Bangladesh
Legacy of Blood
Anthony Mascarenhas (1986)
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BANGLADESH
A Legacy of Blood Anthony Mascarenhas
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Sani H. Panhwar
To Yvonne
and our children who also have paid the price
CONTENTS
List of Plates - Photographs and Documents 1
Preface 3
List of officers convicted by General Court Martial and hanged for the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman 5
Chapter I Mujib and the majors .. .. 6 Chapter II A false start .. .. 10 Chapter Ill The decline of the demigod .. .. 29 Chapter IV Mujib's military nightmare .. .. 45 Chapter V A summer of tigers .. .. 59 Chapter VI Moshtaque is willing .. .. 81 Chapter VII The killing of Sheikh Mujib .. .. 91 Chapter VIII Moshtaque takes over 104
Chapter IX 'Counter coup' and the jail killings .. .. 133 Chapter X A night to remember .. .. 147 Chapter XI Zia; the man and the myth .. .. 165 Chapter XII Coups, mutinies, executions .. .. 188 Chapter XIII The killing of General Ziaur Rahman 209
List of Plates-Photographs and Documents
(between pages 121 and 132)
P hotog raph 1 S heihk M ujiburRahm an afterbein g k illedby the m ajors.H isbody liesspraw ledon the staircase of hishom e in D hak a w ith the rig ht han dstill clutchin g hisfav orite pipe.
P hotog raph 2 Gen eral ZiaurRahm an ,assassin atedP residen tof B an g ladesh. M ajorFarook Rahm an ,2n din charg e,B en g al L an cers,w hom aster m in dedS heik h M ajib'sassassin ation .
P hotog raph 3 M ajorKhan dak erA bdurRadshid,CO of 2n dFieldA rtillery,an d Farook 'sbrother-in -law an dpartn erin M ujib'sassassin ation .
P hotog raph 4 S heik h M ujiburRahm an an dZulfik arA liB huttoin D hak a in 1974. O n ce im placable political foes,they g ottog etherasfair-w eather frien dsafterP ak istan brok e up-w ith M ujib becom in g the Foun din g Fatherof B an g ladesh an dB huttoP residen tof w hatrem ain edof P ak istan .
P hotog raph 5 O n return in g trium phan tly toD hak a afterthe liberation w ar, S heik h M ujiburRahm an receiv in g a Judask issfrom Khan dak er M oshtaque A hm ed,w hocon n iv edathisassassin ation an d succeededhim asP residen tfor83 daysin 1975.
P hotog raph 6 B A TM EN EXTRA O RD IN A RY:A irV ice M arshall Tow ab an d A dm iral M .H .Khan ,the A irForce an dN av y Chiefs,pin n in g n ew badg esof ran k on KhalidM usharraf,leaderof the short-liv edcoup of N ov em ber1975,w hoprom otedhim self toM ajorGen eral.A day laterKhalidw ask illeddurin g the S epoy M utin y an dthe A irForce an dN av y chiefssw itchedloyalty tothe n ew A rm y stron g m an , M ajorGen eral ZiaurRahm an .
P hotog raph 7 A n dha H afiz,the blin dholy m an in Chittag on g ,w hog av e M ajor Farook a talism an forthe k illin g of S heik h M ujib.
D ocum en tI The In dem n ity O rdin an ce 1975
D ocum en t2 P ostm ortem reporton Gen eral ZiaurRahm an
D ocum en t3 P ostm ortem reporton M aj.Gen .M .A .M an zoor

Document 4 General Ziaur Rahman's promotion
Document 5 General Ziaur Rahman's resignation

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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 70.000,000) 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 touching 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 Live Aid 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 effulgence, 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 Moshtaque 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 hatred lingers. Ten years after Mujib's death his daughter, Hasina told me that she could not get the agreement of relatives and neighbors in their home village of Tungipara to erect a suitable monument over Mujib's grave. People react differently when you are not in power: Hasina said in what could be an epitaph for both Mujib and General Zia. Moshtaque, who succeeded Mujib has become a by-word for treachery. General Zia, the next man was once idolized by the army. But then he showed his true colors 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 increases, 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, whenever 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 Mujib 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. 4. BSS-675 Lt. Col. Shah Mohammad Fazle Hussain, CO. 6 East Bengal Regiment.
5. BA-301 Lt. Col. A. Y. M. Mahfuzur Rahman, Personal Secretary to President from C-in-C Secretariat.
6. BA-400 Lt. Col. Muhammad Dilawar Hussain, Asst. Director Ordnance Services, 24 Infantry Division, Chittagong.
7. BSS-722 Major Gias Uddin Ahmed, 2nd in Charge, 11 East Bengal Regiment. 8. BSS-839 Major Rawshan lazdani Bhuiyan. Brigade Major, 65 Infantry Division. 9. BA- 11 67 Major Mohd. Mujibur Rahman. QC, 112 Signal Coy.
10. BSS-1070 Captain Mohd Abdus Satrar, 6 East Bengal Regiment.
11 . BSS-862 Major Kazi Mominul Haque, 2nd in Charge, I East Bengal Regiment.
12. BSS-1526 Captain Jamil Haque, 21 East Bengal Regiment.
13. BSS-1742 Lt. Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan Khan, 6 East Bengal Regiment.

I
MUJIB AND THE MAJORS
Nobody understands what I will 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 colored lights strung between the acacias made a colorful 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 Musharraf, who was Farook's 'Mamu' (maternal uncle) was there. So too was Brigadier Mashoorul 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 fibers. Friends and relatives had come with table lamps, vases and boxes gift-wrapped in the yellow, green and red kite paper favored by the shopkeepers of New Market. But Brigadier Huq, who came later, upstaged them all. He brought an enormous bouquet of monsoon flowers made up by the head mali of Gonobaban, 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 sold 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 Bangladeshis.

'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 Farook'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 Abdur Rashid who commanded the 2 Field Artillery based in Dhaka.

Farook 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 Farook'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?'

Farook 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 visibly digesting Farook's words. When their harsh meaning finally seeped through, the lanky artillery officer straightened out. 'All right,' he told Farook. '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, Dhanmandi, the landmark which was till 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 obeisance's were made Begum Mujib gently ushered them out till her tired husband

was left with a selected few. One of those present was Abdur Rab Serniabat, Mujib's brother-in-law, and husband of his favorite sister. He was a minister with a string of portfolios-Flood 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 BKSAL1 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 idolized 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 the proffered sycophancy and the demanding greed. 'My

1BKSAL pronounced Bakshal, was the acronym for the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League, a one-party system of government announced by Mujib on 26 March 1975.

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 platitudes 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 Saqibar 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 tumbrels had begun to roll. The majors were coming.

II
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 eighth most populous state. Nevertheless on this grey winter's morning Raza ul 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 Zulfikar 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 Hussain, 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 agonizing 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 deferential Karim trailing behind. He admired the flowers. Now and then he flopped onto a deep-cushioned sofa as though testing its comfort. But what attracted him 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 moghul Cecil B. De Mille, Mickey Rooney and Ava Gardner.

It was a happy time, Mujib was then very much a junior politician without the inhibition of having to maintain a political image. It was summer. He 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 them now I'm sure 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, make sure 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-fighting 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, Bangabandhu, 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 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which would have maintained a 'link' between Pakistan and its breakaway province, Bangladesh.
I got a glimpse of this unsavory deal, which was totally at variance with the Bangladeshi 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 Bangladeshi 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 what 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 was being fashioned in the crucible of genocide and war. He received no letters, read no newspapers, had no radio to listen to. He was not allowed to converse even with his jailors. He did not know how his country had been devastated by the Pakistan army or how two million people had died. And just as the world was uncertain about his fate, Mujib did not know the fate of his own wife and children.
Mujib had gone to jail the leader of the biggest party in the newly elected Pakistan National Assembly, valiantly striving for a wide-ranging autonomy for his province. Since then East Pakistan's autonomy demand had made way for the reality of Bangladesh's independence. Even the map had changed for Pakistan. It was not surprising, therefore, that when Mujib emerged once more into the sunshine, it was like a latter-day Rip Van Winkle, out of touch and out of tune with the times. And, it would seem from the circumstances, he had got up from the wrong side of the bed.
Time had stood still for Mujib the man, but not for Mujib the martyr. One of his party men, an Awami League adviser in Dhaka, was quoted as saying 'It's astonishing that this man can sit out the war for nine months and come back stronger than he ever was before.' Mujib's enshrinement was far advanced. 'You have been confined, but your spirit could not be imprisoned,' the Indian prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, said of him. 'You have become a symbol of the voice of the oppressed . . .'2
2 Message to Mujib in London. 8.1.72.

