

25th Victory Day

It is with obvious pride that we celebrate the quarter-century mark of our victory over the Pakistani occupation forces. The glory of independence, the fact of having a country of our own, and the knowledge that we liberated it through an armed struggle, gives this day an added significance. The glory, obviously came for a price. In our case, the price was extremely high. The official figures of 3 million dead and 20 million refugees, who took shelter in India, give us ample sense of the extent of our tragedy. In addition, there were a far larger number of internal refugees — people going from place to place, as one village after another would be attacked and destroyed by Pakistani soldiers desperately searching for the ever growing number of Mukti Bahini. Compared to other nations, our liberation war of nine months was indeed short. But these nine literally compressed atrocity, cruelty, oppression and hatred that other nations perhaps suffered over far longer periods.

Just as Victory Day is one of pride, so also it is one of paying tribute, especially to those who sacrificed their lives for it, and those who helped us achieve it. We pay the highest tribute to the 3 million who were killed by the Pakistani forces, and the thousands of Mukti Bahini members who died so that we could live with dignity. We pay tribute to the estimated 4,000 Indian soldiers who gave up their lives for our war of independence, and remember with gratitude the assistance given by the people and the government of India who gave millions of us shelter and food, and military assistance in our struggle for freedom. We also thank the former USSR, and majority part of the international community who came to our aid. We gratefully remember the international media, and artists, thinkers, and writers who raised their voices against Pakistani oppression, and for our freedom.

Celebrations for the 25th Victory should have been a far more joyous occasion than in reality it is. The reason for it is well known. The political stalemate has not only thwarted our march forward but also made a serious dent in our self-confidence.

Will the remembrance of the Victory 25 years ago make any dent in their sterile positions and help them to put the nation before their partisan interest? We can only hope.

Scout Jamboree

Second Asia-Pacific Community Development Camp, a five-day Jamboree, is being hosted by Bangladesh Scouts in Barguna district. The event is to be participated by scouts leaders from 24 countries of the region, and is by all accounts, the biggest event for our scouts. We wish it all success.

We would like to underscore the tremendous importance of the scout movement for the development of Bangladesh. Its philosophy of caring for the community, training youth for public service, imbuing discipline and the habit of working as a group are all qualities that we need in our younger generation. Given the dramatic rise of indiscipline, the growth of criminal tendency among them, and the deterioration of moral values in our youth, we feel that the time has come for a far greater scout movement in the country.

This newspaper had the proud privilege of organising the "Save Dhaka" campaign in partnership with the scouts, and had a first hand experience of the commitment, discipline and capacity for community work of the scouts. It was but a small example of their capacity to serve the community from which we all have a lot to learn. With greater official and public support, we believe that scouts can do wonders. It is to the great credit of scout leadership, both of the past and especially of the present, that it remained free of all the divisive and partisan tendencies that seem to have afflicted most of the others.

It is our view that the media have not done justice to this great movement. We should help create greater public awareness about the scouts by writing more about its activities. This will help to attract greater number of youth to it, and bring more public and private support behind this movement.

Death in Custody

After the Yasmin Akhter incident in Dinajpur, involving not only those who participated in the raping and killing of the young girl of 14 but also police officers superior to the culprits, the image of the police organisation took an unprecedented beating. After some time, one thought that they had enough of it and tried to take kindly to them — for the umpteenth time. But it was a hopelessly bad task. Other rape and extortion cases came into the open in close succession. The second reprieve came from the thought of closing the media's mind towards endless police atrocities for fear that over exposure would make people impervious to shock — a truly diseased state. And instead a deliberate attempt was made to focus on the good doings of the policemen, for it was very necessary that they find back their overall and the people their confidence in the uniformed men — in the interest of society's wellbeing. But do these reprieves and considerations really help?

