

Anti-liberation Forces' Politics of Vengeance

by Nilratan Halder

Our politics overly marked by fractiousness and ambition has only helped the enemy's cause. The anti-liberation forces show an unflagging desire to pursue their objectives — their belief in a country that is no more; and a terrible revenge on those by whom they were defeated.



Their brains were the prime target of the occupation forces

WHEN the whole of Bangladesh turned into a killing field, it is surprising that there were so many intellectuals to be killed in Dhaka City on December 14, 1971. The Pakistani war machine and insane soldiers let loose on March 25, gave ample demonstration of their murderous mood by killing quite a number of the country's finest souls. Long before the army-led genocide many of the intellectuals had left Dhaka City. Even ordinary mortals could sense foul in the air and considered it unwise to stay in the city. After the March 25 barbaric sloop on the Bangladesh, there was no reason to have any illusion any more. Most people tried to flee beyond the range of the death-spitting barrels of guns. The long shadow of death and destruction grew ominously longer.

So the reason for the intellectuals of the society to stay in Dhaka has to be understood in a deeper sense. Certainly most of them cherished the dream of an independent Bangladesh.

The planned extermination of the soon-to-be free country's upper crust of population was a last ditch effort to be aware it of the intellectuals' creative and constructive services for the nation soon to become free. The hordes were more than successful in their attempt. This Nazi-style intellectual decimation of a country has rarely happened in modern times. Our tragedy is that we have not learnt from the lessons of '71. What is not so

well known is the continuation of that most despicable process. The diabolic blueprint, is being implemented bit by bit, following the same chilling and sinister methods. Surprisingly, however, it is our politicians who seem to be less aware of this danger. Our politics overly marked by fractiousness and ambition has only helped the enemy's cause. The anti-liberation forces show an unflagging desire to pursue their objectives — their belief in a country that is no more; and a terrible revenge on those

by whom they were defeated. It is exactly these political parties which have faltered time and again. They have allowed the parties with proven records of worst crimes, including collaboration with the Pakistan army, to inch into national politics. The murderers, rapists, torturers and looters — all assembled under the banner of Jamaat-e-Islami — this time admitted their limitations. Theirs is a most heinous, long-term but seriously devised strategy. It is foolish not to read an

ominous sign in the reprisals they have resorted to immediately after the creation of Bangladesh. The death of the country's creator Sheikh Mujib and his lieutenants — one of them out of office then — was the first decisive blow. They wanted to fish in the muddy water and with the disappearance of the battle-hardened leaders, the stage was set for Machiavellian politics in which they also could set a few rules of their own.

It was not just a case of strange political bed fellows when freedom fighter Ziaur Rahman, as president, had Shah Azizur Rahman, a wartime collaborator, as his prime minister. Coups and counter coups — attempted ones included — marked the rules of the presidents coming from the barracks. That is what the anti-liberation forces wanted. Most of our valiant freedom fighters got killed in the process.

Starting from the killing of Bangabandhu all such political murders can be connected almost with a straight line. Having done away with the old guards, the anti-liberation forces concentrated on building a solid political base. In that task they have been following both methods of intimidation and distribution of favour. Along with their Madrassa-based political re-

ruitment, they have followed it up with effective help at the time of admission into colleges and universities and further support of money and accommodation during study. Many innocent and unsuspecting youths have been tempted into their trap. This is how the Chhatra Shibir has found its cadre rank swelling over the years.

Intimidation was also an effective means in the recruitment process. First they made Chittagang University their target. Once they have established an almost unchallenged control there, the Shibir activists flexed their muscle. Now they are perhaps the stronger of the forces in Rajshahi and Kushtia Islamic Universities. So far as the wielding of arms is concerned, they have combined it with such ghastly methods as silencing of opponents' veins and chopping off hands and legs. Their next target reportedly is Dhaka University. Already they have taken elaborate preparation for the purpose. All their activities are based on a nearby mosque. More than a score of messes are being funded by the Jamaat. These full-pledged hostel-type messes are conveniently used for Shibir recruitment. Even at a time when their parent organisations are locked in a bitter political imbroglio, the Chhatra

League and the Chhatra Dal have joined hands together with other student fronts to form an all-party alliance and demanded the university authority to take over the said mosque. Reports on the use of the mosque for political purposes has not been seriously contested so far.