It was not the first time that imprisonment had made a demigod of a national hero. But in Mujib's case the embellishing of the legend was a Bengali

phenomenon, an exaggerated emotionalism which would become all the more unseemly when its application was abruptly reversed the day Mujib was killed. Now, however, the headlines roared 'Mujib is a magic word. Mujib is a miracle name.'3

Setting the scene at that time in Dhaka, Martin Woollacott 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 Bangladesh 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.')4

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 from darkness to light'5 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 telephones 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 - telephone to Dhaka - I endorse what has happened. Bangladesh has come to stay. No one on earth can change that fact.' There were three other telephones in the suite and they all began ringing together. Razaul 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 at No. 10 Downing Street. By 11 o'clock Suite 112 in Claridges had become the 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 infighting, the jostling for power in the Awami League had begun.

Peter Hazelhurst in 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

3Yatindra Bhatnagar (quoted by S. S. Sethi. The Decisive War, New Delhi, p. 155).

4The Guardian, London, 10.1.1972.

5Press Conference in London. 10.1.1972.

becoming disillusioned with the Awami League government . . . (It is clear that the only cementing force capable of holding the country together is the charisma surrounding the one and only man who counts in the country today, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.')6

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, paradoxically, 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 (there is no such place) was an unsubstantial thing, the Bengali equivalent of 'God's Little Acre', moved about as convenience dictated. Mujibnagar was neither the command console nor the cutting edge of the resistance. Things were done in its name by fighting men in the field. They accepted only the most formal patronage and they gave only a ritual allegiance. Peter Hazelhurst, who is quoted earlier, with great perception underscored the distinction between 'the liberation movement' and the 'Awami League government'.

The most expositive commentary on the role of the Mujibnagar government is the fact that at the end of the liberation war it had no place whatsoever in the formal surrender of the Pakistani troops in Dhaka on 16 December, 1971. Nevertheless, shortly after that date the Awami Leaguers were installed as the government in Dhaka with no challenge to its legality. Welcoming the ministers when they flew in from Calcutta were members of all political parties, including Professor Muzaffar Ahmad, chairman of the left-wing National Awami Party (NAP), and the legendary Moni Singh of the Communist Party.7

The first and perhaps only real decision the 'government' took was to reject off-hand Professor Muzaffar Ahmad's proposal to have an interim national government of all parties. But before that the first government of Bangladesh had begun to show unmistakable signs of coming unstuck.

It was a mishmash of political entities, divided not so much by ideological considerations as by the extra-territorial labels that, rightly or wrongly, its members were supposed to wear. Thus ministers were commonly classified as pro-America, pro Russia or pro-India. In this context Tajuddin Ahmad was labeled pro-India, Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed as pro-America and Abdus Samad Azad pro-Russia. (Major Farook was to complain later: 'I couldn't find anyone who was supposed to be pro
Bangladesh!'). Tajuddin Ahmad, the prime minister and most able administrator among the lot, was the first among equals and no more. The system was a collegiate one. The throne was still vacant.8

6The Times, London. 10.1.72.
7Sethi, The Decisive War, p. 1 09.
8The Guardian, London. 10.1.79.

These internal dissensions gravely handicapped the government in facing up to its many problems - and they were monstrous and pressing. The depredations of the Pakistan army during the eight months of Bengali resistance and the attrition during the 14-day war had devastated the country. There was no food or medicines in the shops. The jute and tea industries, in normal times the principal foreign exchange earners, had collapsed. At the same time ten million refugees who had gone to India and twenty million people displaced within the country needed shelter in addition to food and clothing. It was a mad race against time for the monsoons would shut down the country in summer. Topping it all was the destruction of the transport and communications systems which made the movement of relief supplies a daily miracle. There was extensive damage to the railway track, signaling equipment and rolling stock. In a delta area where cross-country movement is dependent on bridges and river ferries, every major bridge (at least 280 of varying sizes) and more than half the river transport were destroyed. The remaining river craft could only be used at great risk because in most cases navigation lights and buoys marking the narrow channels had been blown up along with the command stations of the delta navigation system. Chittagong, one of the country's two ports and the principal entry point for food imports, was rendered unserviceable by 29 wrecks blocking the Karnafulli River channel. Fewer than 1000 of the country's 8000 truck fleet were serviceable. There was no gasoline. Bangladesh desperately needed 2.5 million tons of food to avoid famine. And when this was forthcoming from the international community it required an additional miracle to get it to the country's 60,000 villages.

I have not been able to confirm it, but there was an hilarious story making the rounds in Dhaka in January, 1972, when the jostling among the Awami League ministers was at its height. Every move on the macabre chessboard was being carefully scrutinized for advantage and in these circumstances there was, apparently, no agreement about who should preside over the 'historic' first meeting of the cabinet. Should it be Vice President Syed Nazrul Islam or should it be Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad? The issue was resolved with Eastern ingenuity. It took the form of a tea party with Mujib's uncle representing the absent Bangabandhu, as chief guest. The cakes and the ministers were placed on

two long tables joined at one end by a smaller one. In the middle of this head table sat Mujib's uncle flanked by Tajuddin Ahmad and Syed Nazrul Islam. Tea was served. The photographers were called in. The cabinet had its first meeting. Thus history was inscribed without loss of face!

No such delicacy was shown in another matter. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who was 'foreign minister' in the Mujibnagar government based in Calcutta, turned up at his office in Dhaka to find his chair occupied by a junior colleague, Abdus Samad Azad. It transpired that Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad had removed Moshtaque from the job because he had been secretly conspiring with the Americans for a political compromise intended to avoid the break-up of Pakistan. Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, was anxious to help Pakistan because he was using it as a secret channel of

communication to arrange President Nixon's historic visit to China. To this end the Americans began to secretly negotiate with Moshtaque. His colleagues never forgive Moshtaque this treachery. Thus, as part of the treatment, no one bothered to inform him that Tajuddin, on moving to Dhaka, had overnight changed his job.

Khandaker Moshtaque swallowed the insult. But he did not forget. Later, when he got the opportunity, he extracted a terrible vengeance on those who had insulted him.

The war had also left an estimated 350,000 guns with vast quantities of ammunition in private hands. Since the people were desperate short of their daily necessities, the underground armouries inevitably helped to create 'a dangerous law and order situation' as the official jargon described it. Topping this were numerous bands of heavily armed 'guerillas' such as those led by 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.9

In these circumstances it is understandable that the Awami League ministers and politicians should burn up the telephone line to London demanding Sheikh Mujibur 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 honor, the 21-gun salute: they are all carefully designed to impress. India, with its timeless pageantry and instant crowds gives the show a majestic dimension. When New Delhi rolled out the red carpet for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman it was with a fervor 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.'). On hand to greet 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 Diplomatic Corps. Even more memorable than this glittering receiving line, I was told by one of those present, was the vibrant intrusion of uncounted millions of faceless Indians - 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!'

9D. R. Mankekar. Pakistan Cut to Size, New Delhi. pp. 139/ 1 40.

