

1971 — A Tragedy and its Consequences

On to a True Start

On this dawn ushering the silver jubilee year of our independence we first salute the indomitable spirit of our people that created this state.

Bangladesh's journey towards national unity, socio-political fulfilment and economic justice was grievously hurt by the assassinations of August 15 and November 3, 1975.

We are, out of touch with democracy for so many years, finding the path hard and treacherous. But one guarantee is there for overcoming the present impasse which is the universal agreement on the need for a caretaker government and on the redundancy of this parliament beyond paving the way for its dissolution and a new election by May participated by all parties.

To make a true and resolute start for democracy at the end of the present impasse we must endeavour to abide by the spirit of the Liberation War and keep as close to the undying testament it left us — the Constitution of 1972.

We salute at this hour the martyred millions and all our tortured mothers and sisters, all freedom fighters and very specially India but for whose unqualified support the day of deliverance could become far more difficult.

We congratulate our nation and wish it god-speed. All of its constituents will sing from their hearts — sharthok janam amar jonmechhi ei deshe — blessed I am to be born on this soil.

I was born in an independent country under the sky of freedom. I never saw the blood of martyrs; never realized the sacrifice of so many young souls.

1971 was the fateful year for Pakistan when the demand for autonomy in the eastern half of the country culminated into a demand for independence. To suppress the rebellion, the military government of Pakistan unleashed its well equipped army on the unsuspecting civilian population of East Pakistan on the night of 25th March with unprece-

When president Yahya Khan, the military dictator of Pakistan decided to massacre the Bengalis of East Pakistan for daring to demand regional autonomy the world's tragic ignorance about the country was a factor of inestimable value to him.

One major Sullivan Ballou scribbled the words to his wife Sarah, the night before his death in the battle of Bull Run in the American Civil War, 1861.

The following is an excerpt from a research paper presented by Sayyeda Tun Noor Sameera, a Bangladeshi girl who was studying English literature at Karachi University in 1995.

East Pakistan, fewer still would care how many were massacred. No journalist would be permitted to see what he was doing. The massacre would take place quietly as though in some remote and unknown region like NWFP where no news trickles out.

But it did not happen like that. The Bengalis fought back, journalists succeeded in entering the unknown country and thus making it known to the outside world, and the Indian army marched in to deliver the coup de grace.

By coincidence, a professor of engineering, Dr Md Naser, living close to the dormitories had acquired a new video tape camera a few days before. From a window overlooking Jagannath hall he was able to make a film of the attack on the hostels and the murders of the students, helped by the blinding searchlights playing on the walls. In the film students can be seen pouring out of the shattered hostels with their hands above their heads and being lined up against the

walls. An officer is seen jumping down from a tank turret to examine them and as he marches up and down the line of students he appears to be holding a review. Then he steps aside, gives an order, and the long line of students falls to the ground. Then mysteriously, as though coming from nowhere, another line of students appears and they too are mown down.

The attack on the student hostels was part of a concerted plan to wipe out the intellectual gem of the country. But the military were not concerned with destroying only the intellectuals. As frantic Muslims they were determined to destroy the Hindu minority and all the other elements that might dispute their authority.

While the attack on the dormitories was continuing, tanks, weapon carriers and soldiers were converging on other areas of the city. One of their targets was the barracks of East Pakistan Rifles, a constabulary force recruited from the local Bengali speaking population and therefore unlikely to join the forces with the Urdu speaking invaders.

across his blood soaked canvas. A few students succeeded in reaching the flat roofs and were able to fire at the tanks and the advancing Punjabis and Baluchis with old fashioned, bolt-action rifles before the search lights sprang up and they were picked off one by one by sharpshooters.

The massacre began at exactly 11:25 in the evening of March 25, 1971. Four US B-72 bombers, followed by a platoon of Punjabi and Baluchi soldiers, rolled up in front of the two student dormitories of the university and shelled them at a range of fifty yards.

The tanks had not made much noise as they advanced along the metal road from the cantonment, and the soldiers marching behind them were under order to keep silent. The few passers by were not particularly surprised to see the tanks moving through the centre of the city: there had been strange and erratic troop movements throughout the previous week.

Just as the military received orders to kill everybody in the hostels, so it was ordered to destroy everyone in the barracks situated in the Pikhana area. After a relatively long combat, a hundred were killed inside the barracks; those who surrendered were bayoneted to death. There was another mass grave. Two police sta-

and shot down with machine gun fire. The professor, however, was still alive when the soldiers left and his wife dragged her wounded husband back into the apartment. Three hours later the soldiers returned under orders to remove the bodies and bury them. They found Prof Zaman in the bedroom, dragged him down the stairs, propped him up against the wall and shot him through the head.

