

History Speaks, Spawns the Truth

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A Debt of Gratitude

Today is the Intellectual Martyrs Day. Or better still Martyred Intellectuals Day. What distinguishes a martyred intellectual from a Shaheed who doesn't belong to that valued fold? Nothing. An intellectual has his high ideals and superior appreciation of the abstract entities of patriotism and justice to prepare him well to defend those even if that takes life.

We observe this day and for very many good reasons. Indeed it is one of the most poignant events on our calendar, replete with significance for both our nation and posterity. Witch-hunting to silence new ideas and voices of reason and vision is nothing new in history. But nothing compares to what was wrought in Bangladesh in the later three quarters of 1971, specially December. Hitler or even the Inquisition pales before the deliberate and pointed, duly culled and pursued execution of the leaders of the Bengalee people's intellectual life. The killing of such intellectual giants as GC. Dev, Santosh Bhattacharya, Jyotirmoy Guha-Thakurta and Kalachand Roy, the last named in far-off Rangpur came as a part of the general plan to terrorise and traumatise by one fell stroke the Bengalee spirit into submission. By their last spree of murders of the best minds of this nation they wanted to rob the victors of the day a future as a nation. This amounted to more than mere mass murders of which there were a plethora in '71 — to a genocide of the unborn, to a condemnation of the victors to live down a hollow victory and ultimately slide into some ignominious obliteration.

Their evil dream hasn't come true. True, we have been turned the poorer by the loss of such stalwarts as GC. Dev, the philosopher and Munier Choudhury, the linguist, Fazle Rabbi and Alim Choudhury, the physicians, Mofazzal Haider Choudhury and Anwar Pasha, the teachers, Shahidullah Kaiser and Zahir Raihan, the immortal brothers. But an ancient nation somehow plods on and we are steadily regaining our ground in the arts and culture, in spite of the wounds inflicted on the national soul by the cowardly acts represented by December 14.

We observe it to pay our debt of gratitude to the intellectual martyrs for they died so that we live and also not to forget the lesson taught us by the day. They were killed not primarily by the Pakistani butchers but by Bengali speaking sons of this soil. And nearly all of them live amongst us till today. It is no revanchist cry that they should be made to pay for their crime.

DCC's Moment of Truth

In its approval of a non-governmental organisation for scavenging a particular part of the city for the first time, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has welcomed but rather belatedly given out its acceptance of a truth: the maintenance authority of the metropolis is out of its depth in the fight with city's ever increasing load of garbage. It comes more as a measure driven by desperation than an innovative revelation.

Dhaka is getting increasingly vulnerable to the general and ready description 'the city of filth and squalor'. Every street, every nook and corner of the city has been bearing testimony to the unabated onslaught of all types of refuse for quite some time. It would ask for a huge debate and research to ascertain to what extent exactly, the utter disdain of civic responsibility among a section of people and the callousness of city managers have contributed to the nauseating and the sickening reality. The eventual incapacity of the DCC, given its limited logistics and the growth of the city both in space and people was, however, a foregone conclusion.

The step the DCC has reportedly, come up with is a fairly commendable one in taking on a problem of monstrous proportion but as a sustainable formula in the long run, it needs to be reviewed seriously. Because garbage cleaning operation of a city like Dhaka is a huge responsibility. It would be extremely unwise to expect it to be looked after by non governmental organisations solely dependent on financial support from foreign donors.

Besides, an indispensable reality like garbage cleaning cannot be made subject to the impetus of voluntary social service. Its existence in the private sector has to be ensured by commercial viability. The DCC would do well to form a team of experts to study the system in other countries that have given service to the private sector and come up with solid ways to deal with the garbage problem.

Where Dacoits Rule

Dhaka Sylhet highway has become the virtual heaven for highwaymen. According to a Bengali daily, the stretch from Narsingdi to Bhalra come under the prowl of robbers and dacoits daily right after the nightfall. The passengers of the Sylhet bound night coaches and other vehicles are falling preys to these armed bandits regularly.

