

Victory Day resolve

United we forge ahead

THE nation today celebrates the 33rd anniversary of the glorious victory, which heralded the end of the nine excruciating months and gave us a political identity of our own. It was a rare moment in history when the world at large watched a new nation being born out of the pangs and pains of a bloody struggle. The struggle was a difficult one, but ultimately a subjugated nation's yearning to breathe free won over a barbaric regime's plan to perpetuate itself. We broke the shackles of colonial rule and came out in the open--liberated and ready to take the leap forward-- to have our rightful place among the nations of the world. The voyage across the turbulent sea had come to an end, our finest hour was struck.

Victory Day is an occasion for jubilation as well as deep introspection for the nation which paid such a high price for political freedom. The euphoria surrounding the Day will never die down, but we still have to ask ourselves whether the dreams of the martyrs of the Liberation War have been fulfilled, and whether we have achieved as a nation the goals set by the architects of our independence. The truth of the matter is that a nagging divisiveness in the political arena continues to debilitate the nation; economic emancipation of people is a distant target; and social security still eludes us as law and order remains a sore point.

We can never pay back the debts that we owe to the heroes who laid down their lives to give us a better future. But our indebtedness to the great souls increases with every failure, as we move away from building the society that they dreamt of.

So, unity is the crying need of the hour and no occasion is more suitable for the nation to take a fresh vow to rise above crass divisiveness that cannot ensure collective good than the 33rd anniversary of our independence.

Political freedom is not an end in itself but a means to an end which is the economic emancipation of the people. That is what the hard-earned independence is all about.

Saddam captured

A fair trial is essential

THE question is what will become of Saddam now that he has been captured. His capture also brings forth the question of why he was removed from power in the first place. The principle pretext the US and its allies used for invasion -- that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction -- has proved untenable and the failure to find any such weapons has cost the US-led invasion and occupation a great deal of credibility world-wide.

A fair and open trial in which all the facts of Saddam's brutal rule are brought to light would go a long way to restoring some of this lost credibility. The charges against Saddam and the catalogue of his crimes should be presented in public and he must be given every opportunity to defend himself. Even the worst regimes of the last century were permitted a fair trial at Nuremberg, and Saddam is no less deserving of this right, even though it was one he denied so many of his fellow countrymen and women.

Nothing would be more harmful to US interests and indeed to the security of the world than for him to be taken in chains to the US for some kind of show-trial or kangaroo court. The credibility of the US government has been almost fatally compromised by images of detainees in chains in Guantanamo Bay being denied even the most basic of human rights. The US must not make the same mistake with Saddam.

The latest indications are that Saddam will be tried as a war criminal under the Geneva Convention. Whether this means that he will escape justice for crimes that do not fall under the ambit of war crimes is unclear. We sincerely hope this is not the case as the bulk of his crimes were committed in Iraq and for the most part it was Iraqis themselves who suffered the worst at his hands. An Iraqi court or some kind of ad-hoc tribunal convened in Iraq where he would be forced to answer for all the crimes of his regime would therefore be the suitable forum to bring him to book.

Victory Day

Time to heal the divisions

DILARA CHOUDHURY

TO DAY is the thirty-second anniversary of our victory day. It is a day of both rejoicing and reckoning. Rejoicing because this was the day the enemy was defeated and Bangladesh became free of Pakistani occupation. Reckoning because it is a day of reflection and contemplation about the sacrifices of the martyrs and a day to take stock of our journey as an independent nation. It is a day when we must be sober and think deeply about how far we have succeeded in fulfilling the promises of the Liberation War -- to what extent we have been able to establish a prosperous and exploitation-free society ruled by the rule of law and having equitable distribution of wealth. It is a day when we all have to judge the affairs of the state impartially, impersonally, rationally and logically.

What is the state of affairs in independent Bangladesh like? Well, looking back, one feels that there have been both successes and failures. First, the achievements. We can take legitimate pride that, after ups and downs, the country reverted back to democracy in 1991. It is heartening to note our abiding faith in democracy. And there have been noteworthy strides in the social and economic sectors -- the country has had steady economic growth, especially since 1991, the life expectancy is longer, more and more people are getting access to education and health care. All these are all very encouraging. But what is mind-boggling is that despite all these achievements, the state of Bangladesh is confronting a persistent crisis -- the crisis that emanates from the lack of accountability and transparency in our political order. And that we have not yet been able to institutionalize our nascent democracy, although when the country became independent in 1971, it was firmly believed that having democracy rooted in the soil of Bangladesh would not be difficult given the near homogeneity of its population. It was thought that a system would be established through which all frictions and divisions would be resolved.

