

A Truth Commission: Let's follow international precedents

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THE verdict on the assassination of Bangabandhu should help close a sad and shameful chapter in the history of Bangladesh. Will this happen? The convicted assassins will be punished according to law, as they should be and as it should have happened a long time ago. However, in a political culture of partisanship *über alles*, the trial and the verdict have evoked almost as much ambivalence as a sense of relief. The verdict has re-ignited the debate about events preceding the abominable crime and the derailing of the progress of democracy that followed, the price of which the nation continues to pay.

The detour from democracy, in fact, began with the Soviet-style one-party political structure of BAKSHAL launched in 1974. Whatever honest intentions lay behind this fateful move, it was a blow to the flowering of democracy in post-liberation Bangladesh. An objective and non-partisan analysis of the history of this early phase and learning lessons from it should not in any way detract from the contribution of Bangabandhu to the birth of the new nation and his unique place in its history. To paraphrase Karl Marx, those who don't learn from history are condemned to re-live the past.

Equally critical, for overcoming the failures of the past and the present and to set a course for the nation's future, is to bring out and absorb the meaning of the truth regarding the traumatic days of the liberation struggle of the inhuman crimes and atrocities committed; the price paid by citizens in deaths, torture, rape and humiliation inflicted upon millions. Holocaust, genocide, crime against humanity, the epithets attached to the shameful and tragic legacy of human civilization in the 20th century aptly

describe the horrors that visited upon the people of Bangladesh in 1971. Yet, amazingly, no one was held responsible; no one was asked to answer for the monstrous and massive violation of the basic tenets of humanity, as if it was a natural disaster.

The nation continues to pay the cost of ignoring the monstrosities of 1971. The crime was not that some Bengalis, whatever their motives, were supporters of united Pakistan and its ideology (if anything was left of it unswayed by the rule of military dictators); or even that they opposed the birth of Bangladesh, as

evident in the rise of religious fundamentalism, deadly assaults on traditional expressions of Bengali culture, misogyny by *fatwa*, and the spawning of support and sympathy in madrassahs and mosques for a Taliban-style rule in Bangladesh. The ascendancy of theocratic forces and their being part of the opposition coalition (as well as the occasional courting of these forces by the ruling party, especially when it was in the opposition) are indicative of the extent the *razakars* of 1971 have rehabilitated themselves without renouncing their agenda and showing any contrition for their

century.

Truth commissions were established, in existence now, or are being contemplated in some twenty countries to challenge an unsavoury past and to shape a new future, as Priscilla Hayner put it. Her book *Unspeakable Truths* (Routledge, 2000) details the experience with truth commissions around the world.

Originating from the experience of war crime tribunals after the Second World War, truth commissions have gained wide renown with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

to succeed as official investigation into a repressive past, each nation must determine what span to cover, and what kinds of crimes to investigate under what rules. The commission in South Africa had the power to grant amnesty to those who confessed in full and others were required to pass collected information to courts. Choices regarding the functioning of a commission depend on a nation's history and strength of its democratic government. To succeed, the commission must have sufficient resources, a broad mandate and high-level backing, because it is bound to face great

Sarow-wiwa and other environmental activists by dictator Sani Abacha.

A key task of the truth commission is to recommend reforms in institutions such as the court, police and the educational system. In Sierra Leone, for example, the commission's recommendations will be binding and the government will report progress of implementation to a monitoring group.

In Bangladesh, it is unlikely that the opposition coalition, which includes groups and individuals whose role may be the target of investigation by a truth commission, would be enthusiastic about the idea. Nor would be the ruling party, which has given priority to political expediency over principles, immediate and partisan gains over long-term and national interest, and has not hesitated to court, for partisan advantage, shady characters irrespective of their past or present personal role or political position.

A truth commission can come into being and do its job in Bangladesh, only if the democratic forces in the civil society mobilize themselves and make it such a strong demand of the people that the Awami League and the democratic and liberal elements of the opposition find it impossible to ignore. One way for making this happen is to make it an issue in every constituency in the upcoming general election and demanding individual candidates to declare their stand on this question.

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long as these political views were expressed peacefully. But when atrocities of the invading Pakistani forces were aided and abetted, unarmed civilians were rounded up and killed in thousands, women were raped and made sex-slaves, and millions of citizens were driven out of their homes and villages and turned into refugees in the name of the ideology of Pakistan, these were crimes that a society could ignore only at its peril.

