

Hopes for the Future

If nations would only fulfil the promises they make at the time of their independence, and reiterated during successive anniversaries, we should be living in an ideal world. Sadly enough, such an ideal world often looks like an elusive one and, what's worse, a nation begins to have doubts about its own ability to carry out its own commitments.

On this day, as we observe the Independence Day, with due solemnity, we may pass a harsh judgement on our own performance during the past two decades. Indeed, we do have a long list of failures, some bordering on disasters, which have overshadowed our continuing efforts to build a new life for our people. We share some of these failures with other developing nations which, as victims of inequities in global economic relations, are unable to give their people what they deserve. Some of our failures result from natural disasters. There have also been problems which have been imposed on Bangladesh from outside. Yet, there is no denying the fact that so many of the failures remain our own making, failures stemming from unfulfilled promises, mistaken policies and, above all, from our persistent refusal to live by the ideals which had guided our people to nationhood two decades ago.

Manifestations of these failures are painful, grim and, at times, even sordid. We see them in the maintenance of an unjust economic order, most certainly in our failure to bring about a qualitative change in the lives of our vast rural population. We see them in endless violence in our educational institutions and in the deterioration of the law and order situation in all parts of the country. We see them in growing national divisiveness and in the unwillingness of our political parties to reach consensus on basic issues facing the country. Above all, we see another kind of manifestation of our failure — in fact, a disastrous one — in the delay in tackling an untenable situation created by Golam Azam, a foreign national, in assuming the leadership of a major political party in the country. For millions of our people, the perspective today has turned from one of jubilation and reiteration of our pledges to one of anguish and fear.

Yet, in our view, all these failures and even the current mood of uncertainties should not — and must not — obscure the sources of our national strength. Nowhere has this strength found a more convincing demonstration than in the change we have brought about in our political system and in the restoration of parliamentary democracy. We have put authoritarianism to where it belongs: in the dustbin of our national history. Some 20 years after we made history by putting our people on the road to independence, we have made another kind of history, no less vital than the last one, for a nation looking for a place in the sun. We may not be enamoured of the Government of Begum Khaleda Zia, but we see the one-year old administration as a purposeful one, demonstrating its commitment to the welfare of the people. As we say in these columns from time to time, we support many of its policies but we criticise others, thus upholding the tradition of non-partisan independent journalism. Indeed, we sincerely want this government to succeed in full measure, not for its own sake, but for the sake of millions of our people who have seldom known what a good government is all about. Through its success, a success that calls for maximum popular support and participation, the government will be paying its homage to all our past leaders, such as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman and Moulana Bhashani, and to countless martyrs who gave their lives for our independence during that turbulent, history-making year of 1971. Let their sacrifice serve to rekindle among ourselves the sense of purpose that may lie dormant but is never dead.

Neglected Meteorology

There remains little mystery in meteorology except that why should the term stand for the study of weather and not of meteors. Man has physically travelled to the moon. Man's scanners are reaching up to the boundaries of the knowable universe — far exceeding six billion light years. What is a mere ten kilometres of atmosphere — the band where the phenomenon of weather takes shape — compared to that? In the opposite microcosmic direction man has deciphered not only subnuclear particles such as protons and neutrons but gone further into the world of quarks. Meteorology isn't a long and tough walk compared to this either.

Yet the weather prophets continue to be proverbially erratic in spite of revolutionary advances in remote sensing through which man literally sees the genesis and development of weather and how the havoc it wreaks. This is because the variety and the magnitude of data required to first know and then control the process of weather is nearly endless.

On Monday the World Meteorological Day was observed by the states of the planet. Bangladesh did its bit by holding a technical seminar and also an exhibition of meteorological equipment and charts. The topic of the seminar was, as chosen by the WMO, 'Weather and Climate Services for Sustainable Development'.

