

Martyred intellectuals

The glory of their supreme sacrifice can never fade

THE tragedy struck when victory was in sight-- the cohorts of the Pakistani occupation army sensed the impending defeat and decided to liquidate the men who could have rendered invaluable service to the newly liberated nation. The killings of the intellectuals on December 14, 1971 were a manifestation of a beastly appetite for revenge on the part of the razakars, who were lending a helping hand to the occupation forces. The killers have rightly been identified as the most despicable beings on earth.

The plan of the occupation army and its supporters was to orphan the nation which would certainly need the sagacity and wisdom of its worthy sons to move ahead in the early days of its independence. But what they overlooked is that the teachings and ideals of the intellectuals, who dreamt of an independent Bangladesh, could not be destroyed by the assassins' bullets. The martyred intellectuals have a permanent place in the hearts and minds of people of this country. The lesson to be learned from the day is that men of character, wisdom and commitment to society cannot be defeated.

December 14 rekindles the memories of the martyrs and also reminds us of the unfinished job of building a happy and prosperous nation that they cherished so ardently as teachers, academicians, doctors, writers and, above all, true patriots.

The best way to pay tributes to the martyrs is to remove the social discrepancies and discriminations which amount to violation of people's rights. The need for having men like the one we lost on that dreadful night cannot be overemphasized, not least because we are passing through a crisis emanating, by and large, from degeneration in almost every sphere of our national life. However, we can still overcome the difficulties by remaining faithful to the teachings of the martyred intellectuals.

It is time we took a stroll down memory lane and ask ourselves what we have done to honour the supreme sacrifice that they made for the nation. Our commitment in this respect must go beyond observing a day devoted to the souls of the martyrs

IT courses from 2005

A worthwhile initiative

SPeAKING at the World Summit on Information Society Thursday, PM Khaleda Zia announced that IT is to be introduced as a mainstream subject at secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh from 2005. We would like to applaud the government's recognition of the need for widespread IT education and sincerely hope that this initiative is fully implemented.

There can be no doubt that bridging the digital divide is key to Bangladesh's continued economic and social development. In the past decade of democracy we have made some notable advances in education and providing access to economic opportunity, but if we do not move quickly to provide mass IT education and access, we are in danger of falling behind again. In these rapidly changing times, the ability to continue to grow and advance is dependent on being able to master, navigate and take advantage of the new technological landscape.

There is often a gap between policy initiatives and their implementation. Sometimes this has been owing to lack of political will to follow through on pledges and sometimes this is merely a reflection of the scarcity of resources that our political leaders have at hand to see their good ideas through to fruition.

The PM has correctly identified a key area for her government to focus on. Now comes the time for the government to make the investment of financial resources, time and energy necessary to effectuate her IT policy initiative. This means, among other things, building network infrastructure, creating the environment necessary for the industry to flourish, and lowering the cost of computers, power and access to communications systems.

Enacting IT education at the secondary and higher secondary level will require enormous resources and political will. For a developing country where increasing access to even basic education strains the government's resources, it may sound like a tall ask. But with the PM's commitment there should be enough political will and garnering of resources to make her vision work.

Impossible dreams?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

INCREASINGLY our societal attitude is becoming fatalistic as if our fate has already been predetermined and our capacity to effect changes has become finite. Unfettered demonic forces let loose upon a hapless people have brought back brutish Hobbesian state of nature where muscle reigns and money entraps truth in a genie bottle where it is muted, a silent chronicler of Banskhal incidents -- life reduced to ashes where we are asked to believe that the dacoits set the house ablaze without looting any of the valuables. People in authority are at pains to explain, even before investigation had started, that the victims being Hindus was coincidental. They could very well be right. But had such assertion been made after thorough investigation then it could have been credible. But then Bangladeshis have seen many judicial/official enquiries being instituted the reports of which had rarely seen the light of the day.

