

On Enayetullah Khan and *Holiday*

KHADEMUL ISLAM

TODAY is the first anniversary of Enayetullah Khan's death. A year gone already. He was such a fixture on the Dhaka scene that I am hard-pressed to believe he is not around in his trademark kurta with the sleeves rolled up.

I first met Enayetullah Khan sometime in early 1973, when I was a student at Dhaka University. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in power, and it is difficult to convey to our younger readers today the sheer force of charisma that he exercised. Yet a small but vocal opposition to even this godlike authority had begun to emerge, mainly due to political forces and expectations that had been unexpectedly radicalized by a war of national liberation.

Debates raged in the public arena about the future direction of the nation. The left spat and splintered; JSD breathed fire; Maulana Bhashani held mammoth meetings; Siraj Sikdar's men distributed leaflets.

And somewhere in this unholy mix was *Holiday*, taking aim at the establishment with its extravagant English. A certain section of Dhaka's newspaper readers took to it immediately. Especially we students, who were starved for radical fare. We were free to read Franz Fanon, Regis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution*, the Latin American *dependencia* and *foco* theorists all day long, but who would interpret the local events, the history unfolding right in front of us, in living left-wing colour? It was into this void that *Holiday* poured itself.

English newspapers then were timid voices, without the corporate sponsors or money which we see nowadays, dependent on government largesse in the form of ads

Debates raged in the public arena about the future direction of the nation. The left spat and splintered; JSD breathed fire; Maulana Bhashani held mammoth meetings; Siraj Sikdar's men distributed leaflets. And somewhere in this unholy mix was *Holiday*, taking aim at the establishment with its extravagant English. A certain section of Dhaka's newspaper readers took to it immediately. Especially we students, who were starved for radical fare. *Holiday* was contradictory, brash, and defiant. Today I recognize that some of that material was hot air. But it didn't matter then. We lapped it up. And I wanted to write for it.

and newsprint for survival. But *Holiday* under Enayetullah Khan refused to bow and scrape, and to us this in itself seemed a radical act.

Week after week it put into our hands an idiosyncratic blend of opinions, reports, and features: Badruddin Omar on "social imperialism" and its local "comprador-bourgeoisie" (a term that lived and died with the old *Holiday*); Enayetullah Khan's dire warnings on the evils of Indira Gandhi and the Indo-Soviet axis; denunciations of nationalized public enterprises as state socialism; "Maoist" analyses of "subjective conditions for revolution;" wild conjectures about Soviet designs behind their mine-clearing operations in Chittagong port; rants on the personal lives of ruling politicians.

Holiday was contradictory, brash, and defiant. Today I recognize that some of that material was hot air. But it didn't matter then. We lapped it up. And I wanted to write for it.

Dhaka, after the long nightmare of 1971, had sprung back to life by 1973. League cricket matches had resumed; Dhaka Club housie nights were packed; local theatre groups were in business again. I caught a play staged at the Mahila Samity auditorium, wrote a review, and clutching the typed pages in

my hands went to the *Holiday* office near Jonaki cinema hall with a friend.

Inside the small inner room were four desks. Seated behind two of the desks were two men. On one side, smoking a menthol cigarette, was somebody who I later came to know as Fazal M. Kamal, then *Holiday*'s executive editor. Seated behind the other, facing us, was a burly, fair-complexioned man in a short-sleeved khaki shirt. He was staring out of the window lost in thought. This had to be Enayetullah Khan, I thought. He turned his head and saw us standing in the doorway.

"Yes?"
"I've written an article for *Holiday*," I said as I stepped forward and handed him the pages.

Immediately interest and curiosity flared up in his eyes. He looked at me again, at my long hair, jeans, and yellow T-shirt. That outfit wasn't as common as it is today. He swiftly scanned the first page, then flipped to the last page and glanced through it. Then looked up at me and asked, in Bengali, "Khademul Islam, tai na?" (he had noted the author's name on the first page).
"Yes," I said.

"You can leave it there," he said pointing to Fazal M Kamal's desk. I walked over to the other desk and put down the pages. Then looked

around, but nobody said anything else. It seemed a smart move to get out of there. When we were at the front gate I glanced back at the window and saw Enayetullah Khan looking out again. The old expression was back on his face.

The next issue of *Holiday* had my piece. After that whenever I would submit something they always ran it. I was a page 4 man, totally non-political, some sort of arts and culture gadfly.