It is a sad commentary on the wisdom and foresight, even the common sense of our state and other social and academic leaderships that, why in a country so often buffeted by tidal bores and cyclones, meteorology doesn't form a significant subject of study at any level of education? So is the case of the sciences related with water management. Bangladesh has yet to make its educated elite alive to the importance of studying and doing effective work in those earth sciences on which the physical existence of this land depends. The only exception that rather proves the veracity of the observation is soil science which is offered in the universities. But, sadly enough, this has so far failed to show up any outstanding result by way of facing up to the degenerating effects of our all-pervasive land abuse. Exactly as the successive governments didn't care to put to good use the work of the meteorologist a lot simpler. But only superficially so. As we proceed into the hitherto uncharted realms of the unknown, it tends to extend farther. To start on our own journey into this highly vital area of national and human existence, let us start showing our care for where it should so urgently belong.

A Day of Soul-searching: Do We Lack Patriotism?

by Nadeem Qadir

TODAY Bangladesh graduates into its 21st year of independence from Pakistan after a long battle for language and freedom of thought, unique in history.

There is although not much to rejoice about as the past years were marked by political upheavals, divisions within the war veterans both in the military and outside and of course two bloody coups, that ended dreams of a great leader and a soldier.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman dreamt of turning his blood-soaked country into 'Shonar Bangla' or 'Golden Bengal', while Shaheed Ziaur Rahman had similar goals with different nomenclatures.

But, they both failed in their mission for which some blame the leaders, while others say they became victims of domestic and international conspiracies.

As white papers on the two tragedies remain in top secret files, the 'poor' citizens are forced to build their own opinions and politicians exploit that, sometimes without thinking what great damage it could do to the country.

The process failed to create a national unity on basis of being just Bengalis, but has instead thrown the country into years of instability, tension and meaningless deaths.

Independence, for those who fought or supported the war, meant National integrity, economic emancipation and a forward march, hindered for decades by colonial rule followed by Pakistani suppression.

This year just days ahead of the independence celebrations uncertainty and according to commentators even a 'threat of civil war' looms large over the trial and expulsion of Jamaat-e-Islami's Amr, Golam Azam.

And this is a shame for us, because we have let this man stay here for so long and when his appointment came, we failed to act quickly to ensure

that such a man, allegedly a war criminal, is taken to task. Nazi war criminals are being punished today after 46 years and why not Azam and his gang?

It is also a shame that Azam, if nothing else, could at least make himself important enough to threaten state security and create divisions amongst us before an auspicious occasion like the Independence Day.

'Bangladesh is now divided into pro and anti-independence forces,' Jahanara Imam, convener of the trial committee told the press on Monday.

Who is to be blamed for that? The Government or the Opposition. I would say both.

Sheikh Mujib punished some collaborators, including Azam, but under a general amnesty freed others, despite opposition from families of the martyrs. The Awami League has so far kept silent as to why their leader had taken such a step.

Ziaur Rahman lifted the ban on religion-based parties, including the Jamaat, and permitted Azam to enter Bangladesh to see his sick mother. But why did he permit Azam to continue to stay, a question the BNP has never responded to.

Of all, the two sides rushed their presidential candidates respectively, Abdur Rahman Biswas and Badrul Haider Chowdhury, to seek Azam's 'blessings' before the parliament went for voting.

Any explanation by two sides for such an action cannot be good enough and as a senior journalist said 'it gave Jamaat the green signal to go ahead and announce Azam's election as the Amr.'

The Jamaat was already flying high because the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) formed its Government initially with their help.

We often use the Bengali maxim 'You cannot clap with one hand.' The politicians

should accept their mistakes, come out of their narrow practices and lead the nation in the direction that benefits the masses. Remembering our martyrs over the years have turned into rituals, but isn't it time that we gave up the rituals and joined hands by solving all controversial issues, speaking truth and not lies to distort history and accept the reality, and above all bringing back the same 'hot blooded' patriotism of 1971 to build the country for the happiness of those who shed their blood for us, for a dream. Their dream was not all fantasy, but a simple reality.