Sadly it is to be reckoned that even after thirty-two years of independence we are compelled to admit that instead of evolving any mechanism through which all frictions and conflicts could be resolved, we have created an environment in which we seem to be submerging into ever increasing fragmentation and factionalism. The first and foremost disappointment is that the nation building has remained a far cry. It is yet to be achieved. It is indeed a tragedy that a homogenous nation like Bangladesh still suffers from a national identity crisis. And it is underving to note that we are a divided nation. Then there is the crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where peace has remained as elusive as ever. The anti-Ahmadia movement and its religious ramifications are ominous to say the

evolution of these attitudes and beliefs depend on a life-time of socialization, as it happened in the developed West and in a country like Bangladesh it is not possible to have it overnight, but it is equally argued that it is also possible for the developing nations to learn the inner working and culture of democracy if they consciously try with commitments and political will. And it is the political parties that are entrusted with the primary responsibility to instill such culture in any polity by setting examples through their behavior. But we find that our parties do not set such examples for their activists or the citizenry at large.

On the contrary, misperceptions, mistrust, intolerance and antagonism between the two major parties vitiate the environment of a democratic political

three peaceful transfer of power. What a pity it is to witness that the present Jatiyo Sangsad ever after twelve sittings continues more as a façade than a reality in the context of the absence of opposition and effective committee system.

Absence of opposition in the Jatiyo Sangsad is a deep malaise in our polity. The leadership has been unable to create a constitutional opposition due to their intolerant attitudes. Again it is the outcome of the culture of intolerance. In the developed democracies, the treasury and opposition mutually cooperate, but in our case the party in power creates barriers that keep the opposition away from the floor of the parliament, whereas the opposition opposes for the sake of opposition and prefers street agitation to constitutional politics. Time and again, attempts are made

crats in Bangladesh are mostly the products of 'kleptocracy', a term used by political scientist Stanislaw Andrewski, who while analyzing the politics of developing nations dubbed it (kleptocracy) a system that allows the political powers to extract economic surplus. We are familiar with the 'kleptomaniacs' (the ones who impulsively steal even if they don't need it), which gives us the clue that in 'kleptocracy' those who hold political power beginning from the highest position to a lowly fourth class employee milk the state rather impulsively and without any qualms of conscience. That means corruption is pervasive and the entire public edifice is like a bad infestation of woodworm. Everybody is affected in this system excepting the ones who hold the political power and public offices

susceptible to that opinion. They mostly play a supplementary role. They can create new momentum or channelize the politics in a different direction only when there is unity between them and the political parties as witnessed during the anti-autocracy movement of 1990. Moreover, there must be unity within the groups in order to play the supplementary role. Here also, unfortunately, the politics of intolerance has created a rift by politicizing them.

The picture discussed above, unfortunately, is not a happy one. But this is the reality in Bangladesh politics. Naturally we have now to ponder as to how we can effectively get out of this vicious circle. Needless to say that it would require concerted efforts by both the citizens' groups and the political parties. The citizens' groups despite their divisions must try to create public opinion against the present state of affairs. Public opinion should be created for institutional reforms like how to make the parliament functional, how to make political parties more responsible and accountable, and how to make them work together, and how to put pressure on the political parties to implement them. The donors may also pressurize the stakeholders for the necessary reforms. The recent initiative taken to create a third platform is a good one and the momentum should be kept alive. But it should be kept in mind that since political parties are the main agents of change, they must be made to act. Otherwise, no matter how innovative the citizens' groups may be the necessary change would not be forth coming.

It should be uppermost in the mind that Bangladesh cannot prosper if the state is unable to perform the three fundamental functions namely secure order, provide a way for peaceful change of power, and meet the demands of its citizenry in widest possible scale. On this victory day we hope that political parties would comprehend the gravity of the situation and come forward to do the needful.

Dilara Choudhury is Professor, Govt and Politics, Jahangirnagar University.