Mujib was deeply moved by it all. Until then a flag car was the most he had

rated by way of official protocol, and that too very briefly during two short spells as a provincial minister in East Pakistan. Now, he was to tell his family: 'India itself turned out to do me honor.'
The transformation to demigod was completed a few hours later when Mujib returning to Dhaka was overwhelmed by the reception he got. Thousands of people crammed 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 March of the previous year, it was as if a human sea had been packed into the three square mile arena. 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 any man.
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 demigod, 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 percent of all houses have been destroyed. Bangladesh has been flattened. There is danger of famine. We need help.'
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'?10
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 demigod 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

10 The Sunday Times, London, 16.1.1972.

hands operating as a law unto themselves in the countryside. Only now Mujib's presence had temporarily put a lid on them. But exist they did in various shadowy forms which were for the moment tolerated by Mujib so long as the combatants made both public and private obeisance to him. But the internal pressures did influence his style. He conducted himself not as the 'father of the nation' nor as its all-serving President, 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 whetted his natural instinct to retain all power for himself. That's why he chose to be Bangladesh's first Prime Minister, not its first 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 executive authority to vest in the Prime Minister, in this case Tajuddin Ahmad. 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 advisers 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 minor reason for Mujib 's decision - which was privately made much of at that time - were the anomalies there were about Tajuddin's position as 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 the top job. In their eyes Tajuddin. despite his ability, remained almost an upstart. He had been general secretary of the 'provincial Awami League, 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 pro-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 favor of a 'regularized relationship' which would eliminate international objections to the recognition of the new state.11

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 a danger to him. For that role he chose a non-political person, the meekest, most inoffensive man he could find. Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury, who had shot to prominence as the

11 ibid.

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 Gonobaban 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. There he would hold court for his cronies, for party men and petitioners 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. Some would burst into song - some well-known Bengali folksong - 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 Musa, a perceptive but disillusioned 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 required to inject harsh discipline into the government, to recreate a country from scratch along orderly lines. Most of all he had to sustain and guide into channels of reconstruction the tremendous patriotic fervor that galvanized the people in 1971. Mujib could do none of these things. As Bangabandhu, the friend and father-figure. 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 forgot a face or a friendship. 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.

I was given a vivid 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 heartening news for the starving workers of the world's biggest jute mill. Like the rest of industry, the mill had come to 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 not 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 organized. A dozen tables had been placed in the compound. 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 to be paid . . . 'as Bangabandhu ordered'. The paymaster, who had become a nervous wreck, had sent an SOS to the Deputy Commissioner, who in turn had arranged for an army 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 velour not to stay behind. Two hours later we were in Gonobaban. Mujib's official residence, and the young officer was explaining the

problem. Mujib was furious. He couldn't believe his 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 and he had been patiently waiting in an ante-room for Bangabandhu's 'Daskaf (authorisation) for it. 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 3000 workers not important enough to 'disturb' him and the officer requiring authorization 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 beriberi

which permanently affected his eye sight. He finished high school when he was 22.

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 sentence 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 in-justice.' 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 for 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 organizing 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 Paltan Maidan to hear Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, speak on his one and only visit to the eastern province. They had gone to cheer the Quaid-i-Azam or 'great Leader', but Mr. Jinnah stunned his audience when he bluntly told them 'Urdu is going to be the lingua franca of this country . . . Anyone who says anything else is an enemy of Pakistan.'

Bengalis are nothing without their culture and the language is its greatest manifestation. The support of the Bengali Muslims for the Pakistan 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 favor of Urdu which he arrogantly equated with Islam, the established religion of Pakistan. Mr. Jinnah's remarks therefore came as a slap in the face of the Bcngalis. 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 serious disadvantage with his counterpart in West Pakistan who 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.12

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 great 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 at 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 savored 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, Labor and Industries, and Anti-Corruption in Ataur Rahman Khan's Awami League cabinet), Mujib couldn't stomach the routine. So he requested permission to bow out and devote his restless energy to reorganizing the Awami League. Field work, his first love, remained his forte and took him to the top. But this apostle of agitation was never able to overcome the fundamental flaws in his make-up. Mujib saw everything in simplistic terms. He had a tendency to over-simplify even the most complex economic and agricultural problems. And to an over-riding obsession for power was added an immensely suspicious nature. He would unscrupulously intrigue to eliminate the slightest threat to his supremacy, however imagined it might be. This was the dark side of the beguiling moon. When Mujib became Prime Minister of Bangladesh it was these traits, more than anything else in his complex character, that came to the fore.

12 Mohammad Ayub Khan and K. Subramaniam, The Liberation War, New Delhi. pp. 51/52.

Two weeks after he had installed himself in Dhaka I asked him if he still had a mind to undertake the meet-the-people tours he had planned in London. Mujib was affronted by my question. 'How can I do it?' he said very crossly. 'Don't you see I have to erect an administration?' He was doing this in the freewheeling Mujib style. Available bureaucrats were posted under his direction. Even office assistants and clerks were not too small for his attention. Offices in the secretariat began filling with an odd assortment of people, many of them quite evidently not at all suitable. Sinecurists were found everywhere.

Many appointments were made on the basis of a nodding acquaintance with Mujib or on the recommendation of his close friends. The Awami League leaders had been installed in key positions and they brought in their relatives and friends. Some even took commission for a chit. You had to have a god-father to get a job. If you had one, all disqualifications were overlooked, even the cardinal sin of collaboration with the defeated Pakistan military regime.

A prime example was Mahboobul Alam, the Dhaka correspondent of DAWN. Published in Karachi, DAWN was the leading English-language newspaper of West Pakistan and those connected with it were held in esteem by the authorities. After the Pakistan army had launched its campaign of genocide in East Pakistan, West Pakistanis in Dhaka used to jokingly refer to Mahboobul Alam as a 'sarkari' (i.e. pro-government) Bengali to differentiate from the other Bengali journalists who were either openly hostile or sullenly uncooperative. True to this reputation, Mahboobul Alam later that year wrote scripts for Radio Pakistan's PLAIN TRUTH programme - a highly colored propaganda or disinformation effort aimed at the Bangladeshi freedom struggle. For this he was paid between Rs 30 and Rs 50 per piece, about £4 at the prevailing rate of exchange. After the liberation of Bangladesh Mahboobul Alam found himself both without a job and covered with the odium of having betrayed the freedom movement by backing the wrong side. But instead of being locked up in jail on charges of collaboration, as another journalist writing for PLAIN TRUTH was, Mahboobul Alam wangled a job, of all things, as Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman's press officer. But because of the stink it created even Mujib had to get rid of him. It must make the Bangladeshi martyrs turn in their graves to know that this posturing turn-coat, as some others like him, went on to become a Bangladeshi ambassador.

Before long the carnival atmosphere of Gonobaban began to assume a most sinister aspect. Mujib, it was evident, had not erected a new administration of Bangladeshi nationalists filled with patriotic zeal. What he had done between the rounds of musical chairs, was to retain and refurbish the old discredited bureaucracy of the erstwhile East Pakistan. Unlike the large mass of Bengali

military officers and men who had actively fought against the Pakistanis or had suffered the agony of being disarmed, isolated and marooned in West Pakistan, many of the civilian officers of East Pakistan

administration - with some notable exceptions - had for the most pan remained in their jobs and ostensibly loyal to Pakistan during the Liberation War. A variety of reasons were advanced for not joining the resistance. A few had ideological reservations about the 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 Bangladesh became independent on 16th December, 1971 , they quickly jumped on the bandwagon, proclaiming their new-found nationalism as loudly as they had denied it the week before. For this these turncoats were derisively dubbed the '16th Division'.

M. R. Akthar ('Mukul') in his book 'Mujibur 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 intrinsic dedication and only an accidental loyalty to the new state. During the crucial days of 1971 some of these provincial civil servants had shown them-selves 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 immune 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 the central place in the Bangladesh administration. 'They may be inexperienced and make 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 indispensible 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 'forgive and forget'. 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 several hundred 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 'forgive and forget', if at all necessary 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 Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who was put in power after Mujib's assassination, and General Ziaur Rahman who followed him, put the seal on it all. All this - resulting in corrupt, unresponsive 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 Bangladesh secretariat all those FFs who were not already civil servants. On the other, he took pains to identify the FFs 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 Mujibur 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 preferential treatment in the matter of jobs, university admissions, cash grants and the hopes of a pension. The tragedy is that, like everything else, the FF certificates became instruments of political patronage and corruption. And not all the real Mukhti Bahini got them. Those who did, quickly discovered that the FF certificate served only a decorative purpose unless it was backed up by access to the patronage being funneled 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 fortunate compatriots began to arrive. These were the 35,000 Bengali officers 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 President 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 Pakistanis, they were in effect prisoners of war suffering all the attendant 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 Chittagong in March, 1971, underscores their trauma in his book, A Tale of Millions. 'The situation for the Bengali army personnel stranded in Pakistan was worse: he said. 'They were driven out of their homes with 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 at exorbitant prices. 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 symbolized 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 velour, the word 'repatriate' became a term of derision for these unfortunate men. This was an unworthy slander of men whose only sin - if sin 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 regularization of their service. Thus uncertainty about jobs, promotions and appointments undermined military morale terribly.