For a History of Liberation War

by Nazme Sabina

BANGLADESH emerged as an independent and sovereign state in December 1971, after having witnessed one of the most tragic and brutal blood-baths in modern history. During a nine-month period that lasted from March 25, 1971 until mid-December, Pakistani troops perpetrated a massive genocide directed against key segments of the East Bengal population, resulting in the extermination of approximately 3 million unarmed Bengalee civilians.

In these nine months the Pakistani military and their supporters violated about 200,000 women, burned more than 6 million homes, left almost 15,00,000 peasants without farm implements or animals, and forced nearly 10 million people to flee to India. Unfortunately, people in this country are not much conscious about their own history. After 21 years of independence the history of our liberation war is yet to be written. Sounds implausible, but true.

Though history of Bangladesh has been ventured through a number of books, but all of them have been bogged down because of bias, sentimental tilt or lack of accuracy.

It is now upon dedicated researchers to pry into the nation's history. From the concern of social responsibility, they have to go through it.

Development Studies (BIDS) is eager to work for such pertinent issues which have root in our society and politics. Inspired by the great success of Bhaasha Antolomer Artho-Shamajik Podobhumi, [socio-economic background of the language movement], the institute is now engaged in a major work on history of our war of liberation.

With a committee containing Rehman Sobhan, project director, Dr Attur Rahman Coordinator, Binayek Sen, Joint Coordinator, the BIDS research is in its embryonic stage.

Among 10 titles of the whole research, work is now progressing on four — role of students, peasantry, workers, middle class.

Their other fields of focus, though not yet settled, probably will be the roles of women, cultural movement, different political parties in the war.

'We are at the initial stage, we do not yet have a final methodology. But we have plan to coordinate several personalities in other sectors who have vast experience on respective fields,' says Dr. Attur Rahman, Coordinator of the project and Senior Research Fellow in BIDS.

This research will take at least three years to do. Usually this kind of deed faces financial obstacles. But 'till now we have had so much inspiration

Happiness of the masses and not just the 'cost changers.' Are we too selfish a nation to deny the dreams or are we proving to the world that we are a nation of 110 million selfish, quarrelsome and brainless people, lacking patriotism? 'We will be able to stand with our heads high in independent Bangladesh and if we

work hard we can make it a real Shonar Bangla, which is something the Pakistanis never want,' my martyred father told me sometime in early 1971.

After 21 years, what answer do I or for that matter we all have for him and many of his comrades? Only, a word called 'democracy' — 'maybe.'

and nature of student politics during 1952-70.

Then comes the question of the middle class. 'It is a controversial issue, so at first we'll make a theoretical appraisal of the middle class in the society and its class role. Then we want to focus several issues, such as development of the middle class in the then East Bengal and also middle class as a social force. Different political trends within the middle class on the question of war of liberation whether they supported or not, are to be observed in our study,' says Rahman.

While doing the researches, questions of thematic and problematic thoughts are to be taken into account.

On the point of thematic view, we expect the research personalities to put forward the study as an integrated documentation being impartial on economic or political or ideological view.

On the other side, research on war of liberation gives rise to two types of problematic thought — ideological perspective and methodological characteristic. So, they are expected to be objective on two issues, such as a) nationalist movement in one part of a neo-colonial state, b) class-movement in a neo-colonial state and its relations or counter relations with imperialism and other socio-economic forces hostile or to-be-hostile in the country.

The Aussies and the Poms are at it Again

by Derek Ingram

AUSTRALIAN politicians have long been famous for their straight talking. They were never made to be diplomats and in a world where cant and hypocrisy often prevail this makes them rather refreshing. Paul Keating, Prime Minister for less than three months, is the latest of a long line.

Suddenly in Parliament he turned on the opposition and said: 'We are not going to be doffing our lid or tugging our forelock to anybody. We have to be aggressively Australian, wholeheartedly Australian and proud of it, and trade with our part of the world.'