Not only that, the colonnade of trees on the sides of the said part of the highway is all but gone. The dacoits do not only stop at robbing people of their belongings but have also extended the domain of their criminality to the lovely, useful green robed senators. The sufferers are quoted to have said that the trees are felled to create road blocks.

What makes one aghast is that this reign of lawlessness has been going on for quite some time in that area and the local law enforcing administration has so far behaved in a manner as if it could not care less about public sufferings.

Well, if the local law enforcers can afford to remain blind to the reign of the robbers on the roads, the central authorities cannot. We hope an immediate measure would be taken to clear the Dhaka Sylhet highway from the clutches of criminals and also a probe would be conducted into the allegation of negligence in duty by the local unit of law enforcing agency.

THE people of Bangladesh are now passing through the most marvellous moments of their statehood. They had one such rare occasion back in 1971 when their homeland clinched independence from the clutches of the Pakistani occupation army. There were, however, victory and independence day celebrations in between. But most of those were, allegedly, marked by an absence of the truth of facts but full of fictions. The present generation was kept quite in the dark about the true performers of the liberation war. It was, as if, the history of our independence had no links, whatsoever, with the events beyond the year 1971. People, especially those who were born after 1971 were not allowed to peep deep into the true records of the independence movement lest they discover the truth and thus smash the planks of false premises upon which many of the so called history-makers survived.

The language movement of 1952 was the first shot in the air to indicate the beginning of the end. We all know who all those heroes were to ring the bell. Some of them sacrificed their lives, some are still alive. Then followed a panoply of movements to provide further boost to the momentum and each and every step of the then Pakistan government to the residents of this part of that country only added fire to the flame. But of all those, Awami League's six-point demand ushered a new challenge. The leader of the party, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was hooked on to a state conspiracy case called the Agartala conspiracy case. And that was, perhaps, the last nail in the coffin.

The legendary Moulana Bhasani had thrown all of his life to the cause of the people of this country. While Sheikh Mujib was in jail, he had to shoulder some of the pressures that politics of those days generated. He should be duly saluted for his uncompromising stances. The great Moulana always loved Sheikh Mujib and never seemed to have undermined or envied the latter's sacrifices. Unfortunately, some of us always brood the nasty tastes of placing the two on a competitive platform. However, the six-point movement was greased by the Agartala conspiracy case when the whole of the then East Pakistan stood against the motivated trait.

The movements led by the people, especially, the 11-point demands of the students, forced Pakistanis to release Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. There were many heroes of that movement but few names used to steal the

headlines: Messrs Tofael Ahmed, Shajahan Siraj, A.S.M. Abdur Rab (Late) Abdul Guddus Makhani, Sirajul Alam Khan etc. In the general election that President Yahia Khan organized, people of this country singularly mandated Awami League to march ahead with its six-point demand. The military junta of Pakistan began to hatch conspiracy so that Awami League (and hence Bengalees) fall to rule Pakistan. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was nourished and nurtured to act as the villain and he did it successfully. However, arrangements were afoot to hold dialogues and thus detract the whole attention of the nation from the main issues. The administration collapsed in this part of Pakistan. In the meantime, the ongoing fiery events in the then East Pakistan empowered Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to assume the control of this region. All administrative decisions were

dependence that was conveyed to the nation by (late) Abdul Hannan. The followers of (late) President Zia strongly argue that Zia was the declarer of independence. Many of us heard from radio: 'I Major Zia on behalf of our great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman... hereby declare independence.' Are then the two claims mutually exclusive? Definitely not. It was Bangabandhu's declaration carried out by the then Major Zia. The second question: does the acceptance of the truth in any way belittle the contribution of Major Zia in the war of liberation? Again definitely not. We should pay due respect to all those who fought and Major Zia was one of those valiant sector commanders who took the risk of his life to liberate the country.

That Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the architect of this nation could further be testified from the available audio-visual documents on our

freedom fighter had his whole body in India at that time. Most of the freedom fighters who now belong to BNP also committed the same kind of 'crimes'. If, for argument's sake, they had followed the foot prints of Awami League, then once again it would be proved that they had to follow the leadership of that party at that time. Fortunately, at least one of the premises must be true. Second, had Bangabandhu hid somewhere in Bangladesh, the enemy army would have unleashed a much more biting reign of terror within this part of Pakistan. In fact, General Tikka Khan is said to have been asked about what they would have done if they failed to find the Sheikh. 'We would have burnt each and every house to get him within our grip' — was the answer. Therefore, saying that Bangabandhu should not have surrendered seemingly tantamounts to saying that we wanted more killings, rapes and destructions.

Who is the father of the nation? There could, obviously, be a choice as to whether one should call it a father or a founder, but there is no option of throwing out both. Whatever title one leaves to it, all available national and international documents tend to decree that it is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who could be adorned with such a title. Every nation has a father or a founder whose name falls from the pages of history that takes into account the candidate's long record of political sacrifices, organizational capabilities, uncompromising stances and competence to lead people.

A father is always a father whether a son calls him father or not or whether he can properly manage the family or not. He would remain a father despite all his limitations as a human being. It is possibly true that in the immediate post independence period the then government failed to live upto the expectations of the people. Allegedly, there were many follies. China also faced the most severe famines and other disruptions during the time of Mao Tse-tung. Could that lower his status in the eyes of the Chinese? In fact, there are many scholars in this world who are not good husbands. Many ace coaches whose teams fail to win the games few times. Are they robbed of their titles? Calling Bangabandhu a father or a founder of Bangladesh never goes to downsize Moulana Bhasani or Ziaur Rahman. In fact, it is the other way round. Let us call a spade a spade and call it a day for the unfortunate debate.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



taken by him and his party and the people from all walks of life used to adhere to them as sacred duties.

The so-called dialogue failed a reign of terror and killing was let loose and Bangabandhu was arrested on the night of 25th March 1971. The people of this part of Pakistan took up arms to fight with the occupation army. About 10 million people had to take refuge in neighbouring India. Awami League formed government in exile. Army, Navy, EPR, Police personnel joined the war of independence with the people and the students of this country. All political parties and activists of the then East Pakistan (baring a few of the ultra left and the ultra right) participated in the war. Those who crossed the border and those who could not equally contributed to the liberation struggle of our homeland. It was, therefore, not a liberation war of any particular political party nor any particular party should claim its ownership. But because of their elected political position at that time, Awami League formed the government in exile and hence the war is said to have been led by Awami League.

Who declared independence? Bangladesh Awami League had been arguing strongly that it was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who declared in-

liberation struggle. The hitherto unreleased Mukti Gan, the War Crime File etc. and many other documentary films and records tend to forestall the fact that we were not free from that time as was not Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Given these crystal clear judgements on the ownership of the declaration of independence, it is unfortunate that the debate still prolongs only to put strains on our nerves and strings to our progress.

Of late some political leaders seem to allege that the then leaders (meaning Awami Leaguers) were frightened to face Pakistani Army and took shelter in India at that time. Taking the argument further, they forcefully say that had they not left for India or had Sheikh Mujib not surrendered to Pakistani soldiers, we would not have lost so many millions of people and possibly it would not have taken so much time for our independence. There are seemingly a number of contradictions in this sort of points being made and these points forcefully bring to the fore the level of ignorance with which the advocates tend to pursue the path of politics. First, if taking shelter in India was of any crime, then it was General Zia who could turn out to be the brutal victim of such a 'nonsensical' judgement. Because that great

Pro-democracy Struggle in Myanmar Takes New Turns

At present, the junta seemed to be more concerned with suppressing dissent at home than with improving their international image. Recent events provoked the Clinton administration into banning visits by SLORC officials to America writes A S M Nurunnabi.