The defeated forces' ultimate aim is to capture the state power which, as yet, is a long way off. In fact, considering all the various complex issues, it looks improbable. But certainly not impossible. They are not in a hurry. And the way our national politics is being conducted by the main political parties exposes the weak points to the enemies. They may get caught wrong-footed. The vulnerability of our major political parties may be the cause of the nation's losing a firm foothold on our political process. The mainstream political parties are all set to lose their ways in wilderness or get stuck in the cul de sac.

It is exactly for such an opportune moment the murderers with their sharpened knives under cloak are waiting. They would like to turn the clock back and start once again where they left off. Their heinous design of intellectual decimation has so far been successful. On this day of sadness, we can do take a fresh vow to foil their design through turning that feeling of loss into a steely resolve. That way we pay homage not only to the illustrious sons and daughters who fell on this day 23 years ago but also do justice to ourselves, befitting us.

The Day's Message

The prime message to draw from the Martyred Intellectuals' Day is that the marauding force could not have satisfied its vendetta against our intellectuals without the help of its local collaborators. In their totally beleaguered state, only two days before their formal surrender, their desperate mind must have worked at its sinister worst, but the Al-Shams and Al-Badr loyalists were raring to have a go at it. It is they who got the act together and committed perhaps the most heinous crime in modern-day war chronicles.

The context has since changed, but the variants of those collaborators exist in our midst trying to put forward self-invented interpretations to our glorious events as part of a disinformation campaign aimed at the new generations. Let's beware of them. They would have us forget what a terribly heavy price we had to pay for the sake of our freedom. The murdered intellectuals remind of the high point reached in the saga of our people's struggle for mental and physical emancipation. As such, it is the focal-point of our love for and spirit of freedom. That their lives were cut short as an expression of double vendetta — one against the intellectuals for their service to the cause of Bangladesh and the other against the birth of a country about to be formalised makes the day an elemental part of our legacy.

The progeny of the martyred intellectuals have formed Ekattarer Prajanna to keep alight the torch handed down to them by their parents. If they have done so out of some disappointment over a relegation of the values the martyrs stood for, we cannot blame them. The responsibility is much bigger for us than merely uttering such consoling words to them. We must, all of us, renew today our umbilical link to the finest hours of our national history and bring out the best in us to forge ahead.

We are obligated to repay our debts to them by projecting our national history correctly in the first place. To this end, we need raising a composite mausoleum at Rayer Bazar in place of the scattered graves we now have for them. At the same time, there should be audio-visual or printed retrospectives on their lives and works for the continuity of our great traditions.

Baby Dies Twice

No one can die twice. But a new-born baby at Dhaka Medical College Hospital was fated to have the dubious distinction, thanks to the attending doctors at the time of his delivery. Immediately after his delivery, the baby boy was pronounced dead by the attending physician. For long 10 hours the little one was left unattended. But then the morgue staff found him alive. After reported cover-up attempts by the doctors the baby was admitted to the intensive care unit of the hospital. But on Monday morning the boy finally breathed his last.

There is no reason to think that such incidents take place in our hospitals every often. But the very unlikely survival of the baby after 10 hours' neglect serves as a rude reminder. The reminder is that such tragedies do occur there — though rarely. All because the doctors are not either upto the job or their handling of individual cases is perfunctory or worse still, they are unforgivably negligent of duties. The tragedy in this case is that the baby had to defy death in the first place and through his death at last had to draw attention to him and the likes of him.

The institution of a four-member probe committee with 48 hours given for it to submit report, by any standard, is a prompt move. The government certainly deserves appreciation for this. But at the same time can we not ask for the publication of the report when it is ready? Experiences with the follow-up of similar incidents have been far from happy. It is urgent that this report come out — particularly for two main reasons. One is to bring to light what really goes wrong at a time when the patients' lives are left in the sole care of doctors. The other is for taking appropriate actions so that medical professionals mend their ways and contribute to the overall improvement of our hospital service.

