prime Minister’s Air Force’s habit to travel by one of the Bangladesh Air Force’s Russian-built helicopters whenever he went more than 20 miles out of Dhaka. Not only did it save time, but for security reasons his family and personal staff thought helicopter travel an ideal and convenient it. Farook proposed to knock off Mujib in the air when he was most vulnerable.

One of the plotters was Sq. Leader Liaquat who was flight control officer at Dhaka. Farook suggested that Liaquat arrange to fly Mujib the next time he was going out and to take along with him an automatic pistol. At the point of the radio, the nearest area from Dhaka in the control zone, when radio contact with the ground would normally be suspended for a brief period, Liaquat was to switch off the radio, shoot Mujib and toss his body into a convenient river. He was then to proceed to his destination as though nothing had happened. Meanwhile Farook and the others would ‘take necessary action on the ground’.

Farok is an amateur pilot and he thought the plot had much to recommend itself. It would have been the easiest thing to kill Mujib when he was isolated from his bodyguards. The Prime Minister’s travel plans were however unpredictably. The plot, like several other schemes discussed by the group, was never tried out.

As the days passed Farook began to get restless. The young officers were having endless discussions about ideological matters and planned to establish cells throughout the army. In practical terms, however, they were getting nowhere. Coup by conversation did not appeal to the practical minded officer particularly as Sheikh Mujib was showing signs of strengthening his own position. Mujib’s pronouncement of the State of Emergency was yet to come.

But meanwhile Dhaka was humming with rumours about his plans to change the Constitution and install himself as President with absolute power, presiding over a one-party state. Without telling the others, Farook quietly began to work on an elaborate operational plan of his own. It was the middle of December 1974, a few days after they had discussed the idea of hijacking Mujib’s helicopter.

Farook proceeded in a military manner. First the targets were identified. Mujib, of course, was the primary target. But on the list was also every single person or unit capable of reacting against Farook at the decisive moment. Among them were the Farook’s old academy colleagues, Leaguers. Among these were Farook’s own uncle, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and Manoos Ali. The major considered them dangerous because they were capable of getting help from India. On the army side Farook listed Major General Shahjil and the Chief of Staff, his deputy Major General Ziaur (Zia) Rahman and Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, the CSG who was also his own uncle and friend. Then there was the Rakhi Bahini, Mujib’s storm troopers, to be taken care of.

Of these targets had to be covered—i.e. neutralised as possible, eliminate or subdue. What was really necessary. When he worked out the numbers of troops needed for each task Farook found he needed a small army. ‘It was more than brigade strength and I asked myself where the hell am I going to get all these troops?’

He then briefly toyed with a commandeo-style operation deploying 50 men for a strike on Mujib’s house. Probably all 50 would have died because no blocking operation was planned and the Rakhi Bahini and other army units would have retaliated smartly. Farook discarded this plan as impractical and went back to reducing his operational plan to more manageable proportions.

At the same time he took extreme precautions against discovery. He would spend the night drawing charts, making detailed calculations, writing a target assessment at which he would fix his mind. When morning came every scrap of paper would be scrupulously burnt. ‘I had my wife, children, father and mother with me in the cantonment. All our lives were at stake. There was no point in taking any chances’.

Farook was similarly careful in rearranging his target list. ‘Each man had to be studied carefully,’ he told me. ‘I used to ask myself what is his capability? Will he react or will he not react? When I found people not relevant to the problem I would cut, cut, cut.’

He made a searching study of the army commanders, particularly Brig. Khalid Musharraf and the CSG. ‘I knew he was an intelligent person capable of reacting, so I decided he should be neutralised even though I had discussed things with him. Only in the final stages was I finally convinced that Khalid Musharraf would not react against me, at least, and for that matter neither would Zia or anybody else’. The assessment would prove to be astonishingly accurate. After Mujib’s assassination, the army commanders, like frightened sheep, fell quickly into line.

Farook finally narrowed down his list to three persons: Sheikh Mujib, his nephew Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, and his brother-in-law, Abdul Rab Serenat. These were the men closest to Mujib. Moni was an extremely shrewd, capable and ruthless politician with a powerful influence in labour and student groups. He was also Editor-in-Chief of the semi-official Bangladesh Times. Serenat was acquisitions and ambitious. Like Mujib, both hated the army and had strong vested interests in Sheikh Mujib’s mantle. They were also part of the inner circle.

Major Farook decided that these three men should die. *
At around 10 o’clock every night that winter when the social set in the fashionable Dhanmondi area of Dhaka was settling down to the enjoyment of life, a dark figure would slip out of a cycle-rickshaw on the Mymensingh Road, Dhanmondi, and after a short walk past the lake would casually turn into Road No. 32. There was nothing about the grey-checked lungi, the dark cotton bush-shirt and the well-worn chappals (slippers) to point out the sauntering figure apart from the many domestic servants relaxing in the cool air after a hard day’s work. The only difference was that while the others were out for a life-sustaining breather, this dark figure was the Angel of Death. Major Farook Rahman was walking Sheikh Mujib like the Hound of Hell.

‘I could not trust anyone’ he told me ‘I had to check Mujib over personally for a period to see exactly what were his movements, his habits, what he did, where he went. I had to firmly establish the pattern of his life. In the final moment when my troops went into action there was no question of a single slip’.

Farook’s diligence in piecing together his tactical plan was immeasurably helped by the fact that the 1st Bengal Lancers, his own troops, provided the night guard at Mujib’s three-storey bungalow. A grateful nation had provided the Premier with a palace-like residence, Gonobhaban, but Mujib used it as a private office outside the secretariat while continuing to live in his own house in Dhanmondi. All this flattered his vanity as a man of the people. But it also made him more vulnerable. Mujib however, in January, 1975, did not think of this because he was riding the crest of a new wave. He had grabbed absolute power by massacring the Constitution and the National Assembly.

With his private army, the Rakhi Bahini, rapidly multiplying, he felt he had nothing to fear from the military establishment, least of all from any army major. And he had never even heard of Farook!

‘No. 32’ as Mujib’s bungalow in Dhanmondi was known, had a triple cordon system. The inner ring consisted of a police post with armed police placed strategically on both sides of the house. Backing them up were the army sentries who manned the gates and patrolled the inner walls of the small compound. Mujib’s handpicked personal bodyguard carrying side arms and sien guns sprawled in the ground-floor corridors of the house itself.

From their vantage point inside the compound and contacts with the domestic staff, the Bengal Lancer unit knew exactly who the visitors were and what went on in the big house. Invariably Farook would slip in for a chat with his men. Invariably this was to check on their vigilance, but mostly it was to casually pump them for information. He would then proceed on his nightly rounds reconnoitering the area, marking obstacles and the traffic patterns of the busy Mymensingh Road. He would repeat this at the residences of Abdur Rahmemonabat and Sheikh Fazlul Huq Mom. He had no Lancer sentries outside their homes to help him so he just squatted in the shadows observing everybody he could.

Ranges and depths for the back-up artillery he planned to use posed a serious problem. The only area maps available were in the Operations Room of Army headquarters. To ask for even a quick glance at them would have aroused suspicion. So Farook did it the hard way. He obtained a small map from a guide book put out by the Bangladesh Tourist Bureau. Using it as a reference, he foot-sledged his way around the city. Distances in each area were calculated with measured strides. Then he computed the angle of fire for each target and put down precisely where his blocking teams would be located.

The tension of the surveillance and the exhausting walks soon began to affect the health of the young Major, who had once turned down a position in a prestigious infantry regiment because he hated to march. Farook started taking Valium 5 tranquillizers three times a day. But by the middle of February, he had his task plan complete. Only the timing had to be penciled in. On 15 February, 1975 Farook noted in his diary ‘OFFENSIVE PHASE’. He was ready to launch the coup.

Just before completing the Gunery Staff Course in India, Farook’s brother-in-law Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid applied for leave to make a trip to Singapore and Malaysia where he had been invited by another officers attending the course. The application was sent to Farook with the request that he push it through army headquarters. Farook, however, had plans of his own. He withheld the application and urgently summoned Rashid back to Dhaka. ‘I need you,’ he told him ‘there are too many things happening here’. Rashid found nothing further urging. He had been greatly alarmed by the reports he had been getting from his family about the deteriorating situation in Bangladesh. His instincts warned him something was afoot and he didn’t want to be left out. Once the course was completed he hurried back, reaching Dhaka in the middle of March.

Farook briefed Rashid about his plans and when he concurred, the two majors got down to the serious business of overthrowing Sheikh Mujib.

‘Rashid and I agreed that removing Sheikh Mujib was not enough’ Farook said ‘There must be positive benefit. We had to have a positive goal so that at least the side towards the hell we were heading for could be stopped. We wanted to put on the brakes. If that was done we could have achieved something’.

First, the obvious questions was ‘How do we divide responsibility when they seize power?’ Answering his question, Rashid said: ‘If we had gone for power then probably Farook—who is a very good soldier, even better than I am—would have been Commander-in-Chief of the army as well as the Defence Ministry with total power over the armed forces. I would have looked after the civil administration’, he added.

‘Who would have been the top man, the boss’, I asked.

It was an awkward question and Rashid was embarrassed. ‘Well you see . . .’ he said hesitantly. ‘You see . . . we did not go for power because we couldn’t do justice to it . . .’

‘You mean you were not qualified to run the country?’ I interrupted.

Rashid: ‘Not that alone, but also because we didn’t have the support required for it’.

So the two majors decided to put in power someone who they thought could do for Bangladesh what Sheikh Mujib had failed to do. To this end, both of them began looking for candidates to replace Mujib.

Farook recalled: ‘The first and obvious choice was General Zia because at least till then he was not tarnished. Till then he was the only one in whom I had a little bit of faith. A lot of junior officers who were thinking of what should be done to stop the rot used to say: “Let’s find out from General Zia what we should do”. But nobody dared to approach him’. Farook decided to have a try.

He had known the General, who was ten years his senior, since the latter had been his instructor in the Pakistan Military Academy. Zia was a popular figure in the Bangladesh army with an impressive reputation. He had been commander of the 2nd Punjab in 1965 before transferring to the 1st East Bengal Regiment. Later he spent five years with military intelligence. Reverting
to the Bengal Regiment in 1966. Zia did a three-month stint with the British Army on the Rhine. In 1971 he gained considerable fame as the man who announced the independence of Bangladesh over Chittagong Radio after the Pakistani army cracked down on the Bengalis. Later, his war-time service as commander of 'Z Force' added to his reputation. After the liberation of Bangladesh, promotions came rapidly. Full colonel in February, 1972, Brigadier in mid-1973, Major General in October of the same year.

At that time I had a strong respect and affection for General Zia. Farook said, 'I hoped to interest him in taking over the leadership of the country with the backing of the army.'

After much effort Farook managed to get an interview with General Zia on 20 March, 1975. It was a Thursday and when he reported to General Zia's bungalow at 7.30 pm he found Col. Moin, the Adjutant General, about to leave.

Farook said he broached the subject of his mission very cautiously. 'I was meeting the Deputy Chief of Army Staff and a Major General. If I bluntly told him that I wanted to overthrow the President of the country straightforwardly like that there was a very good chance that he would have arrested me with his own guards, there and then, and put me in jail. I had to go about it in a round-about way'.

Farook continued, 'Actually we came around to it by discussing the corruption and everything that was going wrong. I said the country required a change. Zia said 'Yes, Yes. Let's go outside and talk' and then he took me on the lawn.'

'As we walked on the lawn I told him that we were professional soldiers who served the country and not an individual. The army and the civil government, everybody, was going down the drain. We have to have a change. We, the junior officers, have already worked it out. We want your support and your leadership.'

According to Farook, General Zia's answer was: 'I am sorry I would not like to get involved in anything like this. If you want to do something you junior officers should do it yourself. Leave me out of it'.

Curiously the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh army, when informed of the impending mutiny, did not lift a little finger to protect the legally appointed President of the country. Though General Zia did not fall in with the plot he also did not arrest Farook. Instead he quietly turned a blind eye to the plotting while taking steps to secure himself. According to Farook Zia instructed his ADC that the major should on no account be allowed to see him again.

In July, 1976, while doing a TV programme in London on the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman I confronted Zia with what Farook had said. Zia did not deny it—not or did he confirm it. Instead he put off giving me an answer and when I persisted did his best to keep me out of the country for many years.

At the end of March 1975 Farook decided to make his move. There was no special reason for the timing. Only a sudden end to patience brought on by his failure to recruit General Zia for the coup. 'I was getting frustrated and fed up with the waiting' Farook said, 'so I decided to get on with it'. Impulsively he abandoned his meticulous planning and went to Sq. Leader Liesquat. 'What about taking off in some MiGs and doing a bit of strafing on his house,' Farook asked him. 'I'll surround the house and you can control the whole thing with your aircraft.' Liesquat's answer was an equally casual 'Let's go.'

Farook then quickly outlined the operation scheduled for dawn next day, 30 March, and went off to brief the others. It was typical of Farook that he should assume they would fall in with his bravado. But he was due for a surprise. 'I got the greatest disillusionment of my life' he said. 'People like (Major) Hafiz, Colonel Amin and Ahmed Chowdhury and the others all backed out. All these chaps had been talking big, spending nights talking like hell about what they were doing; but when it came to doing it nobody was willing to come forward'.

Everything went black for Farook. The sleepless nights, the foot-slogging, the months of surveillance, all seemed to have been wasted. The great coup had failed to get off the ground because of an unsuspected human factor: the reality of killing Mujib the other plotters got cold feet.

Sheikh Mujib, however, would not escape heart-rending grief on the day set for the aborted plot. It was the day his father died.

The collapse of the plot only confirmed Major Farook Rahman's determination to kill Sheikh Mujib. Henceforth he would go it alone. But first he took pains to draw suspicion away from himself. 'I told everybody to forget it. I withdrew completely from all discussions so that they would think that I had cooled down, I believe in tactical surprise. The idea was to let the others begin and I had gone to sleep.' Farook did it by acting the part of a carefree army officer. He took Fardah to parties, picnics and every possible social occasion. Bangladesh was in turmoil, but for the moment they were the happy couple without a care in the world. It all ended with the big bash on 12 August 1975. The wedding anniversary party was intended to disarm suspicion at the crucial moment. Meanwhile Farook continued to secretly weave his web around Mujib.

He estimated he required about 800 men for his tactical plan which would have allowed him to block the Rakhhi Bahini and other army units and thus avoid unnecessary fighting. But with modifications a minimum of 300 men would be sufficient for a limited purpose. These were readily available from his own troops. The 1st Bengal Lancers had been raised by him in 1972. Later as second-in-command he had selected certain of the men for private specialised commando-style training in addition to their normal duties in the Army Headquarters. He called this his 'Hunter-Killer Team'—men with trustworthy, stable and quiet types—not loud talkers—and intensely loyal to him. Divided into groups of three, they had been motivated with Koranic injunctions about honesty, integrity, discipline, the love of Islam and their obligations to their fellow men. Farook had 150 Hunter-Killer teams at his disposal. He was certain he could depend on them at any time.

Farook tentatively decided that his next strike should coincide with the summer monsoons when torrential rains make the delta country a quagmire. His reasoning, again, was the fear that Mujib's death might provoke India to intervene in support of pro-Mujib elements. 'If India does anything and we are involved in a civil war then the monsoon is the one season we can badly tie down' he said. 'If everything fails, at least we will have the protection of the monsoon'.

Meanwhile Rashid was bravely facing up to an embarrassing personal problem. Having completed the Gunnery Staff Course in India, he had automatically been posted to the Gunnery School at Jessore, near the western border with India. It was miles away from the projected action in Dhaka. Even worse, it deprived him of the command of his gun. All this tended to make him a passenger in the plot. So Rashid was burning up his one month 'holiday' in Dhaka to drum up support for the plot within the army.
always played it safe. 'I didn't commit myself' he said. 'Rather I used to make them commit themselves so that if anything went wrong it could be said that they had approached me, not that I had approached them.'

On one occasion he cautiously broached the subject with the Dhaka Brigade Commander, Col. Shafat Jamil. He recalled that after they had traded words about how bad things were in Bangladesh, Shafat Jamil asked him: 'Ha, Ki, kornu?' (What shall we do?). Rashid promptly backed out. 'No sir' he told the colonel. 'I won't do anything unless you order me. After all you are my brigade commander.' Rashid was quite shaken by the experience. He warned Farook not to trust anyone because he feared the other officers were playing a double game and would put them in trouble.

The meeting with Shafat Jamil did, however, have a very fortunate and totally unexpected result. During their conversation, Rashid said, Shafat Jamil had suggested that instead of going to the Gunners School at Jessore, why not request a transfer to Dhaka 'so that we can keep in touch more conveniently'. This was, in the least, a curious suggestion and raised doubts about the Dhaka Brigade Commander's intention. It staggered Rashid. A posting to Dhaka was then beyond his wildest dreams. He immediately suspected Shafat Jamil was trying to trap him. So rather cunningly Rashid told him that any transfer request he himself made may not go down well with army headquarters. Why not the brigade commander wangle it for him? Rashid did not expect anything to come of it. But the Brigade Commander did oblige. Once again, in April, 1975, Major Rashid found himself commanding 2 Field Artillery very conveniently based at Dhaka.

He was delighted with the turn of events. The brothers-in-law could now go ahead with their plot without depending on the assistance of other officers. The 2 Field Artillery had 6 Italian Howitzers, 12 Yugoslav 105mm Howitzers and 600 troops. Farook's Lancers had 30 T-54 tanks and 800 troops. With the backing of Rashid's artillery and troops Farook was confident that the Bengal Lancers were based on the Rakh Bahini and any infantry units that might try to go to Sheikh Mujib's assistance. The problem was how to get them together without arousing suspicion. Here Rashid came up with the answer.

According to instructions from army headquarters, the Bengal Lancers twice a month went on night training exercises. The intention was to familiarise the troops with night moving and adjusting their equipment in the dark. Accordingly the tanks were to be started up and the crew put through mock firing drill while the whole area was disturbed by the noise. After six months of night training exercises the roar of the tank engines and the clutter of tracks as they moved around had become a regular feature of cantonment life. So the movement of the Bengal Lancers at least would not arouse suspicion. Major Rashid now proposed to his superiors that the tank regiment's night training exercises would be more meaningful if they coordinated with his artillery unit. Both units would then learn to work together as they would be expected to do in battle. Rashid's proposal made sense and was accepted with alacrity by army headquarters. Thus to Farook's delight the tanks and the field guns were brought together.

About this time Farook decided to seek celestial sanction for his terrible purpose. He sought out in the crowded Haji Sharar bazar of Chittagong a Bihari holy man who would have a powerful influence on the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Andha Hafiz (blind holy man) as he is known, was born without sight. His pious and austeres life, however, had brought him the blessing of a phenomenal extrasensory perception and the gift of prophecy. The accuracy of his predic- tions had won him a sizeable following, among them the Khans of Chittagong who were Major Farook's in-laws. Farook decided to consult him—and found an early opportunity to do so. The Bengal Lancers were scheduled to go to Hat Hazar near Chittagong for range firing between 7th and 11th April. When annual Assembly sessions back by two days, Farook took time off for a quick trip to Chittagong on 2nd April to see Andha Hafiz.

Squatting on the floor of the hut Farook placed his hands in the hands of the holy man. Andha Hafiz held them gently for a long time. Clearly he was disturbed by the vibrations he was getting. Before Farook could confess the dark secret he carried out, Andha Hafiz told him: 'I know you are going to do something very dangerous. Do whatever you have to do, but if you do not follow the principles I give you, you will be destroyed'. He then told Farook he must faithfully observe three things: (1) Don't do anything for personal gain but only serve the cause of Allah and Islam. (2) Have courage; and (3) Select the correct timing.' He also advised the major 'Wait three months. After that chances of success are good though there will be difficulties'.

Farook was deeply moved. Even the heavens were pointing to the direction in which he was moving. The three months Andha Hafiz told him to wait had also coincided with his own evaluation of the best time for the coup. In his heart he knew that this time he would not fail.

On 7 June Sheikh Mujibur Rahman achieved what to him was the crowning glory of his administration—the formation of the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSAL, pronounced Bakshal). It formally made Bangladesh a one-party state in which all political and administrative authority was personally vested in Mujib, the President. In no way was he now more powerful than when he started off as Prime Minister in January 1972, when his word was law and every wish a command to his adoring people. But as public affection was given during the 3 years of prodigality, the declining demi-god found it necessary to assume increasingly more dictatorial powers. Now through the BKSAL Mujib sought to legalise his grip on the supreme power that public affection had ceased to offer.

With characteristic bombast Mujib described the change as 'The Second Revolution'. In fact it was nothing more than a palace coup which removed the last vestiges of democracy, justice and hope from a country whose founding was intended to epitomise these virtues.

Mujib had started the process in January of that year by ramming through the National Assembly the 4th Amendment to the Constitution. Apart from emasculating Parliament and conferring ill-concealed dictatorial powers on the President the Amendment authorised Mujib to create a one-party state. It also specified that when the National Party is formed a person shall

(a) In case he is a member of Parliament on the date the National Party is formed, cease to be such member, and his seat in Parliament shall become vacant if he does not become a member of the National Party within the time fixed by the President;
(b) Not be qualified for election as President or as a member of Parliament if he is not nominated as a candidate for such election by the National Party;
(c) Have no right of form, or to be a member or otherwise to partake in the activities of any political party other than the National Party.

Thus Mujib's catch-all legislation completely shut out all opposition. No one could engage in any form of politics without being a member of BKSAL;
and BKSAL membership, according to the Party's constitution, could only be obtained with the consent of the Chairman, Sheikh Mujib. Only BKSAL, i.e. Mujib, would decide who would be candidates for election and voters would make their choice from among those enpanelled by him. (I shall nominate only two or three persons for contesting a seat in Parliament. People will choose who is good or bad). Nothing like this had been attempted during the worst days of West Pakistani repression.