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least. Deteriorating law and order, escalating violence/terrorism, and the increasing repression of women are omnipresent. One of the fundamentals of the state seems to be at stake as it finds itself unable to secure order.

What is it that is hampering the stabilization of the system? Of all the factors cited by the analysts, the most important factor that is creating impediments is our political culture that is characterized by authoritarianism and intolerance. In many ways the political parties are to be blamed for creating such an atmosphere. It is evident by the ways the two major political parties behave towards each other. They have demonstrated their utter inability to create a balanced political culture that is the *sine qua non* of a stable democratic order. It is amazing how our political leadership ignores the necessity of creating an environment in which democracy's set of values like moderation, tolerance, civility, efficacy, knowledge and participation, could be practiced.

Although it is argued that the

culture. Both parties feel that it has the moral superiority over the other. The tensions between the two parties have been reflected in the statements of the leadership. The ones they make about each other. Interestingly, the statements have no connection with the political situation of the country whatsoever and they simply lack a minimum modicum of civility. Our leaders are oblivious that these kinds of belligerency give wrong signals and they have serious repercussions on the polity as evidenced by the increasing violence and hatred in Bangladesh politics. As a result, this culture of intolerance, frictions and divisions gets reflected in every strata of our society. Everywhere we find intolerance. Dissent has no place to be it is within the institutions or in personal lives. The general norm is that one must belong to one camp or the other. If one dissents one must belong to the opposite camp. It is like the culture of tribalism. No institutions can function fully in such environment. It is, thus, no wonder that our Jatiyo Sangsad has remained dysfunctional even after

to overthrow the government through street violence and agitation, ignoring the fact that it may create impediments for another fundamental of the state, namely providing a mechanism to effectuate a peaceful transfer of power. Both treasury and the opposition forget that together they represent the nation and their mutual cooperation is needed to make the system functional. They forget that their confrontation politics is encouraging extra-constitutional politics rather than the constitutional ones.

Consequently the increasing violence and terrorism have taken over the center stage of our politics. Politics today has become criminalised. There has been an ominous nexus between black money, musclemen and politics. The influence of black money and muscle (terrorism) has become imbedded into politics due to the parties' confrontational politics and their unwillingness to register. The appearance of godfathers within the parties has been possible due to their lack of accountability or transparency. These pluto-

Anyone who lives in Bangladesh does not need further explanation for what it is like to live in a system where money buys power and power decides everything, beginning from the application of law or getting a job in the public sector or receiving the services for which ordinary citizens have already paid. State, thus, is unable to meet the demands of its citizenry in widest possible scale. And Bangladesh now has the distinction of becoming the most corrupt nation of the world three times in a row.

The question now comes to mind as to what extent the citizens groups are able to arrest the increasing criminalization of our politics and contribute to the emergence of clean ones that would help institutionalize democracy. A deeper look reveals that citizens' groups have a limited role to play and are not fully capable to play the role of the political parties, as they have no organizational strength to mobilize the masses. Their main contribution is to create public opinion and thereby make the political parties

Justice delayed...a third of a century gone

ESAM SOHAI writes from Kansas, USA

YET another anniversary of December 16 is upon us. Thirty two years after the capitulation of the Pakistani Occupation Forces, there is little doubt that Bangladesh has come into its own and made its place secure in the comity of nations. Yet, some egregious wounds remain unhealed to this day. As Iraqis become the latest people to establish a war crimes tribunal to try Saddam's henchmen, it should not escape our attention that one full generation later, not one single trial has been held to account for the genocide of 1971. It is almost as if there is an unseen force that wants us to forget the justice due long enough to ensure that there is nobody left to be held accountable. Page after page of our newspapers and hour after hour of our public speeches are devoted to Palestinians, Iraqis, Chechnyans, and Kashmiris but few and far in between are calls for justice for our own people. There should be someone left in Bangladesh who will plead the unfashionable and often deliberately forgotten case of our own victims because I will assure you that Palestinians or Chechnyans

will not; they are busy with their own affairs, as should we be.

Granted there is significant controversy whether the magic number of 3 million killed in 1971 is accurate or not. Frankly, I am not dogmatic about the number. May be it was 3 million or just a million or somewhere in between. May be the immediate post-independence government exag-

erated the number of massacre victims to earn extra sympathy. Perhaps the number of women raped was less than 200,000. Fine. The dispute over exact numbers, however, does not detract from the fact that a massacre took place that was planned with precision and executed ruthlessly. The numerical semantics lessen the burden of guilt only to the extent that some perpetrators, to recall Nuremberg prosecutor Sir Hartley Shawcross, 'forfeited their lives

once while others more guilty forfeited it many times over.