Over the next two years I got to know Enayetullah Khan (I never did call him "Mintoo bhai"). For *Holiday* I aspired to write an English that was idiomatic and "hip." My efforts did not win over everybody; my grandfather once lectured me on "clarity in writing." But to my surprise Enayetullah Khan sympathized with my endeavours.

Once I wrote an article titled, I think, "Pie in the Sky" that attempted to tie in American black humourist writers such as Bruce Jay Friedman with the Pentagon's KH-11 "Big Bird" spy satellite. It was, to put it mildly, an experimental piece of writing. And yet, though I'm sure Enayetullah Khan didn't really give two shakes about the content, he did acknowledge the spirit behind it. For the next two or three months whenever we ran into each other at the *Holiday* office he would smile, twirl his forefinger

above his head and say, "Pie in the sky, pie in the sky, eh, Khadem?"

After 1975, I lost sight of him. Our paths had diverged: I had become a university teacher, and he had gone from being an anti-establishment figure to being a solid, card-carrying member of the establishment. He was minister, he was president of Dhaka Club, he was a confidant of the top-level leadership, he was way above my league. I also now wrote very seldom for *Holiday*. He however remained his affable and urbane self with me if we did happen to run into each other. That was because he had loyalty. Enayetullah Khan might have become a politically connected figure after 1975, but I think he never forgot the days when he had been a besieged figure and *Holiday* had felt the full wrath of the state. And he was not the type to forget that it was during that time that, unbidden, of my own accord, I had turned up at his paper wanting to write for it.

Later, in the '80s we connected again. He was separated from his first wife and living by himself in Dhanmondi near Kalabagan. I would drop by the house to chat. He had a wide range of friends and they would sometimes drop by in a gang in the evenings yelling "Mintoo bhai, Mintoo bhai." He would talk on anything: about having been a minister, about his father, about North Korea (which he had recently visited and had been mystified by its deserted, spacious boulevards).

"People don't come out of their homes there," he said.

"Is that what Kim Il Sung's revolution has done to them?" I asked.

"Maybe," he had replied in a wondering tone.

He could even joke about his English. "That's because," he

replied when I once mentioned his tortuous, winding sentences, "I write Bangla so well."

He knew interesting people of his own pro-Chinese political stripe. Once he suddenly told me that he was going over to meet Neville Maxwell, who was in town. Did I want to tag along? Neville was the Oxford Sino-logist whose beautifully researched book *India's China War* had argued that it was India that was responsible for the 1962 Sino-Indian war, that Chinese territorial claims were genuine. It had made Neville persona non grata with India's Nehruvian external policy establishment.

Inexplicably, I said no, thank you. Till this day I regret it, since years later at Fletcher School in Boston I became good friends with Neville's son Ian, and I lost the opportunity to tell him: "You know, Ian, I met your dad once in suspicious circumstances..." Ian, by the way, had an inexhaustible fund of Mao jokes, which I'm sure Enayetullah Khan would not have approved of, for despite the rich contradictions of pursuing an elitist lifestyle while talking about the villages encircling the towns, he was a man genuinely fascinated by the Chinese Maoists.

Some time afterwards, I left for the United States and didn't see him for sixteen or seventeen years. After I came back I did meet him, and there was that same urbane affability. The talk went on to literature, and we talked easily about South Asian novels in English, about Indian English language poets, poetry, and Bengali poems.

At one point apropos of nothing I said: "You remind me of *Holiday* during those years."

He didn't say anything, just smiled, a little ruefully.

And in truth, as far as I was concerned, he should have



remained the dissident editor of a dissident weekly. But a rebel co-opted becomes a ghost of his former self, the aura goes and it becomes almost impossible to track back. *Holiday* never did get back its old bite.

I last met him at a wedding. "Khadem," he said, peering down at me from his height, "you come meet me. There is something I have to talk to you about."
"Okay."

But somehow it never hap-

pened. Next thing I knew was he was in Canada for medical treatment. And then...

It is impossible for a *Holiday* of the '72-'75 era to exist nowadays. You just can't make that kind of wild solo flights anymore in our present-day corporatist media culture. That kind of thing happens just once in a generation.

Khademul Islam is Literary Editor, The Daily Star.