Abul Hossain, 55, a village homeopath in the Khulna Kaliganj rural backyard was awakened up from sleep at night and taken to Kaliganj thana. That very night he was hospitalised in a precarious condition. He died in the hospital. People of the area are certain that police torture killed him. Enraged they laid a blockage of highway traffic and attacked even a car carrying SP of Meherpur. Peace was restored after top police officers ensured people of a second post mortem and of a departmental probe. From policemen including the officer-in-charge of the thana have been closed in and sent to Jhenidah police line.

What to make of it? Crime in uniform is no ordinary crime. Not only the criminal but also his controlling authority must take responsibility. This is not done in Bangladesh. Unless this is practised seriously, and on the part of the government sincerely, there will be no end to police crimes.

Death in custody is no ordinary matter. Any respectable government must respond to its seriousness.

Crisis, Commissions, Criminals and Confidence

The sufficient condition or a free market philosophy is the rule of the law and property rights. If the rule of the law fails to take stern action against those found guilty of jeopardising the market clearing devices, the follies fall on the makers of the system and not on the system itself.

It is often being said that a crisis is, in fact, a crisis for many but an opportunity for a very few (roasting pigs when the house is burning!). The best example to this effect is, perhaps, the last devastating fertiliser crisis in the country when of few of us pocketed a hefty profit at the cost of many sacrifices. The reminiscence of those difficult days still haunts us notwithstanding the fact that the crisis took place about a year back and the large number of innocent farmers are getting ready for next bout of boro cultivation. To recall the crisis was so deep that about a dozen people lost lives during their struggle for procurement of this vital input and the gravity of the crisis necessitated the formation of a judicial enquiry committee to enquire into the causes of the crisis.

As there is no dearth of crisis in the country, so there is no dearth of enquiry commission/committee (EC) also. The first and the foremost positive response that any government usually throws to a crisis is the formation of EC. It is, however, alleged that few of those EC reports are actually placed for public consumption and a few of them are respected with proper actions that would deter the occurrence of the

same crisis once again. This attitude stands in sharp contrast to the ethos of an accountable and transparent government.

Recently, a Bengali daily, the *Sangbad*, published a series of instalments relating to the valuable observations made by the EC formed after the last fertiliser crisis. As usual and as said earlier, the people at large are quite in the dark about the findings of that EC report excepting, perhaps, those subscribing that national daily.

From what have been published, it appears that the crisis owed to a panoply of factors acting both on demand and supply side of fertiliser market. It could be gleaned that a group of people were deeply involved in amassing huge sums by fanning the crisis and these weevils monopolised the supply points. It further appears that for reasons unknown, the whole distribution mechanism, got politicised to rock the boat in the distribution channel.

For example, it was stated that some ruling party minis-

ters/MPs, lifted a huge quantity of fertiliser, placed the same at the disposal of their kith and kin who threw these again to an unknown destination. Some of these places are, for example, Chandpur, Jamalpur etc. The EC report gave a judicious and convincing narration of the whole story of the then crisis and hardly failed to finger at the

quite before the next general election and that is also within a few days, the onus of punishing the criminals, if any, should logically fall on the next to come to the power. On that score alone, arguments should sound plausible.

But transparent and accountable as they claim to be, the BNP stalwarts might like

and hence more confident to get ticket if not win. We are not sure whether the "board" asked those guy any question relating to the findings of the EC report. It BNP policy makers can agree to the non-participation of loan defaulters to the general election, then how can they, at the source breath, allow these "fertiliser dacoits" to contest in the election? The government should not fail to identify them since they have the records of how much fertiliser were lifted by whom and whom they distributed this vital input. If the ruling party can get rid of those criminals, it would be an example for others to follow in the future and at the same time, it could also be deemed as a tremendous respect shown to the farmers, to the EC report and to the nation as a whole.