No one could ever call prime ministers Bob Menzies, John Gorton, Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser or Bob Hawke men who pulled their verbal punches. All except Menzies, who was an anglophile and an ardent monarchist, got under Britain's skin from time to time.

None more so perhaps than John Curtin, the Labor leader who replaced the conservative Menzies in 1941, just two months before the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor and began their lightning drive down the Malaysian peninsula to Singapore.

Churchill had been hurt by a message from Curtin in January 1942, which said that the Australians had heard that the evacuation of Malaya and Singapore was being considered by the allied Defence Committee. If that were to happen, said Curtin, it would be regarded as 'an inexcusable betrayal.'

In the event, the Japanese swept south in a few months as far as Papua New Guinea, on Australia's doorstep, and bombed Darwin from time to time, although they never landed in Australia.

Meantime, the cream of Australian troops were in North Africa and had fought rearguard actions with the

When new Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating laid into the British in an attack on the opposition Liberal Party he was simply continuing a tradition. Perhaps it all started when the British settled Australia with convicts. In a few years, reports Gemini News Service, Australia will almost certainly become a republic, but the love-hate relationship between the two countries will go on.

Makers of Australia



- 1770 James Cook lands at Botany Bay, raises British flag
- 1788 After loss of American colonies Britain begins to land convicts in Australia
- 1790 onwards. Free settlers and freed convicts develop colonies
- 1859 Queensland created. All country now divided into 6 colonies
- 1855-90 Each colony devises self-governing constitution on Westminster model
- 1901 Federal government created. Commonwealth of Australia born. Parliament sits in Melbourne
- 1927 Parliament moves to Canberra

Population: 16,765,000 of whom 225,000 are aborigines - the original inhabitants



British in European theatres such as Greece. There were many bitter exchanges between Curtin and Churchill, although in the end Churchill said he came to respect Curtin and liked him when they finally met up in 1944. In those days personal contact between politicians across the world was necessarily infrequent.

Curtin is an Australian Labor Party folk hero and Keating has now revived 50 years later the notion that Britain betrayed Australia by not coming to its defence adequately in 1941. Even allowing for the fact that the wily Churchill was a man of many mistakes, Keating has not got

his history in perspective. Churchill must have long realised Malaya and Singapore were not defensible — new evidence has come to light to support that — and he was less than frank with Curtin about the true position.

But there was little he could do about it by that time. In December 1941 Britain had just survived a year alone on the defensive against Germany, an ordeal relieved only by Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union the previous June.

When the Japanese struck in December there was on way an overstretched Britain could come to the rescue of Australia. Curtin wanted Australian troops sent back home from the Middle East and Churchill, albeit reluctantly, agreed.

He had wanted them to go to Burma, but Curtin refused. It was not true, as Keating alleges, that Britain would not 'give our troops back to keep ourselves free from Japanese domination.'

In any case, Australia now had inevitably to look to the United States for help. This was the point at which the decline of British global power began. The fall of Singapore marked the beginning of the end of the British Empire, even though Britain won back all the territory in 1945.

However, to this day the Australians remain aggrieved and when Keating started accusing Britain of betrayal he was harking right back to that Curtin message to Churchill in 1941. He has stirred it up now because 'bashing the Pommies' — the word derives inexplicably from the small and ineffectual Pomeranian dog — is good for votes and Keating is in dire need to them. Within days of his Pommie-bashing his personal popularity in the opinion polls had leapt by 18 per cent.

Having pushed Bob Hawke out of the Labor leadership last December, he has only a year before he must call a general election and win power in his own right. The opposition Liberal Party had been running way ahead in the opinion polls long before he took over.

Keating's verbal attack was spontaneous, but his references a day or two earlier to

Australia's changing relationship with Britain, made in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, were of a different order-careful statements of policy.

