

Bangladesh in German Media

Mohammad Amjad Hossain writes from Bonn

The recent trend in the German media is to accord more coverage to the events in Bangladesh. There appears to be a positive trend to improve the image of Bangladesh.

Liberation and the determination and fortitude with which the people of Bangladesh fought the Pakistan occupation forces were followed by world news media with considerable interest, and in most cases, with sympathy and admiration. The German media were no exception.

They also accorded good coverage to the developments.

The interest continued even after the country was liberated in December 1971 and hundreds of journalists streamed into Bangladesh to see and report to the world how this devastated nation, torn by the convulsions of an all-pervasive war of liberation, was facing up to the gigantic task of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction in all fields, under the guidance of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation and the great leader of the people whose inspiration and oratory ability steered the nation to freedom.

It is an acknowledged fact that the War of Liberation in Bangladesh was an epoch-making event of the twentieth century. Some excerpts from the German media on Bangladesh are given below:

"Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" (daily) of 23 September 1971. Editorial: The Bengal Fire by Klaus Natorp

"Humanitarian aid is most important and urgent. The care of the East Pakistani refugees in India and the equally numerous afflicted and needy in eastern Bengal could still be greatly improved. But the matter should not rest there. Not only the symptoms of the crisis are to be treated, but also the root of the sickness should be cured. Two requirements are necessary for that: the internal peace in Pakistan, that means, reconciliation of the estranged wings of the state jointly formed in 1947, and the abatement of the dangerous tension, which developed during the course of the East Bengal conflict between the subcontinental neighbours, Pakistan and India. As far as the latter is concerned, lately there have been some signs of relaxation."

The danger of the war seems to have lessened. Of course, the sounds of fighting can still be heard on both sides, but it seems in the meantime all responsible persons in New Delhi and Islamabad are convinced that a military confrontation would be a greater disaster for both countries than the present situation, which resulted from the violent suppression of the Bengali Liberation Movement."

The following matters must be discussed on a neutral basis "before new critical incidents arise":

- External relations: "How the East Pakistani refugees could be hastened to return to their homes" as "their permanent maintenance is an unbearable burden to India."
- Internal situation: The refugees would only return if ... they would be safe there and the West Pakistani troops "confined" to their barracks. The majority of the population still considers the West Pakistani soldiers as an occupation army and (also) looks upon the civilian administration, which was appointed by them as traitors." It will be difficult to get West Pakistan to "admit that

This was the trend of the media in Germany until December 1972. After the euphoria of the War of Liberation and reconstruction of the war-ravaged economy was over, the world media in general and the German media in particular remained unconcerned. The stigma of Henry Kissinger's oft-quoted words — basket case, disaster-prone, poorest of the poor, also looked upon the civilian administration, which was appointed by them as traitors." It will be difficult to get West Pakistan to "admit that

A review made within the Embassy of articles which appeared in the period 31.01.96 to 11.11.96 reveals the fact that the print media in Germany is paying attention to the events other than natural disaster in Bangladesh. A total of 522 articles, in the form of press clippings made available to the Embassy by an office for media observation in Berlin, was taken into consideration: 288 articles dealt with the elections in Bangladesh in 1996. This was a very active period in Bangladesh, and this did not go unnoticed in the German press. The articles included not only the results of the two elections in the period, but also the pre-election and post-election situations. Also, the political personalities, in particular the two top female leaders, were reviewed.

With a total of nearly 70 articles, flooding and cyclone catastrophes were described. Child labour was dealt with in 30 articles, and it was not forgotten to mention that Bangladesh is doing all in its power to do away with this by giving children the opportunity to go to school. Living and working conditions were described in 16 articles.

It seems to be important to the German media to record catastrophes happening in Bangladesh, and the sinking of ships, both island ferries and sea-going ships (often fisher boats) never seemed to be disregarded.

Although the textile industry in Bangladesh is a flourishing branch and one of the main sources of foreign currency, it

was deemed important by the German media over the given period only 11 times. The BMZ Minister Spranger, in the course of his trip to South Asia, was mentioned 8 times in connection with Bangladesh.

The Grameen Bank has now become better known due to the Micro-Credit Summit at the beginning of February 1997, but in 1996 it was mentioned only 5 times in the articles made available to the Embassy.

