

Leave Bangabandhu to People

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had called the people to turn sorrow into strength on the eve of the National Mourning Day. Looking back at the pattern of observance of the twenty second death anniversary of the nation's liberator, the beacon of our independence, that call seems to have greatly lapsed into a completely undesirable and unnecessary boost to the critics whose strength is not essentially scrupulousness or any sense of history.

He certainly deserved a lot better than the myopic adulation his own party chose to mete him on the occasion of his death. Perhaps the word for the frenzy with which the electronic media were used to highlight Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is paranoia. For a day, it seemed the world did not exist for Bangladesh.

The government does not need to go out of the way to impress upon people the fact that August 15 is truly a national mourning day. For more than one reasons that is that. Not only did we have the architect of Bangladesh slain on that day but also the spirit our liberation struggle was anaesthetised for an inordinately long time to come.

As his party, Awami League should draw inspiration regarding his all-embracing and accommodative and generous characteristics rather than try to fix him in the narrow frame of a party. We are afraid if allowed to continue, the wave of official veneration shown this year which bordered on public vexation, will greatly tarnish Bangabandhu's image. What shame it bequeaths upon the solemnity of the occasion when we have to read press reports that some people indulged in extortion at some places to mourn Bangabandhu's death! No insult can be greater than that.

It is from a completely wrong-headed premise that Awami League is trying to salvage Bangabandhu from the torn pages of history. To start with, Bangabandhu does not need any such act and secondly he is not confined in any particular point of time as far as Bangladesh's history is concerned. He is inextricably linked with the existence of the country. Awami League has no reason to be swept by an excessive and unhealthy zeal for reintroducing Sheikh Mujib. The spell of amnesia induced by its predecessors need not be forced out in a year's time or so. It will pass automatically. Besides, the best way to show respect to this vast soul is to work for integrating the people on a single platform and guide them to prosperity.

Leave enough space for people to know and revere their leader spontaneously.

Let people evaluate and appreciate Bangabandhu.

The Poribesh-bandhu Car

It is not great many days that Dhaka morning press raised quite a hair-raising pollution alarm. Some newspapers said that Dhaka's atmospheric lead-pollution was the highest in the world. The deadly slow traffic in a jam situation blackens the atmosphere in a fashion visible from miles afar. And as one enters that fearful prospect, clouds of fumes can be seen playing all around engulfing everything. And a sickening smell of unburnt fuel and half burnt lubricant numbs your olfactory faculty and sticks to your clothes as to your skin till you take a thorough bath. The eyes burn and there's no way but to believe it is the filthiest and stickiest pocket of air in the world that you are in now.

The Department of Environment measurements of Dhaka's air pollution, published in Sunday's morning press, did have a relieving effect on the panic-stricken Dhakaites. The situation then is not so bad, not as bad as New York or even Calcutta!

It is implausible that at the Purana Paltan-Topkhana junction at 10 on weekdays the pollution is an iota less than 1.5 micrograms or 1500 nanograms the bursting point of the American safety ceiling. So, it is better not to go slack on our vigilance. We repeat, therefore, that leaded petroleum must be banned from import here and now. Two, stop two-stroke three-wheelers sneaking into roads beating a ban and start phasing these out — say, 5000 by the end of this year. Enact new and stringent law prescribing harsh punishment for vehicles giving off black smoke and start harassing these rogues right now.

But the most important is conversion of conventional engines to ones burning LPG fuel. Why is the government being so secretive about it. At only Tk 20,000 a conversion and fuel efficiency going up by possibly 60 per cent this is gold mine for car owners, if they only knew. There should have been a regular campaign matching population control ones. And there should be both compulsion and enticement for taking on the LPG engine. Let there be a rebate in road-tax for the LPG or environment-friendly car. And let them fly a Poribesh-bandhu flag.

Gone the Sufi-singer

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is dead. Very prematurely at 49. The super-heavyweight, 350 pounds of brawn, super-achieving singer was a phenomenon not easy to describe. He has been called by BBC as a suf-singer. A qawwali singer could be called that if he lived his songs and if his wordy melodies welled up to reach out to the supreme being for union, as a homage and in His celebration. Many thought his music did that. But no qawwali singer has come out into the world of films and perhaps none would spring straight from a conquest of Bombay to rocking Hollywood itself, save this tenor. Not all may be captivated and become one in the rank of million charmed Nusrat fans but we must all marvel at his span of so many worlds so much apart as we must feel the raw power of both his beats and his pure notes.