Doctors vary from person to person in their devotion to duty. But it is the system that can enforce a standard in their profession. Let the system get perfected as much as possible and any doctor unworthy of it will automatically find himself or herself thrown out.

Capitulation for UN

The other day we expressed our concern about the safety of Bangladeshi troops stationed in the Bihac enclave through this column. That our concern was not misplaced is becoming more evident with the latest Serb attack that has left no less than five Bangladeshi soldiers wounded, one of them seriously. Besieged and lightly armed, the 1,200 Bangladeshi troops appear to have been held hostage by the Serb forces. At a time when the main topic of discussion at the United Nations' Security Council is the logistics of a smooth withdrawal of UN peacekeeping forces from Bosnia-Herzegovina, this attack on some of their members is a further demonstration of Serbian audacity. Before this the commander of the UN peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, general Sir Michael Rose was not allowed to enter the Bihac pocket for a routine check of the condition of Bangladeshi troops there.

What is surprising is the ultimate capitulation of the UN in the face of Serb aggressions. They have taken hostage of UN forces, killed mediators — they claim accidentally, wounded UN peacekeepers and violated one after another agreement. All through the UN has issued empty threats. Once the Serbs have sensed a rift in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and indecision at the world's big capitals, they started defying the UN with arrogance. The few sorties UN bombers made will now be remembered more as misdirected and miscalculated hits on the Serb positions.

Are the Serbs unbeatable? Never in recent history has occurred anything remotely of such an order of capitulation for the UN. Its failure in Bosnia will have serious bearing on its ability to play such a role anywhere in the world. The arms embargo imposed on Bosnia by the Security Council has seriously handicapped the Bosnian forces' war preparedness. Now they are being deserted by the UN. So if the weaker countries' confidence in the international body starts eroding, no one can blame them. Instead of teaching the Bosnian Serbs a lesson, the UN is now busy beating a hasty retreat from there. For its fall from the Olympian height, the body has none but to blame itself.

Marxist Victors Pledge Loyalty to King and Company

Binod Bhattarai writes from Kathmandu

The world now has its first elected communist government under a constitutional monarch. But the winning Marxists in Nepal find that they are hemmed in by political and economic constraints. First test of strength for the new government is today's (December 14) meeting of Parliament.

FOUR years after the establishment of multi-party democracy, the world's only Hindu monarchy has elected a communist government.

Nepal's new Prime Minister, 74-year-old Man Mohan Adhikari, got the job after two-weeks of post-poll negotiation during which King Birendra failed to secure agreement on a coalition.

Adhikari's Communist Party United Marxist-Leninist (UML) favours radical land reform, the establishment of Bahudaliya Janabad (people's democracy in which other parties would be allocated special roles), and a more nationalistic stance.

But it will find that a strong domestic opposition, a powerful neighbour and influential Western countries will give it little room for manoeuvre.

The UML upset most pre-poll predictions by winning the largest single number of parliamentary seats — 88 out of 205. But the social-democratic Nepali Congress Party, whose re-election bid was led by outgoing prime minister Gijra Prasad Koirala, won 83 seats (down from 110 in the previous Parliament), and the rapidly-growing royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) emerged as the third largest group with 20 seats.

The result increases the danger of political polarisation. The UML was set up to harness young Marxist activists who terrorised eastern dis-



Nepal's Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari: Cautious start

tricts by beheading landlords in the early 1970s. It came into the open only four years ago when street protests led by the Congress Party and the communists forced the King to relinquish absolute power and establish multi-party democracy.

Before the democratic reforms, feudal forces and landowners controlled all governments. After the reforms, they turned themselves into the right-wing RPP.

The new government is

conscious of the problems it faces and is moving cautiously.

Finance Minister Bharat Mohar Adhikari says "we know our limitations. Because of our compulsion of being a minority government, we will try to work on the basis of consensus. Our programme thus will be of a milder dose."

It has pledged allegiance to the multi-party constitution and to the King and promised a greater role for the private sector. It approves "selective privatisation" of state-run corporations.

On land reform, the Finance Minister emphasised that the party's promises were "not communist ideology, but a basis for development. We will try to build a consensus to bring these reforms."