When greed is good

The League needs an election. It has become common currency that the Islamist-BNP alliance is falling apart and cannot even command the loyalty of former dictator Ershad's support. The writing is on the wall. They will be trounced at the polls. Any miraculous BNP victory in January will simply not be believed and will be brought down by people power almost immediately.

FARID BAKHT

HOW much vote rigging can the Awami League accept? How confident is Sheikh Hasina that her party commands the majority of the people's support? Do they feel they can obtain at least 45% of the vote, despite cheating? Have her tacticians done their calculations seat by seat in a first-past-the-post system?

In this game of bluff and threat of street power and shutdown, will her advisers tell her to accept a certain level of irregularities in order to participate in a flawed election and still win?

In a scenario of no elections and a military takeover, as indicated in the London Economist magazine this month, the Awami League cannot win.

The League needs an election. It has become common currency that the Islamist-BNP alliance is falling apart and cannot even command the loyalty of former dictator Ershad's support. The writing is on the wall. They will be trounced at the polls.

Any miraculous BNP victory in January will simply not be believed and will be brought down by people power almost immediately.

BNP II, otherwise known as LDP (and previously Bikalpadhara) will get its revenge and propel the

Awami League to power, by splitting the BNP vote in a dozen constituencies. The Jamaat must fear a complete meltdown. Will that be the final nail in the coffin of the ludicrous idea of an Islamist takeover? Nevertheless, think tanks in the US still consider 2011 the danger period for such an eventuality.

That seems very far away when seen through the lenses of the typical decision maker in Dhaka. All minds are concentrated on the two ladies, their families and associated sycophants. To some it will be reminiscent of the negotiations in early 1971 when miscalculations led to tragedy and ultimately liberation and then government by ill-prepared leaders.

2007 will see no "civil war," even though some excitable politicians like to allude to that threat and we will see no liberation from the clutches of an incompetent elite.

It boils down to this: either the politics carve out a decent path to some kind of election (to which Jimmy Carter can sign off to) and abide by the result or they must kiss goodbye to power for a few years.

Since politics are geared to making money while in office, in one sense one could say that their greed could save democracy. Do they really want to miss out on the commissions to be earned dishing out licenses? Now that BNP ministers have bought apartments in London and New York, surely it is the turn of the opposition.

Of course that means nothing to ordinary people as they will suffer more years of inept government, but at least we can say we still have parliamentary democracy.

So one expects the Awami League to play poker, take us to the

hill and then dutifully engage in an electoral rather than street contest.

The danger is that they will enjoy the theatre and processions of ambassadors amid media speculation and overlay their hand.

If they do, that will be the end of the Awami League.

The warning by Dr Kamal Hossain to the opposition in 2005 is going unheeded. In sum, he advised them not to rock the boat so much that it tips over and everyone sinks. Witnessing the swift nature of military coups, he knows, like others of his generation, that politicians are playing with fire, and invariably get burnt.

While Bangladesh seems to have a remarkable capacity in muddling through despite political standoffs, we must acknowledge that the situation is serious. These are not ordinary days.

What strikes me is how we seem to be enjoying the show while ignoring the issues raised by so many powerless people.

Who now talks about the wide-

spread protests in the critical garments industry in the summer of discontent? Where is the debate about tens of millions of farmers and the landless? What about the hundreds of thousands of rickshaw and auto-rickshaw pullers and drivers in Dhaka? Threatened with expulsion they have always seen off weak governments. They are unlikely to retain their livelihood in the face of an iron fist. Will an Awami League regime be able to provide 2000 extra megawatts of electricity as a fitting tribute to those protesters shot dead in Kansat?

Is it not strange that hardly anything has been said about just what we are going to do with the gas and coal that lies under the surface?

All strategic issues are being ignored while we lie trapped in short term tactical ploys.

The quicker this show is over, the better. One way or the other.

Farid Bakht is based in London.

Change for the better

DR MS HAQ

PEOPLE ask me about the rationale for using interdisciplinary approaches to my writing -- write-ups. I do appreciate that. As regards my answer to their query -- let me put it in this way: one of the purposes of using multidisciplinary approaches to my writing is to enhance, for example, readers' familiarity and friendliness with pertinent requirements of an increasingly inter-disciplinary universe -- an emerging concept resulting from deeper knowledge and understanding on matters of universe.