No matter how we analyze the numbers, they put to shame the extent of all the other alleged atrocities in the world that we regularly harp about. It was neither journalistic license nor patriotic fervour that prompted Anthony Mascarenhas, erstwhile Pakistan's premier newsmen, to call 1971 the 'ugliest

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Pro-liberation forces, pro-Bangladeshi nationalism forces, pro-this, pro-that. What have all these alliances of convenience done to bring the matter of the 1971 genocide to the world's attention, let alone take steps to initiate a war crimes trial?...On this thirty-second anniversary of Victory Day, we need someone to stand up and speak for the victims of the Bangladesh genocide and demand the justice that they so richly have deserved for a third of a century.

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And the masses wait for someone, somewhere, to pick up their cause with as much passion as the

cause of other peoples has been championed. Poor masses, for they understand not that the most dangerous place in a modern society is between a politician and publicity: Palestinians and Kashmiris generate publicity, even in Dhaka; forgotten Bengalis from 1971 do not. While rightly so Robin Cook said that 'War crimes have no statute of limitations.' But their perpetrators and victims do have natural limits on their lives.

In the winter of 1939-40 as Nazis gobbled up country after country and threatened Britain itself, the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain kept on talking about everything except Hitler, hoping people would forget the looming danger. Infuriated by the premier's nonchalance, then Opposition leader Clement Atlee called on the back-bench Tory MP Winston Churchill to 'stand up and speak for England'.

On this thirty-second anniversary of Victory Day, we need someone to stand up and speak for the victims of the Bangladesh genocide and demand the justice that they so richly have deserved for a third of a century.

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The contribution of Sandwip to the struggle for freedom

ABUL KALAM ELIAS

SANDWIP, off the western coast of Chittagong, about 12 kilometre from the mainland across Sandwip channel, is a legendary pretty island, of about 258 square miles.

As an island of glorious tradition and antiquity, Sandwip has produced not only a great many sailors and sea-men, but also fearless fighters and revolutionaries.

Raja Dilal, a forgotten king of Sandwip, who was a heroic personality of the 17th century, fought for freedom until his death, overcome by the tremendous odds arranged against him by the Mughals.

Since Dilal had inborn courage, intelligence and ambition, he, a cowboy king, welded his land together with the iron hand of power and unity. By and by, he became uncrowned king of Sandwip Island. This legendary archer robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. This is why he is called Robin Hood of the East.

Sandwipians are thus descendants of heroes almost from time immemorial. Oh! to think over the palmy days of Sandwip. We have to remember Raja Dilal, Fateh Khan, Manik Chand and Abu Torab who put up a gallant fight against aggression.

excellence in battle. It was thus that Abu Torab kept up the glory of his forefathers.

The history of Sandwip thus is the history of immortal heroes. Even in the Balkan wars, many sturdy young men hailing from Sandwip ran away from home to fight for the Turks. (that is for Islam). This speaks volumes for the fact that Sandwipians are known for bravery, valour of spirit and elevation of mind.

It is said that, the past has given birth to the present, and the present will give birth to the future.

Sandwip produced the revolutionary leader Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed who was imprisoned many a time during British rule and who a great influence on no less an outstanding personality than rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, who himself admitted his indebtedness to this haven of a political thinker.

Lalmohan Sen, who was one of the valiant fighters in the Chittagong Armoury raid, the protagonist of which was Master Da Surja Sen, was a worthy son of Sandwip. While studying in a normal school of the town, Lalmohan Sen, only 21 years old, went to his native island, broke into the safe of his uncle and returned to the band of revolutionary patriots to make a gift to the revolutionary funds. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and transportation to the Andaman Island penal colony. He was set free from Dhaka jail in 1946, but eventually fell victim to a communal riot.

Many a son of our soil of Sandwip has attained martyrdom, many have been wounded or disabled.