The BKSAL system which was to have come into force on 1st September 1975 would have enabled Mujib to get his fingers deep into the soul of Bangladesh. It was an elaborate structure of tightly-controlled parallel pyramids embracing political affairs and administration. Sheikh Mujib, as President and Party Chairman, straddled both. On the political side the top tier was a 15-member Executive Committee of his closest colleagues. Among them were Syed Nazrul Islam, the Vice President; Prime Minister Mansoor Ali who was also Secretary General of the party; Khandaker Mostaque Ahmed (ranked third in the party hierarchy after Mujib) and the leader's own nephew, Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni who was designated one of the three influential party secretaries.

The next tier was a Central Committee of 115 members followed by five Committees of between 21 to 32 members dealing with labour, politics, youth, students and women. Mujib's son Kamal was in the students committee.

Every member of each of these committees was nominated by Mujib. So also were the 61 powerful District Governors who formed the backbone of the administrative pyramid. According to Mujib they were 'to look after law and order, develop social works, ensure proper distribution of goods imported from abroad, allocate money for works programmes, formulate family planning schemes, do publicity and oversee production'. They would 'see whether the harvesting of paddy has been made or not, whether interest is taken by mothers and you are to stop corruption in the thanas'.

The District Governors would also control the Bangladesh Rifles (the para-military border security force), the Rakhhi Bahini, police and army units stationed in their areas. They were to be the President's hands, feet and mouth and were expected to work closely with the 61 BKSAL District Secretaries who were to be the Party Chairman's eyes and ears. These too would be nominated by him. In every case Sheikh Mujib's criterion for selecting people for these posts was, as he publicly admitted, 'because they are good to my eyes'.

Mujib gave a variety of reasons for creating this tight chain of command going down to each of the 65,000 villages in the country. When the 4th Amendment was passed by the National Assembly he said the one-party system was intended to implement the four State Principles—nationalism, democracy, socialist and secularism. Later, at a public meeting in Dhaka on 26 March, Mujib spoke about 'four plans' being the basis of BKSAL. 'Number one plan is to eliminate corrupt people. Number two is to increase production in fields and factories. Number three is population planning and number four is our national unity.' Then again on 21 July, while addressing the 61 District Governors designate in Dhaka Mujib said 'The change was necessary to bring about the welfare of the people, to remove oppression, injustices and suppression, so that easily and simply the constitutional structure can reach the people directly'.

Mujib's many reasons for BKSAL are not contradictory, and it could be argued that they were the facets of a radical reform of national life. But was reform what he really intended? If indeed that was his purpose then he had a curious way of going about it. In the first place he never lacked authority. Even as Prime Minister in a Westminster-style government his towering posi-

tion as Bangabandhu would have allowed him to enforce any reform he desired. Had Mujib wanted he could have sent the whole Cabinet, Parliament and Civil Service packing and replaced them with persons of his choice.

Secondly, the personnel appointed to flesh out BKSAL were the same grasping Awami Leaguers and civil servants whose incompetence and corruption had helped to bring Bangladesh to the brink of collapse. There was nothing to indicate that they had changed their ways. Thirdly, Mujib himself had not changed his style. He still confusions platitudes with policies as though they were enough to conjure away the crises. And when all is said and done, Mujib's talk about removing 'oppression, injustices and repression' begs the question: Whose? Since the State's founding the people had known no other government than Sheikh Mujib's. It could therefore be correctly assumed that he was responsible for all the terror and the rot which he now professed to reform by the 'Second Revolution'.

All this makes clear that BKSAL was another one of Mujib's political games and reform was not the objective. BKSAL was intended to shut out all opposition and to stranglehold on the country. He would have achieved this ambition on the 1st September 1975 had he lived.

Tragically this total extinction of democracy and the perpetuation of one-man rule brought no significant public protest. As before, the press and politicians acclaimed the move; even the venerable old revolutionary, Manik Bhashini, who had from time to time come out against him, announced 'total support' for Mujib's 'Second Revolution' in a statement issued from his home in Kargani Village, Tangail, on 8th March.

Once it was made clear that exclusion from the new system meant virtual extinction, everyone started climbing on the bandwagon. More than 500 journalists in Dhaka went in procession to Sheikh Mujib's house requesting membership of BKSAL. At the same time the editors of nine leading Dhaka newspapers similarly petitioned the leader in the most sycophantic terms. Stating that 'after the war of liberation you have given a call to the nation to unite in response to the Second Revolution for the economic emancipation of the masses', the editors said they would 'feel glorified if they got the opportunity to work as BKSAL members under the leadership of Bangabandhu'.

Mujib had reason to be pleased.

Rather curiously, in the midst of all this suchiness, the one sobering thought about the new system was expressed by no other than Sheikh Mujib himself. Addressing the District Governors designate in Dhaka on 21 July, he instinctively warned them: 'The cause for alarm by the (BKSAL) members nowadays is that the people of Bangladesh react much and you will be smashed. It is good to remember this. You will make devoted efforts throughout (your) whole life but you do one wrong, you will perish from Bangladesh. This is the rule of Bangladesh'.

Unfortunately Sheikh Mujib did not heed his own warning. By that time his mistakes were beyond recall.

Notes:
3. Ibid., 15.2.1975.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 1.4.1975.
Moshtaque is Willing

I asked (Moshtaque). Will there be any justification at this stage if somebody takes a decision to remove Sheikh by force? He said: ‘Well, probably for its interest it is a good thing’.

—Major Rashid

In Farook’s pocket diary, noted against the 3rd July, 1975 in large red letters, are the words START WORK. By that time, he told me, ‘I had fixed Mujib was going to die. It didn’t matter whether it was today, tomorrow or the day after. My tactical plan was ready. I had my troops’.

He continued: ‘From that point, as the Americans say, all systems were Go. Whether I go myself, alone, or whatever happens, I was finally committed on 3rd July. I had completely written off everything about myself. Khulais. The past, the present, for me everything was dead. Suddenly I had crystallised in my mind that I would not wait longer than the 15th of August.’

Farook’s diary told him that the next convenient training night exercise for the Bengal Lancers and 2nd Field Artillery was in the early hours of 15th August, a Friday. The day had a resounding significance for him, for Farook was Friday’s child. All the great events of his life had occurred on Fridays. He was born on a Friday (at the time of Azan—the Muslim call to prayer). He defected from the Pakistan army on a Friday. He was married on Friday. The day also had great religious significance because Friday is the Muslim sabbath. The fact that the Sheikh Friday would be a propitious day for the act he intended as a service to Islam.

He didn’t tell Rashid about the date he had fixed for the coup because he wanted to ensure there was no last minute slip. But in the course of their discussions they mutually agreed that the strike should be well before 1st September when the BSRAS system was due to become operative. Before that date the District Governors accompanied by units of the Rakhi Bahini and the army would have taken up positions in the 61 districts. ‘In that case,’ Rashid said, ‘the situation would have become very difficult to control because instead of being centralised in Dhaka you will have 61 different places where your enemy is spread.’

Rashid was not involved in Farook’s tactical planning. The latter had a distaste for politics and after General Zia had turned him down he gave Rashid the responsibility of finding a suitable replacement for Sheikh Mujib from among the available politicians. In this department the artillery major showed an unsuspected talent for politics.

Rashid was well aware that Mujib’s killing could unleash a spontaneous storm of violent opposition which they would not be able to contain with the meagre forces available to them. He therefore saw Mujib’s successor not only in terms of a fairly unfastrished and competent political leader, but also one whose presence would go a long way to containing any adverse reaction to the killing.

Explaining his reasoning, Rashid said he had to eliminate four potential sources of trouble. The first was the Awami League, the main political party spread throughout the country which had substantial numbers of armed cadres among the youth and students. The second was the Rakhi Bahini, Mujib’s 25,000 well-armed storm troopers who were personally loyal to him. These groups would either react strongly—in which case it would be the end of the matters—they would seek temporary asylum in India as they did in 1971, before returning with the assistance of Indian troops to rout Bangabandhu’s killers. The third consideration, according to Rashid, was the possibility that once Mujib was killed the vengeful people might turn on the Awami League leaders and kill them. This again could create an impossible law and order problem while at the same time provoking a flood of refugees to India with the attendant dangers of Indian intervention.

‘We did not want to create a refugee problem’ Rashid said, ‘because it would have created another situation like that in 1971 and India would have come in. That would have been totally self-defeating.’ So the fourth consideration was that ‘we may cut out any possibility for India to intervene’.

I wanted someone who would immediately make everyone sit back quietly and tell themselves, “Let’s see what happens!”’ Rashid said. ‘Once people decided to wait and see developments we would be safe’.

These considerations automatically excluded anyone from the Opposition because it would have stumped the Awami League and Rakhi Bahini. Rashid decided he must look for Mujib’s replacement from among suitable members of the Awami League’s hierarchy. ‘Such a person would reassure pro-Mujib groups and the Rakhi Bahini’ he said. ‘The public seeing another Awami League leader in charge would not dare to take revenge. There would be no refugees and India would have no reason to intervene’.

The coldly calculated stratagem to bring in the hated Awami League was not such a difficult decision for Rashid to swallow. He had privately decided that it would only be a temporary measure. ‘We knew what they were, these men they were chasing the same Mujib group’ he told me. ‘We knew they were hypocritical, bungling and other things. They could never get rid of it. But meanwhile if we can consolidate and get the army and the air force combined under the proper leadership structure then we can sort them out at any time.’

From this account Farook had made it perfectly clear to Rashid ‘if after removing Sheikh Mujib there is no positive benefit I will not tolerate anyone else’.

Despite the bold words, the two majors were showing themselves to be incredibly naive in the matter of choosing the man to succeed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The criteria that Rashid was working to were essentially security considerations, not the winning combination for a much vaunted change. The most important requirements for the latter—statesmanship, integrity, a man who could deliver the goods where Sheikh Mujib could not—did not figure at all on Rashid’s list. It was unbelievably arrogant for him, or still worse, unforgivably puerile, to assume that Khandaker Moshtaque, the man eventually chosen, would be merely a puppet who would allow himself to be used and discarded at their convenience. It was well known that Moshtaque was a ‘survivor’, the leading alumni of the rough-and-tumble school of Pakistan/Awami League politics. With any intelligence Rashid should have realised, at least at their first meeting, that here was an old fox who could eat them for breakfast, which he did.

* Uddo for finished.
Thus in the spring of 1975—a season for flowers in Bangladesh which, lamentably, has also become a season of woe—Farook and Rashid were plotting what they hoped would become an assassination, not a coup; it would be a savage blood-letting that made a mockery of their pretensions to perform cleansing, health-restoring surgery. Because they had neither the wit nor the capacity to tell the difference, the majors besmirched the proud name of the army they professed to love and set in train dark forces that have been more destructive to the dreams of Sonar Bangla than Sheikh Mujib ever was.

But at that time they were too absorbed in their narrow purpose to look for its wider implications. Rashid, for one, received a nasty shock from a totally unexpected quarter.

Farook's sister dropped in to say that Dhaaka University was buzzing with rumours of an imminent army coup and Rashid was being named as one of the ringleaders. He instantly realised that the plotting and exchange of revolutionary ideas by the young officers had somehow been leaked by loose talk. And if the rumours had reached the university, which was a sensitive listening post, then surely they must also have got to Sheikh Mujib whose intelligence services monitored everything.

Rashid was all the more alarmed the next day when he was summoned to the office of the Dhaka Brigade Commander, Col. Shafat Jamil, the man with whom he had discussed the political situation earlier. Col. Shafat Jamil told him that there was too much talk about a coup going on and as his name was being mentioned, something may have to be done about him.

In desperation Rashid decided to take the bull by the horns. He recalls: 'I told Shafat Jamil if anything is done to me then I will involve you as the ringleader. I will say that whatever I have done was done under your orders. I give you my word. I will prove how you arranged for me to be posted to 2nd Field Artillery to be with you in Dhaaka after cancelling my transfer to the Gunners School in Jessore.'

Rashid said Col. Shafat Jamil got the message. There was no further talk about action against him. But Rashid could see the danger signs. At any time there could be a knock on the door. Like Farook, he too, by then, had become totally committed to Mujib's assassination, if only for reasons of self preservation. He told me, 'There was no turning back now. It was either him or us'. A few days later, before the end of July, Rashid sought an interview with Khandaker Moshitaque Ahmed, the Commerce Minister and the third ranking member of the BNP after Chairman Mujib.

Khandaker Moshitaque was the latest controversial of the Awami League ministers and generally considered to be the leader of the party's right-wing—his Islamic leanings no doubt fostered by the fact that his father, Marhum Altaf Harar, was a Khuddar Kabiruddin Ahmed, known as 'Pri Shahi', was considered to be a Muslim saint in his time. Moshitaque was a year older than Sheikh Mujib. The two had been close comrades in the long struggle for Bengali emancipation during which he had been detained six times for a total of seven years in Pakistani prisons. In the process Moshitaque had also acquired a law degree from Dhaaka University and built up a considerable reputation as an advocate in Dhaaka High Court and the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

In 1971 during the freedom struggle, Moshitaque was Vice President of the Awami League. When he fled to India with his colleagues he was appointed Foreign Minister in the Mujibnagar government-in-exile based at Calcutta, headed by Tajuddin Ahmad. His right-wing views earned him a pro-American label. He did live up to that reputation when Henry Kissinger in the autumn of 1971 singled out Moshitaque in an abortive attempt to split the Awami League and prevent the break-up of Pakistan. Because of this Moshitaque was abruptly sacked from his job as Foreign Minister when the Mujibnagar government moved to Dhaaka after the formal creation of Bangladesh.

Khandaker Moshitaque served as Minister for Flood Control, Water Resources and Power in Sheikh Mujib's first Cabinet. In 1975 when Mujib switched to the presidential system of government Moshitaque became Minister for Commerce and Foreign Trade.

Moshitaque's political ability is underscored by his penchant for survival. Though always very servile and falling easily into line behind Mujib—even in the notorious first one-party system introduced just before Mujib's assassination—Moshitaque did not share in the public odium which attended the other ministers. Nor was he ever accused of the blatant corruption that most of his Cabinet colleagues were. As such Khandaker Moshitaque Ahmed nicely measured up to Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid's ideas for a replacement for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Rashid insists they are not related, though they come from the same general area of Daudkhandi in Comilla district. He also said they never had occasion to meet before. But he was well aware of Moshitaque's reputation since they come from adjoining villages—Moshitaque from Dhosphara, Rashid from Chandina. Rashid's uncle, Masahar Hussein ('Mashu') had been Moshitaque while he was escaping to India in 1971 and they had been close friends since then. Rashid asked 'Mashu' to arrange an appointment for him with Khandaker Moshitaque Ahmed in Dhaaka. This was easily done.

Rashid goes to avoid attention Rashid accordingly turned up at Moshitaque's house in Aga Masih Lane in the old quarter of Dhaaka at 7 pm on 2nd August. He took the precaution of carrying with him an application for a permit to buy a scooter just in case he was noticed and someone wanted to know why an army officer was calling on a politician. Rashid was welcomed by Moshitaque in an upstairs room, and after the normal courtesies, Rashid steered the conversation to the political situation. They spoke for about two hours.

Rashid recalls: 'We discussed political matters for some time as I was indirectly finding out how he felt. Then I asked him, being closest to Sheikh Mujib among the senior most Awami League members, how he felt if asked him, "Can the nation expect progress under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?" He said, "No, they cannot". Then I said "If that is the case why don't you leave?" He said "That is also not so easy". It showed that they (the ministers) are quite afraid of taking such a decision though they know what he is doing. They are such cowards that they have accepted all his bad doings'.

Rashid continued: 'Then I asked, "Will there be any justification at this stage if somebody takes a decision to remove Sheikh by force?" He said, "Well, probably for the country's interest it is a good thing. But it is also very difficult to do it"'.

I asked Rashid to squeeze his mind and confirm if that was exactly what Moshitaque said.

He answered: 'Yes, he said it was very difficult to do, but in the country's interest if somebody could do it probably it would be a great thing'.

Question: 'So he agreed?'

Rashid: 'Yes, Yes, he agreed. Then Moshitaque even asked me if somebody removed him (Sheikh Mujib) who could be next? The alternative should be there'.

Rashid said his own reply was non-committal. He explained to Khandaker
Moshtaque that if anyone did think in terms of removing Sheikh Mujib he would also definitely think of a suitable replacement, particularly some one who could balance out the political side.

As asked if Khandaker Moshtaque had got the message that he wanted Moshtaque as a replacement for Mujib, Rashid replied: 'He probably thought that as I went there to see him I would have chosen him as such. It's quite understandable.'

Rashid was satisfied that in Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed he had found a willing replacement for Sheikh Mujib. He conveyed his impression to Farook who made no comment beyond, 'I hope you are right. That's your problem'. But in his own taciturn way Farook was happy that things were shaping up exactly as he wanted.

The revelations made by Rashid and Farook concerning Khandaker Moshtaque's prior knowledge of their plans to kill Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were made under oath in a series of separate tape-recorded interviews I had with them.

Moshtaque denies he was consulted. But I have no reason to disbelieve the two majors.

They make it clear that Moshtaque was brought into the plot to kill Mujib on 2nd August 1975, i.e. 13 days before the assassination. He thus had ample time to consult his cronies, particularly Tahiruddin Thakur, and to work out how and when they should proceed once the dire deed was done. Indeed, there are indications that that is what happened—and then someone in the group leaked the majors' plot to a contact in the American Embassy in Dhaka.

Farook has noted that he was surprised to find several American Embassy cars 'buzzing round the city' at the hour when his men were carrying out the killing. Tahiruddin Thakur was at the Dhaka Radio station before Khandaker Moshtaque was taken there by Rashid. Moshtaque's speech—written by Thakur—was evidently thought out in advance. Thakur, in a post-facto interview with a Western correspondent, also claimed that the assassination plot was 'finalised' in his house two nights before the event. Farook and Rashid were present at that time. They were NOT present on that occasion, and thus they did NOT have any contact with Thakur before Mujib's killing; and at the time of the interview they were prepared to confront Thakur about his claim. So, if the former Information Minister is telling the truth, the meeting in his house on 13th August was obviously a private gathering of Moshtaque's men to 'finalise' their response to what the two majors had planned to do. This would confirm that Moshtaque had prior knowledge that Mujib was to be killed.

All this, of course, does not obviate the possibility that Moshtaque and Co. were plotting separately to overthrow Sheikh Mujib—as were many others at that time. The Maini Sharbohara Party and another left-wing group, the JSD (Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal or Nationalist Socialist Party), had also had well-developed 'revolutionary' plans which were rudely overtaken by the majors' action.

A senior Bangladeshi intelligence officer told me that at the beginning of August 1975, his department had been investigating at least five concurrent 'possible plots' against Sheikh Mujib in addition to 'serious rumbling among young officers in the army'. One concerned a Bangladeshi politician who, on the pretext of buying Indian saris for his wife, had flown on a day-trip to Calcutta. He never left the Dum Dum airport and during that time he had been observed having a lengthy meeting with a Western diplomat. Another was a report by Sheikh Moni who thought there was something sinister in the fact that a prominent politician had given a private dinner 'for some disgruntled elements and at least three senior military men of the rank of General and Brigadier'.

Lawrence Lifschultz, the author of 'Bangladesh, the Unfinished Revolution' told an interesting story of the plotting in the Guardian (London) on 15th August 1979, the fourth anniversary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination. He said:

'Knowledgeable Bengali and foreign diplomatic sources now claim that Moshtaque and his political friends had been involved more than a year in plans designed to bring about the overthrow of Mujib. According to senior US officials at the American Embassy in Dhaka and from well-informed Bengali sources, it appears that the United States had prior knowledge of the coup which killed Mujib, and that American Embassy personnel had held discussions with individuals involved in the plot for more than six months prior to his death.

'According to one highly placed US Embassy diplomat, officials at the American Embassy were approached by people intending to overthrow the government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This Embassy source says that a series of meetings took place with the Embassy personnel between November 1974 and January 1975. These discussions were held with the purpose of determining the attitude of the US Government towards a political change in Bangladesh if a coup d'etat were actually to happen.'

Unfortunately Lifschultz does not—or cannot—identify the Bangladeshi with whom the US Embassy discussed the matter. The suggestion in the article is that it was some civilians, not the two majors. And I have it on oath from both Farook and Rashid that they did NOT make contact with any foreign Mission or, for that matter, any foreigner. But Lifschultz does say that a senior US official told him in January, 1975, as a matter of prudence 'we came to an understanding in the Embassy that we would stay out of it and disengage from those people'. Lifschultz continues:

'Although a decision was made at a high level in the embassy that there would be no further contact with the anti-Mujib group, what happened subsequently is a matter of controversy among US officials interviewed. Those who knew of the earlier meetings deny any personal knowledge of what happened after early 1975. Others allege that while contact was broken off at a lesser diplomatic and foreign service officials, who wished to remain 'clean', liaison was taken over and carried on through the channel of the American Embassy's CIA station chief, Philip Cherry, and other station agents. When interviewed, Cherry categorically denied this allegation. "The Bangladeshis were doing it themselves" said Cherry. "It's a great canard to think that any government takes place because of a (outside) government. Almost always coupes take place because of the people themselves". When asked about the Moshtaque network's previous history of confidential contacts with the United States, Cherry stated: "There are politicians who frequently approach embassies and perhaps have contacts there, but that's a far cry from any of those embassies involved in assisting them in or involvement in a coup."'

Lifschultz goes on to say that in April, 1975, Moshtaque and his political circle were in the process of discreetly checking military contacts whom they could adopt and integrate into their own strategy and that they favoured 'a senior officers' coup d'etat.' He added:
According to Bangladesh military sources with intimate knowledge of the events, approaches were made to the deputy chief of army staff, Major-General Ziaur Rahman (Zia) ... and according to these sources, General Zia expressed interest in the proposed coup plan, but expressed reluctance to take the lead in the required military action.

Life Schultz concluded 'having failed to secure reliable leadership for the coup from the senior officer cadre, the Moshtaque group went forward with the junior officers' plot'.

Rashid is normally very slow to act. But once he had been jolted by Farook's determination to launch the coup on the following Friday he quickly began laying together his end of the arrangements.