It is interesting to note breakthroughs -- using interdisciplinary approaches -- in areas of research, development and engineering have been on the rise; strengthening among other things, the effort towards building, promoting and sustaining a more viable, dynamic and integrated human society -- at sea, conceptual and operation levels, individual or collective or both, relative to time and space, though - in pursuits of meeting, among other things, challenges of uncertainties associated with life, living and continuity in the presently known universe in a more result-oriented and beneficial manner through the foreseeable future.

Interdisciplinary approaches are increasingly being instrumental in, among other things: exploring and identifying missing links between and among various components (including inter alia human beings) that presumably hold our known universe through a chain of say, continually moving and transforming realities; bridging perceivable gaps that exist between and among those components through knowledge and applications; and harmonizing interplays of the components; all in the greater interest of human kind and others, for instance.

Interdisciplinary approaches have been facilitating inter alia the promotion of concepts and practices of "integration" as antidotes to those of "isolation" in relevant areas. One of the present day challenges, as well as opportunities for world people to keep them fit for survival and continuity, is: how to internalize more meaningfully and gainfully those approaches in say, human domains?

A full scale use of interdisciplinary approaches at local, national and global levels could, among other things, brighten the prospect for sweeping reforms of theories and practices that have been affecting peoples' life, living, and environments that surround them in pursuit of an apparently better world for all, per se. Fortunately, my interdisciplinary background in academic, training, work and other

areas has so far afforded me, among other things, an opportunity to using, to an extent, interdisciplinary approaches to my writing -- thank God.

It is apparent a proper application of interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving has vast potentials for shaping the world in numerous ways. But it involves inter alia determination, foresight, perseverance, result-orientation, collectivity, and sacrifice, relative known and unknown variables though, on the part of its users, subscribers, beneficiaries, and others. Further, the application phase has known and unknown hurdles to pass, such as those arising out of misconceptions, misunderstandings and biased perceptions, as well as actions.

As for an example, the current effort of President Bush towards world peace and development through what I would call a packaged intervention mechanism -- integrating local, national and global challenges like, terrorism, poverty, democracy, freedom and liberty into his change for a better world strategy (I would like to call it in that way) -- bears testimony to that.

I do appreciate people's concern regarding comprehension related challenges associated with say, newspaper articles that have interdisciplinary contexts and contents. But people of Bangladesh (for example) cannot afford to sit back and relax. One of the reasons for that, is: interdisciplinary approaches have added an additional dimension to say, the effort towards meeting growing uncertainties and intense competition for survival, continuity and progress throughout the world, relative to time, space and other variables, though. As such, Bangladeshis (for example), at least those who could internalize those and other approaches in their decisions and actions, should make endeavors to harness the above approaches in a result-oriented fashion for the benefit of people, per se. I came to realize rather deeply the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to life, living and continuity particularly after attending universities in the US in 1990s.

Given my current motivation for assisting countries and organizations in their effort to help themselves, I believe the essays (for example, those have interdisciplinary contents) would, among other things, be instrumental in promoting awareness (in pertinent areas) among those concerned and the trickle down effect of that could assist ordinary people in getting them freed incrementally from the "disease" called naive realism through the foreseeable future, for instance.

Gridlock or compromise in Washington?

Even though Mr Bush is in a conciliatory mood as he digests the bad news from this year's mid-term election, the White House will veto any bill not to his liking. This trend may continue until January 2009 when Mr Bush's second term expires. Until then stay tuned for a confrontational politics in America, the likes of which has not seen in recent times.

AH JAFFOR ULLAH

THE Democratic Party that was out of limelight for 12 years did it in a big way on Tuesday, November 7. Most political pundits thought the Democrats could take control of the lower house (House of Representatives) but in reality they took control of both the lower and upper house (the Senate).

At the last count, the Democrats have won 51 seats in the Senate (including one independent and one Democrat running as an independent). The two independents have said that they would caucus with the Democrats. Thus the entire Congress is now under Democratic Party control. What does it really mean?

For one thing Mr Bush will not be able to pass his favorite bills through Congress. Second, now that all the important committees in both the Senate and the House will be controlled by Democrats, they

would set up which bills will go to the floor. Mr Bush knows already that his power will be curtailed severely and as a gesture of goodwill he called upon the future speaker of the House, Ms Nancy Pelosi, to join him for breakfast.