The elections were mentioned in all the larger national newspapers such as the "Frankfurter Rundschau" and the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" (from Munich). The "Handelsblatt" (from Düsseldorf), an important economic daily, also mentioned the elections, and sometimes carried articles about the textile industry or the economic situation of the stock exchange in Dhaka in a list with all the other exchanges in the World.

Bangladesh was, however, well covered in the eastern part of Germany and Berlin, not only by the national dailies, such as 'Der Tagesspiegel' (Berlin) and 'Berliner Morgenpost' published there, but also by local dailies, such as the 'Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten', the 'Leipziger Volkszeitung' or the 'Oranienburger Generalanzeiger'. Perhaps this reflects the close link to Bangladesh with the former East Germany at a previous stage in recent history.

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Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in mid '72, Germany has constantly been extending economic assistance to Bangladesh to help in its economic emancipation. Apart from economic assistance, Germany has emerged as the second largest trading partner of Bangladesh in Europe. Trade relations between the two friendly countries are being expanded with the passage of time as private entrepreneurs from Bangladesh show an increasing interest in the participation in specialised trade fairs in the Federal Republic of Germany. These are positive indicators, which show the trend of a growing relationship between the two countries. Some Non-Governmental Organisations, such as Netz, Adheri-Hilfe, Die Lichtbrücke, the Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development and the Catholic Central Office for Development Assistance are involved in socio-economic development projects in Bangladesh. There is a lack of understanding of the German media in these aspects.

The taxpayers of the Federal Republic of Germany have the legitimate right to know how their money is being spent. Here the media have the responsibility to inform the people of Germany of the developments in Bangladesh, particularly about the German-assisted projects.

The people of Germany are also not aware of the fact that contacts and relations between these two countries have existed for centuries. Fairy tales and sagas from Bengal, which now constitutes Bangladesh, have found a place in German literature.

The media in Germany have the special role to promote cultural relations between the two countries.

March 1971: History Came Down to My Humble House for a Short While

by Jamila Khatun

I never thought I will live this long to see the silver jubilee of independence day and go beyond that even. Allah graced me with this opportunity and I am grateful to Him. Being a housewife and mother of nine children I never thought of writing any article in any newspaper or journal. Writing to me remained limited to daily financial account and one letter a month to my wards living abroad. But in this special month, I have the inner urge to express myself and let the nation know what my own family especially my second son and my late husband did at the very beginning of the war of liberation. My second son who is now a professor of physics at the Zambian University had the habit of tuning his transistor-radio and listen to different stations after dinner. That is how he could catch the military conversation on the night of 25 March 1971 and also had the far-sightedness to tape the record while one of my daughters helped him in keeping this permanent first-hand record of cold-blooded brutality. This tape was later broadcast by Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, Akashbani, BBC, etc. during our first days of bloody liberation war. Taking family initiative, we published the content of this historical document of immense record value and it was published by *Boi Para Prokashana* (Tikka Khan from Control Room), alongside two television broadcasts. It got wide newspaper coverage in March last year. At my ripe age I still feel the excitement, outrage, frustration, hatred expressed by each and every member of my immediate family on that long and horrible night of 25 March 1971.

With this started the family struggle to survive with our six daughters at home, maintaining dignity, and helping others at the same time as much as we could. Well, almost at the same time we were put to another task: just two days after this incidence and during break-hour of curfew on 27 March. Almost all our relatives residing in the more frequented, more visible

or posh areas like Nawabpura, Shantinagar, Malibagh, etc. expressed their desire to stay unnoticed at least for a couple of days in our house situated at a far less frequented area like Khilgaon. But the peak of this shelter taking reached when a colleague of both our second son and son-in-law of Atomic Energy Centre, Dhaka came to see my husband (now late) and requested him humbly to offer shelter for him and his pregnant wife.

Well, it was no common scientist colleague of them: it was Dr. Wazed Mia, the husband of the eldest daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who surely was at that time widely known to all of us as Bangabandhu and was the undisputed leader and who, we heard through the same military conversation, was arrested and taken away by the Pak Army. There is a hard fact to grip and to visualize the situation here: my husband, tired from his job at Karachi, came back to Dhaka and just finished (not quite though) the construction work of the first storey of our two-storey building, and that with a bank loan. It was the life-time dream of a father of nine children. The weight of this request was supposed to be heavy on him; the very existence of the building plus the safety and dignity of our six daughters vis-à-vis apprehension of a possible military attack that might have occurred any moment. It is also mentioned here that one of our neighbours was non-Bengali to add to the already existing fear. But we feel proud to mention it every time during our family discussion that my husband didn't hesitate for a second, his straight forward answer was — yes, come and take shelter with us as you express the desire. They came and stayed with us for a few days; well it was not that simple in reality. We had altogether around 40-50 people where no one was supposed to identify this couple, hence they were given a single room — the couple, one cousin named Jelly and a boy servant). There was no gas supply at Khilgaon area back in 1971, my eldest daughter used to cook the food for all of us using a woodfuel-stove in the back yard. Interested readers can find a short description of this incidence in Dr. Wazed Mia's book *"Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur ghiree kichu ghatana o Bangladesh"* (ISBN 984 05 01348) published by the University Press Limited (pages: 79, 80, 83, 99).