At 2.30 pm on 13th August he called again at Aga Mashid Lane for another meeting with Khandaker Moshtaque. This was done without appointment, and they spent about ten minutes together. According to Rashid the sole purpose of his visit was to find out whether Khandaker Moshtaque had any travel plans for the next few days.

Rashid recalled: 'I asked him if he is likely to go outside the country in the immediate future. He told me he will not be going anywhere. He will be in Dhaka."

Question: 'He didn't ask you why?'
Rashid (laughing): 'No. After all he is a very clever man and he would have known ...'

Like Barkis, Moshtaque is willing!

Having been assured that Khandaker Moshtaque would be available on the day, Rashid began to look around for officers who could assist in the strike. The failure of the earlier moves had shown they could not depend on serving army officers so Rashid craftily hit upon the idea of recruiting ex-army officers who had a grudge against Sheikh Mujib. Such men could be counted on to fall in with the plot. The man who really came to mind was ex-Major Shariful Huq, nicknamed 'Dalim', who had been prematurely retired following the incident involving Ghazi Gholam Mustafa, Mujib's city boss, at a wedding party eighteen months earlier. Rashid knew Dalim well since he had also been an artillery officer. He telephoned to invite Dalim for a chat.

Dalim arrived at Rashid's house in the cantonment around 10 pm (13th August). Rashid briefed him in general terms about the plot without giving details of the timing or the tactical plan and asked if he would like to join them. According to Rashid, Dalim was willing but at the same time wanted to talk it over with a friend. This was ex-Major Noor who had once been ADC to General Usmani the Defence Minister, and had subsequently been retired prematurely with Dalim and some other officers in the summer of 1974.

Dalim brought Noor to Rashid's house at 1 am (14th August) that night and they had a long discussion about the plot during which Rashid stressed that for an initial period it would be necessary for Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed to replace Sheikh Mujib. Noor apparently was willing to join but was not convinced that Rashid had got Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed to fall in with the plot to kill Sheikh Mujib. To reassure him, Rashid suggested that they met at 5 pm that day (August 14th) outside the Atomic Research Centre. He would take them to Khandaker Moshtaque's house to prove how friendly he was with him.

When Rashid turned up at the rendezvous, he was surprised to find Noor with another retired officer, ex-Major Shariar who he had not met before. Rashid began to have misgivings about his companions but decided that by that time he had no way out. So when Noor assured him that Shariar could be trusted, the three of them went off to Khandaker Moshtaque's house.

Though no appointment had been made, they were quickly ushered in to see the Minister. Khandaker Moshtaque received Rashid warmly and was introduced to the others. Rashid explained they had just dropped in to greet him and after a few pleasantries they left. Apparently the experience was enough to convince Noor and Shariar that Rashid had an understanding with Moshtaque. 'After that' Rashid said 'they told me that any time you want our help we will be with you'.

Rashid asked Dalim, Noor and Shariar to join him and Farook at 10 pm at the new airport beyond the Cantonment where his unit would be on night training exercises. To make sure they would come he held out the bait that they could see at first hand the military preparations and could also have a fuller discussion about details of the plot. Even at that late stage Rashid was not prepared to trust the other conspirators with the whole truth that he had himself learnt from Farook only 48 hours earlier. Sheikh Mujib was to be killed the next morning.
The Killing of Sheikh Mujib

His time has run out... Do it very secretly.

Andha Hafiz

Sitting in a broken-down taxi in the middle of a Chittagong bazaar, Farook's wife Farida was bathed in a nervous sweat. For over an hour she had been trying to get to Haji Shaar with an urgent message for Andha Hafiz. It was a little after 11 am on 14th August 1975 and she was running out of time.

Farida had arrived in the port city the previous afternoon with her mother who was returning home from Dhaka after the mid-week anniversary party. Farook had sent her to consult the blind holy man, and his instructions were explicit: 'Tell him I'm going to do it on the 15th. That I'm doing it in the cause of Islam and the State, with faith in Allah that what I am doing will benefit the people. Tell him also that I'm not doing it for personal desire or ambition. I am prepared to follow the path of Allah, whichever way He wills. I want him to tell me if I'm doing wrong or right or if there is anything else I must do.'

Farook had asked Farida to telephone Andha Hafiz's answer to him in Dhaka by noon. She was not going to make the deadline. 'We had much difficulty in getting a baby taxi' (three-wheeler) she recalled, 'and the one we finally got broke down several times'. When she eventually reached the holy man's house the taxi driver, instead of apologising for the trouble, demanded 27 Taka for the trip.

Farida and Andha Hafiz dressed in a lungi and cotton vest, sitting cross-legged on a low wooden bed. Assorted garments hung from a rope stretched across the single room. As she sat on a cane stool in front of him Farida remembered getting the scent of unseen flowers and a cooling breeze which quickly made her comfortable. Finding no sign of a fan, the thought crossed her mind that there had been a way of keeping Andha Hafiz cool.

The blind man held her hand as he quietly listened to Farook's message. After what seemed to be an agony of waiting, he let out a deep sigh and with some emotion in his voice told her in Urdu: 'His time has run out. Do what you have to do but do it very secretly.' There was another long silence. Then he earnestly advised her to tell Farook that before he undertook his task he must pray with the fullest sincerity for God's support. His commanders must do likewise. He also gave her two 'Suras' which, he said, Farook must recite constantly 'so that his mind would be fixed with a holy zeal and he could think of nothing else.' One of these was the Muslim prayer for the dead. The other was an invocation to ward off evil.

As she got up to leave Farida asked Andha Hafiz to pray for her husband and his companions. 'Don't worry,' he gently comforted her. 'I have placed them in the hands of God. It's His will. He will take care of them.'

Farida's tears were not yet over. When she returned to her father's house she found the telephone lines to Dhaka were not working. Two hours later there was no answer from Farook's telephone. Farida then telephoned her sister's house and got a very bad connection. In desperation she called her father-in-law. 'Find Farook and ask him to telephone me urgently,' she made the call. Rahman found his son at home fast asleep. The young major had returned home early and finding nothing to do had decided to take a nap. It was 5 pm before Farida finally passed on the fateful message.

Andha Hafiz was not the only one to see doom in Sheikh Mujib's stars. A senior member of the President's personal staff, Ruhul Quddus, was a well-known amateur palmist. He had read Mujib's palm at the beginning of the month. What he saw so alarmed him that he quickly set off with his wife for 'extended medical treatment' in Europe. The presentiment saved his neck. He was out of the country when Mujib was killed and the Bangladesh government for many months unsuccessfully tried to get him back.

Fate seemed to be working against Mujib's family. The marriage of his niece, his favourite sister's daughter, on 10th August had brought the clan together in Dhaka. Sernabat's sons had come in from Khulna for the occasion bringing with them several close friends. They all stayed on in Dhaka because Shamsuddin on 14th August was observing his dead mother's 'Chaham', the 30th day ceremony which marks, for Muslims, the end of the period of mourning. Thus the entire family was concentrated within a half square mile of Dhanmandi when Farook and Rashid decided to strike.

Though the majors had not banked on it, Mujib was made even more vulnerable by a remarkable coincidence. Brigadier Nur Zaman was the commandant of the Rahki Bahini, was on a visit to Europe. His second in command was a relatively junior officer who was acting independently for the first time. Thus Mujib's elite storm troopers were not geared, as they normally were, for instant action.

On that fateful day in August, Sheikh Mujib was blissfully riding a crest. The BKSIL apparatus for a one-party state was complete. The 61 District Governors would be in their posts after the weekend. Mujib himself had another trick up his sleeve. He was scheduled to make an important speech at Dhaka University next day, when it had been secretly arranged that by public acclamation he should be declared President for Life. With the Opposition shut out and his own position firmly nailed down, there would be nothing to touch him. Mujib was not to know what the majors were up to, although the reports he was getting suggested that something was cooking in the Cantonment. It therefore concentrated his intelligence work. But when his Pakistani experience had taught him the danger lay—the army commanders. He did not bother about the junior officers. The mistake cost him his life.

Night training exercises for the lst Bengal Lancers and the 2nd Field Artillery on 14th August began normally at 10 pm. None of the officers or the 600 men of the two units gathered at the yet incomplete new Cantonment beyond the Cantonment or in the tank garages nearby, had even a suspicion of the momentous operation their commanding officers had planned for them. Majors Farook and Rashid were observing Andha Hafiz's exhortation to secrecy in the strictest possible way.

The only thing out of the ordinary that night was the fact that one of the artillery regiments' three company-strength batteries had been ordered to dismount, arm themselves with rifles and proceed in 12 trucks to the exercise staging area. Even that order did not raise eyebrows since Major Rashid, on receiving command of the regiment, had often varied the training routine.

Rashid assembled six 105mm Yugoslav-made Howitzers with plenty of ammunition on an airport perimeter. The crews did not know it, but the guns, according to Rashid's 'practice' orders, were soon zero'd on the Rahki Bahini headquarters barracks four miles away. Eleven other field guns were
kept in the unit headquarters with crews at standby. The eighteenth gun in the regimental arsenal Rashid ordered to be taken with crew to the Lancers' garage a quarter of a mile away where Major Farook had started up twenty-eight T-54 tanks in the usual way. Due to mechanical failure he was that night two short of the normal complement. 

Apart from the CO's there were only four officers from each unit present. Two other officers—not fully trusted—had been told to skip the exercise. The troops were another matter. Every available man of each unit had been mustered. It is significant of Mujib's faded image that both Farook and Rashid had not the slightest doubt that the troops—common men all of them—when ordered would not hesitate to come out against Mujib. Rashid had till the last moment been trying to bring in an infantry unit so that the coup, for political reasons, could seem to represent a cross-section of the army. To this end he had that morning telephoned an old friend, Major Shahjahan, the acting commandant of the 16th Bengal Infantry stationed at Joydevpur, to bring his troops to the new airport in Dhaka for a two-day combined training exercise. He did not confide in Shahjahan but was confident that once the infantry unit had arrived on the scene he could talk it into joining the plot. The unsuspecting Major Shahjahan accepted Rashid's suggestion and promised to march his troops to Dhaka by 10 pm. Rashid was now anxiously waiting for the 16th Bengal Infantry and his fellow conspirators, ex-Majors Dalim, Noor and Shariat.

There was no sign of them at 10.30 pm when Shahjahan came through on the telephone to say his men were too tired and that he was calling off the rendezvous. What gave this disappointing news Farook bitterly remarked, 'It seems that the Bengal Tigers have become pussy cats!'

Meanwhile, there was still no sign of Dalim and his companions. They turned up at 11 pm bringing along Major Pasha and Major Huda. The latter was a serving military intelligence officer and a good friend of Dalim since they had served together in the artillery corps. Rashid took the gun and his 12 trucks to join Farook at the tank garages. It was only around midnight that the details of the operation were finally made known to all.

Farook, who was in overall command of the operation, quickly briefed them on the reasons and the purpose of the strike and asked if they would like to participate. All agreed, he immediately got down to work.

With his well-worn tourist map of Dhaka City spread on the squadron office table, Farook ticked off the various points he wanted blocked. One tank would block the runway at Dhaka airport and the troops would control the bridge across the Buriganga River. Other teams were sent to the races at Bangabandhan and the New Market where the Pielkhana Barracks of the Bangladesh Rifles were located. Three big teams ranging from 75 to 150 men were assigned to the principal targets—Sheikh Mujib, Abdur Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazilu Hq Momi. Dalim was asked to lead the assault on Mujib's bunker. He hesitated, probably because of his own family ties. Instead he volunteered for Serniabat's house. Ex-Major Noor and Major Mohiuddin with one company of Lancers were assigned the task of knocking off Sheikh Mujib. Farook's trusted NCO, Risalard Muslehuuddin (nicknamed 'Muslim') was to lead the assault on Sheikh Momi. Their instructions were that they should kill Sheikh Mujib, Serniabat and Momi. If any of Mujib's sons Kamal and Jamul were to be taken prisoner. No other was to be touched. But they were given the latitude to proceed according to developments. And, if necessary 'wipe out anything en route'. This opened the door for the subsequent massacre.

Rashid's job, according to Farook, was 'political' one. When the operation cot under way he had to rope in Sq. Leader Liaquat and have him stand by with the MiGs in case out-station army units tried to come into Dhaka. Rashid had two other responsibilities. One was to take Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed to the radio station, announce the overthrow of Sheikh Mujib and introduce Mujib as the new President. The other was to try to win over Brigade headquarters and the top army brass after the assassination. Farook had a deep psychological insight into the mental processes of his fellow officers. He knew they would not last at least two hours to mobilise any of the army units stationed in Dhaka. He was also certain that once it was established that Sheikh Mujib was dead, the army commanders would hesitate to make a move lest it endanger their own lives and jobs. So he did not bother to keep them covered. Instead he sent Rashid to win them over once the dreadful killing was done.

In the event Farook was proved remarkably correct. At the same time Farook had no doubt whatsoever that he would achieve his principal targets. The three teams had been instructed to proceed expeditiously, 'wiping out anything en route' that tried to stop them. Even if the officers failed, he knew his Lancer boys would not. So he kept for himself the most difficult and dicey part of the whole operation—the containment of the Rakhi Bahini.

In normal circumstances, and given the element of surprise, it would not have been very difficult for 28 tanks to neutralise 3000 men of the Rakhi Bahini grouped in a single compound near the new Assembly Building. But the hard fact was that Farook's tanks were totally unarmed and sitting ducks for the well-armed men who decided to stand up and fight. They did not have a single round of ammunition between them. Even the machine guns could not be operated. All tank ammunition, he said, was locked away safely in the Ordnance Depot at Joydevpur. Sheikh Mujib, who in the first place did not want to accept the gift of tanks from Egypt, had tried to make certain that they would never be used against him. Farook, however, had other ideas—and he was banking on an incredible bluff to pull it off.

'Few people really understand how effective the tank is as a psychological weapon', he told me. 'When you see one coming towards you it is a really brave man not to run away. Not more than a handful of men in GHQ shared this knowledge but they could not be absolutely sure about it. So far as everybody else was concerned the tanks were very lethal and ready to blast anything that moved'. And, he added with a laugh: 'We would have thought I would be so mad as to take on the Rakhi Bahini with a GHQ with a string of unarmed tanks!'

By 4.40 am Farook had his strike group organised and ready to go. Rashid's artillery crews on the apron of the new airport and, in the unit area, stood by their guns. Lined up in the Lancers' garages were 28 tanks and 12 trucks, the total of just over 400 men. Two-thirds of them were in the distinctive black uniforms of the Bengal Lancers which henceforth Bangladesh would learn to dread.

Incredibly these massive preparations were made just 300 yards from the GHQ Field Intelligence Unit which was supposed to operate round the clock.

As a matter of fact Farook had posted sentries outside its barbed wire fencing with orders to grab anyone who might venture out to investigate. No one did. Apparently the routine normality of the tank's night training exercises had disarmed everyone.

Half hour later as the column moved out with Farook in the lead tank he heard the 'Azan', the Muslim call to prayer, wafted on the heavy monsoon
through the deserted streets getting to Sheikh Mujib's residence at approximately 5:15 am. They had 120 men squeezed into five trucks and the 105mm Howitzer which was quickly set up on the main Mirpur Road at the corner of the lake and diagonally opposite the house. Other troops in more trucks blocked off the surrounding area. Then the majors and the men went in.

The armed police guards posted on the perimeter outside the compound were taken completely by surprise and quietly submitted when they saw the heavily armed troops in black uniform. The Lancer sentries at the gate were not in the plot. But when they saw their colleagues and some officers in black uniform they quietly stepped aside and with its guns bashed them to the ground. A quick search revealed nothing he could use. Now the only weapon he had available to him was the steen gun resting across his knees. The bluff would have to work!

The tank column drove slowly down Benami Road, turned right and proceeded towards the Cantonment check point. On the way it passed a group of men in white shirts and singlets. They were troops of the 4th and 1st Bengal Infantry on their morning P.T. The men interrupted their drill to wave to the tank. Farook's men smugly waved back. Incredibly the large tank column outside its normal area had not aroused suspicion. The only person who noticed was Farook's father. Dr Rahman, who had just finished his morning prayers, looked out of the window as the tanks went by. He thought it odd that they should be out and that so early. And he wondered where they were going.

Once clear of the Cantonment area, the tanks surged forward, crushing through the air port. One tank broke off to control the runway, another to the helipad where half a dozen helicopters were parked. Nothing was going to land or take off from Dhaka airport. The other tanks swung round the Pakistan Precision Centre and raced across the fields towards the Rakh Bahini headquarters. Farook looked at his watch. It was 5.45 am. The killer teams should be on target.

On reaching the perimeter wall of the airport Farook discovered there was only one tank following him. Somehow he had lost the other 24. Undaunted he changed his course. Crashing through the compound, he knocked down two trees and swung round the Rakh Bahini barracks. What he saw took his breath away.

Suddenly I found a brigade of 3000 Rakh Bahini lined up six rows deep," he recalled. The were battle-equipped—steel helmets, rifles, packs, everything. There was no backing out after that.

"The driver said, 'What am I supposed to do?'"

"I told him, you just drive past them six inches from their noses. I ordered the gunner to keep the gun pointed straight at them. I told the other chaps in the tank to keep their mouths shut."

"As we slowly drove past them the Rakh Bahini kept looking at us. We kept looking back at them. It was a tense moment. I told the driver if they start anything just steer right and run over them."

"It wasn't necessary. They could hear gunfire in the distance and here suddenly were the tanks. No one moved a finger."

Since the Rakh Bahini had not reacted instantly and attacked the tanks, Farook was certain they would stay put. Once more his assessment was tellingly accurate. Supreme confidence that he had won the day Farook left the other tank to menace Mujib's storm troops and drove on to Dhannamandi.

The scene at No. 32 Dhannamandi was chaotic.

The main killer team led by Majors Mohiuddin, Noor and Huda, had raced through the deserted streets getting to Sheikh Mujib's residence at approximately 5:15 am. They had 120 men squeezed into five trucks and the 105mm Howitzer which was quickly set up on the main Mirpur Road at the corner of the lake and diagonally opposite the house. Other troops in more trucks blocked off the surrounding area. Then the majors and the men went in.

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When relating the events to me in great detail later, Farook remarked: 'Mujib had quite a personality and Moshuddin was completely dominated by him. I don't know what would have happened if Noor had not arrived at that moment.'

Mohiuddin kept repeating: 'Sir, apne ashu.' Mujib kept talking back rudely. Noor, who had stepped on to the landing, gun in hand, immediately sensed that Mujib was stalling. So brushing Moshuddin aside and, according to Farook, screaming something unintelligible, Noor fired a burst from his sten gun. Mujib didn't have a chance. The bullets tore a huge hole in his right side. His body twisted backwards with the impact. Then it slipped, face down, towards the bottom of the stairs. The pipe was still gripped tightly in the right hand.

The time was 5.40 am. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's tempestuous love affair with the Bengalis had come to an end.

Begum Mujib tried to follow her husband when the shooting flared. She was killed in front of her bedroom door by another burst of automatic fire. Then the massacre continued.

Officers and troops went from door to door, shooting the bulls away and spraying the rooms with sten gun fire. Mujib's second son Jamal, the young Sandhurst-trained army lieutenant, had gathered the rest of the family in the main bedroom for protection. Now, his turn was to die. He was blasted at close range by one of the officers. Nine years later the marks of his blood, bone and muscle tissue—and the bullets—could be clearly seen on a large section of the wall against which he was thrown.

The two young daughters-in-law, the new brides of Kamal and Jamal, were huddled on the bed with their arms round the sleeping Jamal. Mujib's 10-year-old son, who had been named after the great philosopher, they were roughly dragged apart and mercilessly shot dead at close quarters. So also was the young Russell who apparently tried to hide behind the furniture. Sheikh Nasir, Mujib's younger brother, who had made a vast fortune after independence, was killed in an adjoining bathroom where he was having his bath.

The evidence of the whole dreadful episode remains frozen in a nightmare tableau because Sheikh Hasina, the elder of Mujib's two daughters who escaped the killing since they were out of the country, has not yet disturbed and burned the house of death.

The attackers appear to have made a systematic search for valuables, much of which they looted. The rooms have been thoroughly ransacked. Every cupboard, drawer and receptacle has been broken open and their contents scattered about. There's a shambles everywhere and the lingering smell of blood.

Mujib was to suffer a further ignominy after he was killed. According to Farook, one of the attackers had never seen Mujib at close quarters. So to get a good look at his face, the man slipped a boot under Mujib's body and rudely pushed it over. It was thus that the shattered remains of Bangabandhu, the friend of the Bengalis, was seen earlier by a photographer specially brought for the purpose from the Government's Information Department.

Not far from Sheikh Mujib's house, the Sernabats and Sheikh Moni were also under attack.

Dalm's team got to the Sernabat's residence at about 5.15 am. There was only a police guard at the gate and probably to frighten him off the troops started shooting. The gunfire awakened the household. Abu Hasnat, the Cabinet Minister's 30-year-old son, recalls looking out of his bedroom window and seeing soldiers in black uniforms shooting at the house. Grabbing the sten gun he always kept with him, Hasnat ran down to the first floor to awaken his father. Abdur Rab Sernabat was already on the telephone trying to call Sheikh Mujib for help. The line was busy. When he tried again he managed to get through.

'Father told Bangabandhu our house was being attacked by miscreants,' Hasnat recalled. 'My father asked him to send help. At that moment I could hear the bullet firing from the other end of the line. My father listened. He was shocked by what he heard. I got the impression that he had been informed that miscreants were also attacking Bangabandhu. My father didn't say another word. He put the phone down and sat on the bed. He just looked at me without talking.'

Hasnat went to a window and began shooting at the troops. 'I just pulled the trigger and emptied the magazine. When the bullets were finished I ran upstairs to the store to get some more bullets.' The action saved his life. Moments later troops burst into the bedroom and killed Sernabat before Hasnat could get back down.

The scene was chaotic. They had not heard the trigger and emptied the magazine. When the bullets were finished I ran upstairs to the store to get some more bullets.' The action saved his life. Moments later troops burst into the bedroom and killed Sernabat before Hasnat could get back down. Then they herded everyone they could find into the drawing room on the ground floor.