He is the umpteenth sacrifice to obesity. Did he try to be healed of the grotesqueness? Did his admirers try to prevail upon him to shear off a hundred-odd pounds and live longer? Perhaps not, at least not with the heart put to it. For his obesity might well have contributed to the power of his music, who knows?

If his reaching out to Hollywood — the west, storming the complacent Western musical culture, was something very interesting, his becoming a truly subcontinental rather than the Pakistani he was in his roots and grooming, is an achievement which must be carried forward by other musicians and other artists in other fields.

Honest Work, Modest Talk

Let the voice of conscience be louder. Let their be no more wastage of time... Even after the wilderness of quarter of a century if we can set our compass right we shall reach the destination.

ly tormented by the trifles searching meaning in everything he comes across.

But could it be set aside as a trifle? And indeed I was in search of a meaning. Because we live in a country — extraordinary in more than one sense. The viability of Bangladesh was doubted even before it came into being. When we emerged as an independent entity at long last it was a nightmare for any development planner. The country bereft of any resource endowment was a puzzle for the economists. It was bled white through centuries' exploitation, ravaged by war and plundered by occupation forces of all hues posing grave challenge to any nation builder. According to the socioeconomic index, its ranking was only above an obscure "upper volta" in Africa. Kissinger ridiculed us as a case of "bottomless basket".

We couldn't care less. Because we had brave dreams — dreams of turning an impoverished Bangladesh into a proverbial "Golden Bengal". When Sheikh Mujib, the nation's founding father, talked of "Sonar Bangla" it was more than empty word. It sprang out of his conviction and inspired the millions like wild fire. That alone was a great national asset although he could have been oblivious of the enormity of the problems involved. But then we were fed with the bold ideas by our patriarchy in various fields, of speciality as to how to go about achieving it. We were told of the saga of the nation's birth and how they flowered in progress

and prosperity. Moreover, the history itself stands testimony to the fact that Europe where the nation states were born for the first time during the seventeenth century, had no pronounced advantages when compared with the great civilisations of Asia. By no index, it could be obvious then to the Europeans that they were poised to dominate much of the rest of world within decades. Yet they could do it through sheer hardwork, perseverance and sacrifices of the several of their generations. In the wake of European Renais-

— catch up with the rest of the world. Because the nations of the world are much ahead of us — some even by centuries. So, during the early days of our independence, we were told to narrow down the gap through sheer hard work which other nations did in their nascent stage. We had been told by the experts and the luminaries that we were to condense the achievements of a century in a decade, the works of decade in a year and the efforts of a year perhaps in a month and so on.

The idea was that of making up the deficiency within the

motion with a goal for maximising production, there were hopes that they could bring about marvels for us as they did in many other countries, even in the developing world. So, if we dreamt of a prosperous future, by all reckoning, it was not without a rationale. Now that dream seems to be crumbling.

It is not without reasons. It requires courage to sustain a brave dream because it involves bold undertakings for its fruition. It demands a national outlook relegating the personal or class interest to the back-burner. Today we do not have either. We do not have a leader of stature to boldly undertake the steps to turn the dreams into reality. National considerations and interests have been repetitiously given way to petty parochial interests which seem to be accorded priority over the greater interests of the nation. The ideas are generated and paradigms are drawn to promote, at the best, class interest and only for the present leaving the future of the nation bleak. We frequently refer to European or North American paradigm when it concerns our comfort and privilege, but defer when it demands certain working ethos from and impose moral obligation on us. Such contradictions have already led us to a state of purposelessness in national life and pushed the individuals — of course, the privileged ones — to senseless hedonism.

The nation has been adrift groping for direction right from the beginning. Now it seems to



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

since they braved the high seas leading to great discoveries, penetrated dense virgin forests to extend beyond them their sway and trekked the desolate continents to tap up their hidden wealth. The fortune knelt at their feet. It may appear stale text-book prescription for the nations' survival and prosperity but it still is the way and there are few alternatives to it.