As a housewife I witnessed the whole episode of the war of liberation through the eyes of my family members. My eldest son was staying at Karachi with his family in 1971 and while trying to reach Dhaka through Kabul, Delhi his wife broke her collar bone. With all this account of very small importance of national scale I simply wish to say that almost all families and almost everybody in every corner of the country took part in the war in some or other. Quite frequently, freedom fighters used to take shelters for a single night, hide their weapon for a period, hold short discussion meeting at our house, which was a normal sight in innumerable other houses also. And finally, after liberation, family friend and air force officer-cum-valiant freedom fighter Sultan Mahmud (later promoted to Air Vice-Marshal) landed his helicopter in front of our house to seek *do'a* and blessings from my husband. After liberation, I said Thank You Allah, I feel sure that at least no one has to listen to the phrase *'BHUKA BANGLADEE'* like we had to at Karachi.

I still recollect all these days vividly and recollect surely seeing Sheikh Hasina in our house after liberation. I am really happy to live this long to see Sheikh Hasina leading the government.

At the end of my recollection, I have a small prayer to all the leaders of our country: make Bangladesh a safe and prosperous country for our future generations and let them be proud of our past by giving due credit and honour to every honourable citizen of this country.

Garfield



Tom and Jerry



Fire at Demra

By Staff Correspondent

A fire gutted at least seven small business installations at Kutubkhali under Demra thana in the city early yesterday.

The damaged set-ups included two kerosene stove manufacturing factories, packaging industry, sanitary factory, automobile workshop and a restaurant, police and fire brigade officials said.

The origin of the fire that broke out at about 4 am could not be known immediately. No casualty was reported in the incident till filing of this report last night.

Two units of the fire fighters from Postagola station took about an hour and a half to extinguish the blaze.

Police said the flame sparked off from Falcon Metal Industry, a stove manufacturing factory. The fire soon engulfed other shops and factories.

SNS holds rally

By Staff Correspondent

Sammilito Nari Samaj (SNS) staged demonstrations and held protest rallies in front of the Razbargh Police Lines and the court premises in the city yesterday in protest of the increasing raping incidents of women and children, says a press release.

They (SNS) also held a street rally near the Sadarghat launch terminal to lodge their protest in this regard.

Urging the government to take necessary action to stop all kinds of repression on women and children, the SNS leaders at the rallies called for increase social consciousness to put an end of barbarous incidents like raping of women and children, the press release said.

5-year old boy killed in road mishap

By Staff Correspondent

A five-year-old boy was killed and his mother was seriously injured as an oil tanker hit a rickshaw on Green Road at Dhanmondi in the city yesterday.

Police identified the dead as Zahidul Islam. His mother Jaitun Begum, 25, was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Jaitun came to the city from Shakhipur in Tangail with a relative, Meser Ali, for treatment of her son Zahidul.

The accident occurred beside a filling station of the crossing of Mirpur Road and Green Road at about 1 pm. Jaitun, her son and Meser met the accident when they were going to Green Road to a relative's house in a rickshaw.

Dhanmondi police arrested Harun-ur-Rashid, the driver of the tanker, and seized the vehicle. A case was lodged with Dhanmondi thana in connection with the incident.

Nurul Haq Bhuiyan indisposed

ASM Nurul Haq Bhuiyan (79) is undergoing treatment at the ICU in Diabetic Hospital (BIRDEM) in a critical condition.

A veteran activist of the Language Movement, the convener of first Rastrabhasa Sangram Parishad, former chairman of the Department of Applied Chemistry and Chemical Technology in Dhaka University (DU) and former provost of Sir AF Rahman Hall of DU, Prof Haq seeks blessings from the relatives and wellwishers for immediate recovery.