NEW developments have lately marked the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar. Since U Nu San Suu Kyi was released from six years of house arrest in July 1995, she used to address her supporters over her garden fence every Saturday and Sunday. Having failed to deter people from turning up, the authorities decided to block them with barricades. But they used to come anyway, leading to a cat and mouse game as Suu Kyi tried to meet them beyond the cordon. In view of the prevailing political situation in Myanmar, Suu Kyi tried to meet them beyond the cordon. In view of the prevailing political situations in Myanmar, Suu Kyi declared that the choice for the military junta lay between 'dialogue and devastation.' It was indeed a simple statement of fact.

Observers noted that politics in Myanmar was progressively turning ugly. The ruling military junta routinely locked up its critics, sometimes torturing them. Villagers used to be dragged into unpaid labour. But the government at least refrained from using physical violence against Suu Kyi until 9th November last when some unruly elements attacked cars carrying her and her advisers. The mob turned violent, throwing stones at the cars, beating her travelling companions with

sticks and chains and chanting various anti-Suu Kyi slogans. The junta denied any involvement in the hooliganism. But nobody in Yangon believed their story. The unruly elements were said to be members of a kind of government supporter's club drawn from civil service, schools as well as unemployed youths who received some payments per head for their intimidation. Though there were large numbers of uniformed soldiers and policemen near the scene, none intervened.

Many impartial observers disliked the confrontational approach of the government at a time when Senator John McCain, a senior American politician, was on a rare visit to Myanmar with plans to meet senior members of the junta as well as the opposition leader, Suu Kyi. The US Senator sought to improve a battered relationship with Myanmar. The mission was not likely to be helped by the junta's present attitude. In this context, it may be mentioned that American legislation passed in September last imposed mild sanctions on Myanmar. There was a threat of worse punitive steps if there is

'large-scale repression or if Suu Kyi is physically harmed.' According to some reports, the junta's behaviour was not just in conflict with its diplomatic aim; it also showed signs of internal disagreement. An intelligence source had hinted last November at the possibility of talks between the junta and Suu Kyi, which would meet her one consistent demand since her release. But the tactics of the junta now seem to lean towards confrontation. In this perspective, some expressed the fear that, to justify its actions, the junta might adopt an even tougher stance, which compromise from might become difficult.

At present, the junta seemed to be more concerned with suppressing dissent at home than with improving their international image. Recent events provoked the Clinton administration into banning visits by SLORC officials to America. Five US Senators called on President Bill Clinton in writing to declare a ban on new US investment in Myanmar for human rights violations. The five Senators contended that the Cohen amendments' criteria for imposing such a ban

were already met in the wake of a campaign of arrest and intimidation, culminating in a violent attack on the car in which Suu Kyi was travelling.

US President Bill Clinton lately singled out military-led Myanmar for criticism as he closed a 12-day Pacific trip. In a speech at a Thai University, President Clinton said in a tough tone that the refusal of Myanmar's rulers to move towards democracy and the regime's involvement in narcotics both represented a violation of the rule of law. He praised the brave reformers in Myanmar led by Suu Kyi. The US president said: 'Every nation has an interest in promoting true political dialogue — a dialogue that will lead to a real fight against crime, corruption and narcotics and a government more acceptable to the people.'

In this context, Suu Kyi observed: 'May parts of the world have undergone unbelievable change. Once bitter enemies in South Africa are now working together. In this context, there is more in common between the military junta and the democratic forces in Myanmar than existed between white and black peoples of South Africa. Since

The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty—A Welcome Breakthrough

This long-term treaty by removing a nagging irritant between the two countries should open up opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation says Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad.