We are not only poor and one of the least developed countries of the world, we are, in our march towards nation state-building, also a late starter of the process with all disadvantages inherent in it. Our precise problem is to be able to catch up

shortest possible time. In a hyper-competitive world in the race for survival our salvation lay in the extra mileage that we could score. We had to sacrifice the comfort of a generation or two and accept a spartan lifestyle as a norm for our progeny.

It was articulated by some of our public leaders that we were endowed with excellent ratio of arable fertile farmland and manpower resource, if not anything else. They could be turned into a tool of progress and prosperity for a country like ours. We were yet to get the optimum yield from our land and the human resources were hardly tapped up. Once set in

the ideas are generated and paradigms are drawn to promote, at the best, class interest and only for the present leaving the future of the nation bleak. We frequently refer to European or North American paradigm when it concerns our comfort and privilege, but defer when it demands certain working ethos from and impose moral obligation on us. Such contradictions have already led us to a state of purposelessness in national life and pushed the individuals — of course, the privileged ones — to senseless hedonism.

The nation has been adrift groping for direction right from the beginning. Now it seems to

have entered the choppy water of confusion. It has no perspective plan projecting the country's shape of things, say fifty years hence and clearly defined strategy as to how would they be tackled then. It runs on ad hocism and expediency with little continuity in its policy. The basic premises of our statehood are still disputed. The policy makers invent cliché and jargons and coins difficult terminologies for our development either ignoring the age-old universal dictum: *honest work and modest talk*. There is no two-way about it. The Europeans did it when the nations states proliferated for the first time and the east Asians have been doing it even now. The poor developing nations' forte is honest sustained work, not the humbug or rignarole on the nation-building.

How do we go about it? By bringing about a holiday bonanza for a few while letting the country slide downhill? By turning the nation into one of lotus eaters? By using the work stoppage or hartal as only instrument to express political dissent? The nation is held hostage to a bunch of self-serving politicians with their fingers stuck deep in an ever-shrinking national pie. They are too busy in their squabble over the share of it to address any of these questions. Let the conscious segment of the society find an answer. Let their voice of conscience be louder. Let their be no more wastage of time which, in fact, is our capital. Even after the wilderness of quarter of a century if we can set our compass right we shall reach the destination.

OPINION

Keeping "Bangabandhu Above Party Politics": A Re-appraisal

by Dr Abul Kalam

In his post-editorial lead piece in *The Daily Star* (15 August 1997) "Can We Not Keep Bangabandhu Above Party Politics" Mahfuz Anam has touched on a vital issue of national concern; the question of adulation and contention over leadership in Bangladesh. The piece, brilliantly conceived and vigorously articulated like any other of his writings, deserves serious attention for a number of reasons.

First of all, while pleading for a consensus to "keep Bangabandhu above party politics," he nevertheless looks both at positive aspects of Mujib's contribution as well as his negative side or faults, conceding that he was not infallible, yet he deserves to get "his due place in history." Secondly, he refers to the Chinese experience in support of his entreaty, believing that the founding-father of People's Republic of China (PRC), Mao Zedong, was "willed once for his destructive policies," yet he "has been brought back to the place of honour that is his." Thirdly, he questions why the successive governments beginning from Gen. Zia to Khaleda Zia did not amend the Indemnity Bill, the ignominious law that protected the killers of the Mujib family and suggests that there was no other reason "except narrow and morally bankrupt politics." Finally, he pleads with the ruling party not to treat Mujib "as their party leader and [thus] raise him far above that," while appealing "to the BNP that it should stop denigrating Bangabandhu as it customarily does and give him the place of honour and respect that history and truth have given him."

I fully agree with, and even endorse, the spirit of Mahfuz Anam's argument, but endeavor to bring forward a few points on such a pertinent issue of national concern so that some of the issues are placed in their proper perspective and that there is a reinforcing sense of direction and logic in the tenor of the whole set of arguments.