Jashimuddin, an intermediate

student of Chittagong College, of which this writer is an alumnus, was uncompromising, fearless and tenacious. He was arrested from Sandwip on May 10, 1971, imprisoned in Chittagong only to be released later on. But he again repaired to the war front. Then he was captured by the occupation army on December 10. He sacrificed himself at the altar of freedom.

During the Liberation War, the Pakistani occupation army sailed

the shelterless coming from the Chittagong mainland in the dead of night, running the risk of life, in search of safety to escape the wrath and brutality of Yahya's guns. Sandwip, a land of twelve saints, was thus an abode of peace and refuge for some time during the Liberation War.

Let us have a peep into the momentous role played by a group of intellectuals and writers of Sandwip at the critical juncture of the Bangali Nation in 1971.

There is not a shadow of doubt about it that Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra will be ever remembered by the future generation for its glorious role in the annals of the freedom movement. It was when the barbaric hordes of the descendants of Nadir and Chengis Khan indulged in massacre, genocide and destruction to try to break the backbone and morale of the Bengali Nation that the organisers and initiators of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, consisting of writers and artists who were passing their awful days in exile, came forward and infused vitality into the hearts of freedom fighters all over the country.

across the sea in gun-boats in the middle of the year and carried on their persecution and torture upon the innocent islanders for a number of days. Zahed Hossain, a lawyer by profession and supporter of the Awami League was arrested and brutally murdered on the historic Kargill Bridge of Sandwip. The Pakistani army killed quite a number of defenceless, unarmed men and women in the vicinity of Sandwip town. But the cowardly barbaric hordes were frightened and in constant apprehension of approaching cyclones and calamity. Thus they left Sandwip, bag and baggage, in no time. The people of Sandwip heaved a sigh of relief. Afterwards, Sandwip became a safe haven for

It was after the crack-down of March 25, which is called the blackest night, when humanity was in agony in Bangladesh, when the hounds of Yahya Khan were let loose on the unsuspecting and unarmed people of Bangladesh to set at naught, their democratic rights and to wipe out the very vestiges of a Bengali Nation. Thus our War of Liberation began.

The Bengali Nation has not yet overcome the shock of the sudden massacre campaign of the blackest night. With the widening flow of refugees taking shelter in Indian refugee camps to find minimum safety, the entire Bangladesh moved a step nearer to blood-bath.

But every cloud has a silver

lining. The whole nation was plunged into the deep sea of grief and frustration. A pall of gloom descended upon earth at daybreak of March 26. At that very moment an English handbill of proclamation of independence by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was received by Kazi Hosna Ara Begum, a programme announcer of Chittagong Radio who gave it to Belal Mohammad, the staff script-writer for Chittagong Radio. Abul Kashem Sandwip, Vice Principal of

Mujibur Rahman presented by Abul Kashem Sandwip.

No sooner had the Bengali people risen in arms against the Pakistani persecution and oppression than came afloat the voice of Abul Kashem Sandwip -- lasting about five minutes -- it was a clarion call to resist and repulse the Pakistani occupation army with might and main. Many Bengalis could not refrain from shedding tears of joy, relief and pride at that auspicious moment. Bengalis stood

laudable venture was able to keep up the morale of the whole nation. Amongst them are the names of Mohammad Shah Bangali (a folk-singer), Belal Mohammad (first organiser and planner), Abul Kashem Sandwip (first proclaimer) and Shamsul Huda Chowdhury who was the programme organiser of Rajshahi Radio before the Liberation War, and who managed to cross the Indian border and afterwards worked as one of the enthusiastic workers of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. He tendered yeoman's service to the nation.

Belal Mohammad and Abul Kashem Sandwip regularly contributed not only to the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, but also to the papers and bulletins published from Mujib Nagar. The freedom loving people of Sandwip take pride in them as compatriots and fellow countrymen.

Mohammad Shah Bangali is an honoured name for another reason. His unique contribution to the moulding of public opinion at the time of the general election of 1970 is an undeniable fact.

Mohammad Shah Bangali was the constant associate and ardent follower of Sheikh Mujib during the campaign for the general election wherever he went, from Teknaf to Tetulia. This popular folk-singer used to sing folk-songs prior to the public address of political leaders at the mammoth gatherings. Thus this famous singer evoked wide appreciation and applause through the length and breadth of the nation.

His songs and melodies, as a matter of fact, paved the way for winning over the hearts of the audience just like a farmer prepares his field before sowing the seeds.