Professor Govinda Chandra Dev, the head of the Department of Philosophy, was an elderly bachelor who never took any part in politics. He liked to look after poor students whom he housed and fed, and he delighted in leading them in discussions on religion and philosophy. The soldiers broke into the house, killed the students and then marched the professor into a nearby field and shot him. His crime was that he was a professor and Hindu. Altogether eleven professors and lecturers were killed. There was method in their violence; very soon it became clear that there were about a dozen men at the university staff working with military officials.

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For nine months East Pakistan, one of the most densely populated regions on earth, was given over to a massacre on a scale unprecedented in recent history. Only the Japanese massacres in China during the '30s and the German massacres in Russia during the '40s could compare with it. It was a "methodical, deliberate and calculated massacre, and it failed only because the perpetrators made a series of obvious mistakes."

Not Unsolvable

For the city dwellers nothing is quite as irritable as a dried-up tap at home. And when it occasionally coughs up droplets of water tantalisingly an insult is added to the injury.

It seems that the media have so far rather myopically viewed WASA's supply capacity as half the daily requirement of water in the city. The other half of the truth is that WASA's system loss is a whopping 52 per cent.

The breakdown of the figure is even more revealing. It is shocking to learn that WASA has the liability of 30,000 illegal connections to its discredit, so that the ratio between these and the authorised water connections is a little more than one is to five.

The World Bank's recipe is privatise and put the lid on waste and pilferage. The WASA employees who resist the idea tooth and nail would have had an impregnable defence against it if they had themselves succeeded in curbing the system loss.

WASA's lack of planning is evident when one finds out that it is only a few days back that water pumps in a number of areas were taken up for maintenance work. These could be set right much earlier to obviate their non-operation at this time of severe water scarcity.

The authority has to step up the mobile supply in areas starving of water as a contingency measure.

But O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the garish day and in the darkest night — amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours — always, always; and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air fans your temple, it shall be my spirit passing by.

It is ironic that mankind with all the leavening of civilization, is but a hairbreadth away from the primordial animal instinct; otherwise how can one account for the smothering of 16 flowers with the brutal gunshots of a psychotic loner?

For Bangladesh, which is observing the silver jubilee of its independence, Dunblane and Georgia, both come to relief as a reminder that to achieve anything worthwhile the a priori condition is sacrifice. It is apt and poignant because the country we are proud of required the supreme sacrifice of millions of freedom-loving martyrs to establish the rights of people, to structure the road to liberty.

Progress is a synthesis of the

And Simplify Me When I am Dead

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ENCHIRIDION

Waliar Rahman



past and a prophecy of the future. The message was full large on every face, big or small, in the Dunblane Cathedral, the words of Antigone. "Many a wonder lives and moves, but the wonder of all is man. But the piece de resistance is to be seen in the city of Georgia, the mountains of Blair could not have been far from the thoughts of St. Augustine. The marvellous power by which seed is produced, and which seems to be as it were inwrought and woven in the human body?"

The freedom we achieved 25 years now is a story of human sacrifice, collective and individual, and a saga of human valour, displayed in its best and most. Bengalis stood up against military oppression and bureaucratic malfeasance and alien values. It was only natural, therefore, that Bangladesh in early '80s made no mistake in signing the covenant with the United Nations to help the world body to keep the peace and maintain international peace and security.

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death by Hitler's executioners. In love with life am I, and life goes surging past. I know I soon must die... These verses are my last... We are proud of our army, our valiant soldiers of peace. On this day, the anniversary of our glorious war of liberation, should not we remember the famous combat of the thirty in 1351 — the combat between Robert de Beaumont and the French side and Branborough, the Anglo-Briton Party. Bleeding and exhausted, Beaumont begged for a drink, eliciting the century's most memorable reply, "Drink thy blood, Beaumont, and thy thirst shall pass!"

Sure enough, the thirst of our sacred soil is quenched, full and square with the blood of million martyrs, some

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known, others unknown. With Lt. Col. Mohammad Hossain those millions would be remembered in verse, perhaps in epic, a painting, a tapestry or memorial stones resembling those of verdun. La Somme or Nettuno or Monte Cassino. We need to pluck our courage — to pluck the Golden Bough! But we are yet miles away from Lake Nemi. The divided soul (of Bangladesh) needs to be borne on the swell of the wind, to the sound of the church bells, sweet and solemn they chime...