First of all, may I perhaps suggest by paraphrasing what Mahfuz Anam says in his final plea, that after the birth of Bangladesh, *Bangabandhu* (the very title conferred on him spontaneously, not by the Awami League, but by the students of the University of Dhaka) cannot "be claimed as the monopoly property of any party or ideology." It is well-articulated that unless the ruling party gives up its current practice of eulogizing the image/charisma of Mujib to serve their political ends, their political opponents "will naturally drag him into present-day politics and try to denigrate him." Politics is, after all, an interacting process where the contending parties do get drawn into both non-zero-sum and zero-sum games for ascending to their objectives of power/positions.

Secondly, while fully sharing the perception that there should be a political consensus that would place Mujib "in the history of Bangladesh," or "grantee him his due place," it may nevertheless be mentioned that the judgement of history can hardly be arrested either in our national context or in the comparative context of international politics. Scores of books have already been written on Mujib here at home and abroad.

Some of them idolize him as a demi-god, others disdain his contribution as next to nothing. Mentionably, over half a dozen of Dhaka University students have registered themselves for M.Phil and Ph. D. in the last academic session alone, with Mujib as primary focus of their research-cum-analysis. Whatever is the judgement of history, the very magic of Mujib's name is so powerful that he is guaranteed a permanent place in the minds and hearts of the generations of the Bengali population for his demonstrated courage and the self-sacrifice he made for freeing the tormented Bengali nation from the shackles of an "internal colonialism" of a brutal regime.

Thirdly, the reference to the Chinese experience is eminently relevant, but seems a little misplaced. The term "modern" is often subjective, but in the context of China if Deng Xiaoping is seen as "the builder of modern China," while viewing Mao as "a great political theoretician" who spearheaded the movement for independence only, would not offer enough justice to the latter; that may, as well, affect our judgement of Mujib himself. Mujib had lived barely four years after the emergence of Bangladesh, the country he led to independence, and that period could hardly be a span of time to build a nation, whereas Mao had lived for over two and half decades after the emergence of the PRC. To say that he (Mao) was "willed once for his destructive policies," only to be "brought back to the place of honour that is his"

would seem to suggest that his only role that deserved recognition was the movement he had launched for Chinese independence. Perhaps a little elucidation is in order.

In fact, those who sought to vilify Mao did so either for self-protection or to demean the achievements of the Chinese revolution, as in the case of the Western propagandists. The Chinese revolution, consisting of pre- and post-independence time-span, has two components: a blueprint of a "protracted war" and a framework of a "permanent war," both were anchored in Mao's mind and were operationalised by him. The first through a three-stage theory of protracted guerrilla warfare led to China's liberation, the latter recreated the Chinese nation through a post-liberation process of socialist education and re-education campaign, a socio-economic process of the Great Leap Forward, and a phase of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." There may have been some excesses at some point of China's march towards change and progress under Mao, but Mao's slogan and threads of modernization were brought together by his successors, including Deng, towards rebuilding a momentum for adjustment with the changing world order. Had it not been for Mao's vision of a societal change for cementing a sense of nationhood through an uninterrupted revolution, China could have fallen victim to the same fate as that of the USSR in its march towards modernity.

Unlike Mao, Mujib was, of course, not a theoretician but a self-sacrificing practitioner. Despite his adoption of a socialist slogan, Mujib's context was different. His introduction of one-party system was indeed a retrograde step, so was his press gagging or the use of the *Rakkhi Bahini* against his political opponents; but the question remains why did he go for steps which tended to obliterate his image of a life-long democrat? When such a question is answered in proper perspective, the burden of blame on Mujib would perhaps be lighter. In any case, Mujib may not have been a theoretician, but he was indeed an idealistic dreamer who had envisioned a *Sonar Bangla* (and to that extent does deserve to get his due place in history), a dream that he left unfulfilled, and completed by the successive set of leadership of the country, including his own daughter, Sheikh Hasina, now holding the realm of power in the country.

Last but not least is the issue of the ignominious Indemnity Bill. Politics in this country, as elsewhere, is based on party priority. One may wonder whether in the Awami League pattern of politics since the August 75 tragedy did the Indemnity Bill at all importantly feature, as seen in its list of priority before the party actually ascended to the realm of government. Was it not in virtual league with the gang of "self-proclaimed murderers" of the so-called Freedom Party during the Ershad regime against the BNP? Did it make it a major issue while sponsoring another league against the BNP government after the 1991 election?