The differentiation between the FFs and 'repatriates' also politicized the defence forces and riddled them with factionalism and indiscipline. Ultimately it would lead to the killing of Sheikh Mujib, the Jail 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 rumor 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. Mujib, it was said, would step down to reorganize 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 severe. 'Nonsense,' he told me, 'do they think I am not capable of running the government?' The rumor, which 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 people. Now he was isolated from them. The official restraints that were imposed on him, the demands on his time made 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 gloriously bask in the spotlight at the centre stage, savoring every nuance of the protocol and all the perks that went with it - his personal standard, the honor guard, the foreign signatories 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 or Bangladesh and all the trauma and patriotic fervor 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 this 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.

III
THE DECLINE OF THE DEMIGOD

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

The scene: Pallan Maidan, Dhaka. The date: 17 September, 1972. The occasion: The first public protest against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's rule.
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 grievance, 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 Bengalis and failing to fulfill 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-soaring prices which put food and other necessities beyond reach of the people, shortages, market manipulation, official corruption, nepotism, mounting unemployment, mass arrests and beatings by the police, an irresponsive 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 dismissal 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 Bengalis. 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 Bengalis 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 war lords, went their separate ways. In London and in Geneva Mujib had once more been overwhelmed by panic calls from Dhaka. For seven weeks Bangladesh was at the mercy of God and the telephone.13 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 dogs. '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 hustings had returned and they ardently believed that given the opportunity Mujib would yet vindicate the public trust. A Bengali journalist told me: 'Leader will straighten things out. Now you will see the fun.' That would be another promise belied. The events, however, did mark a new phase in Mujib's decline. Henceforth he increasingly temporized with all sorts of political stunts, deluding himself that bravado and showmanship would substitute for his deficiencies as the executive head of government. In the process he discarded everything Bangladesh was supposed to represent: constitutionalism, the rule of law, freedom of speech, the right to dissent, equal opportunity. Gradually tragedy in Bangladesh settled into permanence.

If the new state did not collapse within the first eight months of its founding it was only due to the efforts of the international community. UNROD, the United Nations Relief Operation in Dhaka, was an unprecedented rescue mission both in magnitude and effectiveness, one of UN's unsung success stories. Even the name signified a practical effort to cut through formalities, legalities and red tape, to come to terms with the explosive reality of 75 million people in the gravest distress. Since the area, hitherto East Pakistan, was still formally recognized as part of Pakistan, a member state, the UN operation could not be designated as aid to Bangladesh. To give it the East Pakistan label would similarly have been offensive to the sensitive Bengalis and their international friends. So the UN Relief Operation to Dhaka was launched and with it the greatest single international outpouring of money, food, equipment and technical assistance known to date. At least twenty countries were represented in Dhaka with

13 Reported in The Sunday Times. London. 10.9. 1972.

men and material. Money, men and supplies also came in from the ICRC (The International Committee for the Red Cross in Geneva) and its affiliates, particularly the Norwegian and Swedish Red Cross Societies, and from a number of German and British charities such as Caritas, War on Want, Save the Children Fund and Christian Aid.

UNROD coordinated this gigantic operation. It had some difficult moments. Sometimes there were some hilarious boners, even heated debates about the type of operation it should be - and there was some corruption of course. But its ultimate success is judged by the fact that not only did it save Bangladesh from collapse, but UNROD was also generally free from contention and re-crimination by the local government and the people it sought to help. Although food was scarce and available on the open market only at a mounting premium, UNROD ensured that the statutory ration of rice was maintained. Bengalis did not die of starvation while CNROD organised the supply and distribution of food.

I remember an enormous chart hanging on the wall of the Dhanmandi office of Dr. Viktor Umbricht, UNROD'S director. Popularly called 'the bed sheet' (it could easily cover a fair-sized bed), it served as a ready reckoner for the war damage, the money/supplies available for rehabilitation from donor countries

and the various task forces in the field. UNROD estimated there were ten million people destitute in the rural areas and another two million in towns. At least 1.5 million houses had to be rebuilt. But the immediate requirement in the spring of 1972 was $78 million for housing and food; $80 million for additional food imports; $200 million for industrial and agricultural inputs and equipment; $45 million for housing materials; $15 million for railway repairs; $ 13 million for inland water transport and $6 million for schools. UNROD had its own wireless network and transport system with the blue United Nations flag flown on minibulkers, trucks, helicopters, aircraft and barges. Russian and Indian navy salvage teams cleared the wrecks blocking Chittagong and Khulna ports and the Chalna anchorage. British army engineers repaired the big bridges in the North. Indian technicians helped to restart the railways. Scandinavian doctors and nurses worked round the clock to control epidemics of smallpox, cholera and typhoid. There were hundreds of East European engineering specialists repairing war damage. An American specialist working entirely with local dock labor and the most primitive equipment set a record for clearing food ships in Khulna. French and Japanese technicians helped to restart the mills.

Correspondents wanting a quick run-down on the way things were shaping would make a bee line for UNROD headquarters where the amiable Director of Information, Fernando Jaques da Silva, would provide instant answers. This remarkable Brazilian, who after-hours would regale us with refreshment and his guitar, did much to keep the massive rehabilitation effort in perspective. While spelling out what the UN specialists were doing, he would quietly pro-mote the idea of close cooperation between UNROD

and the Bangladesh government and in no way discount the latter's overall responsibility. Thus, to the government's satisfaction, press reports invariably gave the impression of Bangladesh achievement whereas UNROD in fact was doing all the pushing and most of the running.

One evening during an informal conversation over dinner, Dr. Umbricht appeared to be concerned about a meeting he had earlier in the day in the Bangladesh Foreign Office. 'I can't understand why,' he told me with evident exasperation, '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 of the world body, had been extended 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 inability to attend. The formal excuse was that it was not fully geared to participate. But Dr. Umbricht had been privately informed about the real reason. Apparently, the German Democratic Republic, which had rushed in to open the first diplomatic office in Dhaka and like Bangladesh was not a member of the United Nations, had also received an invitation 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 Moshtaquc Ahmed. Azad decided to make the gesture to the East Europeans and after issuing the required directive to the permanent 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 Bangababan 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 Hussain while his servant vigorously 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 rumors? We have not received any UN invitation so how can we reject it?' 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 refusal.

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, Abdus Samad Azad hotly denied 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 U N 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 on its way out. By June, 1972, the price of paddy, the unhusked 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 it away as 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 risen spectacularly during the liberation war, showed no signs of declining 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 lungis 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 stolen jeeps and cars. The number plates were only casually plastered with mud. Sometimes they carried rifles and sten 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 after dark with the guns.