The crushing of democracy before it had a chance and the rise of tin-pot dictators who ruled the country for fifteen years arguably were the direct consequences of ignoring the crimes of 1971. Mutilation of the constitution by decree (including amending it to grant indemnity to murderers of the head of the government and other national leaders) was of a piece with these developments.

More far-reaching effects are

monstrous misdeeds. The series being published in the Bengali daily *Janakantha* on *razakars* tells of the metastatic spread of this cancer. Threats and actual physical harm with virtual impunity to the brave journalists tracing the stories of the *razakars* is an added testimony to the seriousness of the disease.

Three decades after liberation, the aim today mainly need not be retribution and punishment, or to launch a nationwide witch-hunt. The aim would be to bring out the truth - on the basis of facts, testimony and evidence recorded, reviewed, scrutinized and interpreted by an impartial and widely respected panel of jurists and public figures. It would be a national catharsis, a means of purging the poison that has invaded the body politic, exorcising the ghost of the past, and renewing the spirit and the ideal of a progressive, democratic and forward-looking nation in the 21st

Century Commission. It was an effort to come to terms as a nation with atrocities of Apartheid and build the future as a democratic society on the basis of understanding of the past and reconciliation. Other countries in Latin America and Africa with a history of terror, repression and large-scale atrocities against people by state authorities and pretenders to such authority have taken the path of the truth commission. New ones have begun work in Nigeria and Panama and others are about to start in Sierra Leone and East Timor. Indonesia and Peru are preparing the rules for their commissions and these are being considered for Mexico, Bosnia, Serbia, Ghana and Burundi. Canada is considering one to look back at the treatment of the indigenous people.

Tina Rosenberg, writing in *New York Times* (26 February, 2001), suggests that for truth commissions

resistance, Ms. Rosenberg asserts.

Testimony should be public, making exceptions only when there is a real danger to the testifier or those named of being victimized. Televised testimony in South Africa reached a large audience. It made headlines every day and helped overcome the resistance of apartheid supporters.

While learning from other countries, each government should tailor its commission to its specific context, says Ms Hayner. The Indonesian draft rules have copied extensively from South Africa including granting of amnesty to those who make honest and full confession.

Nigeria has adopted South Africa's and Germany's provisions for examining the role of social institutions such as the church and the media in supporting dictatorship. Nigeria's truth commission has held hearings on Shell Oil's role in the execution after a fake trial of Ken

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All health information to keep you up to date

Facts about skin problems

What causes itchy skin? Eczema and Dermatitis: The words eczema and dermatitis are used interchangeably by doctors, which can cause confusion. If your doctor refers to your child's itchy rash as atopic eczema and someone else calls it atop dermatitis, don't worry it is one and the same thing. Very simply, eczema and dermatitis look virtually identical red, sore itchy skin, it is the cause that makes them different. There are many types of eczema and they are mainly caused from within the body, because of genetic or hereditary factors whereas dermatitis is caused from outside the body, such as contacts with detergents or chemicals. One in ten people suffer from eczema, the commonest type is the one affecting children, infantile atopic eczema.

Infantile atopic eczema: Research suggests that 15 per cent of children develop it. The exact cause of atopic eczema is unknown, but there is a strong genetic link in people with a family history of asthma, hay fever, rhinitis or eczema.

What does atopic eczema look like? Atopic eczema usually starts on the face in a young baby and progresses onto the inner folds of the knees and arms. If mild, there may only be, a few red, itchy patches. If severe the whole of child's body may be covered.

Atopic eczema varies in severity, sometimes it can almost disappear and the skin is simply dry and itchy, at other times small blisters appear which weep and crust. It is painful and intensely itchy. Once the skin is broken there is the possibility of infection.

Fortunately atopic eczema disappears in most children by early adolescence, but some people continue to have problems in later life. Children who have had atopic eczema will always have dry, difficult skin as adults, prone to contact dermatitis and will need guidance on how to avoid contact with irritants.

Aggravating factors:

- * Changes in the weather, cold windy weather.
- * Stress and emotional factors.
- * Irritants in the water, chemicals in swimming pools.
- * Pollen, pet hair and dust, including the house dust mite.
- * Wool, synthetic fabrics, biological washing powder.
- * Becoming hot.
- * Washing with soap, perfumed products.

Contact Dermatitis: A close cousin of the eczemas is contact dermatitis. The skin looks dry, inflamed, red and itchy, often as eczema blisters appear which weep and crust. Broken skin can become infected.