Meanwhile Hasnat was in the loft desperately trying to break open the trunk where he kept spare magazines for his sten gun. As he tried to break the lock he could hear firing all around. The sound of boots approaching. Leaving his gun on the floor Hasnat jumped and tried to squeeze himself through the skylight hoping he could escan out of the roof. He couldn't get through. So he jumped down and sat on the floor of the loft waiting for the men to come and kill him. Nothing happened.

Next day it was a repetition. Occasional bursts of gunfire. After a while the commotion died down and he could hear troops stomping out into the road. Hasnat waited a long time till everything was silent. Then very carefully he crept downstairs. He found the drawing room a shambles of blood, bodies and broken furniture. His wife, mother and 20-year-old sister were badly wounded and bleeding. His two daughters, uninjured, were sobbing behind a sofa where they had hidden during the massacre. Lying dead on the floor were his 5-year-old son, two sisters aged 10 and 15 and his 11-year-old brother, the family ayah (maid) a houseboy and his cousin Shahdad Islam Sernabat. The latter was one of the best dressed and looked a lot like Hasnat.

Evidently the attackers had made mistakes for Sernabat's son and killed him. Of the 10 friends who had come along with the family from Barisal for the wedding of Mujib's niece four days earlier, one was killed and five wounded. Hasnat later slipped out of the house and escaped to India.

The fate of Sheikh Muni was brief and devastating. Apparently he was a light sleeper and when Raisaldar Muslehuddin and his men drove up to the house in two army trucks, Muni quickly jumped out of bed. Seeing the troops he called out to inquire whether they had been assigned to guard him. Muslehuddin asked Muni to come out and when he did he grabbed hold of him. At this point Muni was four months pregnant, jumped in front of her husband to protect him. Both were killed by a single burst from a sten gun. No other person was touched. Mission accomplished, Muslehuddin and his men drove to Mujib's house.

When the others had gone on their deadly mission, Rashid made straight for Sq. Leader Liaquat's house to alert him to stand by with his MiGs. It took a few minutes to get him out of bed and to brief him. Liaquat refused to do anything without orders from the Chief of Air Staff. So leaving him, Rashid
dashed off to see Major Hafiz, Brigade Major of the 46th Infantry Brigade (Dhaka Brigade) who was involved in the earlier plotting but backed out at the last moment. Rashid wanted Hafiz to bring out the 1st East Bengal since Major Shahjahan and the 16th East Bengal had failed to come from Joydevpur. He hoped the Brigade Major would not now hesitate to act since the operation had already been launched.

Hafiz, however, refused to call out the infantry. He would not move without instructions from the Brigade Commander or the Chief of Staff. There was some argument and Hafiz tried to get his CO, Colonel Shafat Jamaal, on the telephone. When he failed to get through Rashid got him into a taxi and drove off to Shafat Jamaal’s house. They were entering the compound when they heard the first salvos from the Howitzer coming from the direction of Dhanmandi.

Rashid said he told the Brigade Commander about the strike. ‘Sir, we have gone for action to remove Sheikh…’ Shafat Jamaal, he recalls, was shocked and very angry. He too could hear the guns booming in the distance. There followed loud exchanges between the two officers, when the telephone rang. It was General Shafiuullah calling to say he had received a call from Sheikh Mujib that some soldiers were attacking his house and he wanted the Dhaka Brigade to mobilise immediately to go to his assistance.

‘Shafat Jamaal (Jamal) that it’s too late to do something since we have already gone for it,’ Rashid said. ‘Shafat Jamaal put down the telephone. He was furious but did nothing. Then he told me, ‘I must go and see General Ziaur Rahman’. I didn’t bother to stop him.” Rashid got into his jeep and rushed to Dhanmandi.

After Rashid left, Shafat Jamaal received another telephone call from General Shafiuullah, who was crying as he informed him that Sheikh Mujib had been killed. The Army Chief appeared to have broken down completely and failed to give the Dhaka Brigade commander instructions to quell the mutiny. So quickly throwing on his uniform, Shafat Jamaal walked over to General Zia’s house. He found him shaving.

After recounting Rashid’s visit and the telephone calls from General Shafiuullah, Shafat Jamaal told Zia: ‘The President has been killed, Sir. What are your orders?’

Zia, he recalled, was quite calm, evidently aware of what had happened. Zia answered: ‘If the President is no longer there, then the Vice President is there. Go to your headquarters and wait there.’

Zia clearly was not going to be pushed into any hasty action. Sheikh Mujib was dead. The situation was extremely fluid and unclear. So General Zia, like the other senior officers as Farook had suspected, decided to wait and see.

When he reached Sheikh Mujib’s house Rashid found everything quiet. The troops were milling about outside and in answer to his query confirmed that Bangabandhu was indeed dead. Rashid said he was upset to hear that the family had also been slaughtered. His political perception made him keenly aware that this was a blunder of the first magnitude. It would turn public opinion against them and also disgrace them internationally. At the same time Rashid did not blame the troops because, as he put it, ‘it was a military operation and civilians can get killed.’ Nevertheless he was too squeamish to go inside the house. Instead he turned his jeep and returned to Brigade Headquarters in the Cantonment.

Rashid recalls: ‘Colonel Shafat Jamaal and the other senior officers were there. I told them that since it is confirmed that Sheikh has been killed there is no question of interference or any action by them. They should stay where they are and be prepared just in case the Rakhi Bahini move and they have to counter it.”

He said the officers were angry but also silent and afraid. ‘Everybody was wondering what should happen to them now that Sheikh Mujib had gone and no one did anything.”

Meanwhile Farook, having confirmed Sheikh Mujib was dead, had secured the city. Taking 10 of his tanks he returned to Rakhi Bahini headquarters to confront the Acting CO. ‘The man was shaking in his boots’ he recalled. ‘Somehow he had all lined up what I thought I had come to get. I had informed him that the Rakhi Bahini had been merged with the army and would be subject to orders from the army and army headquarters. Then he got on the phone and spoke to the Director of Military Operations, Colonel Noiruddin. Farook talked him into bringing the Rakhi Bahini under military orders. Once that was accomplished Mujib’s storm troops ceased to be a threat.

Later, going down Mirpur Road past Sheikh Mujib’s house, Farook was flagged down by a Lancet picket. They had three men securely tied on the ground. ‘We caught them going to the house’ they told him. ‘They say they are going to blow them up.’ Looking down Farook could not make out who the two younger men were. The third he recognised immediately. It was Brigade Mansoorul Haq, Military Secretary to the President, the man who had presented Farida with the big bouquet three days earlier. Farook calmed his troops. There would be no more killing.

Farook continued: ‘I then lined up my tanks and marched the column back via the 2nd Capital Road, Farm Gate, right into the Cantonment and parked them in front of Brigade Headquarters. I told them there: ‘We are placing ourselves under your command.”

The officers in Brigade Headquarters were understandably non-plussed. What do you tell a brahsh young tank commander who has just knocked off the President? One or two congratulated Farook. The rest were angry, silent. ‘I could feel their hostility’ Farook said, ‘as if they were telling me ‘you are a pariah, not wanted’’. When I tried to be nice to Colonel Rashid it would be turned on me savagely: ‘Who told you to give advice. You keep your mouth shut.”

Rashid said the success of their operation tempted him to consider making a grab for power, instead of installing Khandaker Moshtaque as President. He desired to be in control of the situation. The Rakhi Bahini had been cowed into submission by Farook’s tanks. GHQ was in a state of paralytic shock. The army was in disarray but with a little persuasion now that the deed was done, it could be counted on to rally round the majors. He was also confident that the people were not shedding any tears for Mujib. But he was not sure what the public reaction would be once it became known that the families had also been slaughtered.

That was Rashid’s main concern at the moment, and while giving it thought, he put off going to Moshtaque’s house for about 20 minutes. Then he heard Dalm, contrary to instructions, announcing on the radio that Mujib had been killed and the army under Moshtaque had seized power. Dalm also said that martial law had been imposed on the country which henceforth would be known as the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh.

Apparently Dalm and some of the other retired officers—with typical indifference and rashness’ Rashid said—had rushed to the radio station after killing Sheikh Mujib and Serniabat. There they fought over the microphone,
each wanting to be the first to break the news. Then Dalim grabbed it and made the announcement in his name.

The broadcast shocked Rashid into action. "I knew it would create a problem for us," he said, "because the brigades outside Dhaka would want to know how Dalim, a retired officer, had staged a military coup which could only be done by the army. How could such a man speak for the army? They would not accept it."

Dismissing the thought of grabbing power, Rashid went post haste to Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed's house.

VIII

Moshtaque Takes Over

*I went into the toilet and while sitting there I began to prepare myself in my mind about what was to come.*

—Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed

At 7.30 am Rashid's jeep, followed by a solitary tank, snaked through one of Dhaka's older quarters into Aga Mash Lane and came to a stop outside Khandaker Moshtaque's house. It was an old-fashioned three-storey building sandwiched between even older houses in a tiny square. The clatter of the tank tracks had electrified the run-down neighbourhood. Hundreds of people, already staggered by Dalim's fateful radio broadcast, had instantly gathered to watch the drama unfold before their very eyes. They perched silently in windows, on the roofs and at other vantage points in the square, but keeping well away from the tank.

Looking through the top-floor balcony Moshtaque was shaken to find the venomous mouth of the tank's cannon pointing in his direction. Moments later, Rashid, dishevelled and carrying a sten gun, ran up the stairs followed by two armed soldiers.

Though the Major, during their three previous meetings, had made no secret of his intention to give him Sheikh Mujib's job, Moshtaque was too much a politician to fully trust another man, especially when he was a military officer in frightful circumstances such as these. The long wait after Dalim's radio announcement, and now the tank, had unnerved him. He was full of misgivings. Moshtaque gave me a vivid account of the episode in two lengthy interviews on 11th and 12th December, 1975, after he had been thrown out of office by the counter-coups.

"I was not sure whether they had come to kill me," he recalled. "They were looking very disturbed and had guns in their hands. I kept looking at their hands to see what they were going to do. When I saw that instead of pointing their guns at me one or two of them were saluting, I felt relieved. So I took courage and asked, "What brings you here?"  'If nothing else, Moshtaque is an excellent actor."

Rashid told Moshtaque he wanted him to take over as President and for that purpose must accompany him to the radio station. The words were music to Moshtaque's ears. Still he was hesitant. He did not yet fully trust Rashid and decided to test him. "How do we go?" he asked the major. "Do we go in your jeep or in my car?" The intention here was to ascertain whether he would drive with dignity in his own car or as a prisoner in the military jeep. Rashid told Moshtaque they could use his car if the driver could be trusted. Now even more relieved, Moshtaque said he told the major: "Alright, give me some time. I have something to do and I have to put on my clothes."

He continued: "I went into the toilet and while sitting there I began to prepare myself in my mind about what was to come. This gave me some time to think."
government' on a regime brought to power by treachery, assassination and military coup.'

The military officers, Moshtaque said, went into a huddle in another room, returning about half an hour later to confirm acceptance of his terms. He then quickly put them on the air one by one to swear allegiance to his government. By 11.15 am when he finally made his own broadcast, Moshtaque had gained complete mastery of the situation. The majors may have made him President, but he bottled them up with the army. He was not going to be anyone's puppet.

In his first broadcast President Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed excelled even Sheikh Mujib in bombast and in exploiting the people's gullibility. He described the killing and the coup as 'a historical necessity.' He said 'everybody was to change the administrative system but since it was not possible through available means that armed forces had come forward to change the government ... they have opened the golden gates of opportunity before the people.' Moshtaque also solemnly pledged 'in unambiguous terms that this government will never compromise with any type of corruption, nepotism or sectarianism. For even as he spoke he was compromising with the most heinous of crimes—murder.'

Moshtaque was guilty of another public deception which some Western newspapers dubbed as 'The case of the Missing Islamic Republic.'

Dalin's announcement early that morning had led everyone to believe that Bangladesh was now an 'Islamic Republic.' Farook and Rashid also intended it to be so. Moshtaque, however, had his own ideas. He had no intention of changing the country's secular character. But very cleverly he did not announce his unpopular decision at that time. Instead he fooled everyone by liberally lapsing his speeches with appeals to Allah and concluded with the words 'Bangladesh Zindabad,' the Urdu equivalent of 'Joi Bangla' (Long live Bengal) which had been Mujib's rallying cry to the Bengalis. At the end of it all the people, 85% of whom are Muslim, were left with the impression that a new Islamic dispensation had been installed. It was only later that they would learn the true nature of the new Islamic Republic. Sheikh Mujib's ideological commitments and his professed domestic objectives were also unchanged.

In essence President Moshtaque was carrying on in the traditions of the Awami League. But by that time Khandaker Moshtaque had consolidated his position and it was too late to complain.

Moshtaque's speech caused tremendous confusion in Britain where there is a sizable Bangladeshi community. Pious Muslims who had exulted when Dalin first announced the establishment of the Islamic Republic, were crestfallen when the text of Moshtaque's broadcast was known. Hundreds of telephone calls were made to the High Commission in London for clarification.

One caller asked Deputy High Commissioner Farook Chowdhury, 'Is it or is it not an Islamic Republic?' When the official said there was no change, he was disgustedly told, 'If this is the case then why did you kill Sheikh?'

The call was not the only one to be foiled by Moshtaque's adroit reversal of the declaration of the 'Islamic Republic.' Saudi Arabia was also taken in. Though they had repeatedly expressed goodwill for the people, the Saudis had resisted recognition of Bangladesh for three years and a half because they felt the Muslim people should have an Islamic state. Justice Abu Sayeed, the Bangladesh's first President, who later became President, had stated Mujib's travelling envoy, explained the Saudi position to me when recounting a meeting he had with the late King Faisal in January, 1974.
According to Justice Chowdhury, King Faisal wanted clarification of what was meant by the Article in the Bangladesh Constitution relating to secularism. 'I told the King,' he said with semantics that would have appalled King Solomon, 'that, as President of the Republic of Bangladesh, on various occasions I had referred to this particular Article and said that it did not mean irreligion. It merely meant that all persons professing different faiths would be treated with equality in the affairs of the state, i.e. they could profess and practise their own religion and maintain their religious institutions and should have equal opportunities in life. Since a very small minority does not profess the faith of Islam, Your Majesty might treat it as an Islamic country.'

Justice Chowdhury continued: 'For a time it looked as if the King was impressed by my argument. But then he said he would be happy if the word 'secular' was omitted from the Constitution and it is declared as Republic of Bangladesh. He further met my point about tolerance of other religions by saying an Article specifying that the minorities would not be oppressed would be an adequate protection for them.' King Faisal was not fool. He did not grant recognition to secular Bangladesh and imposed his government under King Khalid on hearing the news of Mujib's assassination and Dalim's declaration of an Islamic Republic, rushed in with the long-denied recognition. I have not been able to discover by what verbal gymnastics Justice Chowdhury, as Moshtaque's Foreign Minister, was able to mollify the Saudi embarrassment—if indeed he did—when the new President retained the country's secular status.

Meanwhile on that fateful day, events were moving swiftly in Dhaka. With fore-knowledge of what the majors had planned, Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, the President's special time to formulate his plans and thus was able to move with precision and purpose in the midst of the general confusion. First he imposed martial law, and ordered an indefinite curfew throughout the country. But here again, as a sop to religious sentiment, he took pains to ensure that there was a three-hour break in the curfew so that the faithful might go to the mosque for Jumma (Friday) prayers. Next he appointed a Vice President and a 10-men Cabinet which excluded members of Sheikh Mujib's inner circle. Among the new appointees were Justice Abu Syed Chowdhury and Dr. A. R. Malik, Farook's uncle who was a university Vice Chancellor. He was made Finance Minister. The new President suspended some of Mujib's most trusted officials and placed them on the transfer list. Moshtaque also arrested several politicians, among them Ghazi Gholam Mustafa and Abdul Samad Azad, the man who had replaced him as Foreign Minister when he was dumped from the job a few days after independence. He also granted interviews to both the press and the radio, and the press, radio and TV were quickly orchestrated to praise the new dispensation and denounce the old.

The sycophants needed no encouragement to switch loyalties. They went in droves to the President's house to fawn on Moshtaque, and any of the majors they could find. Congratulatory telegrams and letters poured in from everywhere.

No tears were shed for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Maulana Bashhani, who had a few months earlier pledged 'total support' for Mujib's 'Second Revolution', quickly issued a statement welcoming the historic change and offering fullest support to Khandaker Moshtaque's government. In London a group of well-known Bangladeshis stormed the High Commission demanding seeing Mujib's photographs and assaulting his personal intelligence officer. The High Commissioner, Syed Abdus Sultan, who had always shown himself greatly devoted to Mujib, and was one of his most trusted appointees, instead of having the boys arrested for trespassing and vandalism, entertained them to tea in his office after removing the many photographs of Mujib which normally adorn his office.

In Dhaka Khandaker Moshtaque lost no time in tiding up the evidence of the massacre in Dharmandi. Mujib's family, along with the Semnabads and the Monis were quietly buried in Benani graveyard in the Cantonment. Mujib's body was flown by Air Force helicopter to Tungipara and buried in the village graveyard. It was there that Bangabandhu's final humiliation took place. According to Brigadier Manzoom, when the news of the coup and assassination became known some villagers broke in and looted Mujib's ancestral home.

A few hours after installing Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed as President, Farook and Rashid placed themselves at the disposal of the Army Head-quarters, but were not allowed to join their units. Not only were they a source of embarrassment and fear to the military commanders but they were also the target of much hostility from those officers who had earlier conspired with and helped install Sheikh Mujib, but had backed out at the last moment. The problem was solved by Khandaker Moshtaque. For his own security he insisted that the two majors remain with him in the President's house at all times.

Although he had connived with the majors in the overthrow of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and now clung to them for protection, Khandaker Moshtaque, like his predecessor, had a basic mistrust and dislike for all things military. He too was after all basically an Awami Leaguer who had suffered at the hands of Pakistan's military rulers. The military 'monstrousness' which Mujib had now reared its head. Moshtaque was quick to perceive that unless he demolished it by restoring military discipline and re-establishing civil authority over the armed forces, he would not be able to consolidate his position as President. To put down the military, therefore, Moshtaque's preoccupation during his 83 days in office. But he faced his first obstacles to his plans. The most important was Farook and Rashid's insistence that Major General Ziaur Rahman should replace Major General Shafullah as Chief of the Army Staff. Later, despite Moshtaque's reservations, they brought in another man of his choice to head the Bangladesh Air Force. He was Group Captain Towabi, a former Pakistan air force officer who had for a time served as the senior air officer with the Mujibnagar government-in-exile in Calcutta. Towabi was living in retirement with his German wife in Munich when when Moshtaque went there to recruit him. But he faced. First, he did not trust him, was essentially a gut feeling, but Moshtaque was not the one to invalidate his intuition. Time would prove how right it was. Secondly, Zia, unlike the other senior army officers, was popular with the troops. This was anathema to Moshtaque for he firmly believed that such unqualified officers must be regarded as a potentially dangerous army rival. So he did the next best thing. While appointing Zia as Chief of Army Staff, Moshtaque made sure he was tightly boxed in and made ineffective by his own nominees.

Rashid was supposed to be advising him on army matters. But without consulting the major, Moshtaque created the post of Chief of Defence Staff—ranking above the three Service Chiefs (and above Zia) and appointed Major General Khalilur Rahman, Commandant of the Bangladesh Rifles, to the job. Major General Ershad, who was on a staff course in India, was given his second promotion in four months and brought in as Zia's deputy. Brigadier
Khulid Musharraf had been Zia's rival for promotion. Mostaque retained him in the sensitive position as CGS (Chief of General Staff) under Zia. On top of all this, he placed General M. A. G. Osman, Musharraf's rival, as his own Defence Adviser. Known as the 'Papa Tiger' because he was Colonel-in-Chief of the Bengal Regiment, Osman was an old-style officer and a gentleman who lived by the Military Manual. Mostaque found him the ideal person to oversee what he grandly described as the restoration of discipline in the Armed Forces.

In fact Mostaque was doing the opposite.

Recalling his actions, Brigadier Manzoor regretfully told me later: 'Moshaque outdid Mujib in his mistreatment of the Forces. He was clever and cunning. He spread one against the other and he set up the bureaucrats against the Army.' General Zia, who was present on the occasion, nodded his head in agreement.

On 26th September Mostaque indemnified Mujib's killers against punishment for their crimes. It took the form of the 'INDEMNITY ORDER', 1972' issued on the authority of the President of Bangladesh and published in a Gazette Extraordinary—but without the usual publicity in the media. There was good reason for the secrecy for surely there would have been a public outcry had its contents been known.

Held by the legal verbiage was total exculpation for the Majors, their men and all others involved with them not only in respect of the killings and the coup of 15th August, but also in the planning and abetment of it. In effect it was a comprehensive pardon for the men who had slaughtered the Founding Father of the nation and 21 members of his family.

In the circumstances, no one expected Mostaque to prosecute Mujib's killers. But to formally pardon them is an entirely different thing. I was told later that not even Farook and Rashid expected it or thought it necessary. But Mostaque, ever the casuist, was playing it safe for his was more than a casual role in the grisly affair. I don't know whether he issued himself an 'indemnity certificate' like the others or not. Certainly the terms of the Ordinance were broad enough even for this purpose.

The pardoning of the killers, the promotion of Farook and Rashid from major to Lt. Colonel, and the most extravagant praise he heaped on them—in a radio broadcast on October 3 he called them 'the sons of the sun of the armed forces'—had the most shattering effect on the morale and discipline in the armed forces. Clearly established for officers and men was the precedent that anything is permissible—mutiny, mayhem, murder—only don't get caught doing it. All this would foster widespread unrest and Bonapartism, attempted coups and countercoup, and General Zia Rahman's assassination in Chittagong seven years later.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by his free-wheeling ways, broke the sequence of crime and punishment in Bangladesh and for betraying the people brought down upon himself and the country a terrible legacy of blood. Khandaker Mostaque, however, during the brief 83 days of his coup, formally cemented the break and multiplied the legacy many times over.