Mujib had dismally 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 arms should be surrendered within ten days. It was another case of the demigod 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 writ, the ending of the amnesty period coincided with the festival of Eid-ul-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 begun 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 had they 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 Mukhti 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 cadres, who had little or no part in the fighting, as the eyes, ears and channels of government authority in the areas which the freedom fighters had controlled for several months. Guerrilla leaders, operating under cover, had 'governed' sizeable chunks of territory during the liberation war. They advised the population 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, by 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 victimization 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 Mukhti Bahini in the armed forces, the national militia and police or to provide 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, distinctly 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 had over their weapons to the Prime Minister. Two TV spectaculars were organized for this purpose. The most impressive of these was in Tangail, and involved 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 to attention. Inside 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 cap, Kader Siddiqui ceremonially escorted Mujib past a long display of rifles, sten guns, and at 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, Tiger 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 fighting strength, discipline and dedication to a man other than Bangabandu would haunt them in the days to come. The sycophants would pour poison in Mujib's ears and he, 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. About 30,000 guns were handed in, 70,000 less than the government expected. Neither Mujib nor Khandaker Moshtaque 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 Jasimuddin Ahmad) and the pro-Pakistan armed gangs such as the Razakars and the notorious Al Badar. 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 installed as the new administration of Bangladesh. When all is said and done these government functionaries and policemen were in a natural position to collaborate-and collaborate many of them did. Yet the Collaborators' Order, with minor exceptions, was not directed against them.
At the same time the Awami Leaguers 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 Awami League. Shah Moazzam 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.14 Even some '16th Division' officers seized the opportunity to hit back at unfortunate individuals who had crossed them at some time or other. All they had to do to ensure an opponent's ruin was to denounce him as a collaborator. The government did the rest. He was clamped in jail. His property was seized-all before the charge was investigated. Understandably some tried to defend themselves against this misdirected zeal. 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 'Mujibur Rakta Lal'. The man in the dock, who had been accused of being a Razakar, stood silent 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 magistrate) '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 in exile.'

14 The Guardian. London. 1.12.1972.

The whole thing was a mockery of justice. The government finally put an end to it but not before the disorder intensified.

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 2000.) The incident is noteworthy because it involved the first of Mujib's experiments with private armies. This was the Lal Bahini, a paramilitary group raised by one of the Prime Minister's henchmen to 'control' of 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 arms. 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 disappointing. A lot of small fry was netted but the big fish got away. They always do. They were of course part and parcel of the government and the ruling Awami League.

Corruption is not only a Bangladesh phenomenon. But few countries in the world have been so riddled with corruption as the new state was from the moment of its founding. It was as if a plague of locusts had descended on the country and set about devouring anything that offered the slightest margin of profit. And since Bangladesh was starting anew, there were endless opportunities 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 chillies before flooding the market with imports of these items brought in by his own cargo vessels. Others manipulated the rice trade, the edible oils market. Still others organized 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 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 rumors 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 - even among some of the retired majors involved in Mujib's killing. Those who took less pointed a finger at those who took more. In such a convoluted society wrongdoing 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 restarted from a collapsed position after the war, the government had perforce to control almost every aspect of life in Bangladesh. It soon developed into a system of licenses based on an economy of want. Those who at the various stages controlled the issue of licenses were therefore in a preeminent position to make their demands. Graft soon became a way of life. As my Bengali friends still say 'If you want to succeed you must pay.' Things got out of hand when those who controlled the system used the licenses themselves to multiply their profits many times over. In the matter of personnel, the Awami League did not have a creditable record. In fact 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 cars 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 entwined with the official corruption was the colossal smuggling of food and jute out of the country into India. The practice existed long before the birth of Bangladesh. 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. Major Abdur Rashid, one of the two ring leaders of the coup against Mujib, had evidence of this when, as a Pakistan army captain, he was temporarily 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 took action against 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.

Toni Hagen, at one time head of UNROD, reported early in 1972, that 'Bangladesh is like a sieve 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.15 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 chiefly because

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.'16 After Mujib's assassination the Bangladesh government itself said that 'smuggling of goods across the border during the three and a half years of independence cost approximately 60,000 million Takkas' (£2000 million). The goods smuggled out of the country were mostly jute, food-grains and materials imported from abroad.17

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 government 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 Bangababan would 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 incidents that have vexed relations between the two

15 Reported in The Sunday Times. London. 19.3.1972.

16 The Observer. London. 15.10.1972.

17 Bangladesh Today. 1.4.1976.

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 Bangladeshis 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 'bleeding the country'. 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 Bangladeshis carry it out to them?' That was the end of the argument.

From the start the governments of Bangladesh and India had tried 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 entanglement could have been pinched off at the start had it been found necessary. But there were some drawbacks and curiously 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 worm infested.'18

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 he paid to retain a 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 like monsoon rain on Gonobaban. 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 practiced in varying degrees in other countries, and in Bangladesh itself, after Mujib's death. But

18 Speech in Dhaka. 26.3.1975.

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 entirely satisfied and they all eventually turned on Mujib.

The hemorrhage 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 hemorrhage was not staunched after Mujib's death. Some corrupt politicians were removed from positions of influence but 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 him. Their attempts at cleaning up have at best been cosmetic.

Bangladesh would never have been brought to such straits in so short a period had it not been for the unbelievable sycophancy which filled Gonobaban and Bangababan like the clouds of intoxicating vapors in an opium den. Sycophancy is on a par with maladministration, corruption and smuggling as the prime cause for the decline of both Mujib and Bangladesh.

The Greeks and Romans used to say a god is nothing without worshippers. Mujib, the demigod, had these in abundance. They clung to him like scabrous leeches, greedily sucking all available patronage while at the same time isolating him from reality and the people. There were all kinds of 'durbaris'. Some were inoffensively obsequious, their only purpose being to demonstrate they were on the right side of the fence. Others were outrageously servile and grasping. 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, calendars, desk ornaments and daily 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 'durbaris' 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 second 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 commemoration.

When the invitation reached Gonobaban, Mujib was greatly touched by the gesture. The sycophants, however, were indignant. It would be 'insulting and inauspicious', 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 worst sycophants were among Mujib's advisers and ministers. Among the former

were Tufail and Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, Mujib's nephew who would also die with him. Most prominent among the latter was Tahiruddin Thakur, the Minister of State for Information. Thakur was once a journalist, and would later play a shadowy role in Mujib's assassination. He geared 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 master. Thakur's attitude so revolted some of his officers that one of them, an executive of Bangladesh TV, on one 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 debasement as it was intended to, the touching of feet henceforth became the form for the durbaris. 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 criticized 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 take 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 dispatch 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 . . .'19
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 cars 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.
19 Quoted in Bangladesh Today. London. 1.10.1974.

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.

IV
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 inauspiciously 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 master minded 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 students' 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 students 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 are 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 Bashani, the ageing Chief of the (Marxist) National Awami Party hurriedly called off his own protest meeting and fled to the seclusion of his village.20

The left-wing leaders had badly miscalculated in attempting a head-on clash with Mujib. They had not realized 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 ownership of land, the sanctity of the family, Islam 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 abstract 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.

20 Abu Moosa in The Sunday Times. London. 7.1.1973.

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 turned the tables on 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 recognized 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-recorded 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 arrival of undiluted socialism in Bangladesh'.21

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 the pressures for reform brushed aside but Mujib and the Awami League also saw their election victory as a license to press on as they had done in the past. The tempo of the Mad Hatter'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 rumor to this effect during a visit to Dhaka in February, 1974, but it was not till December of 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.

21 The Guardian. London. 9.9.1973.

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, 1975 in Dhaka after Mujib was killed, General Zia 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 Organization and Establishment). Everything was ad hoc. The army was paid because Mujib said it should be paid. Our existence depended on Mujib's word. Our chaps went through hell 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 volunteer's army. The officers and men are all 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. Then there was the humiliation.' Explaining this 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 killed . . . two jawans (privates) . . . and we went to Mujib and asked that the people who did it 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 seemed to be a threat to him. 'It was he who divided the army into so many 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 disappointment returned to Dhaka. Thereafter Mujib wanted him sent to Sandhurst. He, in fact, peremptorily telephoned General Shafiullah (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 Pakistan's two military dictators, Field Marshal Ayub Khan and General Yahya Khan. Ayub had arrested Mujib on 7 October, 1958, the day he seized power. During the next 10½ years of Ayub's dictatorship Mujib had been jailed for long periods in solitary confinement. Then in 1968, while once more in detention for political activity, he was made the principal accused in the notorious Agartala Conspiracy trial in Dhaka. The charge: conspiring with India for the secession of East Pakistan. It was a capital offence and Mujib only escaped the gallows because a countryside upsurge against Ayub in 1968 forced him to drop the charges and bring Mujib to the conference table.