The government announced that a high-level commission will look into the issue, which it sees as crucial in a country where more than 90 per cent of the 20 million people are rural, and more than 40 per cent are subsistence farmers. Average annual income per head is less than \$200.

To ease political fears, Prime Minister Adhikari said after his appointment: "The

UML government will direct its efforts for institutionalising the democratic process and establishing a political culture based on morals."

The promises were reiterated in Adhikari's first address to the nation, when he named "a clean government and the elimination of corruption" as his priorities.

Corruption charges against the Congress government would be investigated, including those against the former Prime Minister.

The party's first obstacle is the December 14 (today's) meeting of Parliament at which the new government will have to prove it can muster a majority. If it fails, fresh elections will follow.

But no political party wants another poll now, so the UML may scrape through with support from either Congress or RPP.

Says RPP general-secretary Dr Prakash Chandra Lohani: "Whether the UML government lasts five months or the full five-year term depends on their ability to mobilise support to address issues of broad national interest."

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.

Parjatan's river cruise

Sir, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation has launched ML Shalook for river excursion both for the foreign and domestic tourists every Friday and Saturday from 10 am to 3 pm for five hours with tea, coffee, snacks, lunch and cultural show aboard at the cost of Taka 500 per adult and Taka 300 per child. The capacity of the tourist launch is reported as 72 persons. If the launch runs for five hours it would earn Taka 72x500= Tk 36,000 each Friday and Saturday. Is not Taka 36,000 for an excursion of five hours too exorbitant? It is also learnt that if there is no capacity load of passengers the launch would not ply on that day. But it would of course ply if anyone makes full payment of Taka 36,000 for the five hours trip!

If I am correct the ML Shalook with a single deck and capacity of 52 passengers was originally constructed at the Narayanganj Dockyard in the year 1968. The launch was transferred to Khulna where in it was plying from near Khulna Forest Jetty Ghat to Mongla and back at a fare of Taka 10 per head one way on condition that the minimum number of passengers should be twenty. It took about 6-8 hours to reach Mongla during low tide and 10-12 hours on return journey due to low power of

the engine. The operation of the ML Shalook was stopped and it was brought back to Dhaka wherein it was lying out of order and idle at Pagla Ghat for about 18 years.

It is now learnt that the old and dilapidated ML Shalook has been repaired, made double deck, capacity increased from 52 to 72 at a cost of Taka fourteen lakh, renovated and painted and again put on tourist operation.

Whatever it might be, but we strongly feel that the present existing rate of tariff of the river cruise aboard ML Shalook — Taka 500 per adult and Taka 300 per child — is too much on the high side, which a common tourist whether foreign or domestic can hardly pay. And as such most of the time the launch may not be in use for the envisaged purpose and would be misused and used for the VIPs and government officials, without earning the revenue.

We strongly feel that both for the sake of foreign and domestic tourists and also in the interest of promotion and development of tourism in the country the rate of tariff may be reduced from Taka 500 to Taka 100 (one hundred only) per adult and from Taka 300 to Taka 50 (Taka fifty) only per child, may be curtailing some of the extravaganzas on board. The tourists may be allowed to carry their own packet lunch or tiffin or the same provided

on reasonable payment. There is no need for cultural show on board ML Shalook, because the purpose is sight seeing.

We also suggest that Friday and Saturday may be earmarked for return visit to old remains of historic Idrakpur Fort in Munshiganj and Sonakanda (Bandar) Fort respectively by ML Shalook at the confluence of Dhaleshwari, Lakhia and Brahmaputra, built by the Moghuls in the 17th century. This would create much interest among the tourists, both foreign and domestic and also among our students to know and re-discover Bangladesh.

We hope that our authorities concerned may kindly seriously consider the matter and take positive steps.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Sustainable system

Sir, Murphy's Law has been maintained well in Bangladesh also by her "democratic" people who are in charge of the people's treasury and who are longing for "Alibaba's treasure-trove". Regardless of the outcome, all the exchanges of "formulas" among the parties-in-parliament in the seesaw tactics of their political manoeuvres strikingly unveiled this nation's developing sense of democracy.