Despite the bombast of his first radio broadcast, Mostaque had few innovations to his credit during the first ten days in office. One, which was given front-page coverage in the government newspaper, was the announcement of a new form of national head-dress—a black 'nehru' cap similar to the one he wore, but used by few others in Bangladesh at that time. However, during this time Mostaque took steps to remove all possible rivals in the political field. He reckoned the main threat, apart from the unstable army, came from his old party, the Awami League. Its leaders could be highhandedly placed General M. A. G. Osman, Mujib's confidant, to make it clear that the country had accepted Mujib's killing. Mostaque quickly rounded up the four men who had been most prominent in the Mujibnagar government in Calcutta—Tajuddin Ahmad, Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman. Here again, Mostaque acted with extreme guile to disarm public opinion.

Mansoor Ali, till recently the Prime Minister, was invited to Bangabandhu where he was photographed being effusively received by Mostaque. While the pictures were being shown on TV that night, poor Mansoor Ali was quietly whisked off to jail. Syed Nazrul Islam, the former Vice President, and Kamruzzaman, who had been Mujib's confidant, were then jailed without fuss. So was Tajuddin, who had been dismissed for publicly criticising Mujib and still enjoyed countrywide respect.

Peter Gill, who was the last journalist to see Tajuddin alive, recorded the event in the Sunday Telegraph:

'As I approached his house I saw Mr Ahmad being escorted to a military jeep by an army officer. The house was guarded by about 20 soldiers. The jeep passed by leading convoy of about 50 more soldiers were crammed into an army Land Rover. I walked to the jeep and with all the naivety at my command asked Mr Tajuddin Ahmad whether he was about to join the new army-backed government of President Ahmed.

'I don't think so,' he replied. Then after a glance at the army officer in the driving seat he added: 'I'm being taken to an army detention camp.'

While in jail these four political leaders became the object of a diabolical 'contingency plan' which would ultimately result in their massacre there two months later.

Farook told me three people—Farook himself, Rashid and Khandaker Mostaque—were privy to the plan which was intended as a contingency in the event of a coup. Recalled 26 months after it when Mostaque made his first visit to his village home in Dhospara because they felt he would be extremely vulnerable when he left the safety of the tanks in Bangabandhu.

'If we could bump off Sheikh Mujib,' Farook explained, 'then we reckoned others could do the same to Khandaker Mostaque. You must remember that the coup was the most shattering effect on the morale of the politicians and so many people in jail would have been the obvious choice of anyone trying to form an alternative government, probably backed by India. So they had to be removed.'

Accordingly it was agreed that should Mostaque be killed or there be a counter-coup, two things would be done immediately. One, the Chief Justice (at that time Justice Abusadat Mohammad Sayem) would be immediately sworn in as President to avoid a government vacuum. Simultaneously, a 'combat' team from the President's House would rush to Dhaka central jail and kill Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman. Assigned to the latter task was one of Farook's 'hunter-killer teams'—the three to five who were specially trained and motivated squads he had earlier boasted of. This was one put in charge of Farook's most trusted men, Risaldar, now Hon. Lieutenant. Muslehuddin. He was the Lancer who led the kidnap of Sheikh Fajrul Haq. Mostaque's house on 15th August. Thus the diabolical murders were planned in the most cold-blooded way.

'The contingency plan was expressly designed to operate automatically,' Farook added. How true his words! Operate it did with the most baleful results
government through most of the Bengali freedom struggle. After repatriation to Bangladesh in 1973 he was mercilessly ostracised by his colleagues in the Foreign Office in Dhaka. He lingered for several months as an O.S.D. (Officer on Special Duty which in the bureaucratic parlance means 'Officer without responsibilities'). His only link with Pakistan and what happened to him in the 1976-77 period was that, while visiting his home in London in February, 1974, Tabarak was lying with a broken leg in the corridor of a business meeting and phoning the Department of External Affairs in Dhaka to inform them of this. He was on the deathbed and they told him this was a matter for the Foreign Secretary, but Khandaker Moshtaque, who was then the Senior Minister in the Foreign Office, told him to ring the Foreign Secretary to make the appointment, but he refused. He was not prepared to suffer the same indignity. The only link that remained was that, when the Foreign Secretary asked him to make arrangements for meeting Mr. Moshtaque with a delegation of Pakistani journalists, he refused, saying that he had no time to do so.

Later, when he took over, General Ershad would drop them one by one. But at that time all those appointments had encouraged Mahmood Ali and others like him to hope that Khandaker Moshtaque, with some encouragement, would take the decisive step for the re-establishment of Pakistan. 

Mahmood Ali told me that although Khandaker Moshtaque, because of immaturity, had failed to endorse the re-naming of Bangladesh as an 'Islamic Republic', he was confident that it was Moshtaque's intention 'to reverse the course set in December, 1971'. He had therefore proposed to Moshtaque that if there were no other objections, he would bring the proposal to the Planning Commission and the Ministry of External Affairs of Pakistan and request them to forward it to the Ministry of External Affairs of Bangladesh. But Moshtaque had declined to do so, saying that he was not prepared to take the risk of being involved in anything until the two governments had re-established diplomatic relations.

I asked Mahmood Ali if he seriously believed that the Bangladeshis would want to go back to Pakistan after all that they had suffered in 1971. There were other obstacles. A confederation pre-supposed a paramount authority and Khandaker Moshtaque would have no such role in a junior position. That was something that neither would be inclined to do. Mahmood Ali admitted that Prime Minister Bhutto was an obstacle to the re-unification of Pakistan. He said, however, that Mr. Bhutto was seriously troubled by a revolt by his party stalwarts such as Mustafa Khan and Hamid Reza and he would go the way Moshtaque would 'unless he can sweep away the opposition by giving them Bangladesh back'.

Bhutto, it was clear, had no such intention. At about the time Mahmood Ali was talking to me in London, Foreign Minister Aziz Ahmad was telling his American counterpart during the U.N. General Assembly, in New York that Pakistan wanted close ties with Bangladesh, a state-to-state relationship, not a special one, but nothing more. According to Justice Chowdhury, Aziz Ahmad told him: 'There are certain over-enthusiastic persons who want many things but we are not encouraging them. We have to keep them under restraint.'

Mahmood Ali waited three weeks in London for the fateful announcement from Dhaka. It never came. Evidently someone in Bangladesh had strung him along. Khandaker Moshtaque would never have dared to put the clock back. Had he tried to do so he would have been immediately killed by the Majors Farooq and Rashid, both staunch nationalists. Farooq told me: 'If anyone wanted to hand over Bangladesh to someone else, I would have blown his
bloody head of it'.

Three months later, when we had occasion to discuss it, General Ziaur Rahman told me he had been 'extremely suspicious about Moshtaque hobb-nobbing with Pakistan'. "Immediately after Mujib was killed," he said, "several Bangladeshi journalists who had been living in Pakistan rushed to London to start wrangling on how they could come to Bangladesh which is the heart of the country. Same for Burma." Similarly some Bengalis who had been underground for some years in Bangladesh suddenly surfaced in London and all intent on resuming relations with Pakistan. All of us were quite amazed and were wondering what they were trying to do—but really, the answer was obvious," Zia added.

China's long overdue recognition gave Moshtaque's ego a big boost. But otherwise things were not going well for him as the summer made way for autumn. Despite the best efforts of the government's propaganda machinery, India's Sheikh Mohamed Tajuddin who had earlier spared no diplomatic diligence for Mujib, was unable to dispel widespread public confusion about Moshtaque's policies. On the one hand Moshtaque hob-nobbed with pro-Pakistan elements and lost no occasion to speak out loudly about Islam and Indian atrocities. On the other, he also paradoxically clung to Mujib's secular line. The absurdity of this stance was noted in the government White Paper on the economy issued on 12th September, 1975.

Moshtaque had appointed an Economic Task Force to identify the economic problems in an obvious attempt to expose Mujib's wrong-doings. The Task Force submitted its work in a record 12 days. The report was then incorporated in a White Paper which staggered the country by recommending: 'The immediate task is to put the economy on an even keel and bring back sanity, rationality and discipline in economic policy and management ... keeping in view the four basic state principles, namely DEMOCRACY, SOCIALISM, SECULARISM and NATIONALISM ... So, there was something wrong. The Four Principles they referred to had been the Four Pillars of Mujibism', the selfsame banners that brought Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to an early grave. Yet here was Khandaker Moshtaque, the self-proclaimed product of the 'historical movement', doing the opposite thing with the same pawning as Mujib's jargon in his government's first White Paper. No wonder people were bewildered. Why had Sheikh Mujib to die? Seeing this, the Majors who had put Moshtaque in power became more restive.

On the 3rd October, the 56th day of his regime, Khandaker Moshtaque was driven from Dhaka to announce the 'decision to restore to the people their lost democratic rights'. Restrictions on political activity would be lifted from 15th August (1976) and General Elections held on the following 28th February (1977) for a parliament and parliamentary form of government. This shrewd political move was widely acclaimed. Also well received was the announcement that the government had decided to release political prisoners and give the people and the generals and to join them in discussions of high policy. On one such occasion, four days after the killing of Mujib, the Chief of Army Staff, General Shafiuullah, called a conference of Formation Commanders and Principal Staff Officers at Army Headquarters. Farook and Rashid were also present. Shafiuullah informed the assembled officers that President Moshtaque had sent the two majors to 'explain why they killed Sheikh Mujib and we will have to listen'. Rashid started off recounting the law and order situation and why Sheikh Mujib had to be replaced by President Moshtaque. Before he could pursue further Moshtaque was angrily interrupted. They had in the past been told to know only too well the dark side of the Sons of the Sun! The counter
owe no allegiance. He is a usurper, conspirator and murderer and at the first opportunity I'll overthrow him. The Dhaka Brigade commander who told me about the incident said his outburst caused consternation among the officers and a speedy end to the conference. The majors did not attempt to address the Formation Commanders again, but they did make their presence felt at Army Headquarters. Moshtaque allowed them to do so. And he turned a blind eye to the depredations of Farook and Rashid's men and some of the retired officers from the group that killed Sheikh Mujib. Thus instead of stamping out indiscipline as he publicly promised, Moshtaque in fact kept the army in turmoil.

General Zia would later tell me: 'He (Moshtaque) used the majors for his own protection and did not mind if he destroyed them in the process. He played on their fears and the fears of the Bengal Lancers and Artillery men, thus dividing and creating indiscipline in the Army.'

It was an uncomfortable situation all round. Here were two majors, still formally within the army, yet outside its discipline and chain of command, with powerful armoured and artillery units at their disposal. Rashid periodically descended on General Zia at the Chief of Staff's office to 'discuss' problems or to make 'suggestions'. At the same time the commander of the Bengal Lancers, Col. Momin, received his instructions from Major Farook Rahman, still nominally his second-in-command. Farook's arrogance was particularly galling to the army brass. Having complained to Moshtaque about the lack of personal transport, he had been given the run of the President's motor pool. So Farook used to sport about in the President's Cadillac or Mercedes limousine to the immense irritation of his seniors. Inevitably these anomalies became intolerable. Plotting in the army against Moshtaque and the Majors developed in earnest.

Towards the end of September a young infantry officer was caught trying to subvert some of the Lancers who were guarding Bangabandhu. The matter was promptly reported to Farook and Rashid who interrogated the man and, so they claimed, discovered he had been put up to it by Brigadier Khalid Muhurat and Colonel Shafat Jamil. Rashid took the 'evidence' to General Zia with the request for appropriate action. Zia promised to look into it. Nothing happened. Rashid said he had the same experience on many other occasions when he reported such incidents to the General.

"Zia kept telling me, 'Rashid don't you worry. If anything happens it will be over my dead body.' I think he was either a coward or very clever," said Rashid. "He may have been hoping we will knock out each other and give him the benefit."

Khandaker Moshtaque, who also accused General Zia of ignoring his warnings, was even more caustic in an interview he gave me at Dhaka on 12th December, 1975, a little more than a month after he had been forced out of office. 'Before 2nd November,' he said, 'even the rickshaw men were knowing that something was going to happen. I knew it. Everybody knew it. Yet they couldn't see it. What were they doing?'

Who are the 'they' you are referring to, I asked Moshtaque. He replied: 'Those fellows in the Cantonment. Those men who call themselves generals and who really are small majors. What were they doing? Ninety-eight per cent of the officers were with me, yet they couldn't protect the President against the two per cent? They are miserable failures.' Then, in a pointed reference to General Zia, Moshtaque added: 'Let me tell you again, he (Zia) is like a small major, inexperienced, unintelligent, ambitious-minded. He couldn't defend the Cantonment. How can he defend the country? Yet he is ambitious.'
General Ziaur Rahman, assassinated President of Bangladesh.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zafiquar Ali Bhutto in Dhaka in 1974. Once implacable political foes, they got together as fair-weather friends after Pakistan broke up - with Mujib becoming the Founding Father of Bangladesh and Bhutto President of what remained of Pakistan.

On returning triumphantly to Dhaka after the liberation war, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman receiving a Judas kiss from Khandaker Mashruque Ahmed who conspired against his assassination and succeeded.
THE BANGLADESH GAZETTE
Extraordinary
Published by Authority
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1975
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
MINISTRY OF LAW, PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE
(Law and Parliamentary Affairs Division)
NOTIFICATION
Dacca, the 26th September 1975.
No. 672/Pub. — The following Ordinance made by the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on the 26th September, 1975, is hereby published for general information:

THE INFAMITY ORDINANCE, 1975
Ordinance No. 36 of 1975

ORDINANCE

in resticts the taking of any legal or other proceeding in respect of certain acts or things done in connection with, or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or steps necessitating, the Historical Change and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of the 15th August, 1975.

WHEREAS it is expedient to restrict the taking of any legal or other proceedings in respect of certain acts or things done in connection with, or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or steps necessitating, the Historical Change and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of 15th August, 1975.

AND WHEREAS Parliament is not in session and the President is satisfied that circumstances exist which render urgent action necessary;

NOW, THEREFORE, in pursuance of the Proclamation of the 26th August, 1975, and in exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of article 91 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the President is pleased to make and promulgate the following Ordinance:

1. SHORT TITLE — This Ordinance may be called the Infamy Ordinance, 1975.

2. RESTRICTIONS ON THE TAKING OF ANY LEGAL OR OTHER PROCEEDINGS AGAINST PERSONS IN RESPECT OF CERTAIN ACTS AND THINGS — (1) Notwithstand anything contained in any law, including a law relating to any defence service, for the time being in force, no suit, proceeding or other proceeding, legal or不然, shall lie, or be taken, as before or by any Court, including the Supreme Court and Court Martial, against any person, including a person who is in or has, at any time, been subject to any law relating to any defence service, for the time being in force, or an act or acts of or in respect of any act done or thing done or any takes by such person in connection with, or in preparation of execution of any plan for, as an emergency step, towards the change of Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of the 15th August, 1975.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a certificate by the President or any person authorised by him in this behalf, that any act, matter or thing was done or step taken by any person mentioned in the certificate in connection with or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or steps necessitating, the Historical Change and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of 15th August, 1975, shall be sufficient evidence of such act, matter or thing having been done or step having been taken in connection with, or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or a necessary step, towards, the change of Government and the Proclamation of Martial Law on that morning.

KHANDAKER HOSHITRAO AHMED
Dacca;
The 26th September, 1975.

M.U. RAIMAN
Secretary.
POST-MORTEM REPORT ON THE DEAD BODY OF THE LATE PRESIDENT ZIAUR RAHMAN


Body Identified by—Lt. Col. Mahfuz, P.S. to President.

Time of Death—04:00 hrs. on 30-5-81.

Time of Post-mortem Examination—10:00 hrs. on 01-6-81.

Brief History—The President was allegedly assassinated by the miscreants on Saturday the 30th May, 1981 at 04:00 hrs. in Chattagong Circuit House. He sustained multiple bullet injuries on his person and died on the spot. It is stated by Lt. Col. Mahfuz that his body was buried with another two dead bodies at about 14-30 hrs. on 30th May 1981 near Chattagong Engineering College. Lt. Col. Mahfuz with others of the Sta. HQ CIG. exhumed his body from that mass grave on 01-6-1981 morning and brought to CMH CIG. Ctrt. for necessary P.M. examination at about 10-00 hrs. on 01-6-1981.

On Examination—The body was partially decomposed but the configuration was intact to be identified as the body of the late President Ziaur Rahman. There were about twenty separate bullet wounds on the body. The details of the wounds are as follows:

a. One bullet entered through right eye and was out through the left occipito-parietal region with the extrusion of the brain matter.

b. Another 8"x3" oblique lacerated wound present extending from the left angle of the mouth up to the left lower neck. The mandible was shattered and all the neck structures

c. There are about ten bullet wounds over the chest and abdomen probably entrance wounds.

d. There were equal number of corresponding blaste wounds on the back of the trunk also. These were probably exit wounds.

e. There was big lacerated 4"x3" wound on the perineum and left groin with corresponding wounds of the back of prepuce and buttock left. Probably due to the effects of brush fire.

f. There were two bullet wounds in the rt. arm.

g. There were few scattered small wounds on both lower limbs.

The body was cleaned and reconstructed. Formalin Solution was injected in all the wounds and the body was soaked by the same. The whole body was then bandaged with soft cotton wool and wrapped in new white sheet. Cedar wood oil, Eucalyptus oil and "Aar" were sprinkled over the whole sheet. Then the body was preserved in a coffin by sea leaves. The coffin was wrapped by the National Standard and handed over to Brig. A.K.M. Azizul Islam, Lt. Col. Mahfuz and Lt. Col. M. Naeemul Islam at 13:00 hrs. by CO, CMH, Chattagong.

Sd/-
Lt. Col. A. Z. TUFAIL AHMED
Gd. Specialist in Pathology.
By the end of October Moshtaque, Osmanli, General Khalil, and Farook and Rashid were convinced that a coup was imminent. General Khalil said that according to the reports they were receiving the finger of suspicion pointed equally at Khalid Musharraf and General Zia. ‘We used to meet every night to try to find out who was the more dangerous,’ Khalil told me. ‘At first the boys (Farook and Rashid) wanted to arrest both of them. Then they suggested we quickly form a brigade that was loyal to us and get everybody arrested. But that too was discarded as not being feasible.’

Whatever the reason, General Osmanli apparently was convinced that General Zia presented the greater danger. On the night of 2nd November, accompanied by General Khalil, Osmanli informed Moshtaque that Zia must be removed from his job as Chief of the Army Staff. Rashid, who was present on the occasion, gave me an interesting account of the incident. The cabinet sub-committee had been convened on the evening of 2nd November to finalise the arrangements for restoring the Constitution and political rights. After a lengthy discussion the meeting broke up a little before midnight, leaving the Law Minister, Manoranjan Bhan, the task of drafting the required legislation. Osmanli had attended the meeting. Before going home to the Cantonment he had got hold of General Khalil and went in for a chat with the President. Rashid joined them. The rub of the discussion was that Osmanli had serious misgivings about General Zia and wanted him removed from his job. Rashid objected strongly. He said it was not Zia but some other senior officers such as Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil who were the real threat to the government. And in gushing his argument, Rashid said he took pains to sly convey a warning to Moshtaque that Osmanli may have a deeper motive for wanting Zia out. Moshtaque was quick to grasp the point. Though he had never been happy with General Zia, this was a new situation and he was not going to throw his hand away so easily. Furthermore, there was the possibility that what the new man Osmanli had in mind was even less acceptable to him than Zia. So Moshtaque temporised. He told Osmanli ‘Alright, you want to change General Zia tell me who is to replace him? Give me some names.’ Osmanli promised to do the needful the following day. The two generals then bid them goodnight and left Bangabazar for their homes.

Rashid recalls sitting for more than half an hour with Moshtaque in the President’s private quarters chewing over the bombshell that Osmanli had dropped. It’s symptomatic of the mass of suspicion and intrigue that permeated Bangladesh at that time that the two of them began to suspect that, of all persons, the grand old soldier, General Osmanli, may be working hand-in-hand with Khalid Musharraf’s group. ‘We decided to wait and see whether he would recommend Khalid as General Zia’s replacement,’ Rashid said. ‘If he did, then we would have been sure he was doing some mischief.’

Rashid was returning to his own bedroom further down the corridor when a very agitated police officer ran up to tell him breathlessly in staccato bursts: ‘Sir…those army men…those who were guarding…they have run away. They said…we must go also as there’s to be trouble…serious fighting. They said we must run away.’

Rashid’s worst fears had materialised. The counter-coup had begun.

Notes
2. Ibid.
IX

'Counter coup' and the Jail Killings

In the middle of the confusion, the telephone rang. When I picked it up I heard a man say: 'I'm DIG Prisons. I would like to talk to Hon'ble President.'

—Major Abdur Rashid

Bangabandhu, the President's House in Dhaka, is not built to withstand a seige. The splendid colonial-style building with wide carriage-ways and acre upon acre of tropical flowers and foliage—the colours somehow always seem more vivid in Bengal—has an old-world charm about it, quite removed from the pressures of everyday. It belongs to another world; a world of pomp and circumstance, of unhurried movement, a world of orderliness. Yet on that fateful night of 2nd November, 1975, Bangabandhu looked like a military camp gearing to beat off an invader.

The roar of tanks starting up had startled hundreds of crows roosting in the trees and they flew about cawing wildly in the night. But within moments even their raucous noises were drowned out as the rest of the tanks splashed past life. Farook had eight tanks in Bangabandub. He had another eight at Subhrawardy Udhyian, the old racecourse ground, conveniently placed to control the radio station and intercept anything coming from the Cantonment and the old airport. Twelve other tanks awaited his orders in the Bengal Lancers' lines in the Cantonment itself.

Farook had been sleeping in an adjoining bedroom when Rashid awakened him to break the news of the defection of the infantry guard, the 1st East Bengal Regiment. The two of them had a hurried conference with Khandaker Mosthaque. Farook wanted to implement immediately a plan he had prepared for such an eventuality. It involved seizing Dhaka Airport (the old one), the 46th Brigade Headquarters and other key army installations. How he hoped to do this with tanks alone—and without the necessary infantry back-up—Farook did not explain. But he did say that Mosthaque and Rashid reacted sharply to this 'hot-headed' scheme. They told him they would rather try to talk their way out of the crisis than provoke a civil war. So Farook undertook an alternative plan, a defensive one. He ordered the tanks in all three locations to start and take up previously designed defensive positions. In Bangabandub this meant some of the tanks moving outside the walls to control the approach roads. Others stayed within the compound like enormous growing mastiffs waiting to savage any intruder. Men with machine guns and steen guns took up positions on the long perimeter wall.