While a prisoner of General Yahya Khan in 1971 during the Bangladesh independence struggle, Mujib had had an even closer brush with death. The story he told me was splashed on the front page of The Sunday Times. According to Mujib, he had been tried by a military court and found guilty of treason and sedition. On 15 December, 1971, the day before the Pakistan army surrendered to the Indian troops in Dhaka, General Yahya Khan had ordered Mujib's execution. A military team went from Rawalpindi to Mianwali where Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was being held in jail. The team went about its task in a methodical manner. A shallow grave was dug in the cement floor of the room adjoining the Bangladesh leader's cell. He was told that this was being done 'as an air raid precaution'. But Mujib knew what it was for and prepared himself for the worst. Fortunately for him the ceasefire was ordered that night. The jailor, taking pity on Mujib and knowing that Yahya Khan was about to abdicate, smuggled him to his personal quarters where he kept him for two days. The operation was helped by the confusion that attended the surrender of the Pakistan army. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto replaced General Yahya Khan as President, he refused to revalidate the execution order when asked to do so. Two weeks later Mujib was a free man and on his way to Bangladesh via London. He never forgot the jailor who saved 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 Pakistan army in 1971. To their basic hostility of things military was added, after independence, the fear that the Bangladesh army might try to supplant them. This anxiety was grounded in the fact that the Bengali military men had been in the thick of the fighting during the independence movement while the Awami Leagures 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 emasculated the role of the Defence Forces. Before he was one month in office 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 tangible support with money and arms, the tea was at best a token gesture. But it did have the esoteric 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 stranded at Benghazi airport. Tea was the last thing on their minds. What they wanted was a lift to London and they had heard that the plane would soon be headed in that direction. Captain Bill Mackintosh, 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. 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 around all of three vintage ex-Pakistan army tanks left over from the 1971 war. When they were ceremonially handed over to the 1st Bengal Lancers. Bangladesh's only 'armored' 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 armored 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 led the tanks to Mujib's house and changed the course of Bangladesh. But before that Mujib tried to build an alternative to the army.

The Jhatiyo Rakhi Bahini, which roughly translated means National Security Force, was an elite paramilitary force whose members had 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 handpicked men from the old Mukhti Bahini - to assist the police in the maintenance of law and order. As opposition to Mujib increased, he found it 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 terrorized 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, market-manipulation, smuggling and political repression by the cohorts of the Awami League who were savoring their election 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 Bahani 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 caused as much by illegal arms cached 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 lo 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 Sharbohara (proletarian) party, who had fought the Pakistan army during the liberation war in 1971, and had then come out against Mujib. 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 Motijeel 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. With blood spurting from his wound he jumped from the microbus shouting 'Don't shoot. I'm Kamal. I'm Kamal.' When they realized 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 realized that heads would roll because of this blunder. After making sure that Kamal was still alive, he lost no time driving to Bangababan for an immediate audience with Bangabandhu 'on a matter of the greatest importance'. Mujib's reaction on hearing the new surprised the Deputy Commissioner. 'Let him die'. he said, clearly furious that Kamal had once again taken the law into his own hands. When Abdul Hayat asked what he should do about the policemen, Mujib told him to return them to duty. 'They have nothing to fear' he said. It is a matter of record that on that occasion at least Mujib kept his word.

My friend Zackaria Chowdhury ('Zack') who recounted this story saying he had got it firsthand from the Deputy Commissioner, told me Mujib refused to visit his son in hospital for two days. When on the day after the incident 'Zack' called at the hospital, Begum Mujib was very distressed and told him in Bengali: 'Bhai, he has come to have such a big head that he doesn't come to visit his own son who is dying.' The fact is that Mujib was becoming increasingly embarrassed by Kamars behavior. I know of several
occasions when he remonstrated with him about his free-wheeling ways. Then paradoxically he also indulged Kamal and sent him on political errands or to work among the various student groups. As such Kamal was never far from the throne. On this occasion, father and son were soon reconciled. When Kamal left hospital and had fully recovered he was temporarily taken out of political work and given the task of organizing a series of football tournaments. It was hoped that this would keep him out of mischief while at the same time giving the people something to take their minds off their problems.

Among the angry young men in the Bangladesh army were two young Majors who took immense pride in their professional competence and who now found 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 Bengal Lancers, the country's only tank regiment which till the middle of 1974 had only three obsolete tanks in its armory. 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 Chittagong'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 cantonment and in the evenings the sisters and their husbands would often get together, as they put it, 'to pass the time'. It was these 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 Pakistan army. His father's family are known as the 'Pirs' (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 Ja-alpur/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 Naaul 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 of Staff of the Bangladesh army in November 1975, before being killed in the sepoy mutiny.

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 license 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 fervor Farook, on his way to college, stopped off at the Inter-services Selection Board office in Kohat and volunteered for a commission. A week later when the call came there was initial disapproval 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 by becoming battalion sergeant major. When he graduated fourth of three hundred officer cadets, he was given his choice of service. Farook chose the armored corps. 'I don't want to do foot-slogging in the army' he said politely turning down suggestions by Majors Ziaur Rahman and Khalid Musharraf, then instructors in the P.M.A., that he should join the Bengal Regiment. Instead, Farook was appointed to the 13th Lancers.

Later Farook transferred to the 31st Cavalry, then based at Sialkot, and in 1970 at the age of 24, he found himself a captain, acting squadron commander, of 'Charlie Squadron' and 'in the command chain of the armored corps'. This significant career opening was made possible by his success in the tactical armour course 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 where Pakistan was involved in training and servicing the Sultan's armed forces. Farook has no idea why he was chosen for secondment, but the fact

remains that at the beginning of 1971 when the political upsurge was getting under way in East Bengal, Farook found himself a squadron commander in the Abu Dhabi armored regiment based near the oil port of Jabaldhana.
It was a happy time for the young tank commander. Military duties, in which he exulted, 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 tear along the desert roads at 100 mph. 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 the Sunday Times featuring my massive expose of the Pakistan army's campaign of genocide in Bangladesh. It marked the turning point in his life.
As Farook put it, 'what actually convinced me about your writing was your technique and reporting.' 'The way you wrote about those Pakistani officers straightaway struck me that this man is not a fraud. Only a chap who has been in close touch with the Pakistan army knows exactly how they behave. I know. And I also know that no one can simulate it. That's why I was solidly convinced that this chap knew exactly what he was writing and couldn't be wrong. This forced me to decide to go'.

I asked Farook 'Would you have gone if you had not read the article?'
He answered: 'As I said, I was not interested in politics because I was rising very fast professionally with the little service that I had. I was only interested in seeing how fast I could go. I was only interested professionally in being a general officer. Then suddenly this thing came to me and disrupted my whole damn career'.
Confirmation of the disaster that had staggered the Bengalis came in a letter from his uncle, Nurul Quader, a Bengali civilian officer who had fled to Calcutta to join the Mujibnagar government. Farook is an ardent nationalist. He is also single-minded, with decisiveness grounded on careful planning. After carefully weighing the situation, Farook decided he could no longer serve in the Pakistan army.
On 12 November, 1971, he packed a bag and drove to Dubai airport where he abandoned his car. Then he caught the first flight to Beirut and London for the long journey to Bangladesh.
Farook saw Farida for the first time when picnicking with Major Rashid and his wife, Tinku, on the Kaptai Lake near Chittagong. Farook was instantly smitten by the younger sister's beauty, refinement and quiet charm. 'I want to marry her' he told Rashid in the matter-of-fact manner they converse with each other. 'You must arrange it'. Rashid did the needful. Farook and Farida were married on 12 August 1972. After the marriage Farook and Rashid became inseparable.
The Majors first met in the Pakistan Military Academy at Risalpur. Farook belonged to a senior batch, but it did not matter. The Bengali officer cadets, who were heavily outnumbered in the Academy by Punjabis and Pathans, sat together in the cafeteria 'to chit-chat' as Rashid tells it. Rashid was very talkative; Farook a good listener.
Like Farook, Khandaker Abdur Rashid's own presence in the military academy was the result of the effusion of patriotism during the Pakistan-India war in 1965. Rashid came from the tiny village of Chaypharia on the road between Comilla and Daudkhandi where his father was a primary school teacher of modest means. He is not connected to the great or the learned, and is the first to deny Bangladesh gossip that he is a nephew of Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, the Awami League minister the two majors installed as President after knocking off Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Rashid insists that the only connection with Khandaker Moshtaque is an accident of geography. They come from the same sub-district.
Rashid was studying soil science, geography and geology at Dhaka University when the war broke out in 1965, and he thought it was a patriotic duty to seek a commission in the Pakistan army. He was selected and after a run-of-the-mill showing in the PMA. graduated 92nd in his class. Rashid requested posting to the Bengal Regiment but