To be fair, BNP had been inching towards bestowing Mujib his due place, as was indicative in the successive visits to Tungipara by Abdur Rahman Biswas and Khaleda Zia. At one stage did the Awami League leadership felt it necessary to reciprocate the BNP gestures. Rather, one of its policy decisions, that of cancelling 7th of November as a national holiday, was intended to widen the chasm between the two major political streams of the country. Consensus-building in politics is not a unidimensional affair; as in other societal process, it requires two sides to reciprocate.

Politics in this country unfortunately has been only one of convenience, or as Mahfuz Anam says "a narrow, and morally bankrupt." BNP's problems, as I can diagnose, is its failure to fully capitalise on the image/charisma of Mujib, as well, along with that of Gen Zia, which would have been to its electoral advantage. For that would have left the Awami League without the monopoly of Mujib's charisma to go around in its campaign to return to power.

It is indeed a truism that the same old pattern of narrow and morally bankrupt politics of the post-liberation years "is now driving the country down and down the economic and social ladder" in a world that is witnessing a sea-change in the post-Cold War era. How long can the nation afford to shoulder the burden of this narrow and bankrupt craze of politics?

The writer is a Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

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.

Rushdie's Land of Mourning?

Sir, In the August 11 issue of the *TIME* magazine, Salman Rushdie, in his article *A Land of Mourning*, has questioned: "Why on earth would anyone want to celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of the century's great tragedies?" Well, this leads me to believe that he is against the celebrations. Fine, it's his logical choice.

But at the end of the article, Rushdie is introduced as "Co-editor of *Mirrorwork*: 50 Years of Indian Writing, 1947-1997." Now, the question is very symbolic — "By editing *Mirrorwork*, is he celebrating or mourning?" To me, it seems that he is celebrating at least one part of India's last 50-year history. What do you think?

City transport

Sir, I am very worried about the transport system in our capital city, Dhaka. About 8.5 million people reside in this city and the transport system is not being developed to cope up with this population. As a result, the people are faced with a lot of problems.

One main problem is the shortage of transport. Another problem is the severe traffic congestion.

In regards to the fare, there seems to be no regulations. The transport staff claim higher fares than what they should be, especially during peak hours. Moreover, the passengers are treated in a rude manner by the transport staff. It's a common

scenario in the city where the passengers have had verbal and physical altercations with the transport staff.

Taxis and scooters are good modes of transport, but they are beyond the means of the average people due to high fares. Another problem is the lack of obeying traffic rules properly. The drivers often create traffic jams which sometimes result in accidents.

With all these problems, it has become difficult to journey by public transport in this city. The transport system must change.

I would like to propose some suggestions:

- a) The transport system should be rearranged to favour the citizens;
- b) it must be emphasised that they are serving the citizens and thereby citizens' interests should be the top priority;
- c) all the transport staff should be trained to obey the traffic rules, including good behaviour with the passengers;
- d) to ensure proper traffic system, (e.g. route permissions, driving licences) fuel emissions must be checked for each driver on a regular basis and in a corruption-free system.

Masudul Islam
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Towards a baby boom!

Sir, Further to my letter of July 27, I would like to add that the two-day weekly holiday goes against the spirit of family planning.

Previously, only the people from areas nearby Dhaka would go home on weekends, but now, people whose families live in such distant places as

Rangpur or Chittagong find time for it. It sounds a bit ruthless, but these frequent trips will undo whatever success we have achieved in birth control.

It is indeed unfortunate that so much money spent on this sector will go down the drain, as we will inevitably be heading towards becoming the world's most overpopulated country.

Mrs Lulu Ahmad
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

T&T bills

Sir, May I draw the attention of the revenue department of the T&T Board on issuance of the telephone bills, please?

From time to time the T&T puts advertisement in the newspapers instructing the telephone subscribers to pay their monthly telephone bills within stipulated time, "failing to do so their telephone line will be snapped" — the threat is proudly pronounced.

No problem with that, the Board has the right to do so, but does it don't hold the responsibility to ensure that it issues the bill on time? It is clear from the bills that the bills are printed out by the computers well in time. But it became so regular that the recipients to receive the bill with two or three days in hand to pay it.