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To the Editor...

"Can Statesmanship Triumph Over Folly?" Sir, I have read with great interest the illuminating article under the above heading in your issue of March 12.

It is not often these days that one comes across well-balanced opinion on the present day political, social and economic crisis that our motherland is going through due to lack of statesmanship on the part of leadership of this country. The solution Mr Rehman Sobhan has suggested, to my mind, is the only way to come out of this impasse, created by the leadership in position and in opposition. During the last few days thanks to the open ended 'peaceful' non-cooperation movement, I have been travelling in rickshaws and often entering into thought-provoking discussion on the present day impasse with the rickshaw pullers. Very interesting to note that all of them, irrespective of their political leaning, agree on one respect and that is only taking the country to economic situation.

To come out of this situation honourably, Mr Rehman Sobhan's opinion seems, to me, to be the only one which may save the prestige of the top leaders as well as that of the entire nation. I would however like to add only one point which Mr Sobhan perhaps has missed out in the first part of his article. Does he seem to have omitted to mention that the fundamental rights of the people guaranteed by the constitution have been grossly violated in attempting to enforce the strike in support of 'peaceful' non-cooperation movement by threats and coercion? Nevertheless, I congratulate Mr Rehman Sobhan on his frank opinion. I only hope that the leadership take the opinion of this eminent person who was closely associated with the freedom movement of 1971 and in formulating the economic policy of Bangladesh at its nascent stage. I also take this opportunity of referring to the editorial captioned 'Presidents Speech'. Here I see another illuminating opinion on the

subject that is disturbing the minds of the entire people. The politicians, all of them without any exception, must leave aside everything and concentrate on solving the problem within the framework of the sacred Constitution of Bangladesh. The framers of the constitution made this a rigid one with the aim that this constitution cannot be tampered with by any one party at will but unfortunately a situation has been created which the framers of the constitution did not foresee.

It is sad that apparently it seems that many including the learned people did not bother in the past to seriously think of the Constitutional provisions and its inviolability as one would gather from the day to day conversations. Unfortunately, even the most knowledgeable people, the members of legal profession and, the mediamen also cannot be excluded; they also, it seems, did not bother about the constitution before.

The other day, I had to visit a leading hotel of the city which gave the most dismal look, never seen before. I saw a large garment's factory, which used to be throbbing till late in the night, giving a deadly look even during the period of so called relaxation for the garment industry. It is no use allowing so called relaxation to a sector of industry when the banking, the transport, the port etc are not allowed to function. The present political impasse is ruining the country and taking it at least 50 years back if not more.

Against this background however, I see a little hope. Perhaps never before during the last twentyfive years the people have discussed the constitution so much and felt the necessity of looking at the Constitution with seriousness. A few weeks ago I went to the New Market book shops to buy a new up dated copy of the Constitution. I was asked to come back a few days later as all the copies, the book sellers told me, were sold out. People are becoming conscious of the importance of the constitution. Here is the hope.

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Dhaka Day by Day

Fairy-tale News

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

Dhaka is becoming one of the most unpredictable of cities, not to mention the most dangerous. You just never know when someone will throw a petrol bomb from the top of a building or when you will be smothered in the middle of an angry mob or be teared out to tears. Funnily enough, while the whole city is aflame with violence of some kind or the other, our dear beloved Bangladesh Television has managed to retain its mask of complete complacency. Like the deluded teacher Pangloss in Voltaire's Candide, BTV news tries to show that Bangladesh is in a state of being in the "best of all possible worlds".

If February's elections have been termed 'farical' by the Opposition and even some of the most relied upon foreign news agencies, BTV news can only be described as fantastical. On Sunday, for example, while the city was tense with numerous incidences of violence, the news boasted that Dhaka had normalised, people were coming out to work and everything was just wonderful in reality bombs were being exploded in Mirpur and bomb blasts in Mirpur and Jhatbari, a Mukto Mancha (Free Stage) was destroyed by police triggering further violence and the city's Mayor was leading a sit-in in front of the Secretariat. None of this was in the news.

Like in Ray Bradbury's movie Fahrenheit 451 the screen, showed only what Big Brother

ings etc? According to BTV they just did not occur.

Well if BTV wants to drown in a fake make-believe world, it is most welcome to do so. But honestly, to assume that we are such fools as to take any of such news seriously, is surely an insult to any person with even half a brain. To those of you who have patiently waited to see some kind of credibility in BTV news and have been sorely disappointed — one word of advice: Don't fret, just switch off the tube and order for cable.