They were quite unsurprising and misunderstood in Britain. The idea that they upset the Queen is probably quite wrong. Everyone missed the point that he was talking before the Queen of Australia, not of Britain. He was putting forward Australian government views that she would constitutionally endorse, just as she would if in her official presence a British prime minister was making a critical policy statement about British relations with Australia.

Keating simply pointed out that Australia, like Britain, now looked for partners in its own region. He said: 'Just as Great Britain some time ago sought to make her future secure in the European Community, so Australia vigorously seeks partnership with countries in our own region.'

Australia is heading towards becoming a republic. A target date of 2001 has been set. Such a move means a changing relationship with Britain but not a distancing of Australia from Britain. In due course a similar change is bound to take place in Canada and even New Zealand. The concept of a head of state living on the other side of the world is hardly historically tenable, and has nothing to do with the Queen's personal performance, which could hardly be faulted in 40 years.

Nor should that affect the Commonwealth relationship one iota, since more than one-third of the member countries are republics anyway, simply recognising the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth.

DEREK INGRAM is Editor of Gemini News Service.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

The Burmese problem

Sir, The autocratic regime of Burma is deliberately creating problems all around that country to stabilize their own illegitimate government. On Bangladesh frontier they are pushing out the religious minorities and we are reacting in the manner they want us to. It can be said without any shred of doubt that they are not doing this barbaric act for the benefit of the majorities in that

country. At least we, Bangladeshis are well aware of the ways of autocrats. We are drawing attention of the whole world to the atrocities committed to one section of the population of that country. But is that regime doing any good to the other sections of that country? Haven't the junta kept the rightful leader, elected by an election, under confinement? Aren't they refusing to accept the verdict of the people? It is time we take the plight

of the whole population of that wretched country to the world at large. If we have to take the complaint of the Muslim minority we should place it to the whole population of Burma and help them to solve the same.

Our country is governed by a party under a leader who relentlessly fought against an autocratic regime for a long period. Who else can be in a better situation to help the Burmese brothers and sisters to come out of their plight? Now our appeal will be heard all over the world because we are directly affected by their 'domestic' problem. We can even approach the Chinese to come out openly against the junta. Thailand is also affected by the ploys of the Burmese military junta. We have already mobilized the world opinion quite favourably. We should now start helping the various

democratic groups to wage efforts to uproot the illegitimate junta from that country. If they succeed with our assistance all problems including the Rohingya one will get a chance to be settled once for all. Any sporadic effort and temporary patch up will only cause further suffering to the hapless Rohingyas again and again in future.

M A Haq
West Rajabazar, Dhaka

The Day of Quds

Sir, Since the Middle-East Peace Conference in Madrid, initiated by the USA, more than five months have passed and during this period several other meetings were also held but so far there is not any sign of settlement of the problem. However, we were expect-

ing no result out of these conferences from the very beginning. But, unfortunately, some of our brothers and leaders are still in the belief, that 44 years of occupation of our sacred Baitul Muqaddas, our first Qiblah, could be solved through negotiations and dialogues. Indeed, negotiations and dialogues had been two main functions for solution of many problems, but in the case of Israel no doubt these cannot play any important role, since arguments are continuing for as long as 44 years, yielding only senses but no result.

Israel's history is a combination of terrorism, violation of human rights and important of all its tendency to establish Zionist ideology, is a clear evidence that with Israel compromise is meaningless. In this context, I would like to draw attention of all my

brothers and sisters in faith all around the world that it is we who together can give this tumour the right treatment and this can only be achieved by our concrete unification. I think the last Friday of the holy month of Ramzan — Jumatul Vida — which had been announced by late Imam Khomeini(R) as international day of Quds, can be a good opportunity for all Muslims to express atleast their sympathy and sorrow to the oppressed people of Palestine who now-a-days are suffering different types of oppression. 'The day of Quds is a day of Islam... on this day all Muslims must come out of isolation and against oppressions by foreigners with all their strength.'

Sayed Rahim Ashnakhah
An Iranian student at BUET, Dhaka.