Before leaving for Subhrawardy Udhyian to take personal command of the tanks there, Farook made one telephone call. It was to a friend, an army officer overseeing the government's telecommunications system. Farook requested a total communications black-out with the outside world. It is not known whether this officer did indeed oblige Farook or instead choose to talk the other way, as Rashid found so many other officers doing at that crucial moment for the Majors and Mosthaque.

Sitting in the President's office with Khandaker Mosthaque, Rashid had been burnishing up the telephone with calls for help. First he phoned General Zia, Chief of the Army Staff, and found him asleep. He briefed the general about the developments and requested his presence in Bangabandub. 'I'll look into it,' was Zia's brusque non-committal reply. Then, to the major's chagrin, Zia abruptly hung up.

Rashid telephoned Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, Chief of the General Staff. 'Sir, what's happening?' Rashid asked. 'You tell me,' said the Brigadier. Rashid briefly told him about the infantry withdrawing from the President's House. Then he asked: 'What do you think?' 'What's there to think,' Khalid retorted. 'What was expected earlier has started. I'm going out now. You wait there. I'll call you back later.'

Rashid's third call was to the headquarters of the Bangladesh Rifles. But he got no joy from them. Then he telephoned Air Vice Marshal Towab, the Chief of the Air Staff who was billeted in the VIP rest house next to Hotel Dhaka Serena. Towab owed his appointment to Rashid. Two moments later Towab told him the major had flown all the way to Munich with a letter from General Osmani to offer him the job. So Rashid was counting on a positive response at least from this Air Force officer. Once again he was disappointed. According to Rashid, Towab didn't think there was any point in rushing to Bangabandub. He felt it would be of little use there. Towab said he would, instead, see what he could do about getting help from some Air Force personnel. Rashid got the message: Towab would not be coming. 'Perhaps he didn't think he should risk his life,' the major added wryly.

Rashid, in desperation, then telephoned General Osmani at his Cantonment residence. After explaining what had happened, Rashid told him that the President would like to have his Defence Adviser in him in Bangabandub as soon as possible. Osmani readily agreed to come. But he did not have a car. Looking out of the window he also noticed a lot of troops moving about. Osmani was not sure if he was safe to venture out. But the old general did try to take a lift. While waiting for a lift, he telephoned an order to the Bangladesh Rifles to send two battalions to guard the President. Apparently these instructions were aborted somewhere down the line because no BDR units turned up at Bangabandub.

Osmani also telephoned General Zia. 'His wife picked up the telephone,' he told me, 'and said Zia can't come to the telephone... there's some difficulty. When I insisted on talking to him, she told me in a hushed sort of voice that there were some men in the hall with him and he couldn't come to the phone. I thought then that Zia was under some sort of restraint.' Osmani added.

Calling Khalid Musharraf's house a little Osmani was informed that the CGS was 'in the lines' i.e. with the 4th East Bengal. He telephoned him there. When the brigadier came on the line. Osmani recalled, they had a brief but sharp exchange that indicated that by this time Khalid Musharraf had taken charge of the operation.

Osmani: 'Khalid, what the hell's going on?'

Khalid: 'The tanks are adopting threatening postures.'

Osmani: 'What threatening postures? You pull back your infantry and I assure you the tanks don't do anything.'

Khalid: 'Don't worry. I'll sort it out.'
Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil had been waiting a long time to sort out the majors in Bangladesh. In fact on the day Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed, Khalid had personally contacted Shafat Jamil, the 46th Brigade (Dhaka Brigade) commander, to ’prepare for action against the mutineers.’

The troops had accordingly been prepared to strike at midnight, but the action was never carried out because Khalid was in his office in Dhaka and did not contact Jamil again until three days later. The CGS then told him: ’We want no further bloodshed. Stand down your troops.’

Shafat Jamil had never accepted this situation. From time to time he went to General Zia, who had been promoted to Chief of Army Staff in place of General Shaffullah, complaining that the mutineers were in control. Let’s re-establish the chain of command. If you allow me, I’ll sort them out.’

’Zia never shut me up or gave me orders,’ Jamil recalled. ’He was playing both sides.’

However in the middle of October, General Zia suddenly ordered the Bengal Lancers to return to the Cantonment, leaving only four tanks in Bangkok. The order was not carried out and receded next day when the majors intervened. Farook and Rashid had asserted their supremacy again.

On 25th October, General Zia summoned Shafat Jamil to his office in Army House, where the brigadier found the General more amenable than usual. He offered to let him go back to the base at Dimla.

When Jamil entered and exchanged courtesies with his Chief, General Zia got up and went to the toilet leaving Jamil alone with Towab for more than 10 minutes. They sat in silence because Jamil did not like Towab since he was connected with the majors. When Zia returned, without further ado, he told Jamil to go back to his headquarters, leaving the brigadier in charge of the army under the reason for being summoned in the first place. Then he realised that Zia had wanted to give them an opportunity to speak.

Towab confirmed the incident in his own way. He told me he had been getting reports of an imminent coup and indications were that General Zia was behind it. So to test him out Towab had gone to Zia to say: ’General, I’ve been hearing things and I want you to know that if you are planning anything, please note that I am fully behind you.’ Zia was not at all taken in by Towab. He never trusted the Air Force Chief and he correctly assumed that it was more likely possible that Towab was only trying to get a hold of the majors. But he cunningly put Towab and Shafat Jamil together. This could have been either to compromise Towab since Jamil’s opposition was well known, or to quietly promote their intrigue from which he could benefit. In any case the effort failed.

On the 1st November Khalid Musharraf asked Shafat Jamil: ’Are you still keen to streamline the chain of command?’ Jamil replied in the affirmative. Then Khalid told him: ’Things have gone beyond the limit. We must strike now.’ A secret meeting was arranged for that afternoon in a Chinese restaurant near Dhaka’s Stadium. Khalid and Jamil were joined there by two trusted junior officers when they discussed the plan of action. The junior officers suggested that General Zia should be killed as part of the coup. But this was vetoed by Khalid because he did not want any bloodshed. The decision was taken to strike the next day at Bangabandhu to take out the majors and their tanks and to seize control of the government. They would simultaneously arrest Zia and forcibly retire him. After that the conspirators were confident they would not have trouble from any of the other officers.

Accordingly on the evening of 2nd November, Shafat Jamil ordered Major Iqbal, the company commander of 1st East Bengal regiment guarding Bangladesh with about 300 infantry men, to withdraw his troops to the Cantonment after midnight—and to keep the move secret. Major Iqbal complied. He had the troops back in the barracks by 1 am on the morning of the 3rd November. That was the start of the counter-coup. A detail under Capt. Hafizullah of the 1st East Bengal was sent to detain and isolate General Zia in his residence. Hafizullah stormed into Zia’s house. Zia, who had been awakened earlier by Rashid, got on one knee and called out his name. ’Uncle Hafizullah, the captain, nervously pointing his gun at the general, told him, ’Sir, You are under arrest. Please don’t do anything.’ Hafizullah detained Zia in the living room with an armed guard. But in attempting to isolate Zia by rapping off the telephone in that room, Captain Hafizullah didn’t realise that it was only an extension cable that was on the other side of the room. It was on the bed. He kept in the ear of the guard that Begum Zia received her calls from General Osmani and Major Rashid.

By 3 am, General Osmani said, ’I was getting reports from all over that the infantry had taken over the airport, parts of the city and the radio transmitter on the outskirts of Dhaka. Tanks were confronting the infantry. A civil war situation had developed.’

In Bangladesh, Major Rashid was anxiously awaiting some word from General Zia. It was more than an hour since they had spoken and the situation had deteriorated rapidly. He called Zia’s home a second time. Begum Zia said her husband was still captive in the living room. She was evidently crying and quite overcome with anxiety for her husband’s safety. Rashid tried to reassure her. ’Don’t worry. If they haven’t done anything to him so far it’s not likely they intend to harm him. But pray to God. Only He can help us now.’

Indeed, God was now their only recourse. Man had failed the majors. The fantasy world of power, pretension and politics they had built up since August on the dead bodies of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s family, was now crashing all around them. Rashid didn’t blame himself or Farook for their tragic miscalculation. Instead he put the blame on Zia, silently cursing his hesitancy, his refusal to act against those who had been conspiring against them, and even more, Zia’s inability to trust them or anyone at all. Rashid was still very bitter a year later when he recounted the incident in an interview. ’He (Zia) was a cowardly man who couldn’t be trusted and couldn’t trust anyone,’ he said. But at that time he was sitting there and the general, Rashid’s reverse was interrupted by a call from Khalid Musharraf.

Khalid: ’We are in action now, so why don’t you come and make a compromise?’

Rashid: ’What compromise?’

Khalid: ’Come and join me. You have nothing to fear.’

Rashid: ’So far as I’m concerned, I trust only once . . . I may make mistakes, but I don’t change and I don’t compromise especially in such circumstances.’

Khalid: ’We are coming for the counter . . . I will see you till the end.’

Rashid: ’If you have started the action, it’s your luck, I will also see you till the end.’

The two officers traded verbal abuse and insult for several minutes before Khalid Musharraf hung up. Bangladesh may have been on the brink of civil war but for the moment at least the battles were being fought by telephone.

The 46th Brigade activity as a whole—and less so as the Bengal Lancers prepared to meet the impending assault. They could see elements of Shafat Jamil’s 46th Brigade infantrymen coming towards them in the first glimmer of light before dawn. Yet the foot soldiers always kept a safe distance from the tanks which every now and then made quick, menacing movements and swung their guns about.
The President's office reflected the frenetic atmosphere outside. Telephones rang. Orders were shouted. Men dashed in and out with messages. Rashid himself kept making quick sorties outside the main building to keep an eye on the troops. Then some time after 4 am, as he recalled in a tape-recorded interview, in the middle of the confusion the telephone rang. When I picked it up I heard a man say: "I'm the DIG Prisons speaking. I would like to talk to honourable President'.

Rashid handed the telephone to Mosthaque.

Rashid continued: 'The President listened for some time to what the man was saying. Then he spoke quietly and listened some more. Then I heard him say, "Yes... Yes... Yes..." several times. I couldn't make out exactly what he meant, but it seemed he was giving some sort of OK.'

Rashid was only telling part of the truth. It will be recalled that Majors Farook Rahman and Abdur Rashid, two months earlier, had formulated a diabolical 'contingency plan' which, in the event of Mosthaque's assassination or a 'counter-coup' would pre-empt the restoration of an Awami League government by killing the top party leaders who had been detained in jail. The plan had been expressly designed to be self-executing. Now, in the early hours of 3rd November, the 'contingency plan' had, indeed, been automatically activated at the first real sign of trouble for Mosthaque's government.

When Khalid's 'counter-coup' got under-way, the provisional designated 'combat team' led by Nabi Risaldar Muslehuuddin went straight to Dhaka Central Jail and demanded admission. Seeing the armed men in uniform the prison authorities argued that the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Prisons—i.e. the head of the Dhaka Central Jail—would have to come from his quarters to deal with the matter. What transpired next has been well documented in a series of depositions and tape recordings made by the jail authorities themselves, on the orders of Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil, Brigadier Aminul Haq, a senior army officer, interviewed them on the evening of the 4th November, 1975.

According to these records, Muslehuuddin and his men said they had been sent by Rashid and Farook and demanded that Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam, Masoore Ali and Kamruzzaman be handed over to them. On hearing this the DIG went so scared but nevertheless refused to comply because it was against prison regulations. Muslehuuddin then insisted on telephoning President Mujib in Bangabandhu and was allowed to do so. In the course of the call Rashid ordered the DIG to do whatever Muslehuuddin told him. Despite these instructions the DIG was reluctant to comply. After consulting his superiors the officer then telephoned Bangladesh to obtain clarification and instructions from President Mosthaque himself. Mosthaque verified Rashid's instructions. Accordingly Muslehuuddin and his gang were admitted to the jail proper and allowed to go to the cells.

Tajuddin and Nazrul Islam shared one cell; Masoore Ali and Kamruzzaman an adjoining one. They were all brought together in Tajuddin's cell and killed by automatic fire from close range. Three of them died immediately. The fourth, Tajuddin, had bullet wounds in his abdomen and leg. He seems to have slowly bled to death. Horrified prisoners in adjacent cells later told the family that they could hear him moaning and calling out for water from the cell that Muslehuuddin and his gang had locked shut before leaving.

The savage slaying of these helpless men is an act of infamy on par with the massacre of the Bengali intellectuals by the departing Pakistani troops on the eve of Bangladesh's independence in December, 1971. Yet, whereas the Bangladeshi martyrs are revered and mourned nationally each year on their death anniversary, the Jail Four remain a national embarrassment, unnumbered and unremembered except in private by a selected few.

There is much confusion about the jail killings—who did it? How? and Why? The conventional wisdom has it that they were bayoneted to death. Clearly this is untrue for the official record shows they were killed at close range by automatic fire. This was verified by the families. It has also been advanced by a number of writers that somehow from their jail cells Tajuddin and his companions managed to plot and plan with Khalid Musharraf and his men to launch the 3rd November coup. The jail conditions and the extreme hostility of their environment made this impossible. Also the writers clearly are not aware of the 'contingency plan' hatched by Muslehuuddin, Rashid and Farook two months earlier to kill the Jail Four.

Lifschultz in 'The Unfinished Revolution' quotes the Reuters correspondent in Dhaka, Atiqul Alam, about possessing a hand-written letter from Tajuddin to the Indian High Commissioner Samar Sen concerning 'coup plans and preparations'. Alam was stoutly denied any such letter and no one else has heard of it. While I am prepared to accept that Atiqul Alam may have told a different story to Lifschultz and others, he is in the circumstances hardly a credible witness since he was jailed for 'collaboration' by the Awami League government in 1972 and only released six months later when he cited a list of senior officials who were gravely embarrassed to be called upon to give evidence on his behalf at his trial.

Zillur R. Khan, the noted academician, in his book, 'Leadership Crisis in Bangladesh', also makes the statement (page 151) that 'the most damaging evidence supporting the contention that the coup (led by Khalid Musharraf) was planned from jail'. In fact, it was not. While Mujib was the fact that the four closest associates of Mujib, who were languishing in jail, knew about the coup and were preparing to come out as heroes. This is an astonishing assertion. The real facts based on jail and government reports, backed up by the testimony of independent witnesses, some of Khalid's chums and the Tajuddin family, gave a contrary picture.

Tajuddin was arrested on 22nd August, 1975, and his family was kept under house detention for several weeks thereafter. He was not allowed any visitors till 15th October when his wife was permitted to see him for half an hour in the presence of five jail and intelligence service officials. The second and final visit granted Tajuddin was on 1st November, just 30 minutes before he was killed. Mrs. Tajuddin was allowed to see him for less than 20 minutes in the presence of four men, some of whom were military officers in civies. She recalled that Tajuddin was in a 'very depressed mood'. He had been kept a day and a half day and had hoped to fill in the last of the 560 pages. Mrs. Tajuddin said her husband also had a premontion of death. 'The situation,' he told her at that last meeting, 'seems to be very bad and I don't think we will be allowed to leave this place alive.'

Apart from these two visits, Tajuddin had no communication at all with the outside world. An official who saw him at that time confirmed that he had been very gloomy before the end and certainly was not expecting to come out of jail a hero.

All this could have been cleared up by a proper inquiry.

The Judicial Commission consisting of three Supreme Court judges was in fact appointed in November, 1975, to inquire into these jail killings. For reasons yet unexplained, General Zia, during the five and a half years he ruled in Bangladesh, did not allow the Commission to function or fulfill its purpose. The Commission thus quietly withered on the vine. That episode will always
nately with the two men. Then Dalim turned to Osmani: 'Tell them to surrender,' he shouted. 'I know why Ayub Khan called you an old mute. But don't you be stubborn now.' Moshtaque got the excited major to simmer down. The negotiations dragged on for another three hours. The officers shuttled between Bangababan and the Cantonment and there were exchanges of defiance on both sides. And every now and then Khalid and Rashid traded insult and invective on the telephone.

At around 10 am there was another telephone call to Bangababan, one which would have a profound effect on the decision of the majors and Moshtaque to capitulate to the forces led by Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil. The news was described to me by Major General Khalid Raheman, Chief of the Defence Staff, who was in Bangababan at that time.

General Khalid said: 'Nurul Islam, the Inspector General of Police, who was a close friend of mine, telephoned to give me the news of the killing of Tajuddin and the others in the jail during the night. I was horrified by the news and immediately went over to Chashi (Mahboobul Alam Chashi, Secretary to the President) to tell him so that he could inform Moshtaque. Chashi immediately said to go and was sent to the President's room. He got up and went to the President's room. The President gave the order that Moshtaque was involved in the jail killings so horrified him that he decided from then on that he would do nothing to protect him or the majors. But, for reasons yet unexplained, the general did not tell another soul about the killings that day. (For this reason Major General Shafat Jamil would 36 hours later try to arrest him, claiming his silence and that of the other majors involved in the murder of Tajuddin and other RAF majors, Rashid, who was constantly in Moshtaque's room that morning, were not to know of General Khalid's decision to remain silent. All they knew was that the grisly secret was out and that they were now extremely vulnerable to an angry public reaction which would surely come when the news percolated into the city. Their attitudes thereafter showed a remarkable change. The effort now was not to fight but to extricate themselves from the mess as quickly as possible.)

Till then Rashid had been putting on a bold front, telling those around him that the government should fight it out to the end. But now he began to call for a stand-off and their reluctance to precipitate a civil war'. For his part Moshtaque, with Rashid's approval, requested the other side to allow the two majors to leave the country safely with their families. The only one not party to these goings on at that time was Farook, sitting with his tanks at Shavarwardy Udyan. Farook was itching for a fight. But the signal from Rashid in Bangababan never came.

Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil agreed to Moshtaque's request that the majors be allowed to leave the country. It was then left to Air Vice Marshal Towhidul Islam to brief the Bangladesh Foreign Office to work out the modes of their safe conduct to Bangladesh along with those who elected to go with them.

At one stage Moshtaque himself insisted on going into exile with the majors. (Brigadier Manzoor would tell me a month later that it was an attempt to get out of the country while the going was good). But Khalid Musharraf would not consider it. Eventually 17 members of the group immediately returned from the killing of Sheikh Mujib—including Alam, Noor, Huda, Pasha and Shariar—went into exile with Farook and Rashid.

The departure was marked by emotional scenes in Bangababan. Some of the Bangladeshi Lancers and artillerymen wept openly. 'Don't leave us or we will be killed,' they wailed. Farook tried to reassure them with the promise that

nership was broken—principally by official conscience, to a lesser degree by public silence. For that reason we are all diminished. And Bangladesh continues to wobble in its legacy of blood.
they would not be victimised. But the apprehensions remained. This would be a major factor in the Sepey Mutiny four days later.

As Farook was waiting in the airport terminal building to board the Fokker aircraft that would be taking him to Bangkok, the ‘azam’ (call) for Magreb or evening prayers rang in his ears. He looked at his watch, noting the time, the date and the day. Then he smiled ruefully to himself. The 3rd of November was a Monday—not his lucky day! And Friday’s Child was tasting his first defeat.

After the departure of the majors there was an angry argument in Bangabandhu about what should be done next. Moshtaque wanted no further part in the proceedings, saying he had resigned and was going home to his private residence. Khalid Musharraf wanted him to continue in his position as the Chief of Army Staff, hoping he could use him to advantage. The argument continued. Ultimately Moshtaque agreed to remain on two conditions. The first was that the Army pledge allegiance to him and promise to obey his orders. The second was that the Cabinet be allowed to meet formally to express support and confidence in him. Khalid wasn’t very happy about these conditions. He countered with the demand that he be appointed Chief of Army Staff in place of General Zia.

This demand, according to General Osman, was actively supported by Air Vice Marshall Towab and Commodore M. H. Khan, the Chief of Naval Staff. The evidence is that these two officers, who were heading their respective services, bitterly abandoned General Zia in favour of Khalid Musharraf when he appeared to be leading the winning side. Two days later, they would, like glorified butlers, pin the general’s Star and Ribbon on Khalid Musharraf’s uniform. The picture of that happy event—Towab and Moshtaque wore big smiles—was splashed across five columns at the top of the front page of the Bangladesh Observer. Then two days later, when Khalid had been killed in the Sepey Mutiny, Towab and Commodore Khan switched sides again to back General Zia. No wonder the sepoys and the navy and air force rankers had such utter contempt for their officers at that time.

For the moment, however, there was no hint of all this. General Osman told me Khandaker Moshtaque and Khalid Musharraf had a big argument in Bangabandhu after the majors left for Bangkok. Moshtaque appeared to be playing for time—what exactly for, no one explains. But at about 11 pm he finally got Khalid and his men to disperse and meet again the following day (4th November). It was very late, Moshtaque explained. They were all very tired and, in any case, nothing could be done without the approval of the Cabinet.

‘We had a little food,’ Osman recalled, ‘the first in more than 20 hours. Then we went to sleep that night wondering what new trauma the day would bring.’

When he turned up at about 10 am on Tuesday, Khalid Musharraf was accompanied by the Major General Khalid Towab and Commodore Khan. They brought with them the first shock of the day. It was General Zia’s resignation. It was a short letter, Osman recalled. Zia said he was resigning because he did not want to become involved in politics. And he asked for full pension and the normal gratuity and benefits an officer gets when he retires. Osman remembered this last request with some derision. ‘How could he, a General and Chief of Army Staff at that, go down so ploddingly clutching on to his pension rights?’ Osman asked.

Whatever Osman’s opinion of him, Zia was a survivor. The resignation clearly had been obtained under duress because he was still being held prisoner in his own home. And if Zia was anxious about the future it was because he would have to live on his pension alone. Unlike some of the others he had not made money on the side. Indeed, after resigning Zia asked one of his junior officers to buy him a small house with a monthly rent of about 10,000 Taka.