Aurora calls on Navy chief

Lt Gen (Retd) Jagjit Singh Aurora, former GOC-in-Chief of the Indian Eastern Command, yesterday called on Chief of Naval Staff Rear Admiral Mohammad Nurul Islam at the Naval Headquarters, reports UNB.

FFs urged to be united to eliminate Razakars

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said that the persons who did not hesitate to risk their lives by joining the Liberation War, were still the most dignified citizens of the country, says a press release.

Recalling the heroic leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during Liberation War, the discussants called upon the freedom fighters to be united to eliminate Razakars from the country.

Organised by Bangladesh Muktiyuddha Sangsad (BMS), the discussion was held at the Dhaka District Krira Samity auditorium yesterday.

A number of dignified persons including a member of the Planning Commission of the exiled government during the Liberation War Prof Anisuzzaman, organiser of the freedom movement poet Asad Chowdhury, Sculptor Rasha, Commander of the Sub Sector Nine Major (Retd) Ziauddin, Sadeq Ahmed Khan, Ishtiaq Aziz, Syed Abul Bashar, Zamaluddin Ahmed, Fazlul Haq took part in the discussion presided by the BMS convener Saidur Rahman.

The discussion titled 'Arrest of Bangabandhu on March 25 and the Mass Killing Day' was organised to mark the Black Night of March 25 and the arrest of Bangabandhu.

Metropolitan



Chief Justice Abu Taher Mohammad Afzal administering the oath of office to Prof M Mustafa Chowdhury, the newly appointed Chairman of Public Service Commission (PSC), at the Supreme Court Bhaban yesterday. —PID photo



Speakers at a discussion on 'Arrest of Bangabandhu on March 25 and the Mass Killing Day' in the city yesterday. — Star photo

More heads of state, govt greet President, PM

More heads of state and government have congratulated President Shahabuddin Ahmed on the occasion of the 27th Independence and National Day, reports UNB.

In their messages they expressed the hope that the existing close and friendly relations between Bangladesh and their countries would be further strengthened in future.

The messages so far received from the President of French Jacques Chirac, President of Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Sultan of Brunei, President of Turkey Suleymen Demirel, President of Indonesia Soeharto and President of Pakistan Muhammad Rafiq Tarar, King of Malaysia, President of Malta, President of Hungary, President of Swiss Confederation, Ameer of the State of Kuwait Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, President of Kazakhstan, Pope John Paul-II of Vatican City and Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar General Than Shwe.

Meanwhile, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and its Prime Minister Sirimavo RB Bandaranaike have felicitated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the occasion.

Residence of DU teacher ransacked

By DU Correspondent

Some unidentified persons yesterday ransacked the residence of AAMS Arefin Siddique, an Associate Professor of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of the Dhaka University, sources said.

32 get honorary commission

Twenty-four Armed forces personnel from the Bangladesh Army and eight from the Bangladesh Navy have been granted honorary commission and promotion on the occasion of the 28th Independence Day, an ISPR press release said in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

Seven honorary lieutenants have been granted honorary commission in the rank of honorary captain, while five subedar majors and 12 subeders have been granted honorary commission in the rank of honorary lieutenant which will take effect from today except in case of 12 subeders.

In their cases, the honorary commission will be effective from one day preceding the respective days of their going on Leave Preparatory to Retirement (LPR).

Those granted honorary commission in the rank of honorary captain are: Honorary Lieutenant SM Mokauur Rahman, AC, Md Younus Khan, Artillery, Mohammad Nurul Islam Khan, East Bengal, Md Shafiqur Rahman, East Bengal, Abul Kawser, East Bengal, Md Bashir Ullah, Ordinance, Muslim Uddin Ahmed, EME.

Pak envoy hosts reception

By Staff Correspondent

Pakistan High Commissioner to Bangladesh Karam Elahi hosted a reception at the Chancery premises on Monday to celebrate Pakistan Day on March 23.

Several ministers including Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, Agriculture Minister M. A. Chowdhury and former President HM Ershad attended it. It was also attended by foreign diplomats and elite of the city.

Harinath Dey's death anniversary tomorrow

The 27th death anniversary of shaheed scientist Dr Harinath Dey will be observed tomorrow, says a press release.

He was killed by Pakistan Army on this day in 1971. A "kangali bhoj" will be held at the residence 43, Malakar-tola Lane, Sutrapur, in the city.