The failure to do this (as has always been in the past) has pervasive ramifications. It would help fast erosion of confidence on EC report, the policy changes in fertiliser distribution network, rule of law in the country and

above all the overall faith in the so-called "free market" economy that the ruling party so long had faith on. It is not, in fact, few hundred or thousands farmers that were hit hard by the unscrupulous trading of those in evidence in the EC report, but it was the total system of distribution that collapsed by their nefarious acts. The critics of the existing system of fertiliser distribution go to argue that it is the distribution mechanism that is the villain or peace implying, perhaps, that such a system is bound to give birth to such type of crisis. We feel that the causality should run other way round. A free market concept embodies a market free of intervention by it from government, mastans, party cadres etc. The sufficient condition or a free market philosophy is the rule of the law and property rights. If the rule of the law fails to take stern action against those found guilty of jeopardising the market clearing devices, the follies fall on the makers of the system and not on the system itself. A repetition of the last fertiliser crisis can partly be stopped only by ensuring that those found guilty were taken to proper tasks. Otherwise, crisis, commissions, criminals would live long, confidence would die soon.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



criminals. There are other factors that apparently fanned the crisis and the EC report also recorded them with due weight.

So far so good. We are, however, not sure as to whether the government is willing to go by the findings of the EC report or whether it intends to shelve it in the cold storage. Of course, the present government could argue that since it has to

do one thing which could raise their party image, enhance the image of uncompromising stance, and above all, their image in the eye of the public. They would disallow those criminals from getting party tickets for the next general election. It is quite obvious that many of them had come to face the oral test before the chief of the ruling BNP and other members (they are richer

Birthday Appeal: Set Me Free

POSTSCRIPT

by Neeman A Sobhan

WELL, happy birthday to me! And if there is common consensus in this country AT LEAST with regard to its gender if not its politics, then, at twenty five, I can say that I, Bangladesh, am a big girl now! In fact, in country where traditionally women are "kooi-tey-boori" or, over twenty, over the hill, then I am certainly old enough. That is I should have by now, found myself, come into my own, acquired some maturity, settled down and been productive, prosperous and even gained some weight among the nations of the world. But here I am still foot loose and fancy free, wayward and wasted. I am still as confused, restless and unfocused as I was in my teens. In many ways since my inception, I feel have grown haggard before my time, and in other ways I feel I have not really grown up at all.

On the 16th of December,

many people will be celebrating my birthday. Most will be going over and over my history. Significant, precious and pivotal thought it is to me, I am however, personally exhausted of the past. Although I honour and respect every bit of what went into my creation, I now want to look ahead not behind. For a quarter of a century I have been merely the repository of history, burdened with the legend of our nationhood, still sore to the touch with its memories of blood, strife, agony, martyrdom and unremitting disillusionments. I have been nurtured on a sad past, and am battered by my present. All I want for my birthday is one simple gift — a plaintive wish for a future, perhaps even a bright future, if its not asking too much.

All these years, I have lived in purdah, shackled to poverty, illiteracy and corruption, watching helplessly as institutions and value as

institutions and values crumbled, parts of our ancestral heritage were parcelled out among the greedy, the unscrupulous, the unpatriotic. I have suffered being led by power hungry politicians who have taken advantage of my youth and inexperience, leaving me with not even a dream or an illusion.

My twenty five years young eyes are already old and haunted and yet today I feel them well up, with yearning, with rebellious desires. I am young, I have not seen the world, I have not exercised my options nor shown what I could be. For too long I have walked with downcast eyes, been humble, over-modestly

covered my head, repressed my creative urges and been the handmaiden of the few who wish to write my future history according to their views and shape my destiny without my consent. For too long I have been lulled by flatterers referring to me as being golden. On this my silver anniversary, I declare that even copper is good enough as long as I am crafted and honed with honesty and sincerity. I don't want an identity that is alloyed and impure. Better to be the Bengal of good earnest steel and iron that the plated gold or silver of the corrupt and crooked.

This is the year I want to break loose. I want to be recreated, to re-enter the world like a new-born and explore it with fresh eyes, seek fresh possibilities. I wish to be part of the world in a new way, hold my head up high, I want to be free of all my problems, all the old mistakes. I want to be new.