‘But Sir,’ the embarrassed officer replied, ‘you can’t find a place even in Mohammadpur (a Dhaka suburb) for less than 800 Takkas.’

General Zia’s resignation had cleared the way for Khalid, the coup leader, to become Chief of Army Staff. Accordingly in his insistence Moshtaque summoned the Cabinet to meet after evening prayers that day to consider the appointment and also to formalise his own position as President. Osman told Khalid, Towab, Commodore Khan and General Khalid to be on hand in Bangabandhu when the Cabinet met. They were about to disperse when Air Commodore Mir Ahmed, the Director of Air Intelligence, hurried in and told them the news about the massacre of Tajuddin and his companions in jail. Islam made no secret of the affair, babbling at the top of his voice. Now finally, 30 hours after the event and long after the majors and their men had left the country, the tragic news was at last made public.

‘There was a terrible commotion,’ General Osman recalled. ‘Some ministers who had come in were overcome with fear. Others were shouting. We were all taken aback. I felt sickened by the thought that we had once more lapsed into barbarism.’

Moshtaque, the consummate actor, was protesting as loudly as the others and as though he didn’t know about it all along. He said the Cabinet must meet immediately to consider the situation. Accordingly an emergency meeting was called which even junior ministers were invited to attend. The 26 members of the government who quickly assembled in the Cabinet Room on the ground floor of the Secretariat building didn’t take long to appoint a Judicial Commission to investigate into the jail killings. The Commission had three Supreme Court judges and was required to complete its findings ‘expeditiously’. Then they all went on to a heated discussion about the ‘counter-coup’ and why Farook, Rashid and the rest of the group had been allowed to leave the country.

Khalid, General Khalid Towab and Commodore Khan were brought in for questioning. They assured the government of their loyalty and promised to obey the President. But some of them were visibly annoyed when the ministers demurred about appointing Khalid Musharraf as the new Chief of Army Staff in place of General Zia. Moshtaque cunningly passed the buck to General Osman. ‘I can only act on the recommender Action of my Defence Adviser,’ he said. Osman, taking the cue from Moshtaque, loudly announced that ‘normal procedures’—i.e., the selection process, would have to be followed to make the appointment and that would take some time. This did not please Khalid Musharraf and his friends. Angry exchanges followed.

Suddenly they were interrupted by a loud banging on the door. Col. Shafat Jamil, waving a stick and accompanied by five officers with sten guns, forced their way into the Cabinet Room. It caused consternation, with ministers fleeing in panic from their chairs. At one stage President Moshtaque was so frightened he fell to the floor with a young major holding a sten gun at his head. General Osman went to his rescue, pleading with the young officers: ‘For God’s sake don’t do anything. This is madness. You will destroy the country.’

Shafat Jamil demanded Khandaker Moshtaque’s resignation. ‘You are a murderer,’ he screamed at the President. ‘You have killed the Father of the Nation. You have killed the four leaders in jail. You are a usurper. Your government is illegal. You have no right to stay in power. You must resign immediately.’ Then turning on General Khalid, the Dhaka Brigade commander...
accused him of rushing up the jail killings. 'You are under arrest,' he told him.

Recalling these events a month later, General Osmani told me: 'I kept telling myself, 'My God, this is going to be another bloody massacre'. Anything could have happened. If just one shot had been fired by accident it would have been the end of all of us.'

The commotion continued for a while. Every time the young officers surged forward pointing their guns at the ministers, Osmani kept pushing them back. Finally, in desperation, Osmani told Moshtaque: 'It's getting too dangerous. You had better resign.' Moshtaque nodded his head in agreement. With that the moment of madness seemed to pass.

When the ministers had settled down once more, Shafat Jamil proposed that the Chief Justice should be made President in place of Moshtaque. One of the ministers (Osmani identified him as Manoranjan Dhar, the law minister; Shafat Jamil said it was Yusuf Ali) interrupted to say that that would not be the correct procedure. Legally, he added, the Speaker of the National Assembly should act as President if Moshtaque resigned. Whoever it was, Shafat Jamil turned to Moshtaque savagely: 'Damn him and damn you all,' he screamed. 'You changed the Constitution to justify one killing. So you can change it again. I tell you the Chief Justice will be President.'

That settled the matter. Having had their way the military officers allowed all but four of the ministers to leave Bangabandhu. The four—all ministers of State—were Tahiruddin Thakur, Shah Moazzam Hussain, Nurul Islam Manzoor and K.M. Obaidul Rahman. They were told to write out their resignations. 'Are you going to arrest us?' Tahiruddin Thakur asked. No one bothered to answer him. But two of them, Thakur and Shah Moazzam Hussain, were indeed arrested soon afterwards and charged with corruption and the misuse of power. No one has explained why they were singled out for such treatment.

Osmani recalled there followed several hours of hectic activity in Bangabandhu as the officials prepared for the change of government. Khalid Musharraf also drafted several letters for Moshtaque to sign. One of them concerned his resignation as President. Another was to make Moshtaque responsible for the majors leaving the country along with their killer team. The third, according to Osmani, 'was something to do with the jail killings'. He would not say exactly what this was.

Continuing: 'Khalid kept insisting that Moshtaque sign the last two letters and pre-date them to the 3rd November. Moshtaque kept refusing. Things were getting out of hand again so I told him (Moshtaque) 'You may sign if you have to and if there's a court case I'll come as a witness'. 'What can you mean by that,' Osmani replied: 'Oh, I would say he signed it under duress.'

It was 1.00 am on the 5th November when Chief Justice Abusadat Mohammad Sayem was finally brought to Bangabandhu. Seeing Osmani in the corridor the judge asked why he had been brought there. Osmani told him: 'You are to be the President.' When the Chief Justice solemnly declined the honour, Osmani advised him: 'For God's sake do it. You have to be President otherwise there will be no law and the country will be finished.'

Justice Sayem, however, still wanted no part of the arrangement. He turned around and went home, to be followed by Khalid, Shafat Jamil, Osmani, Khalid and the Air Force and Navy Chiefs. They finally persuaded him to accept the job. Thus on the 6th November, 1975, Justice Abusadat Sayem became Bangladesh's fifth President in the fourth year of the country's independence.
6th—the situation was beyond recall. Already ignited were the fires of the great Sesty Mutiny. It would destroy him in a matter of hours and go on to destroy the appeasement policy, prevailing shadow on the country’s other half, bringing in its wake an increase in fundamentalist sentiment.

Khalid’s coup, even more than 20 or so coup attempts and mutinies that plagued Bangladesh between 1975 and 1981, was ineptly planned, short-sighted and pressed with a surprising lack of vigour for a soldier who had such a clear record during the Liberation War.

When they met in the Chinese restaurant near Dhaka stadium on the 1st November, the conspirators were under pressure to pre-empt action by someone else. The air was thick with rumours about the imminent overthrow of Moshtaque’s government. Any number of groups were known to be plotting. The Jati Party (JSP), the Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and the Sharad Tangyi Paribartakon Samity were party known to be actively forming revolutionary cells among the army jawans preparatory to a bid for power. General Ziaur Rahman, the Chief of Staff, was also the central figure of much gossip concerning another coup. The New Pakistan, resentful of the elevation of former Pakistani officials to key positions in Moshtaque’s government, were working on a ‘corrective’ action. At the same time the Pakistan-oriented parties wanted a man more pliable than Moshtaque to promote their designs for a ‘New Pakistan’. The word in Dhaka was that something was about to happen. But the intelligence staff Musharraf didn’t want to be caught napping as he had been the previous August by the majors’ coup. So when he told Shafat Jamil and the other officers, ‘We must strike now’, he was echoing a desperate need for action.

The Chinese restaurant plot therefore was a hasty one and strictly limited in its implications. Essentially these were the same for the government, for the majors, jubilant Awami Leaguers, students and pro-Moscow groups who had supported Mujib in the past came out on the streets in large numbers to celebrate. Tuesday, the 4th of November, was observed as ‘Mujib Day’. Reception meetings were held in the main towns and in the capital, at Dhaka university campus, the Shahid Minar (Martyrs memorial) and other public places. A number of processions were taken out from different parts of the city to Road No. 2 Dhanmandi where Mujib’s house was filled with garlands and flowers. Next day a half-day ‘hartal’ (business closure) in memory of Tajuddin and his companions shut down the city. At the headquarters of Mujib and the majors, the body of the dead, were said as the four murdered Awami League leaders were ceremonially laid to rest, three of them in Banani graveyard, Dhaka, in plots adjacent to the unmarked mass grave in which Sheikh Mujib’s family lies. Then another mass observance with prayers in Mujib’s memory was called for Friday, the 7th. All this gave the impression that the coup heralded the return of martial law and barely got over the nightmare of Sheikh Mujib’s prodigality, and the return of the allegedly pro-India Awami League when sentiment against India was running high because of a dispute over the Farakka Dam. What made it all the more damaging for Khalid was that the public outrage when they discovered that his mother and brother, both staunch Awami Leaguers, had led the main procession to Mujib’s house on the 4th. The left-wing JSD and the right-wing Muslim League seized on their presence in the Awami League procession as ‘proof’ that India was behind Khalid’s coup. The charge was hammered home in many letters (anonymous ‘clue letters’) and posters that flooded the military cantonments and main cities. The results were devastating.

Col. Shafat Jamil told me later in an interview that Khalid was very upset when he saw the papers that Wednesday morning. Picking up the telephone he asked me to call the National Office and say that he had not been part of the process and that your picture is in the paper. For this you may have shortened my days and I may not survive.’ According to Jamil, ‘Khalid felt this would go against us very much.

Curiously neither of them did anything to counter it. The coup leaders neither encouraged nor discouraged or dissociated themselves from the Awami League demonstrations. The first three days when it mattered most they unaccountably remained silent and so let their case go by default. This is all the more surprising in view of the attractive presentation made on their behalf of the JSD, has summed up the conventional history of Khalid’s four-day coup: ‘When Khalid Musharraf and his faction came to power they immediately put an end to all fundamentalist sentiment and took the country into a political dominance over the country. The Awami League and its tilt—the parties of the Manti-Muzzaffar circle—came out openly and made all efforts to re-establish the image of Sheikh Mujib.’ The fact is that it’s not what Khalid did but what he failed to do in the face of the opposition’s opposition that he has to bear the Indian brush and so turn public opinion in Bangladesh against him. The overthrow of Moshtaque and Sheikh Mujib’s killers, for one, was received with tremendous exultation and gloating in India. The Indian press and official radio outdid each other with the most egregious reports. ‘Martyrs memorial’ and the Shakid Minar were the equivalent of big invasions and some alarm in Bangladesh whose people are always chary of the attention of their big neighbours. They began to wonder whether India was behind Khalid’s coup. Unfortunately for Khalid this suspicion was fostered by what was happening in the country at that time.
by the new President, Justice Sayem, in a nationwide broadcast on the evening of the fourth day, i.e. Thursday the 6th of November. Sayem made clear that the new government was 'neutral, non-party and interim'; one dedicated to 'an active foreign policy' which included 'unqualified support' for the Muslim world. Compared to Moshtaque's bombastic pronouncement in similar circumstances a month earlier, Sayem's broadcasts much earlier and forthright declaration of intent. It dissociated the armed forces from the killing of Sheikh Mujib. It also promised the return of law and order and a clean and impartial administration. The objectives were so far and so eloquently stated that General Ziaur Rahman, who succeeded Khalid Musharraf as the new military ruler a day later, had no hesitation in adopting them without change for the first year of his rule.

All this was the work of Justice Abusadat Mohammad Sayem, who at 59 was by any standards a remarkable man. He had served as a junior to A. K. Fazal Hossain, the towering Bengali Muslim leader venerated as the 'Lion of Bengal'. After a distinguished practice and service, Sayem joined the army and resignation of President Moshtaque and became the first Chief Judge of the Bangladesh High Court in January, 1972. A year later when the Supreme Court was created, he became its first Chief Justice. Justice Sayem had been most reluctant to step into Moshtaque's shoes, and on occasion he was persuaded to accept the job in the national interest, he fulfilled the role of President with dedication and sincerity. As Head of the new government President Sayem gave an immense dignity to Khalid's coup. But the appointment and his guiding hand came too late to matter. Before the text of Sayem's broadcast was printed in next morning's newspapers it was overaken by the Sepoy Mutiny.

A major consideration for Khalid during his short-lived coup was the improvement of his military position. He didn't feel entirely secure although he controlled the major fighting units in Dhaka. ShafatJamıl's 46 Infantry Bdivision consisted of two infantry regiments, the 4th East Bengal which he had raised and was suspected to be personally loyal to him, and the 10th and 11th of November. They were a powerful force. But within the same cantonment at that time were two important disaffected units—Farook's Bengal Lancers and Rashid's 2 Field Artillery. Although they had been disarmed, they could be dangerous and inclined to 'block' at all times. For this purpose Khalid summoned the 10th and 15th East Bengal regiments and seconded by the 72 Infantry Brigade. He raised both regiments and they had fought under him during the Liberation War as part of 'K (for Khalid) Force'. Now he was depending on these freedom fighters to bolster his strength. The 15th East Bengal was reinforced by Major Tofazzul Hoque because of personal reasons failed to reach Dhaka in time. But the 10th East Bengal under Major Nawai joined rapidly moved into Sheri-Bangla Nagar, the new capital area of Dhaka, by the morning of 5th Col. K. S. Huda, the 72 Infantry Brigade commander who we wished to Khalid, also came post-haste to join him in Dhaka.

On the 5th Khalid called a conference of military commanders to drum up support among the out-station brigades. But neither he nor Shafat Jamil made any attempt to address or to motivate the rest of the soldiers and the troops in Dhaka. They ignored them completely. In the circumstances this was understandable and it hastened the outcome. Ironically, two of the officers of the 10th East Bengal, who had been loyal to Khalid depended, were responsible for his death during the Sepoy Mutiny.

There is no evidence of foreign-related action by Khalid Musharraf between the 3rd and 7th of November; no attempt to tilt Bangladesh this way or that; certainly nothing even remotely suggesting, as the JDS's 'SAMYABA' journal stated, an increase in Indio-Soviet political dominance over the country. Only two events concerning foreign countries were recorded during this period. One was a $10,000,000 grant-in-aid agreement with Britain for the supply of industrial spares and raw materials. The other was a US $30,0 million agreement with Turkey for 49 meter-gauge passenger coaches for the Bangладesh railways.

In both cases the agreements were negotiated by senior officials of the Preservation. The coup leaders had nothing to do with them. It must be noted that in the circumstances the allegation that Khalid Musharraf had sold out to India is also a calumny of President Sayem. But no one has made such a ridiculous suggestion against Sayem.

The sepyo mutiny erupted in Dhaka a little after midnight on the night of the 6th of November. For two days there had been ominous signs of unrest in the Cantonment as sepoys of the Bengal Lancers and 2 Field Artillery watched with mounting anxiety, first the arrest and resignation of General Ziaur Rahman, and then the arrival of Major Tofazzul Hoque, leaving for Bankag Kirtor and Rashid had assured them that they would not be victimised in any way. Now those assurances were wearing thin with the exit of Moshtaque. Zia and General Osman, the 'Papa Tiger' and Colonel-in-Chief of the Bengal Regiment who had been a reassuring father figure as the President's Defense Adviser. There was no one left to protect them. The troops were now at the mercy of Brigadier Khalid Musharraf and Colonel Shafat Jamil, both well known to be arrogant, harsh disciplinarians. Jamil on several occasions had publicly threatened retribution for Mujib's killing. Now the soldiers of Sepoy Mutiny and Khalid himself was dead. The jawans became even more apprehensive when word got around that the 10th and 15th East Bengal were on their way to Dhaka from Rangpur to 'sort them out'.

Playing on the soldiers' perturbation at the same time were thousands of leaflets and posters which descended like confetti on the cantonments and military installations on the 5th and 6th of November. They circulated with a work of extreme right-wing groups such as the Muslim League, and the left wing JSD. The former had once been accused of collaborating with the Pakistanis. It had resurfaced under Khandaqer Moshtaque and now once more the prospect of being suppressed by being suppressed by Khali Maidarfull. The latter, operating out of Rangpur, said to be under the cover of the Biplobi Sahik Sangsa (Revolutionary Soldiers' Organisation) and the Biplobi Gono Bahini (People's Revolutionary Army). The leaflets from the political right and left had a common theme. In effect it was that Khalid was commanded by Major Jaffer Imam for unceasingly promoting the return of the hated Mujibism and Baksal.

The JSD went up one significant step further. The jawans, it argued, were being used as pawns on the checkboard of power by ambitious senior officers who really had no interest in the plight of the soldiers or the oppressed masses. In the general upsurge of JSD proposed a list of 12 demands. Among them were the ending of the much-abused 'batman' system where soldiers were employed as officers' body-servants; the removal of all differences between officers and men in the matter of uniforms and status; the recruitment of jawans from the jadawis and raiwahs rather than from the labourers class; improvements in housing and food; a crackdown on corruption and release of all political prisoners. Loaded as they were in favour of the military under-dog, the demands found instant favour among the aroused soldiers because they had in the past suffered terribly outside the established military pecking order.

This finely-calculated gambit was the brain-child of a remarkable ex-army
officer. He was Lt. Colonel (retired) Abu Taher who would later be hanged by General Zia but nevertheless became a legend in Bangladesh for his integrity, patriotism and egalitarian concepts of a productive people's army based on the jawan or common soldier. Abu Taher trained as a commando in the USA, first in Fort Bragg, Georgia and then at the Special Forces Officer Training Institute, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As a member of the Special Services Group (SSG), an elite Pakistani para-commando unit, Taher found himself stranded in West Pakistan at the start of the Bangladesh War of Liberation. His first attempt at escaping to join the struggle ended in failure. But in June of 1971, he had managed to slip in the company of two other officers. Like him they went on to carve their names in the history of the Bangladesh. One was Lt. Colonel Mohammad Ziauddin, a legendary left-wing figure, the first man to publicly condemn Sheikh Mujib in 1972. The other, Mohammad Aimal Manzoor, as a major general would be responsible for the assassination of President Zia at Chittagong in May. Taher had served with distinction in the Liberation War, losing a leg during an assault on Kamalpur, a river port on the Brahmaputra. In 1972 he was made Adjutant General of the Bangladesh Army, then commander of the 44th Infantry Brigade at Comilla before being forced into retirement along with Col. Ziauddin for publicly airinhg their views about the shape and content of the Bangladesh Army. The two colonels wanted the inherited British pattern replaced by a Chinese-style productive 'People's Army'. Sheikh Mujib and the military establishment would have none of it. Taher was director in charge of the Dredger Organisation. But he maintained his links with the Officers through secret membership of the JSD which was infiltrating the armed forces.

According to A. S. M. Abdul Rab, general secretary of the JSD, Taher formed the Biplobi Samik Sangtha (Revolutionary Soldiers' Organisation) in July, 1974, as a 'vaguely socialist and left-wing, army group, not well organised'. But after Khalid's coup 15 months later, 'Taher shaped the opportunity and quickly gave the organisation an organised, activist shape and a pro-people programme linked to the students'. Thus were the jawns made aware that it was a combination of reasons it had become a question of 'them or us', now was the time to rise up against the这本书.

They did exactly that a little after midnight, i.e. in the early hours of the 7th November. With an infectious spontaneity the jawns began breaking into the 'kiosks' or armouries and looting guns, rifles and all available weapons and ammunition. Then they spread rapidly through Dhaka cantonment chanting 'SEPHAL, SEPHAL, BHAL BHAL OFFICER DE BHALA CHAAT' (All sepoys are brothers. We want the blood of officers), and 'SEPHAL, SEPHAL, BHAL BHAL SUBEDAR UPPER OFFICER NAI' (All sepoys are brothers. We don't want officers above the rank of subedar). Clearly the JSD's call for class conflict was being interpreted literally by the troops as an order to kill their officers. Thus Abu Taher, by cleverly manipulating the sepoys' pre-disposition to mutiny brought on by the fear of victimisation, was able to promote his own revolutionary ideas.

The first to feel the effects of the mutiny were 10 young army officers billeted in the Officers' Mess near the 2 Field Artillery barrack (All. 196). The foremost or body-servant of one of the officers ran down the bedroom corridors shouting 'Run for your lives. The sepoys are coming to kill you.' Hastily discarding their uniforms for obtrusive civies, the officers clambered over the back of the bed and proceeded to a secret hide-out in the city. Accompanied by Shafat Jamal, Khalid had gone to Bangabandhu around 11.30 pm for a late night meeting with Towab and Comodore Khan. Having switched support from Zia to Khalid at the start of the coup, the Air Force and Navy's once key role in the government that was to be sworn in on the morrow by Prime Minister Sayem. Specifically they wanted equal status with Khalid as Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrators (DCMLAs). The President would be CMLA or Chief Martial Law Administrator, however nominally. Khalid refused their demand to control all the forces and be CMLA. They argued acrimoniously for more than an hour until the meeting was abruptly broken up by the report of the mutiny.

Khalid decided to leave Bangabandhu immediately. Shafat Jamal chose to stay behind. The coup leader drove off in his private car accompanied by Col. Husein (recently declassified). The Army Brigade commander's decision to leave the 8th East Bengal based in Chittagong who had been visiting him while on leave in Dhaka. They proceeded down the Muripur Road. The general assumption was that they were trying to escape across the river in the direction of India. Jalim disputes this. He saith they were on their way to the 10th East Bengal atUGNH NAGAR, the new capital area of Dhaka. Whatever the truth, it was unfortunate for them that the car broke down near the Fatima Nursing Home. Khalid telephoned 10th East Bengal headquarters from the clinic, asking whether they had the situation under control and if it was safe for the coup to come. He says he heard only silence as the 10th East Bengal walked down to Sher-i-Bangla Nagar and spent the night with 10th East Bengal.

