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Swift arrest of alleged rapist of DU student

Efficiency of the law enforcers commendable

WE recognise the efficiency with which Rab has arrested the suspected rapist of the Dhaka University student. The arrest has been made in the shortest possible time, within three days of the incident. This proves that our law enforcement agencies are capable of apprehending any criminal if they are directed to do so. Regrettably, this is not the usual response of our law enforcement agencies when it comes to arresting the culprits in most rape cases. What happens usually is that after being raped, the victims have to live in constant fear of further harassment—both by the rapists and their cohorts and by the law enforcers dealing with their case.

According to Rab, the arrestee, Majnu, a 30-year-old drug addict, had earlier raped several female beggars and mentally challenged women near the same place where the rape of the DU student took place. The fact that Majnu could get away previously, even after being a “serial rapist”, speaks volumes about the condition of law and order in the city. Clearly, the widespread protests across the country in this case have prompted the law enforcers to take swift action.

We hope now that our law enforcers would show the same level of efficiency in arresting the rapists in the countless other cases that have been recorded across the country. According to reports by different rights organisations, women and child rape almost doubled in 2019 compared to the previous year. A total of 1,413 women were raped in 2019, according to Ain O Salish Kendra, and at least 1,005 children were raped in the same period, according to Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum. We would like to see prompt action from the law enforcers in this connection.

Moreover, the government should acknowledge that Dhaka is becoming increasingly dangerous for women to live in. In a poll conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation in 2017, it was ranked the fourth worst megacity for women in terms of sexual violence. The recent rape of the DU student in one of the busiest thoroughfares of the capital has once again made it clear that the city has failed to ensure security for its women commuters. Therefore, ensuring security of women should be on the government's priority list. The police should identify the places where such crimes usually take place, and deploy its force there 24/7.

Coming back to the issue of the arrest of Majnu, as the Rab has already handed him to the Detective Branch of police, which is now investigating the case, we hope that they will complete their investigation and submit the report in the shortest possible time. The Dhaka University authorities have demanded the rapist's “exemplary” punishment and the students have demanded that the case be tried under the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act. These demands certainly merit consideration if we are to expect the victim to get justice soon.

Iran's retaliatory strikes may have had a sobering effect

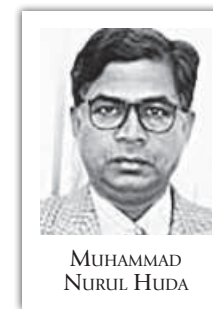
But how long will good sense prevail?

IT is a strange yet somehow positive development that Iran's airstrikes on Iraqi bases hosting US troops has had a sobering effect in terms of diffusing (for now) the real threat of an escalation of hostilities between the US and Iran. Though the Iranian strikes were a retaliatory action against the US for the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, one of the most important figures in Iran, and despite Iran's claim of 80 casualties (dismissed by the US), it was more a way of warning to the US and its allies of how things could go in case of further aggression from the US. President Trump's rather cheerful reaction “All is well”—as, according to the US, there were no casualties—is indicative of the toning down of the aggressive stance he had taken against Iran, in both action and words, leading to very strong reactions from the Iranian side. In fact, the words exchanged between the leaders of the two countries left the world on tenterhooks wondering whether another major war was in the offing. Thankfully, for now, that seems to be on hold, or at least so we hope.

In fact, President Trump's decision to kill the general on the pretext of the latter's intention to harm Americans, a presumption that has not been backed by any credible evidence, has been the most capricious and, not to mention, dangerous one so far. Analysts are attributing it to a diversion from the US commander-in-chief's impeachment process and his ambitions for a re-election. Whatever may have been the reason, this was a decision doomed to backfire, putting American lives in danger; it also threatens the lives of millions in the Middle East in case of a full-scale war. The frightening threats that followed from both sides go to show just how vulnerable the rest of the world has become because of the whimsical, short-sighted reactions of some of its leaders.

While Iran's strikes may be considered more symbolic and less as an invitation to war, and Trump's reaction more controlled, we cannot help but feel an unease about what will happen next. President Trump has played a dangerous game, one that threatens to disrupt the peace in the Middle East as well as the whole world. It is time for the international community to be united in doing everything possible to avoid any escalation of war which will only lead to the deaths of innocent lives and the destruction of nations.

The return of the intrepid patriarch



MUHAMMAD
NURUL HUDA

ON January 10, 1972, history witnessed one of the momentous events of our political journey in the homecoming of Bengal's Braveheart. On this day, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of Bangladesh, returned, amidst a tumultuous welcome, to his native “Sonar Bangla”. He returned to Dhaka where ten months ago he had issued a clarion call for independence, urging his people to go all out to achieve that goal.