Clearly either the postal department or the section which handles the bills is at fault. With the present efficiency level of the public sector service providers, I do not expect any improvement in next ten or fifteen years down the lane (God forbid, we remain hostage of the monopoly business of the T&T Board till that time).

May I propose something to reduce the sufferings of the subscribers: until we have the fortune to have a better time?

The T&T should divide the metropolitan Dhaka in at least four revenue zones. The bill should be issued to the subscribers on zone basis. Exam-

ple: All subscribers in Zone One will be issued with bill of July 1997 during the first week of August, print-out taken, handled and posted in time. The subscribers of Zone One should get the bill by two weeks' time. They must pay the bill by third week with a grace period of fourth week. Likewise the Zone Two, three and four will be handled that way.

This will reduce the workload of the bill handlers who, after print-out from the computers put the bills in the envelopes and take to the post office will have enough time, and postal departments will have adequate time too to deliver the bills. This will also give the handlers sufficient time to do justice to their work at a regular pace instead of hurrying everything in one week and doing nothing for the rest of the weeks of the month.

This will reduce the length of the queue of the subscribers in the banks during last few days of the months; bank clerks will be less burdened as well. There will be no less amount in revenue than the receivable amount in any way. I am sure this will bring a respite to all concerned and T&T Board can save some money by avoiding putting ads to remind the subscribers to pay the bills with an ugly threat months in, months out.

The subscribers are eager to pay the bill on time. The exceptions are there who use the telephone service and do not want to pay to the T&T but to somebody else. T&T should find ways to tame those rogues if it can; the law abiding citizens will be more than happy to pay the service provider at agreed principle between them and the Board. Would the authority pay any heed to a try and see. It does not cost you a single taka.

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BTV Bangla film show

Sir, Following the declaration of two-day government weekly holiday, it appears that the management of BTV has run berserk in setting its various programmes.

The old regular Friday afternoon Bangla film show was first changed to Saturday afternoon which has again been shifted to Thursday night. If the Bangla film is screened on Thursday night, then when would the children and the family members go to bed? After midnight? For the government servants it is not a problem because Friday and Saturday are two continuous weekly holidays.

Most of the schools and colleges are closed on Friday and most of the Bangla film viewers are school and college going children. We feel that Bangla film show should be shown over BTV on every Friday afternoon for the convenience of all concerned including the children and the elders.

O H Kabir
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Smile, smile!

Sir, The August 12 issue of *The Daily Star* carried an interesting picture on page 7. The caption says: "Salman F Rahman, President of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, presented the Finance Minister, SAMS Kibria, with an Information Handbook published by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry."

Now, dear readers, just for a while, forget the caption and ignore the news on the left — and look at the picture only... Well? Does the picture enchant you in any way?

Yousuf Jamil
Mirpur 10, Dhaka 1221

Quazi Motahar Hossain

Sir, The 30th of July was the birth centennial of one of our most illustrious sons of the soil, Quazi Motahar Hossain. A scientist, litterateur, sportsman, musician, orator — all moulded in one. He died in 1981 and though hard to believe, we had conveniently forgotten to remember him, even on special occasions e.g. his birthday or death anniversary. The last sixteen years have indeed been a shameful period for the Bengalees. An intellectual highly regarded by the international intelligentsia group for his versatility and performance *par excellence*, but sadly forgotten by his own people and nation is an unpardonable crime.

It was heartening to note that this year was an exception. BTV, Bangladesh Chess Federation, Bangla Academy and Shilpakala Academy along with others celebrated the day with due fervour and respect.

This gesture has strengthened my conviction that there is yet hope for us Bengalees. On this occasion two books have been published by Sheba Prokashani and Shishu Academy. I hope that these books will be used as a reference by the NCTB and the life and works of Quazi Motahar Hossain be included in the school and college textbooks. An important road in Dhaka and a building of Dhaka University ought to be named after him. It is the least we can do for this great man who was one of the leaders of the Muslim renaissance in the subcontinent. It was his compatriots' sincerity and tireless effort that has brought us where we are today. Can we ignore our indebtedness and cheat our own selves? It will tantamount to ignoring our own being and heritage.

Najma Haque
Dhaka