Short after breakfast next morning (7th November), some jawans from the Bengal Lancers and 2 Field Artillery came over to urge the 10th East Bengal to mount 'a counter-mutiny'. Against Khalid Musharraf and the commanders. A few minutes later Khalid Musharraf and Colonels Huda and Haider were gunned down in the CO's room by two company commanders, Captain Asad and Captain Jalil. It's not clear what prompted them to do this. Some allege at least one of them was directly influenced by Abu Taher: Shafat Jamal, however, says the two officers had developed a 'rancorous—that things would go against them because they had come all the way from Rangpur to bolster Khalid's strength. So they killed him to clear themselves and to curry favour with the mutineers.

Khalid himself has been unkind to Khalid Musharraf. He was neither the traitor who tried to sell his country as his detractors suggest, nor the hero who attempted to right a grave injustice, as his friends would have it. The evidence suggests that this handsome, mercurial man was merely an ambitious military officer, an unlucky opportunist who, because of his political ineptitude, didn't quite make it.

Farook and Rashid are the most unlikely admirers of Bangladesh military brass. Yet they have paid Khalid a surprisingly fulsome tribute in 'The Road to Freedom', a book published in Dhaka in 1984. Describing Khalid as a 'true patriotic hero', they accused became victims of circumstances while trying to avert the danger to the nation created by the conspirators'. The real con-
The mutiny spread rapidly in Dhaka.

By 11.00 a.m. the troops had fully taken over the Cantonment. Some fired at random in the air; others milled about excitedly, shouting slogans and searching the prisoners. A group of jawans led by Havildar Sarwar of the Bengal Lancers, scattered the guard at General Zia's house, ending its four-day detention. Zia, still in his night clothes, was loudly cheered as they carried him on their shoulders to the headquarters of the 2 Field Artillery nearby. The general appeared to be overwhelmed by the sudden turn of events. For long months he had only shaken the outstretched hands of the nameless young men who had rescued him or lightly pressed the shoulders of those who embraced him in the manner that Muslims do. When fully recovered, one of Zia's first acts was to telephone General Khalil to say: 'I am free. I am okay. There's nothing to worry about. Please inform the American and British and Indian ambassadors.'

General Khalil told me he was thrilled to hear that General Zia was safe. But he could not immediately pass on the information to the foreign missions as requested because he was too busy monitoring the developments. When he finally managed to telephone the diplomats later in the morning, Khalil discovered that Zia had already been in touch with them.

Zia asked his rescuers to bring him some officers, notably General Mir Shaukat Ali, General Abdur Rahman and Col. Aminul Huq. When the troops ushered them in, Zia embraced each of them. He asked for help in controlling the troops. 'I don't want bloodshed,' he told them. A little later Zia telephoned Col. Shafat Jamil at Bangabandhu asking him to 'forgive and forget and unite the army'. Jamil, however, would have none of it. 'I was rude to him,' he recalled. 'I said nothing doing. We'll sort this out in the morning.' Zia hung up.

A thought our troops would support us,' Jamil added, 'but I didn't because they were not motivated. They didn't feel they were being used. A little later about 150 jawans and civilians, the latter Abu Taher's men, stormed into Bangabandhu without resistance in search of the coup leaders. In trying to escape Shafat Jamil fell and broke a leg and spent the next three months in hospital. But somehow the accident saved his life.

The jawans took over the radio station at 1.30 a.m. announcing to the night staff on duty that 'Sepahis Biplob (sepoys revolution) has begun and will continue under General Ziaur Rahman.' The astonished radio staff didn't quite know how to take it. When they realised that the jawans were not threatening them they asked that General Khalil Musharraf be brought over. As the radio continued proclaiming 'Sepahis Biplob', and that General Zia had taken over, the radio staff who had at first been alarmed by the firing in the Cantonment, poured into the streets to celebrate. For three days they had believed that India through Khalil Musharraf was threatening their hard-won independence. Now that

in a nightmare was over, they hailed the troops as liberators. Everywhere jawans and civilians exchanged salutations, embraced one another, and wept in joy. According to the majors, General Zia exploited the misunderstanding created by the presence of Khalil's mother and brother in the Awami League procession and 'so a devilish combination of misfortune and conspiracy brought about the tragic end of a great patriot, General Khalil Musharraf.'

God is great, Long Live Bangladesh, Long Live the Sepoy Revolution, Long Live General Ziaur Rahman. It seemed that the people were reliving the heavy moments of the Bangladesh uprising in March, 1971. It was a night to remember.

In a short speech over Radio Bangladesh, General Zia announced that he had temporarily taken over as Chief Martial Law Administrator. He had done so at the request of the armed forces and because of the situation in the country. He said he would discharge his responsibility to the best of his ability. Zia also called for unity, hard work and dedication to getting the country moving again. He ordered offices, courts, airports and mills—closed since Khalil's coup on the 3rd—to open and resume working at once. 'May Allah help us all as the adda.'

The chief, emotional appeal, eloquently stated in Bengali and with just the right timing, sent a current of nationalistic fervour surging through the country. Zia, the hero, the man who had proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh at the start of the Liberation War, was once more the man of the hour. Who heard him broadcast that morning of the Sepoy Revolution will ever forget the experience. 'I was lying in bed, an old friend recalled, 'when the radio announcer said 'Stand by for General Ziaur Rahman the Chief Martial Law Administrator'. Then his voice came over—simple, sincere, reassuring. Suddenly the darkness was pushed back and there was hope again for the country. I must go to work today. I must go to work.' The radio station had begun preparing for the day, all the time crying emotionally to myself. Allah had been Merciful. Allah had indeed answered our prayers.' Thus was Bangladesh born again—its peoples' hopes raised once more, however temporarily.

There is some controversy about how General Zia made his broadcast. Abu Taher and the JSC claim he took Zia to the radio station after responding successfully to a personal appeal from the general to rescue him. This is disputed by some of Zia's associates who were present at 2 Field Artillery headquarters on the morning of the 7th. One of them, a military officer who denied no names was identified as he is still in the army. Abu Taher turned up around 5.30 am. Zia embraced him warmly, just as he had embraced the others before him. They had, after all, been comrades in the Liberation War and subsequently had kept in touch. After exchanging pleasantries, Abu Taher requested and obtained a private word with Zia. But when Zia went to get him, Abu Taher refused to listen to the other officers on the grounds that for security reasons refused to let him go. Abu Taher was furious. The others, however, had their way. Instead of Zia going there, these officers summoned a recording unit from Radio Bangladesh. My informant insists it was Zia's recorded speech that was broadcast early that Friday morning. .
'Our revolution is not for changing the leadership only. This revolution is only for the interest of the poorer class. We have accepted you (Zia) as our leader in this revolution. For that reason you are to express very clearly that you are the leader of the poorer class. And for that you have to change the structure of the armed forces... From today onwards the armed forces of the country will build themselves as the protector of the interest of the poorer classes...'

To this end the Demands document proposed a system of pyramiding soldiers into certain cells. A Revolutionary Army Organisation with Revolutionary Soldiers' Cells would be formed in each unit of the army throughout the country. In Dhaka a Central Revolutionary Army Organisation would decide all policies and 'link up' with the revolutionary students, workers, peasants and masses. Most importantly, it was emphasised that General Zia 'should not take any decision without consulting General Khalil' before making any change in the army structure.

Clearly Abu Taher and his group wanted an entirely new system of government. They were trying to ride General Zia's back to achieve this objective. The gambit had been tried before on a notable previous occasion. In 1971 Bengali student leaders—among them A. S. M. Abdur Rab, now general secretary of the JSD—had transferred Sheikh Mujib with a group of the famous 'Six Points' for Bengali autonomy. They ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh. If Col. Abu Taher could now inveigle General Zia, popular new military leader, into public endorsement of the 12 Demands, Bangladesh would be pushed irrevocably into radical, revolutionary channels. That this was indeed scores of officers at 2 Field Army, who saw through his game and persuaded Zia to decline the invitation to speak at the meeting of the jawns. Taher thenupon abruptly cancelled the meeting.

He did, however, manage to get Zia along to the radio station in the afternoon. A room full of excitable troops, Taher confronted him with the 12 Demands. Zia diplomatically signed the paper on which they were inscribed. In the circumstances he couldn't have done otherwise. But when invited to broadcast again to the nation, Zia carefully steered clear of any reference to the 12 Demands. Instead he thanked the people for their support, emphasizing that he was a soldier and not a member of any political group or party. And he appealed to the troops to return at once to their places of duty.

Taher made one more attempt to get Zia to publicly commit himself to the sepoys' 12 Demands. This was at an 11 am conference Zia had called at 2 Field Army headquarters on the 7th to decide on a course of action. Present on that occasion were General Osmani, General Khalil, Towah, Commodore M. H. Khan, Mahboobul Alam Chashi (Secretary to the President) and Abu Taher. Col. Taher's presence was a gesture to the jawns because his followers were the most social among the mutineers. Taher in turn was the most vocal at the meeting. The first item on the agenda was who should be President. Mostaque's time had run out, but Osmani and Chashi pleaded that he should be re-instated. In this they were echoing a substantial public demand. Khondaker Mostaque, after General Zia, was the most popular figure during the September Mutiny. A number of troops and civilians were charging logins in favour of him being made President. Mostaque's portrait decorated military vehicles and private cars. A group of jawns had also taken him in the morning to the radio station. When they got there Taher's men, who had astutely controlled it from the start, would not let him broadcast. Now Osmani and Chashi wanted Mostaque to be made President again 'in the national interest'.

General Khalil and Abu Taher opposed the move. Zia himself had had enough of Mostaque's slights and intrigue in the previous months. So when quietly threw his weight behind Justice Sayem, who had been sworn in the day before by Khalid Musharraf, it was quickly decided that Sayem should continue as President.

The meeting didn't go entirely General Zia's way. Earlier in the day he had assumed the role of CMLA. Zia obviously felt it was his by right because he was the designated leader of the counter-coup and head of the Army which was by far the most important of the defence services. Now, however, after they had agreed that Justice Sayem should continue as President, General Khalil sprang up and sent a note by messenger, insisting that it was inappropriate that anyone should appear to stand above the Head of State. He argued that the President, for reasons of precedence, must also be the CMLA. Put that way General Zia could not very well demur, especially not as all but Taher supported Khalil's argument. 'We have no objections without first consulting this body,' General Zia was reduced to saying.

The meeting adjourned after 45 minutes. C. Gen. M. A. Hafeez, a rank he shared with the Air Force and Navy Chiefs. The three of them formed the President's advisory council. Zia swallowed his humiliation, but he never forgave General Khalil for it.

Other matters agreed at the conference were the need to move rapidly to the release of all political prisoners. The JSD was particularly interested in this last point because its principal office bearers and a large number of party workers were in jail. But when Abu Taher proposed that the conference endorse the sepoys' 12 Demands—he called it 'the programme of the 7th November uprising'—he was马上 rejected because other officers at 2 Field Army opposed the move. Taher saw through this in the days to come when the JSD and its Revolutionary Peopls' Army tried to topple Zia.

Troops had also mutinied at Chittagong. Comilla, Jessore and other brigade headquarters. Some came to Dhaka to join the 'Biplut'. There were some tense moments when officers were threatened by their troops. But apart from the murder of Khalid Musharraf and his two companions at Sher-i-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka, there was no significant violence reported anywhere on the 7th. The killing of officers started next day, i.e. from the morning of the 8th. Soldiers were killed in a number of towns. Some were killed out of revenge; others that happened to belong to the 'hated officer class'. An Army lady doctor nicknamed 'Cherry' and Major Karim, a dental surgeon, were among the former group. Among the latter were Captains Anwar Hussain and Lt. Mustafizur Rahman who were attending a hockey camp at Dhaka stadium. They were among some 'revolutionary' soldiers as they attempted to flee, taken to a spot near the TV station and shot dead. Another officer, Major Azim, was caught and killed at Dhaka airport while boarding a flight to Chittagong.

General Zia blamed the JSD for the killings. In an interview six weeks after the event, Zia told me the JSD had 'tried to destroy the army for its own narrow purposes'. Discipline had been wrecked and, he added confidentially, the country's security was endangered because the army 'had been reduced to only 30 per cent of its officer strength'. The officers had 'disappeared'—a few had fled—and the rest just ran away.

The killings convinced General Zia and the army commanders that they were now facing a determined attempt by a group of radicals to seize power by turning the spontaneous uprising against Khalid Musharraf into a fully-fledged military revolution. The JSD in fact made no secret of its intentions after the 8th. Once it had supported Khalid's overthrow as the first move in the
step-by-step advancement of the proletarian cause. Now the party called for immediate and uninterrupted revolution. Its national leaders such as A. S. M. Abdur Rab, retired Major M. A. Jali and Mohammad Shawalpen, who had been released from jail on the 7th, quickly denounced Zia and tried to peel the Jummas from their class-obsession. A new wave of leaflets and posters flooded the cantonments. This time, under the banner of Col. Abu Taher's Revolutionary Soldiers Organisation the troops were urged to form 'BIPLOBI SAINIK PARSAANS' (revolutionary soldiers' councils) to press the sepoys' 12 Demands. They were also instructed to hold tight to their weapons until their demands were met. Thus the stage was set for a showdown with General Zia.

Army Headquarters in Dhaka Cantonment resembled a mini fortress under siege. Zia and his headquarters staff worked, ate and slept in their offices for almost two weeks. This was not for convenience, but as a matter of necessity. The headquarters, I was told by one of the officers who lived through the ordeal, was 'the only secure place in the country for officers'. Nevertheless apart from Zia, Brigadier (later general) Mir Shaukat Ali, who temporarily took over Khalid's job as COG, and one or two other officers were still nervous in front of the soldiers and prudently removed all badges of rank from their uniforms. 'This was a measure of prudence,' my informant said. 'It was that sort of situation.'

Security was provided by a hastily-assembled commando group chosen from the 7th, 9th, 11th and 12th East Bengal regiments, all based at Jessore. Each of these units had a specially-trained commando company. Zia brought them together in Dhaka on the 9th to guard and support Army Headquarters while he faced up to the continuing upsurge and JSD threat. It was a courageous effort and, in retrospect, one of the bright moments of the Bangladesh Army. In the capital at that time were four infantry regiments, the Bangladesh Rangers and the Army Air Force. The latter were in an uproar but were not the major threat because their principal weapons—the tanks and the field guns—had been disarmed. The men had only the rifles and other guns they had managed to loot. The infantry was another matter. Zia wasn't immediately aware of how deeply affected these fighting units and he had no way of disarming them. So he played it cool. He bought time to identify and neutralise the commando troublemakers by pacifying the troops with non-political sweeteners from their 12 Demands: improved pay, accommodation and kit and the ending of the invidious 'biman' system of body servants. Zia also went on the radio and TV to warn the country against the insidious activities of 'interesters'. He assured the public that both he and the armed forces were 'absolutely neutral'; that the government was non-party and non-political and dedicated to the return of democracy. In many ways the broadcast was an echo of what President Sayem had said on behalf of Khalid Musharruf on the 6th of November.

Zia would not have succeeded were it not for the remarkable character of the Bangladeshis. However volatile their politics and violent their political changes, Bangladeshis are paradoxically middle-of-the-roaders, eschewing extremism in both religion and politics. What else would explain the persistent eclipse of the left, or the rejection of Aytollah fundamentalism of the right whenever it reared its head? Their basic chemistry is constituted in equal measure of burning nationalism, unobtrusive piety in the practice of Islam, and an aggressive sense of equality combined with a penchant for instant outrage when confronted by injustice and wrong-doing in their land?

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, perhaps better than anyone else, understood these character traits of his people. He was remarkably presentient when he warned his Baksal party three weeks before he died that '...the cause for alarm nowadays is the people of Bangladesh react too much ... You may devote efforts throughout (your) whole life, but if you do one wrong you will perish ... This is the rule of Bangladesh'.

Abu Taher and the JSD failed because they tried to push the Bangladeshis beyond their natural desire. The mistake would cost Taher his life. Once they received their demands and Sepoy dignity had been restored, ending of the 'batman' system, most of the jawans quickly lost interest in 'biplob' or revolution. The Cantonment quietened down. By the 23rd November General Zia was ready to crackdown on the JSD. While he was broadcasting a warning that night—'We shall not allow any more disorder ... We shall tolerate any more bloodshed ... armed police fanned out in the city. Among the first to be arrested were Rab, Jali, Hasani Huq Inu and Flight Sergeant Abu Yusuf Khan, Abu Taher's elder brother. Taher himself was arrested next morning from a hide-out in Dhaka University hostel. That effectively ended the great Sepoy Mutiny.

Two days later a dramatic bid was made to rescue Abu Taher and the other JSD leaders. It took the form of an attempt to kidnap and take hostage the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Samir Sen. Six armed JSD 'commandos', two of them Taher's brothers, grabbed Mr. Sen outside his office in the Dhanmandi area of Dhaka. Reacting instantly, the High Commissioner's bodyguards opened fire killing four of the attackers, including one of the brothers, and wounding the other two. In the process Mr. Sen received a bullet wound in the arm. Mercifully for both Bangladesh and India this dastardly scheme did not have more serious consequences. What India would or would not do for the kidnap attempt succeeded is a matter of conjecture.

The fact remains that the incident convinced many Bangladeshis that Taher and the JSD were a lunatic group of adventurers who had gravely imperilled the country. General Zia took advantage of this feeling in the next few weeks when he hounded the JSD till an estimated 10,000 of its members were locked up in jail.

Col. Abu Taher was brought to trial on 21st June, 1976, seven months after his arrest, before a specially-constituted military tribunal which sat in Dhaka Central Jail. Charged along with him were 33 others. Among them were the top echelon of the JSD and more than 20 soldiers, some of them professionals. It was clear from the start that Taher was the principal accused. He never denied his leadership of the BIPLOBI GONO BAHINI (Revolutionary Peoples' Army) or BIPLOBI SAINIK SANGSTHA (Revolutionary Soldiers' Organisation). By his own admission he had also attempted and failed to change the system of government by a military insurrection. In those circumstances the President, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General Zia had ultimately been the principal beneficiary of this chain of assassination, coup and counter-coup. Now, ironically, Zia had brought Taher to trial for the very mutiny that had placed him in power on the 7th of November. Taher was also not given a reasonable op-
portunity to defend himself. The charges were first made known to him on the day the trial started. It was only then that he was allowed access to lawyers. The rest was done with appalling haste, as though Zia was anxious to be done with it as quickly as possible. Taher was sentenced to death on the 17th of July, 1976. His mercy petition to the President was rejected on the 20th. Next morning, the 21st, he was hanged at dawn in Dhaka Central Jail.

It was murder by fiat; a grotesque distortion of the judicial process. No one deserves to die that way, whatever the crime, unless we are all to be stained with the guilt of the injustice. The action shamed General Zia and all those who had a hand in it.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to interview President Sayem about the circumstances in which he so promptly confirmed Abu Taher’s death sentence. Sayem was the only one of more than a score of people I interviewed in connection with this book who declined to talk to me. But some idea of his version of the event is given by Zillur Rahman Khan in his book ‘Leadership Crisis in Bangladesh’. Zillur Khan, who interviewed Sayem in Dhaka in June, 1981, has recorded: ‘At Taher’s trial, due process of law was clearly violated by the government to such an extent that Justice Abu Naser Sayem, then President of Bangladesh, indicated off the record that he had reservations about the trial’s fairness... Sayem felt that the government evidence at the trial was insufficient for a death sentence but that Taher had received just punishment because of his treasonous attempt to sacrifice the sovereignty of the country.’ After such double-fisted reasoning, President Sayem should not feel aggrieved—as he indicated to me on the telephone—about the chicanery and hypocrisy of military leaders and politicians. With such private misgivings he was wrong to confirm Taher’s death sentence whatever the pressure from General Zia. It must remain a blot on his otherwise admirable record.

Taher’s last moments are poignantly described by his wife, Lutfi, in a letter from Kishorgang dated 18th August, 1976, reproduced in Lifschutz’s book ‘Bangladesh: the Unfinished Revolution’. It said:

‘On the 20th in the evening, Taher was informed that on the 21st early in the morning at 4 o’clock, the death sentence would be carried out. He accepted their news and thanked those who had to deliver the message. And then he took his dinner completely normally. Later the Mouvti (priest) was brought and asked him to seek absolution for his sins. He said “I am not touched by the evils of your society, nor have I ever been. I am pure. You may go now. I wish to sleep”. He went to sleep quietly. At 3 o’clock in the night he was woken up. He asked how much time was left. After knowing the time he cleaned his teeth and shaved himself and bathed. All those present came forward to help him. He forbade them to do so, saying “I don’t want you to touch my body which is pure”. After his bath he told the others to prepare tea and to cut the mangos we had given him. He himself put on the artificial limb, shoes and trousers. He put on a beautiful shirt, his wrist watch and combed his hair carefully. After that he took tea, mangoes and smoked cigarettes with all those present. Looking at his courage all burst into tears about the death sentence on such a man. He condoled them saying, “Come on, laugh. Why are you so gloomy? I had wanted to make the face of death bloom with smiles. Death cannot defeat me”. He was asked whether he had any wish. He said, “In exchange for my death, the peace of the common man”. After that Taher asked: “Is there any time left?” They answered a little bit. He said in that case I shall recite a poem to you. He read out a poem about his duty and his feelings. Then he said, “Alright, I am ready. Go ahead. Do your duty”. He went towards the gallows and taking the rope in his own hand he put it around his neck. And he said “Goodbye countrymen. Long live Bangladesh! Long live Revolution!”

A. M. Abdur Rab, the JSD’s general secretary who was sentenced to 10 years rigorous imprisonment at the same trial but was released later in an act of clemency, said of Taher’s hanging: “Zia couldn’t afford to let Taher live because he was the symbol of the patriotic left jawaans and the young, junior officers”. Taher himself saw his death as martyrdom for the cause and embraced it as such. In a short valediction he told his wife and brothers: “If lives are not sacrificed this way how will the common people be liberated? Things didn’t go the way Abu Taher wanted. But his ghost did haunt Zia for the next five years in more than 20 mutinies, insurrections and attempted coups until Zia was finally brought down in a hail of bullets from the guns of young officers, perhaps equally disenchanted but less imaginative than the volatile, one-legged ex-army colonel.”