Above everything, after twenty five years of attaining independence, I want to know Freedom. I want to be a truly free nation and finally taste this elusive thing called Democracy, apparently the source of all freedom. But all these are wishes. Who will grant them, and is anyone listening?

It is an interesting irony that in spite of my turbulent and impoverished history I have a serene and pleasing aspect. I am a beautiful woman who hides her woes well, so many people don't take my problems and needs seriously and defer them to a

later date. How can I show them how I am ailing and how much I need help. Like the picture of Dorian Gray, somewhere in the attics of the nation's conscience there is a portrait rotting away. Perhaps today we should look within ourselves and inspect that picture. Its of a twenty plus woman, sunken cheeks from malnutrition, pockmarked by society, corrupted by political panders, foul mouthed and diseased, and decrepit before her time. This is my portrait and that of all of us. This is what we really are or will be if we don't take history into our own hands, if no one commits himself to me, saves me. I have been a survivor but today I am exhausted. Yet I still have the resilience of youth. Today, on my birthday I come before my people as a supplicant. This day, the anniversary of my birth and of our independence, I beg you: SET ME FREE!

Situation in Senabhaban

Outside the main building of Senabhaban, there prevailed an atmosphere of the ghostly silence amid watchful eyes and ears of security personnel. PSF and PGR officers were looking normal but a type of uncertainty and suspense could be read from their faces.

IT was 0135 hrs on 5 December '90 when I left my residence; my wife saw me off from the porch. She was worried and panicky but did not oppose my going to Senabhaban. I was travelling in a jeep and a pickup jeep with a section of PGR troops was following as escort. We started facing small gatherings when we reached the road crossing near the Dainik Bangla office. At some places assembly of persons was thin, at some other places there were large gatherings. We were stopped at a few places but on seeing the Army vehicles they let us pass without interference. People clapped in certain places as we crossed indicating friendly gestures. But after crossing Hotel Sheraton I found the crowd occupying the entire road and in large number, they looked unruly. I also noticed the road littered with bricks and broken glasses at some place.

As we approached Farm Gate overbridge I got alarmed noticing the size of the crowd and they looked violent. We were travelling at normal speed and stopped wherever there were obstacles or indications to stop. Beside driver, I had two armed PGR sepoys and a wireless operator in the jeep. Near the overbridge I saw a thin bamboo barrier with a gap just enough for a jeep to pass through. Before I could say anything, the driver suddenly accelerated the speed and crossed the bamboo barrier without hitting it. But immediately I heard a big bang and found the wind-screen broken and collapsing in small pieces. A half size brick, after breaking the glass stuck a sepoy sitting at the rear but caused no injury. That was a miracle; the brick passed between me and the driver without touching us. Out of jittery the driver sped up and invited trouble; I was certain it was not intended for us. But it could have been very fatal had the brick hit the driver or me and consequence would have been worst.

At that overcharged situation, any accident, confrontation or untoward incident involving men in uniform could have created serious misunderstanding and at-

tracted violent reactions. In fact in such a situation when public mood on or off the street was so hostile even an inadvertent incident or accident could trigger serious troubles. I was always aware of this aspect of the movement and remained alert to avoid escalations from any threatening events. Attack on my jeep did not perturb me at all. I felt reassured when I reached Senabhaban. Its main entry gate was heavily guarded by PGR troops and locked from inside. The officer on duty came forward and arranged my entry. As I approached towards the main building, officers on duty from PSF (President's Security Force) came to receive me. They already heard about attack on me through wireless sets. Some took me to PSF control room to remove broken pieces of glass from my body and combat jacket.

Lt Col. Abul Basher, Deputy Director of PSF who was in charge of the President's security and ADC Capt

Kamal briefed me on the situation prevailing at that time inside the main building. Chief of Army Staff and CGS met the President just half an hour back and many ministers including the Vice-President were with the President. Capt Kamal told me that President had instructed the Chief of Army



FALL OF GENERAL ERSHAD

by Maj Gen Manzur Rashid Khan (Retd)

Staff to arrange Radio and TV broadcasting of messages of Sheikh Hasina and Begum Zia. It was an encouraging information for me; I felt relieved hearing that President had not changed his mind and broadcast preparations were on. When I initially proposed it over telephone just about two hours back it was inconceivable to me that President Ershad would allow his two bitterest antagonists appear before the Radio

and TV audiences to announce his unconditional surrender.