One is baffled at this continuous hide and seek game being played upon the people by the government. When Lord Hutton started his enquiry into the alleged suicide of Dr. David Kelly (in which Tony Blair and Jack Straw had to appear) the progress of the enquiry had been telecast on a continuing basis. Now Lord Hutton is reportedly writing his report and has refused to give an advance copy to the Prime Minister. One may advance the argument that it took the West hundreds of years to reach this state of openness and transparency. But such arguments are fallacious ab initio because if we have no hesitation in taking advantage of the material advancement of the Western civilisation then why should we argue that liberty is an exogenous concept for us and our society should be excused for its normative disorder. Such fragile arguments trying to stretch the meaning of words beyond the realm of credulity, such confutative attempt to befoul a perceptive public can only invite comments such as those by EU Commissioner Chris Patten who expressed European concern over deteriorating law and order "as illustrated by endemic criminality and the inability of the police to respond in an appropriate manner. The nexus between the police,

Since the art of politics is to capture power politicians may not be averse to exploiting religion for political ends. In the light of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on nine-eleven, co-sharing of power with any fundamentalist Islamic party is pregnant with ominous and dreadful possibilities. However ill-conceived and grotesque Osama bin Laden's jihad against Western "moral debasement" and mono-centric policy had been, there is no denying the fact that bin Laden's brand of "transnational Islamism" could articulate Muslim frustration far better than the pro-West Muslim countries could do. Last month Indian Deputy Prime Minister L.K.Advani voiced serious concern over the activities of Pakistani intelligence service and Al-Qaida in Bangladesh trying to destabilise the North Eastern part of India. Predictably Bangladesh rejected the allegations and pointed out that such accusations cannot but arrest the growth of good neighbourly relations between the two countries.

Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country. The country's constitution was amended to

declare Islam as the state religion. Most of the people are devout Muslims. Communal disharmony has been rare. Yet instead of resting on past laurels it may be advisable to ascertain whether there has been an increase of Islamic fundamentalism in the country. The recent demand, albeit by a small number of people, to declare the Ahmadyyas as non-Muslims is not a good sign. Attempts to rouse communal feelings on this pretext should be arrested. The core issue whether the Ahmadyyas are Muslims or not should be left to divinity to make a final determination. Bangladesh government has taken a prudent step in refusing the demand of the religious bigot to declare the Ahmadyyas as non-Muslims and by allowing them to practice their religion. But the violence perpetrated on the minority community immediately after

From an optimist's point of view one would hope that political leaders voted to power would devote their energy to servicing the people instead of servicing their own and take a long term view of national-interest projects regardless of the fact who will be in power when the projects draw to their conclusion. Traumatic birth of Bangladesh fuelled by inexorable will of the people to be free must be allowed to bloom in the globalised future of peace and prosperity.

The parliamentary elections explained as a result of "power vacuum" at that time has not helped Bangladesh's image abroad as a tolerant Muslim country.

It is well known that intra-state and inter-state migration of people takes place mainly due to poverty. If lack of physical security is added to poverty then the possibility of inter-state migration increases manifold. India has been alleging illegal presence of Bangladeshis in India for quite sometime as "economic migrants". Recently West Bengal Chief Minister alleged that more than one million Bangladeshis who had entered India legally had not returned home. Bangladesh government has naturally denied the existence of illegal presence of Bangladeshis in India. But given the porosity of Indo-Bangladesh border and its length this issue, if it is an issue at all, should not be allowed to fester and should be resolved once and for all.

Any one who has lived in the European Union countries for any length of time and is familiar with European history cannot but be convinced that cooperation pays

admirable were it not outrageously illegal. Most people concede Saddam's trial is needed. But why now? There are several reasons.

One is US public opinion. Iraqis' testimony would show what a nasty regime Saddam ran and what a humane job the Coalition did in ending it. Bush hopes this will play well with his domestic audience in 2004. Another is Iraqi and world opinion. Centcom is magnifying and intensifying its no-holds-barred anti-insurgency measures against Iraqi Sunni resistance that violate The Hague, Geneva and God knows what other Conventions.

The trials will deflect attention

Clean-cut square jawed US military officers serving in Iraq regularly appear on TV explaining that they and their men are obeying orders and just doing the job they're trained for. The German generals used this defence at Nuremberg. It didn't wash then. Can it now?

foreign minister (1949-53).

Unfortunately, the IGC lacks a Vyshinsky. Ashcroft volunteered his best prosecutors. But they are all black, Latino or white. The really good ones are Jewish or born-again Christian fundamentalists. They won't do.

This impasse was broken on 5 December, when CPA/IGC revived Mukhabarat, Saddam's dreaded secret police, to fight Sunni resistance. IGC hopes to find a Vyshinsky from among Mukhabarat veterans. It's pointless discussing the legality of holding these trials. The CPA is a law -- or an outlaw -- unto itself. It transgresses international laws, conventions and common sense with dexterous sophistry that otherwise would be

from the severity of these measures. They will also smoothen the way for the US-collaborating Shia-Kurd domination of the new government next July by bludgeoning the Sunnis into submission.