To show a gentler and kinder side, Mr Bush has already softened his position on Iraq. The day after the Republican Party was ousted from power both in the lower and upper house, the ignoble secretary of defense, Mr Donald Rumsfeld, tendered his resignation. Mr Rumsfeld is on the way out. A deafening silence has descended upon the vice-president's office. We are yet to hear any comments on the failure of the Republican Party to capture majority of seats in both the House and Senate.

The same goes for Mr Karl Rove, the architect of 2000 and 2004 victory for the Republican Party. Many political commentators have said that Mr Rove may have a secret plan to bring voters to cast their votes in favor of the conserva-

tive party but that fizzled out. Mr Rove did not realize that morality was not the hot button issue in 2006. It was all Iraq, corruption in the high offices, no entitlement (social security) reform, social justice (increase the minimum wage). The issues that resonate with Republicans such as fight the terrorist, regime change in abroad, abortion, patriotism, etc., took the back seat in this election season.

Only few days ago in one of the several stump speeches a combative Mr Bush said: "Terrorists win and America loses" if Democrats won on Tuesday. However, all the rhetoric is gone now and Mr Bush knows very well that he has to work with a tough legislative branch and gone are the days when the president was able to pass any bill in his liking. One thing is for sure, the new Congress will do everything to bring home the American servicemen from Iraq. How quick, though?

Once the new Congress convenes, there won't be any talk about tax cut for the rich, instead,

we will hear about setting the nation's agenda; the newly elected members in both houses would talk about raising the minimum wage, funding stem cell research and authorizing the federal government to negotiate lower drug prices for Medicare patients, cutting student loan interest rates, to name a few. The domestic agenda would again dominate the next Congress. In the last six years Mr Bush was too busy shaping the world with his own ideas and consequently the foreign issue had dominated the politics in Washington DC.

We are going to see a combative president in the next two years and perhaps Mr Bush is already started to sharpen his pen for vetoing any bill not to his liking. It is noteworthy that the president only used his veto power once in the last six years. I strictly remember Richard Nixon used to veto constantly as both the upper and lower house were controlled by the Democrats. This is what was called gridlock. The same is going to happen now.

The bills that will be dear to the Democrats in Congress will be vetoed by Mr Bush and in return the Democrats will make sure that the president's bill is not passed so easily. Mr Bush has to compromise his bills and negotiate with Ms Nancy Pelosi and Senator Harry Reid who is going to be the majority

leader in the Senate.

In the last six years Mr Bush has all but ignored the Democrats but all that will change in a hurry. It remains to be seen how Mr Bush would cajole the Democrats. Wall Street loves gridlock in Washington. In theory, Mr Bush will not be able to rack up the budget deficiency by expanding war on global terrorism. The US corporations will make more money if more dollars are pumped into the domestic economy. With this anticipation Wall Street started rallying in October and November this year.

The day after the election Mr Bush signaled his readiness and eagerness to work with the Democratic leaders in the Congress. To this effect he said he may entertain some of the Democrats' pet ideas, such as minimum wage, and to seek compromise on his own agenda, such as renewing the No Child Left Behind education law. He is also willing to overhaul of immigration laws -- blocked so far by his own party men who wanted to see a tougher bill. How strange that Mr Bush's immigration bill stands a better chance in a Democratic Congress. On the other hand, the Democrats' favorite alternative energy sources may also provide grounds for compromise.

However, there are some

Republican strategists who think there will be some severe gridlock in the legislative branch of the government. "You'll have a bare minimum of legislation," said Ed Rogers, who worked in the White House during 1989 through 1992 under Bush's father. A pessimistic Mr Rogers said: "You'll have aggressive -- bordering on hostile -- oversight. The Democrats -- they're not going to be able to do much legislatively that he's going to sign." Another Republican consultant, Charles Black quipped, "An ugly couple of years with not a ton being accomplished."

This scribble also thinks that the next Congress will be a lame duck one that will be dominated by vetoes by the president and partisan bickering. We may see Mr Bush's mean side. Even though Mr Bush is in a conciliatory mood as he digests the bad news from this year's mid-term election, the White House will veto any bill not to his liking. This trend may continue until January 2009 when Mr Bush's second term expires. Until then stay tuned for a confrontational politics in America, the likes of which has not seen in recent times.

Ah Jaffor Ullah, a researcher and columnist, writes from New Orleans, USA.