Bangabandhu's homecoming to a victorious nation was extraordinary because despite his incarceration in Pakistani jail, the independence movement was carried out in his name and the armed struggle drew sustenance from his inspiring exhortations. Millions in occupied Bangladesh prayed for his safety while he was in prison. During Ramadan in 1971, scores of people fasted for his wellbeing, asking for providential intervention in special prayers. Such was their love for the leader whose supreme oratory electrified an entire population and galvanised a suffering polity into an armed resistance.

Oratory, let us remind ourselves, was not the only forte of Bangabandhu whose sacrifices and sufferings at the hands of an insensitive establishment endeared him to the grateful Bengalis. Quite clearly, here was a leader who, for the better part of his youth, went to prison for the cause of his people. While the people languished under dreadful circumstances, Bangabandhu's fortitude in solitary confinement thousands of miles away was exemplary. Throughout his life, he stood like a solid rock in the shifting sands. The admirable beacon of freedom that he was, Bangabandhu harboured a certain extravagance of objectives and thus wandered beyond the safe provisions of personal gratification.

Bangabandhu's homecoming also played a significant role in stabilising the national and international environment. On the international front, his presence expedited the huge economic assistance for a war-ravaged economy and according diplomatic recognition to the newly independent sovereign nation; on the national front, the herculean task of restoring public order was largely accomplished by Bangabandhu's deft handling of a very volatile scenario. Restoring public faith in the efficacy of the regulatory organs of the state was a huge responsibility.

If we look back now, we will see that in the 1960s, the Bengalis of erstwhile East Pakistan were subjected to the most humiliating treatment. It will be no exaggeration to say that they were experiencing the tribulations of a colonised people. In an atmosphere of all-pervasive fear and subjugation, it was Bangabandhu who confronted the mighty Field Marshal Ayub Khan and showed his guts by forcefully advocating the rights of fellow Bengalis. During the trial of the so-called Agartala Conspiracy Case in Dhaka Cantonment, Bangabandhu took to task the rogue Pakistani army personnel and

Punjabi establishment, Bangabandhu displayed admirable physical and moral courage during the course of a public meeting in 1970 that he was addressing. It so happened that his speech was being purposely interrupted by some Muslim League-Jamaat hirelings. When these elements did not stop despite being cautioned, Bangabandhu shouted at them by threatening that he did not come to Lahore to seek votes as he had plenty of them in his own place—and that they either listen to him or disappear from the meeting area. No Bengali had ever publicly ventured to rebuke the power-obsessed Punjabis in such a manner.

It is also a fact that the post-partition scenario in Pakistan did not witness much of a change. The military-civil bureaucracy conspired with the business oligarchy and the landed gentry to protect their vested interests. People's emancipation did not figure seriously in the politicians' scheme of things. It was under such circumstances that Bangabandhu could galvanise a somnolent people into unprecedented political activism for achieving real freedom.

We also need to recognise that Bangabandhu was gifted with extraordinary organisational acumen. Accordingly, he prepared his party and



Bangabandhu's historic speech at the Racecourse on March 7, 1971.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER

cautioned them to behave. He did not agree to participate in the Round Table Conference as a prisoner. The 1960s were, in fact, a time when all Bengalis could justifiably take pride in their courageous conduct that drew sustenance from Bangabandhu's defiant disposition.

The modern generation needs to know that Bangabandhu was a real epitome of courage, both in the physical and moral sense. The historic Six Point Programme, an explicit embodiment of Bengali nationalism, was unveiled at Lahore, the heart of Punjab, by Bangabandhu. In Lahore, the bastion of the arrogant

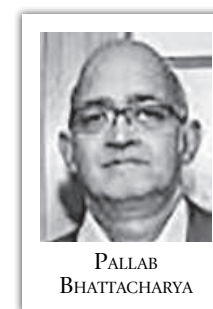
History tells us that when Bangabandhu said this, it had an electrifying impact on the Bengalis whose spirit soared immeasurably in heightened expectations. Their support for their leader was total and unconditional, as evidenced in the historic landslide victory of the nationalist causes in the 1970 elections. When the time came for tough talk across the table, Bangabandhu did not wilt. In fact, the cabal of Pakistani army generals that accompanied General Yahya Khan for a meeting in March 1971 were awed and surprised by his forthright presentation.

the ordinary people for an imminent armed struggle. His historic March 7 speech bears eloquent testimony to that. During the extremely tumultuous days of March 1971, before the war broke out, Bangabandhu acted as a constitutional politician with supreme forbearance.

We need to appreciate that Bangabandhu could never be cowered into submission. The trappings of power did not attract him. It is time again for the nation to pay homage to their great patriarch.