These measures are eclectic but familiar tools of military occupation. They range from collective punishment-- uprooting trees to force farmers to give information--to population control.

Thus, Abu Hishma village is "encased in razor-wire fence," (NYTimes 7 Dec 2003) in effect making it a concentration camp. The residents can enter and leave only with ID cards in English (underscoring supplied) most locals can't read.

Demolishing houses of sus-

In today's changed world after the events of nine-eleven one can not but be cautious about the possible resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh which would attempt "to create a true Islamic society, not simply by imposing the sharia, but by establishing first an Islamic state through political action" (Neo-Fundamentalism -- Oliver Roy). Such attempts would be conflictual with the practice of Islam which Muslim Bangladeshis are enjoined by their religion to do. Though US State Department's International Religious Freedom Report 2002 observed that "religious minorities are disadvantaged in access to job in the government or the military and in political office" and that the police often are slow to assist the minorities who become victims of violence, yet the State Department's Human

Rights and Democracy Record 2002-03 for South Asia has termed Bangladesh as a "moderate Muslim nation". Lest we forget in an unwitting passage to fascism we should remember that "religions have too often been used to justify the violation of human rights, in part through the hierarchical and selective use of the role of ethics and postponement of temporal justice to divine judgment or Karmic consequences. Yet the world religions have also provided a constant voice of critique against violation of human rights by calling for equality and universal compassion and love, calls which reach far beyond the mere protection of human rights" (Human Rights and Responsibilities in World Religions 2003).

Perhaps, one of the great difficulties faced by our politicians is to learn to rely on the people instead of on money and muscle and to accept defeat at the polls with good grace. After all in a democratic election for one to win some others have to lose. In neighbouring West Bengal CPM is in power for more than a quarter century not because of money and muscle but because they have been able to deliver

mind and destined for big things. Do all the above sound familiar? You bet. These are things the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) routinely do for a living in the West Bank and Gaza.

An Iraqi called Tariq told a reporter: "I see no difference between us and the Palestinians. We didn't expect anything like this after Saddam fell." And who's advising the GIs? Why, none other than the ubiquitous IDF, which pops-up alongside US forces in all sorts of places. IDF has trained Special Forces at Fort Bragg in assassination techniques (*The Guardian* 9 December 2003.)

The Israelis are good at this with

years of practice. Pentagon's willingness to learn from its former charge shows its adaptability and openness. At heart, it's a voracious knowledge absorption machine imbibing the best in killing technology to defend and spread freedom worldwide.

Meantime, while Bremmer's busy shaping an Iraqi government, his Centcom cohorts are working hard to pacify Iraq, using if necessary the Vietnam tactic of destroying the place to save it. The erudite and cultured Paul Bremmer would like to be remembered as a 21st century St. Paul bringing democracy's epistle to Iraqis. But Centcom centuries' black activities that may come to invoke comparison with Heydrich if not Kaltenbrunner could tarnish

Bremmer's image.

The saving grace is that Bremmer's unlikely to be compared with Eichmann. That honour is reserved for Bush's man of peace Sharon, the sabra PM engaged in what appears to be salami-genocide. A little slice here and today; another slice there and tomorrow. Pretty soon, there may not be any Palestinians left to deal with. Voila! problem solved.

In her classic *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Viking 1953), Hannah Arendt invoked the banality of evil. The astonishing thing about Eichmann and other Nazis was not that they were pointy-headed zealots but rather dull and plain individuals (see Daniel Goldhagen: Hitler's Willing Executioners).

To them, the Final Solution was just another job they implemented with German meticulousness. Nothing personal against Jews, you understand. Do the same texture and tone of banality and matter-of-factness animate the Coalition's "war on terror" in Iraq and elsewhere?

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It didn't wash then. Can it now?

Mumtaz Iqbal is a retired banker.

ERRATUM
We regret the inadvertent misprint of the word 'important' in the title of the first post editorial published in our last Friday issue.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Suhrawardy on the US

Lately we have seen many a letter and article catalogue the wrongs allegedly done by the United States. To put the matter in fuller perspective, I would like to share the following remarks made by one of the architects of Bengali nationalism about America:

"It is not a small matter for a nation to undertake the task of spreading prosperity and happiness, of undertaking to assure peace and progress, and of assuming the responsibilities of insuring to mankind freedom and liberty. This is not a small task which the United States of America has undertaken, and the impact of its efforts is today felt throughout the world. To undeveloped and underdeveloped nations you have given hope that they will be able to reconstruct their lives."