instead was given his second choice and commissioned in 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. He was an eligible bachelor and his uncle's friend had a very eligible niece. Zobeida ('Tinku') the elder daughter of S. H. Khan of the Chittagong industrial family. 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 at Khulna 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. Rashid says this man, a Punjabi, 'was also involved in making money from the smugglers.' Later when he caught some gold smugglers red-handed, Rashid suddenly found himself back to his Artillery unit. The excuse, 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 ceasefire line in Kashmir. It was a trying period for the young Bengali officer. The radio reports he was picking up from different parts or 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 honor 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 sec them. After an agony of waiting his request was granted and on 2 October, 1971, he took Tinku and their 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 reentered 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 recreate the 'monster' he had known in Pakistan he ended up doing that very thing - and it destroyed him.

V

A SUMMER OF TIGERS

There was crisis everywhere.

-Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

The summer and autumn of 1974 to many people in Bangladesh were the worst in living memory. The orgy of killing by the Pakistani army in 1971 had been traumatic: but in retrospect it was accepted as the price of independence, and in the darkest days of the freedom struggle the hope of a new life burned fiercely in the hearts of the Bengalis. Now in the third year of independence hope was extinguished.

The food supply had progressively deteriorated due to smuggling, market manipulation and corruption at all stages of the import and distribution network. Rice prices were soaring beyond the 300 Takka crisis mark. Then the floods came, engulfing 21,000 square miles or two-fifths of the total land area of the delta country during July, August and part of September. Famine and crisis stalked the land like the big jungle cats. People in the countryside began to die like flies.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself publicly admitted later that 27,000 people died of starvation. In the circumstances this was a very conservative estimate. Bodies take a long time to get run down, and for every human being who ultimately falls victim to starvation, many others are killed off by diseases arising from malnutrition and low resistance. Since at least 3,000,000 people were living below the starvation line, by that reckoning the death toll as a result of the famine was well into six figures.

Indeed confirmation of this assessment came from the Prime Minister himself. Before emplaning for New York to address the General Assembly after Bangladesh had been admitted to the United Nations. Mujib ordered his ministers to open gruel kitchens in all the 4300 'unions' (i.e. groups of villages) in the country. Ultimately 5700 gruel kitchens were opened to give three to four million people a meager life-sustaining meal each day.22

Millions of people in the countryside surged to the towns in search of food. Thousands of them gravitated to Dhaka, the capital, in the hope that Bangabandhu would give them something to eat. But the Prime Minister was hard-put to maintain even the weekly ration for the population which was multiplying at the rate of three million a

22 High Commissioner Sultan at Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting in London. 19.11.74.

year. It was calculated that the Bangladesh population of 75 million would double itself in 26 years.

The influx of people to the city brought new tensions to Dhaka where the government was embarrassed by the large swarms of beggars and destitutes everywhere. On 3 January, 1975, a massive cosmetic operation was launched forcing 200,000 destitutes and slum dwellers either to return to their villages or to be moved to three 'camps' that had been hastily laid out several miles from the city. The worst of these was at Demra, 14 miles from Dhaka, which the Guardian (dated 18.2.1975) described as ' Mujib's man made disaster area'. Conditions in the camp were appalling.

More than 50,000 people were crowded into the camp which was ringed 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 9' 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 food 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 'not an act of God, but an act of government; a man-made disaster'. 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 diverting it on to his ministers.
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 Jashod, 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 Bangababan. 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 Paltan Maidan the mob was led to Mansoor Ali's house, which it savaged. 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. 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 Manzoor said that much of this killing was the result of intra-party squabbles. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who succeeded Mujib as President, told me that sometimes in his house 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. Moshtaque 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 inconceivable that he had failed the people. He dismissed nine ministers blaming 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.
Till then 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.
When dramatic gestures failed to stem the rot. Mujib persuaded himself that it was not his policies that were wrong but the system of government. Apparently the parliamentary system with a Cabinet of ministers collectively responsible to the National Assembly hampered his style. He began to complain that the parliamentary system was not suited to the requirements of Bangladesh. There was a curious redundancy in Mujib's desire for more power. His towering position as Bangabandhu, and the tight grip he had on all but eight seats in the National Assembly since the elections in the previous year had reduced Parliament to the position or a rubber stamp. No one dared deny him anything: yet Mujib hungered for more power. He decided to switch to a presidential system loosely devised on the French/American pattern. He did this in an outrageous manner.
First on 28th December 1974, he proclaimed a 'State of Emergency,' suspending fundamental rights and completely stripping the courts of their power to intervene in any of his actions. Then he rammed through the Assembly a series

of far-reaching amendments to the Constitution which reduced the National Parliament to an advisory status and 'legitimized' his own grip on absolute power.
In less than a month the National Assembly rubber-stamped the changes, 294 members voting in favor and none against. The captive press chorused its approval. The

sycophants cheered. Sheikh Mujib described this action as the 'second Revolution' aimed at 'emancipating the toiling people from exploitation and injustice'.23 He was sworn in as President on 25 January, 1975. In the short span of three years the great parliamentarian had become the great dictator!
The farcical nature of the 'Second Revolution' was exposed by the com-position of his new Cabinet. There were the same docile faces, operating in the old servile manner. Syed Nazrul Islam, who moved up to Vice President, was put in charge of the Ministry of Planning. Mansoor Ali, designated Prime Minister, continued in the Ministry of Home Affairs with a string of other portfolios. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed became Commerce Minister. The government, as a whole, continued its rapid journey downhill. Apparently all that had happened was that the Mad Hatter's dance had briefly halted for a game of musical chairs and Mujib, the puppet master, had got himself a new whip. Otherwise nothing had changed. But Mujib had irrevocably harmed himself. By concentrating all state authority in himself he had also concentrated public criticism and hostility against his own person. No longer could he pass the blame on to his ministers, officials and party men. This was a curious blunder for so astute a politician.
Towards the end of January, 1974, some young army officers were involved in an incident which would have a direct bearing on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination. The occasion was a wedding reception in the Ladies Club, Dhaka. Among the guests were Major Sharful Huq 'Dalim' and his attractive wife. She is the daughter of Mr. and Begum R. I. Chowdhury. The Chowdhurys were close friends of Sheikh Mujib and his family. Begum Chowdhury, a senior member of the Awami League, had accompanied Begum Mujibur Rahman when she came to London for medical attention in 1973. R. I. Chowdhury, who was First Secretary (Consular) in the London High Commission, had also been favored by Mujib with more than the normal extensions of service after reaching retirement age. Thus Dalim and his wife were considered part 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 Awami League's 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 roughed up the army couple. Some say the thugs attempted to kidnap them, but there is no confirmation of this. In any case Dalim's army colleagues decided to take immediate action. Accompanied by their troops they piled into two trucks, went hunting for the offending gang and ended up wrecking Ghazi Gholam Mustafa's bungalow.
23 Bangladesh Today. l.2.1975.