What causes Contact Dermatitis? Frequent contact with irritants such as soaps, detergents, shampoo, chemicals and solvents, removes the natural protective barrier of oils causing the skin to become dry. This together with general wear and tear sets up a skin reaction called irritant contact dermatitis. There are many thousands of possible allergens, the common ones are nickel in jewellery, zips, studs, and some saucepan handles, perfume, sticking plasters, rubber, dyes and glues in shoes, preservatives in cosmetics and other topical creams and medications.

It is quite possible to become allergic to a much worn favourite item i.e perfume, it doesn't have to be a new material. Often the site of the problem is helpful in identifying the cause. For example, irritation on earlobes or under a wrist watch would point to nickel allergy. Whereas irritation under your armpits would point to an allergy to an anti-perspirant. Avoidance of the offending material is a vital part of the treatment.

If identification is difficult, your doctor may send you for patch tests. This involves various substances being applied to the skin and covered with a patch. After approximately 48 hours the patch is removed to check which substances have caused irritation. It is also important to be aware that for some people many active ingredients in topical cream medications cause allergic reactions. Antibiotic creams, local anaesthetic sprays and creams for personal itching and insect bites may actually be making the problem worse. This is not always apparent on initial use but prolonged use can lead to an allergic reaction occurring and this is known as sensitisation. If you suspect this is the case ask the pharmacist or doctor for advice.

Next: Before the doctor comes.

Industrialization of developing nations: Significance of marketing

ABM S ZAHUR

In the development programmes of many developing countries industrialisation is increasingly occupying prominent place. However, the process of industrialisation has been painful. The pitfalls include absence of vigorous growth mentality, difficulties in administration and management, lack of advance planning, poor maintenance, inadequate financial controls and marketing. Poor marketing bears a significant part in frequent failures to generate anticipated increase in national income. Usually new manufacturing concerns emphasise on staffing the production, financial, and general administrative departments of the firm and thinking about sales is deferred to the point of actual production because of the presence of a ready market and the availability of experienced trade channels.

The management of new firm usually experience some problems which are discussed below:

* **Selecting proper product attributes** because aggregate demand of a given product often consists of many thin and heterogeneous demand schedules that are not additive;

* **Decision on assortment size and varieties** because imports condition the market to varieties assortment not economically feasible for domestic manufacturing;

* **Determining the extent of product line**. Generally speaking the advantages of a full product line are not well conceived by the management of a new firm. This results in creation of problems such as (a) a high degree of unnecessary and misguided diversification; and (b) trade intermediaries in general and retailers in particular tend to supplement their incomplete and domestically-based product lines with imported products because of

higher margins on imported articles.

* **Production planning and control.** In this area it is difficult to determine the optimum production mix and production scheduling. For many firms trial and error, regardless of its extremely high cost, is the only answer to the product mix riddle. The problem of production scheduling occurs because of lack of adequate market information. This results in manufacturers operating on job-order basis rather than engage in mass production in anticipation of demand. Such a situation means high set-up cost, very short production runs and undermining seriously of anticipated linkage effect expected from a new industry.

* Domestic manufacturers in developing countries often face a dual problem in setting their basic prices. First, imports frequently impose an upper ceiling on prices, regardless of the adopted policy toward imports. Secondly, prices become rigid once they are set. A major pitfall for a new firm is its tendency to ignore the whole gamut of price differentials and discount structures. Many firms start operations with no specific plans concerning trade margins. Thus the spread between retail price and factory price is often unplanned and at times fails to accommodate the necessary trade margins.

Terms of sales discount structures also receive little attention. Some firms make no distinction between cash and credit sales in pricing their products. Such step boosts credit sales and undermines net factory price as the cost of

discounting credit notes is not taken into account. Some other firms insist on cash sales and, thereby, do not attain desirable sales goals. The problems of financing, price differentials, and discount structures are often compounded as a result of the need to devise new systems and procedures.