Outside the main building of Senabhaban, there prevailed an atmosphere of the ghostly silence amid watchful eyes and ears of security personnel. PSF and PGR officers were looking normal but a type of uncertainty and

suspense could be read from their faces. Though they were near the President but hardly knew what was actually happening and what was coming next. I talked to them and explained what was being done to defuse tension and uncertainty. They needed someone to assure them and feel certain of their responsibility — actions and deeds. I assured them that whole Army was united to do what was best for the

nation and the people. They all should maintain discipline, chain of command and should not indulge in any reckless or headstrong move. Unfortunately, officers of PSF and PGR, who were engaged in the security of President had become target of suspicion and mistrust. At that time Army troops were also deployed around (outside) Senabhaban for the protection of the President creating a notion of facing PGR and PSF. Some thought that they would remain loyal to the President. In such a situation it was quite difficult to make out who was loyal to whom and who was not or a fence sitter.

ADC Capt Kamal told me that he informed the President when I started from and also told about the attack on me. He was waiting for me in the dining hall. When I entered the dining hall, it was a surprise for me; almost half of his Cabinet was sitting around the table occupying all the seats. Time was around 1:50 am, on 5 December '90. President Ershad was sitting at the northern end of the table occupying the main chair, on his left were Begum Rawshan Ershad, Deputy Prime Minister Shah Moazzem Hossain, Ministers Anwar Hossain and Nazim Rahman, Begum Rawshan Ershad's brother-in-law Mustafizur Rahman and a young man, probably Mustafiz's son, Vice President Moudud Ahmed, Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed, and Foreign Minister Anisul Islam Mahmood were sitting on the opposite side of the table. There were pin drop silence in the hall room as I walked near the President from the western side. He asked if I was injured and what was the overall situation prevailing at that time. I told him that the attack was, probably, not aimed at me. The mob at Farm Gate was in a considerable strength and main roads were still occupied. They were looking for ministers and leaders of JP. I also informed them about patrolling of main roads connecting Airport by the activists in trucks and motor

cycles. The picture I narrated was not exaggerated or understated. My aim was to make President Ershad and his ministers realize the gravity of the situation and that there should not be any second thought on the decision already made. They listened to me quietly, none asked any question or showed interest in discussion.

After hearing me, the President got up and made move to leave. He along with Rawshan Ershad soon left but others remained in the dining hall. I also left immediately for ADC's room. A few minutes later, President called me; he was standing in the corridor with his wife. He asked me what to do with the ministers and should not they leave now. I said that it would not be safe for them to go outside the Cantonment but could be dropped in places nearby. He agreed and asked me to arrange transport and escort for them. When I informed, most of them agreed. They were taken to places of their choice in and around Cantonment and Banani/Gulshan areas in Army transports and escorts. After their departure, I sat down in ADC's room to know the progress in recording speeches of Alliance leaders for Radio and TV broadcast.

I rang the Chief of Army Staff; he heard about the attack on me near Farm Gate and expressed his concerns. He was very happy to hear that I reached Senabhaban and going to stay there. He expressed his confidence stating that so long I would be there nothing would go wrong. He informed me that everything was going on well, he had contacted leaders of both the main Alliances and officers were sent to record addresses of Sheikh Hasina and Begum Zia. They had welcomed the role being played by the Army and expressed full confidence on him as the Chief of Army Staff. Both had agreed to address people on Radio and TV and appeal for maintaining peaceful atmosphere. There was no discord, disagreement or opposition from any quarter in respect of the role he started playing.

Monday: Situation in Senabhaban-II



The agitated crowd

— Photo AKN Mohsin