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 prematurely retired from service. Among them were Majors Dalim, Noor and Huda. As a gesture to the family Mujib tried to make it up to Dalim by assisting him

in setting up a business venture. The hurt, however, rankled. 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 centers 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 the Rakhi 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 Maoist Sharbohara (pro-letarian) party and the man Mujib's son Kamal had once tried to hunt down, was finally caught by the police near Chittagong towards the end of December, 1974. According to his brother-in law, Zackaria Chowdhury ('Zack'), Siraj Shikdar was escorted to Dhaka and taken to Gonobaban to meet Sheikh Mujib. Mujib tried to win him over. When Shikdar refused to compromise Mujib ordered the police to 'deaf 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 sister, Shamim, who is Zack's wife, however, maintains that the bullet wounds on Siraj's body clearly showed he had been shot from the front six times in the chest, probably with a sten gun.
Whatever the reason, it was openly talked about in Dhaka that Siraj Shikdar had been liquidated on Mujib's instructions. Shamim 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 (Sharbohara) party and looked for an opportunity to kill this murderer' she told me. Shamim was banking on the fact that, as she was one of Bangladesh's best known sculptresses who had 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, school of art. Mujib accepted the invitation but failed to turn up. 'I was getting desperate' she recalls. 'However much I tried I just couldn't get within shooting distance of him'. She never did. Fate intervened to save Mujib. Shamim fell in love, got married to Zack and left the country with her husband.
Bravo Squadron of the First Bengal Lancers under the command of Major Farook Rahman in July 1974 moved 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 black spot near the roundabout on the Narayanganj Road which was infested with dacoits. The leading bandit 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 ustad's (chief) orders'. The 'ustad' 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 police-keeping operation. 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 recalled. 'Every time we caught a chap he turned 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 shelling for doing our job.'

Farook said he received a general order in writing informing him that should he arrest anyone he would be acting on his own responsibility and that his regimental 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,' Farook said. 'It meant that we were supposed to root out corruption and malpractices, but 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 Naxalites (Maoists) 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 like Siraj Shikdar and Col. Ziauddin and such groups, if we catch them to kill them.' Farook refused to comply with these orders. 'I was not deeply interested in Marxists.' 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 lieu-tenant named Ishtiaq who has since resigned and left the country, that 'he started 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 said they were all astonished 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 organization. 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. Sharful Hussain "Sharful Hussain. This is absolutely useless. Let's go and knock off this chap." He said "Yes Sir. But think about it a bit more. I said, "All right, I'll think about it."'

'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 who I had myself 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.'

'Then I realized 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 betray 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. I would not have asked. We felt we have 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 crime of the century by destroying the feeling of such a large number of people.'

Farook said the Tongi incident made him a rebel. '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 al his feet. Politicians used to meet with exaggerated casualness at weddings, funerals and at the mosques after 'namaz' (prayer) on Friday. They were extremely careful in their intrigue. Talk could be dangerous since sycophants among them had the habit of running off to denounce each other. And 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 sounding 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, Gl-OPs in army headquarters, Major Hafiz (Brigade Major, 46 Dhaka Brigade), Major Salim of the Artillery, Major Nasir, Major Ghaffar and Sq. 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'. 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 Che Guevera'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 retired to a palace'? I debated the idea for a long time. If we had the whole army or the whole population behind us things would have been different. 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 that the Indians would object 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'.

Farook continued: 'I realized that if he was killed 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'.

In December 1974 Major Farook Rahman told his fellow plotters of a plan to kill Sheikh Mujib. It was the Prime Minister's habit to travel by one of the Bangladesh Air Force's Russian-built helicopters whenever he went any distance out of Dhaka. Not only did it save time, but for security reasons his family and personal staff thought helicopter travel an ideal arrangement. 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 went out and to take along with him an automatic pistol. At the point of the radio cross-over from Dhaka control to the next 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'.

Farrok 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 un-predictable.

The plot, like several other schemes discussed by the group, was never tried out.

As the days passed Farook began to get restive. 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 no-where. Coup by conversation did not appeal to the practical armoured corps officer particularly as Sheikh Mujib was showing signs of strengthening his own position. Mujib's promulgation of the State of Emergency was yet to come. But meanwhile Dhaka was humming with rumors 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 discarded 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 the civilians Farook listed some of Mujib's senior ministers and Awami Leaguers. Among these were Farook's own uncle, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and Mansoor Ali. The major considered them dangerous because he felt they were capable of getting help from India. On the army side Farook listed Major General Shafiullah, the Chief of Staff, his deputy Major General Ziaur (Zia) Rahman and Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, the CGS who was also his own uncle and friend. Then there was the Rakhi Bahini, Mujib's storm troopers, to be taken care of.

Each of these targets had to be covered - i.e. neutralized as far as possible, eliminated if necessary. When he worked out the numbers of troops required 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 commando-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 in target assessments and troop requirements. These he would fix in 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, the CGS. 'I knew he was an intelligent person capable of reacting, so I decided he should be neutralized 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 amazingly 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, Abdur Rab Serniabat. These were

the men closest to Mujib. Moni was an extremely shrewd, capable and ruthless politician with a powerful influence in labor and student groups. He was also Editor-in-Chief of the semi-official Bangladesh Times. Serniabat was acquisitive and ambitious. Like Mujib, both hated the army and had strong vested interests in Sheikh Mujib's mantle. They were also part of Bangabandhu's family.

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 Dhanmandi 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, Dhanmandi, 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 place 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 stalking 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 Prime Minister with a palatial residence, Gonobaban, but Mujib used it as a private office outside the secretariat while continuing to live in his own house in Dhanmandi. 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 emasculating 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 Dhanmandi was known, had a triple cordon security system. The outer 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 sten 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. Ostensibly this was to check on their vigilance, but in reality he was casually pumping 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 Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni. He had no Lancer sentries outside their homes to help him so he just squatted in the shadows observing everything 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 city map from a guide book put out by the Bangladesh Tourist Bureau. Using it as a reference, he foot-slogged 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 tactical plan complete. Only the timing had to be pencilled in. On 15 February 1975 Farook noted in his diary 'OFFENSIVE PHASE'. He was ready to launch the coup.
Just before completing the Gunnery 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 other 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 required no 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 slide 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 to divide responsibility when they seized power. Answering my 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 hesitatingly. '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 commissioned in 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 Anny on the Rhine. In 1971 he gained considerable fame as the man who announced the independence of Bangladesh over Chittagong Radio after the Pakistan 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 straightaway 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 about 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 Mujib I confronted Zia with what Farook had said. Zia did not deny it - nor 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 see Sq. Leader Liaquat. '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.' Liaquat's answer was an equally casual 'Let's go'. Farook then quickly outlined the operation scheduled for dawn next day the 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 doing this and that, 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: when faced with 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 believe that I had gone to sleep'. Farook did this by acting the part of a carefree army officer. He took Farida 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 Rakhi 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 specialized commando-style training in addition to their normal duties in the Armored Corps. These he called his 'Hunter-Killer Teams'. They were all 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 and he was certain he could depend on them at all times.

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 forced into a civil war then the monsoon is the one season they will be badly tied 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 troops. All this tended to make him a passenger in the plot. So Rashid was burning up his one month 'holiday' in Dhaka trying to drum up support for the plot within the army.

He joined in the political discussions going on in the cantonment. But he 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 had things were in Bangladesh. Shafat Jamil asked him: 'Ha, Ki. korun' (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 Gunnery School at Jessore, why not request a transfer to Dhaka 'so that we can keep in touch more conveniently'. This was, to say the least, a curious suggestion and raises question marks about the Dhaka Brigade Commander's intention. It staggered Rashid. A posting to Dhaka was then beyond his wildest dreams. He immediately suspected Shafal 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.

Farook 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 105 mm 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 could take on the Rakhi 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 familiarize the troops with sorting their equipment in the dark. Accordingly the tanks used to be started up and the crews 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 clatter of tracks as they moved around their base 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 Hali Shaar quarter 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 piety and austere life, however, had brought him the blessing of a phenomenal extrasensory perception and the gift of prophesy. The accuracy of his predictions 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 Hazari near Chittagong for range firing between 7th and 11th April. When this exercise was put back by two days, Farook took time off for a quick trip to Chittagong on 2nd April to sec 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