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Stage set for battle for Delhi



PALLAB
BHATTACHARYA

THE bugle has been blown for the elections to the Delhi legislative assembly with the Indian Election Commission announcing the poll schedule on January 6. The polling will be held on February 8 and the counting of votes on February 11, setting the stage for another state-level electoral face-off between India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a key regional satrap, Arvind Kejriwal, helming Aam Aadmi Party.

the outbreak of leadership feud within the saffron party's Delhi unit. The BJP had burnt its finger by projecting the first female Indian Police Service (IPS) officer and political greenhorn Kiran Bedi as its Chief Ministerial candidate in the previous assembly poll in Delhi in 2015, and was stream-rolled by the AAP which won 67 of the 70 seats. The BJP managed just three seats while the Congress, which had ruled the Indian capital for 15 years under Sheila Dikshit till 2013, drew a blank.

So, the race for wooing the voters of Delhi in 2020 will witness a battle between the BJP's biggest mascot Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Kejriwal, who shot to prominence and pushed into politics eight years ago riding

failed to renew its reign in Maharashtra, had to go for alliance in Haryana to retain power, and was comprehensively defeated in Jharkhand. In Maharashtra and Jharkhand, the BJP ran into tough challenge posed by regional powerhouses in Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Sharad Pawar and an alliance led by Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

The stage is set for a repeat in Delhi where the BJP has not been in power for two decades. A favourable verdict in Delhi assembly poll could help the BJP in putting behind it the recent losing trend (in Maharashtra and Jharkhand) and the prospect of local issues outgrowing national subjects in the electorate's mind.

The BJP's decision to fall back on the charisma of Modi in Delhi is expected

Kejriwal remains the AAP's best vote-catching face even though his party appears to have lost some of its sheen after faring badly in Lok Sabha polls in Delhi and Punjab last year. However, the AAP continues to be a favourite to return to power, possibly with a reduced majority. Kejriwal hopes that his pro-poor and populist schemes like primary healthcare, quality educational facilities across Delhi, and subsidised water and electricity will deliver the electoral reward.

On the other hand, the BJP will bank on Modi's announcement of legalising 1,200 unauthorised colonies across Delhi, mostly inhabited by the poor. It will be its trump card as it is expected to benefit an estimated 40 lakh people—a sizable portion of the electorate—out of Delhi's total population of 2.01 crore. Besides, the saffron party will flag the issues of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and expansion of the metro rail network, a lifeline of a safe and fast public transport system in Delhi. The AAP has sought to counter it by providing free ride facility for women in state-run buses.

The BJP is pinning its hopes on a possible “silent” consolidation of majority community votes post-CAA, while the AAP looks to benefit from rising anti-BJP protests across the country in relation to the controversial citizenship law as well as the horrific violence in Jawaharlal Nehru University on January 5. The Jamia Millia University in Delhi has been a nerve-centre of anti-CAA agitation.

A key determinant of the Delhi assembly poll outcome will be the Congress' performance. The Sonia Gandhi-led party put up a surprisingly good show in national polls with vote-sharing rising from 15 percent in 2014 to 22.5 percent in Delhi last year. But the party remains hamstrung by factionalism and the absence of a local leadership face that could match that of Kejriwal and Modi. The real test for the Congress is how to tap into the perceived anti-incumbency against the AAP and the BJP and position itself as a viable alternative. A big worry for the Congress could be the voters' response in the event of a polarised campaign. This is an issue of no less concern to the AAP, too. The party has been reticent in making a strong anti-CAA pitch for fear of backlash from the majority community. Just a few days ago, Kejriwal indicated his government may not follow the Marxist government in Kerala in getting a resolution passed in Delhi Assembly opposing the implementation of the CAA. Apparently, the coming assembly election is weighing on his mind.

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Anti-BJP protests in relation to India's controversial new citizenship law and the horrific violence in Jawaharlal Nehru University on January 5 may impact the outcome of the Delhi assembly elections.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Delhi, whose assembly has a total of 70 seats, will be the fourth Indian state to go for polls in the last four months after Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand. A triangular contest among the state's ruling AAP, the BJP and the Congress sets the frame of the Delhi contest.

While Kejriwal remains the Chief Ministerial face of AAP, the BJP has not yet named its candidate for the top post, in a move many say aimed at preventing

piggyback on Gandhian Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement across the country against the then ruling Congress. One key reason for the BJP not declaring its Chief Ministerial candidate for Delhi poll could be its below-par performance in Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand last year, when the party had fought the assembly elections there under Devendra Fadnavis, ML Khattar and Raghubar Das respectively. The BJP

to shape the campaign narrative which will be dominated by national and state-specific issues as it usually happens in state-level polls in other parts of India, and it will be another test for it if local livelihood issues come out triumphant. The BJP will be looking to hold onto the momentum generated by its sweeping all the seven Lok Sabha constituencies in the national elections in April-May last year, in which the AAP finished a poor third.