It is difficult to utilise the existing import-oriented channels in the distribution of domestic manufacturers because of the following factors:

a. Imports not only segment the domestic market, they may also fragment that market. Thus existing channels cannot serve the needs of a domestic manufacturer contemplating nationwide distribution;

b. Import-oriented channels generally lack functional specialization. A domestic manufacturer, on the hand, needs a "chain type" of channel in which specific tasks can be assigned and responsibilities fixed;

c. Lack of functional specialization is coupled with a high degree of division of labour. Such tasks as financing, storage and warehousing, bulking and sorting, grading and packaging are often performed by separate agencies mainly because of lack of adequate capital.

d. An import-oriented channel usually works backward; consumers, retailers, and other intermediaries are always seeking goods. This results from the tendency of importers to throttle the flow of goods and from the sporadic and uneven flow of imports. Inventory hoarding to choke the market can be achieved at a relatively low-cost. On the other

hand domestic manufacturing ensures a steady stream of merchandise.

e. The variations in product specifications resulting from different foreign origin, lead to certain practices unfavourable for domestic manufacturing because profits are not conceived as compensation for the performance of certain tasks, they reflect the trader's ability to take advantage of the situations.

f. The credit system utilised in an import-oriented channel may differ considerably from that required by domestic manufacturing. Usually a commercial bank furnishes the importer with the necessary documentary credit. Similar arrangement is not extended to domestic manufacturing. Credit also plays a primary role in sustaining and regulating the flow of imports into the domestic market. The marketing channel is a sort of hydraulic system in which the balance of credit pressures at hundreds of larger and smaller couplings determines the speed, direction and volume of the flow of goods through the system.

This system cannot satisfy the needs of modern manufacturing which requires a faster and more direct flow of goods.

In order to point out the significance of promotional decisions for a new firm the points are discussed below:

* Even if domestic manufacturing is planned to replace imports, imports may still continue to flow in. Often this happens because of lack of coordination among government

agencies.

* A new firm often encounters the knotty problem of "domophobia"

[mistrust in the quality of domestic products]. Sometimes considerable effort is needed to establish an acceptable image of domestic manufacturers.

* Obtaining cooperation from dealers is yet another problem of a new firm. In import-based system the costs of distributions are essentially buying costs rather than selling costs. Domestic manufacturing

requires a new philosophy and different behavioural patterns.

Concluding remarks: Lack of attention given to marketing considerations results in serious flaws in planning and implementing new industrial projects. However, marketing problems are not restricted to the planning phase of new manufacturing projects, they continue to exist once the manufacturing process is started. They often turn into obstructive forces leading to the stagnation and decay of ventures that looked hopeful initially. Thus marketing is a key factor in the success or failure of industrialisation programmes.

and deliberate effort was made in this direction. The addition of three battalions as late as 26/27 November 1971 was utterly inadequate for this purpose; and

(c) That the plan did not cater for the contingency of withdrawal of the Pakistan armed forces and West Pakistan civilians by sea or land to Burma in the event of East Pakistan being overrun by the enemy. Such contingency planning was clearly called for in view of the fact that all the senior army commanders appeared to be entertaining the fatal conviction that East Pakistan could not be held against Indian invasion.

A planned withdrawal, accompanied by determined rear guard action and proper diplomatic arrangements, would have been preferable to abject surrender.

We find that although the defence of Dacca was of vital importance from the political and military angles, and it was universally realised that the fall of Dacca would

mean the end of East Pakistan, the General Headquarters was not in a position to furnish us with the detailed plans formulated by the Eastern Command or its subordinate formations for this purpose. While it is correct that ordinary the GHQ would not concern itself with details of the plans prepared by formations lower than the corps level, yet for obvious reasons the defence of Dacca had to be treated differently, and the GHQ should have taken a direct interest in its details at the planning stage, knowing full well that it may not be able to exercise much influence at the execution stage. There has thus been a serious failure on the part of the GHQ authorities in the matter of guiding, directing and influencing the battle for the defence of Dacca.

NEXT: MILITARY ASPECT-VI

MILITARY ASPECT-V

To achieve his mission, the Commander, Eastern Command, formulated his operational concept as follows:-

(a) Main defensive manoeuvres to be undertaken in areas west of River Jamuna/Padma.

(b) Forward defensive posture to be adopted.

(c) Immediately on commencement of hostilities, offensives to be launched to wrest initiative from the enemy. For this purpose, two task forces were to be created, one in area Mymensingh- Jamalpur and the other in area Maulvi Bazar for capturing opposite Indian territory.

(d) Strong mobile reserves to be placed at Aricha both in the offensive and defensive role.

(e) Securing of Lines of Communications and vital installations and the maintenance of law and order by Mujahid, police and Razakars.

(f) Each sector to be made logically self-sufficient for 30 days.

This last concept has been regarded by military experts as providing the basis for the establishment of what are called "fortresses", meaning thereby compact units and formations, eventually falling back on certain strong points owing to the availability of logistic support at those places, namely, reserve stocks of food and ammunition etc. These fortresses were expected to hold out "to the last man and