Those are the words of Hussein

Shaheed Suhrawardy, hardly the proverbial 'American agent', spoken in his July 1957 address to the United States Senate.

Esam Sohall
Wichita, USA

Re: Shabash Bangladesh

I refer to the commendable analysis of Dr. B.C.'s speech by Mr. Nazmul Karim (Dec 6). What has this gentleman doing all these days since he was returned to the pavilion by Khaleda Zia? We do not require such educated and self-proclaimed civil society members. Dr. B.C. must know that an MRCP or FRCS degree in medicine is not all it takes to be leading a nation.

Our future leader must have vision, wisdom and courage -- vision like that of Dr. Mahatir Mohamad, wisdom like that of

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and courage like that of Bangabandhu.

Dr. Rubaiya Naheed
Princeton University,
New Jersey, USA

Changing colour will not solve our problem

So our police force is now changing the colour of their uniform. Is it to hide their shame or to fool us even more? I think the police should get clothes without pockets. And since there will be no pockets, I believe it will go some way towards encouraging our officers not to take any bribes.

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

My friend Ahmedul Kabir

Returning to Bangladesh after an absence of five years, I have learned through your newspaper about the sad death of my friend Ahmedul Kabir with whom I had been acquainted during my 25 years stay in Dhaka (from 1973 till 1998).

I used to contact regularly Ahmedul to obtain or confirm various information. Occasionally, when Belgian journalists were visiting Bangladesh, I would always advise them to contact Ahmedul to get a balanced view of the country's problems. As we were often invited to the same official receptions, I would search the company of Ahmedul for whom I had and keep a deep admiration. I was particularly fascinated by his great sense of humour, his honesty and his secularism. I remember in particular how he was attached to his French made car: a vintage Citroen, the only model of its type

in Dhaka.

I remember also how he had agreed to write an article in Sangbad about leprosy in Bangladesh, after I had drawn his attention to the ignorance and prejudice of the general public concerning this disease; he immediately sent one of his staff to the leprosy hospital of Jalchatra where, at the time, a few Belgians were working. Ahmedul was a great man and a very warm friend. I will miss him.

Benoit Labrique
Ex-Charge d'Affaires of the Belgian Embassy in Bangladesh

Deteriorating law and order situation and the people

Improvement of the law and order situation should be the first priority of the government. Because the most important factor for the

smooth functioning of economic activities and to attract foreign investment in the country, is to improve the law and order. In Bangladesh, the situation is deteriorating day by day rather than improving. One can easily perceive the present situation by going through the newspaper reports on killings, kidnappings, rapes, and extortion and so on how the situation is getting from bad to worse.

In such an ominous situation, what role the political parties should play. Political parties should help improve the situation by working together. But in our country, the scenario is quite frightening and disappointing. Every political party in our country is nurturing terrorists for selfish political gains. Police administration cannot perform their job independently as there is always pressure from the political parties to act according to their will. And people have lost their faith in political parties and law enforcers.

Poor people are denied access to justices, as they do not have money to afford the expense of litigation. The faith in the judicial system, which is the last resort of the people has been threaten as political affiliation are getting priority in nominating justice of the high court. All these factors have contributed to the chaotic situation in our society. The party in power and opposition are playing with the fate of the people. They are most interested in party interest rather the interest of the mass people who voted them to power. But how long this situation will continue nobody knows. If the political parties truly realise the interest of the people and the country, the situation in our country is bound to change within a very short period of time.

Mallik Akram Hossain

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Indo-Pak relation

India and Pakistan, two perennial foes have normalised their relation. PM of India AB Vajpayee will visit Pakistan in January to join SAARC summit. So both India and Pakistan have a good chance to kick off talks to bury the hatchet. To improve relations, Pakistan and India should set up economic diplomacy. They should commence FTA for the welfare of two nations. They should exchange FDIs in large scale. In the age of globalisation and free market economy, economic diplomacy is the best therapy for entente. Mr Vajpayee and Mr Musarat should be pragmatic, technical and altruistic enough minimise the rivalry between these countries. I hope peace will prevail in South Asia.

Molla Mohammad shaheen
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