DETAILED comments can be made only after one has a chance to look at the treaty in detail. But undoubtedly this 30-year treaty on the sharing of existing flows of the Ganges is a welcome breakthrough. This has created an existing flows of the Ganges is a welcome breakthrough. This has created an opportunity for addressing the problems that have been becoming increasingly serious over the years as a result of reduced flows below Farakka. This long-term treaty has certainly created an environment in which steps can be taken to improve water management and utilisation in the Ganges catchment area in Bangladesh. For example, it was not possible so far, construction of a dam to secure assured flow of water to secure funds for constructing the proposed Ganges Barrage near Farakka. Unless this barrage is built, most of the water is likely to go waste, going down to the Bay of Bengal. Water can be controlled and diverted for various purposes including irrigation, salinity control, etc. by constructing this barrage as soon as possible. I believe, fund raising for the purpose will no longer be a serious problem, provided the barrage construction proposal is now pursued with determination.

I would like to congratulate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her foresightedness and political sagacity in concluding this treaty so rapidly. It is surely a mutually beneficial act for both Bangladesh and India. The Prime Minister and the other leaders of India should also be congratulated.

I am particularly pleased to see the resolution of this long standing problem between the two countries. In fact, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP), Centre for Policy Research (CPR) of New Delhi and Institute of Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) of Kathmandu have been working together over the past six years on water sharing and other regional issues. We came to the firm conclusion years ago that the Ganges water sharing issue could not be resolved at technical or bureaucratic level and that it was most likely to be accomplished at the highest political (summit) level. The technical aspects were known. What was necessary was a clear-cut political direction. The resolu-

tion of the problem at the initiative of the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India is a vindication of our understanding of the situation.

This long-term treaty by removing a nagging irritant between the two countries should open up opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation. In our regional conference on Eastern Himalayan Rivers held in New Delhi in mid-October 1996, a call was made to convert the Ganges, which had so long been a river of discord, into a river of friendship. An opportunity has now arisen for such a development. Cooperation can be expanded to all possible areas including an integrated approach to basin development in which other countries such as Nepal and Bhutan can also participate. The Mahakali Agreement between India and Nepal signed some months ago is another landmark event which should also help improve the prospects of regional cooperation. There is no doubt that regional solution of trans-boundary problems are beneficial to all countries concerned, without any one losing in the process. Obviously, all participants will keep their national interests and perspectives in view while negotiating terms and conditions of cooperation. I believe, for the benefit of all, the regional countries should work together to expand and deepen scope and work programmes for regional cooperation keeping in view geo-political and geo-economic realities. I would like to end this short comment by quoting the following paragraph from *Converting Water into Wealth: Regional Cooperation in Harnessing the Eastern Himalayan Rivers* jointly prepared by Bangladeshi (Q.K. Ahmad), Indian (B.G. Verghese, Ramaswamy R. Iyer) and Nepali (B.B. Pradhan, S.K. Mallia) authors in 1994 within the framework of their research collaboration on the issue: 'The Eastern Himalaya region is too poor to afford further loss of time. The waters of the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Barak/Meghna constitute an abundance of wealth and energy that must be creatively and cooperatively used. We can move forward together towards a better future or suffer the privation of self-abetation while the world marches on. The choice is obvious.'

To the Editor...

Let's be pledge-bound Sir, 'December' comes to us as a 'victory month.' And we the people of Bangladesh have been enjoying the whole month through dramas, songs, seminars, and symposia.

On the other hand, when we think of those who have sacrificed their lives in the Liberation War, a sorrow grips our minds. Successful governments had come and worked for the nation but people in general have not been benefited. Now people have again voted and elected a democratic government. They are supposed to work in favour of people and we are expecting the present government party, having a legacy of sacrifices for the nation, will not let the hopes go in vain.

The government should take every step very carefully. Law and order should be maintained by any means, unemployment problem should be solved by package policy i.e. every body should be educated, capable and hard working.