The low-cost house "talks" banking on trial-and-error strategy in pursuit of a perfect system for a democratic administration the power actors made everybody believe in while keeping the voters' hope for happier days alive, mediated by the colonial association, could not have produced fruits affordable to all despite a

blend of positivism and negativism leading the civic sentiments of optimism over pessimism to where no polity had ever been.

Now, long before the doomsday is a reality, this state may find herself better off with a governing system of her own that can be a unique model as well.

To that end, the following outline may be inside the territories of geographic entities: Union Council or equivalent is composed of one representative from each village or equivalent elected by local residents; District Council or equivalent is composed of one representative from each Upazila or equivalent elected by Union Council or equivalent members; Division Assembly is composed of one representative from each Union/Upazila or equivalent elected by Union Council or equivalent members; State Assembly is composed of one representative from each District or zone proportional to population elected by District Council members; Division Assembly elections are held at 3-year interval and elect State Vice President from open-to-all candidates for 3-year terms; State Assembly election is held at 3-year interval and elects State President from non-partisan candidates for 2-year term.

During election month, a caretaker administration headed by the neutral President or UN Secretary General's representative assisted by a dozen or so non-partisan representatives of professional bodies in ministerial capacity can replace the incumbent government.

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OPINION

Let Us be Patriotic for a Change

Zahur Ahmed

Let us agree we love our motherland. Let us agree that this poor golden motherland of ours has 120 million people and most of them are below the poverty line by any standard. We have about 30 million unemployed and 75% of our population is illiterate. Is there anything else we can agree on — probably a lot more. Maybe we can agree that we all want power — oh sorry we must be political leaders to be in power.

We have elected 330 members to the parliament at a huge cost to the national exchequer. The parliament quickly made itself the supreme body to govern this poor nation by amending the Constitution (they all agreed then). The majority party formed the government and the second majority party elected the leader of the opposition, all according to the Constitution.

So after all these events why are our political leaders in the streets again? Our leaders must remember that they have been elected to the parliament to govern this nation. If they feel that they are unable to do so then they should make room for the able people, by-elections can fill the respective vacancies. They all wanted to institutionalise our hard earned democracy. They made the parliament the supreme body of this nation, their first democratic institution. So, it is disgusting to see our leaders use the streets to deliver their Democracy Day speeches, only in front of several thousand people. What happened to our national media (TV and Radio), couldn't our leaders speak to the whole nation via our national media. A lot more people would have heard them instead of the few thousands gathered at the different street corners and without disrupting normal public life.

Please tell us, what do you mean by "institutionalised democracy". You often use this phrase in your statements. Do you not mean that (i) the parliament is the supreme body to rule this nation, (ii) all institutions, agencies etc. involved in governing the national affairs should be under the parliament, (iii) the election to the parliament should be free and fair, (iv) all members should have full access to the national media. In addition, you can enact laws in the parliament to suit the needs to govern the nation. This is how you can institutionalise democracy. Use the proper forum to enact the required laws and policies to conduct a free and fair election, instead of street speeches and street programmes.

Please do not underestimate the wisdom of our people, looking at your action they are questioning your motive. They are not moved by useless and ridiculous programmes. Do you really plan to govern this nation or you just want power? Don't forget our people rise spontaneously to the occasion. Remember 1952, 1969, 1971, and 1990 no body led the people. The political leaders only joined them to become leaders.

So for a change let us be patriotic, set aside your differences and work to really institutionalise the hard earned democracy. Talk about what you plan to do with the 30 million unemployed, the economy, recurring flood, the literacy, the traffic and transport problems etc.

The people have elected you to be the political elite of this nation. You have formed the government and the opposition by the rules of the Constitution. What you really should ensure is the election to the parliament be free and fair. So you should enact laws to make the Election Commission independent and responsible directly to the parliament. All ministries should be answerable to the parliament. Make the proceedings in the parliament more flexible, transparent and democratic. Let the individual members speak their mind instead of being restricted by the floor-crossing rules.

The author is a trained physicist, who returned to the country few years back, and is currently running several industrial units.