There should not arise any question from any quarters suspecting the future. Planning should be clean and transparent for any development project. Because we are utilising

foreign aids, so we must think before how to effectively utilise the funds. Feasibility Report(s) should be checked very carefully and projects distributed vis-a-vis development prospects.

There are so many problems in our country. The government may not be able to solve all, but providing as much possible for the people will be a great victory after all. Our victory will be achieved when we shall materialise our great leader Bangabandhu's dream of building a 'Sonar Bangla' by providing work and remuneration against the work for everyone of the nation.

We would request the government to look into every sector, provide with proper guidance under the leadership of experts and also establish human rights, rule of law, political stability and a peaceful society. That will be our true victory, and if we fail then it will again be a great tragedy for the nation.

Again, it is time to realise that any body's sacrifice cannot go in vain. We must remember, the father of the nation and also the national leaders who have sacrificed their lives for

the nation at the time of liberation and after liberation. And remember the valiant freedom fighters, and not forget to provide their right share of success to their families.

Obaidul Kabir Chowdhury Asstt Vice President National Bank Limited Head office, Dhaka

Silver jubilee of independence

Sir, I feel it obligatory to write on our independence. Nilphamari was a sub-division under Rangpur district when I joined Nilphamari branch of the then National Bank of Pakistan as manager in March 1971. On 25 March Pakistan junta attacked the people of Dhaka killing thousands of them. All communications were off. Dhaka dwellers were fleeing to the villages to save their lives. I along with my two kids took shelter in a village very near to Nilphamari town. The bank remained closed for some time.

In the meantime the Pak military took possession of Nilphamari town and called all the officials to resume duties. They issued warning that if

anybody failed to do so, they would be forcibly brought in and punished. Finding no other alternative I came to join. National Bank of Pakistan, being the treasury bank branch, was the focal point of watch of the Pak army. Everyday army officers were coming to me and threatening me to let them know about the deposit accounts of the minorities and the freedom fighters' (tried to keep the secrecy about the accounts).

During the month of December, the army officers camped in at Nilphamari College and forced me to take all the money to Rangpur Cantonment. They also took me there. They kept me waiting there for few hours without taking any decision. One Punjabi Major, who seemed very kind, helped me to talk to my manager of National Bank of Pakistan, Rangpur branch.

I was kept unified for 6 to 8 hours. My colleague in Rangpur talked to DMLA of Rangpur and rescued me from the hands of the Pak army personnel who were conspiring to retain the money brought from Nilphamari. Then the money was deposited at the treasury branch of Rangpur NBP.

Again at the time of liberation — three or four day before

the 16th December, the Pak army along with the members of Peace Committee made a list of intellectuals to kill them all. We were simply uttering the name of God, who is the Saviour. Then the independence dawned on the soil of Bangladesh. We became free.

I know that each and every Bengalee has got many stories that to tell which has not yet been told. We should speak out about whatever we have experienced during the War of Liberation, lest we forget everything.

Mahbul Haque Chowdhury Dy General Manager Sonali Bank, Head Office, Dhaka

Change of site for better

Sir, Consistent with the change of time and situation, growth of population, rise of sky-scrapers, intense business and commercial activities, administrative necessities, sufferings and requirements of the public, it seems imperative that Bangabhaban may be shifted from its present premises in the middle of Dhaka's most crowded, busy and congested

area between Gulistan and Motijheel, to a more suitable and blissful place like, say, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar or Baridhara.

Over last 35 years we have been simply hearing plans and programmes for the shifting of Dhaka Central Jail from thickly populated area of south-western old Dhaka but we do not know how and when the scheme of shifting of Dhaka Central Jail would be completed.

We would be grateful if the authorities concerned, especially the Ministry of Works and Rajuk, consider one thousand and one problems, difficulties and sufferings of the people and take immediate necessary steps to shift Dhaka Central Jail and also Bangabhaban, from the bustle and hustle of old city to a better site and help provide some relief in the process to the areas concerned of the metropolitan city of Dhaka without further loss of time.

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