

"Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib-- the symbol of our freedom"



History: Contest and confrontation

I thank Mr SAMS Kibria for his timely article "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib- the symbol of our freedom" (March 17).

Every political party has the right to glorify its leaders and its past achievements. But this glorification should be based on facts. Any distortion not only misleads people but also undermines the achievements of the persons concerned. Mr Kibria has rightly pointed out that BNP's claim on Zia's role in our War of Liberation is blowing out of proportion.

BNP claims that the people of Bangladesh joined the war at the call of the then major Ziaur Rahman after Sheikh Mujib surrendered to the Pakistan Army. If it were true, then as the most natural course of events, Zia would have been leading the war and people fighting under his command. But if we look at the facts we find Zia as one of the 11 sector commanders designated by the Mujibnagar government. The fact does not match their claims, rather it only justifies the historic fact that he declared the independence of Bangladesh on behalf of Bangabandhu and he himself joined the war at the call of Bangabandhu.

In fact major Zia made the declaration as being the senior most Bengali officer in Chittagong at that time, if he did not do that, definitely any other junior officer would have done it. Possibly it is only his fortune that linked him with our declaration of independence.

BNP should accept this fact and stop creating fictions.

Masum Khan, on e-mail

America's military budget

In Praful Bidwai's Article "The coming war on Iraq: Protest; don't grovel", Mr. Bidwai shows his complete ignorance of the truth, and a decided tilt towards naive opinion and populist spin.

Example: "America's gargantuan military budget equals the defence spending of the next 15 highest countries-- combined."

Really? Which are those 15 countries and as a percentage of GNP, what does their military budget amount to? With a \$3 trillion plus economy, an equalised 1 per cent would be larger on a dollar basis than a lot of countries-- combined. Let's not forget the basic economic structure: labour as a cost of production of weapons would theoretically be larger here than in a country with more human capital and fewer other enterprises to employ them in-- otherwise known as opportunity costs-- so more funds need to be allocated to produce a gun in America than in the Soviet Union-- speaking solely from a labour stand point.

Furthermore, what is the economic status of those countries? How developed are they relative to the United States? Perhaps they do not have enough funds in general to allocate so much to defence? Perhaps they need to focus those funds on basic social needs such as housing and food-- neither of which are major problems for the US at this time. If you want to argue from the standpoint of our lack of focus on

our social security system, I would remind you that the United States is not a Socialist country, and that the forces of capitalism by definition result in those with more wealth than others. But everyone has an opportunity to better their situation. It is this 'ability' to change one's situation through hard work or smarts or luck that makes the capitalist system far superior to just about every other type of social structure.

I could go on and on with just about every line of this article, but I think you get the point.

F. Hussain
New York, USA

A stitch in time saves nine

In answer to question "Should Myanmar remain our distant neighbour?" posed by Mr M Anwarul Haq, my response is an emphatic "No".

Of course the ultimate decision rests upon the government. And that's where the problem is. I am particularly apprehensive about our government's extent of foresight. It made a costly mistake when it denied access to connect with the submarine cable that went past the Bay of Bengal. I sincerely hope that it won't make the same kind of mistake again by overlooking the potential opportunities that Myanmar now provides.

Bangladesh need not worry about its diplomatic stance. The issue of economic overrides all other concerns. Although the mili-

tary junta of Myanmar is guilty of "crimes against humanity" a phrase frequently used by the western democracies, it is the westerners who are now investing in millions (\$\$). So much for humanity! But that's good for Bangladesh; at least it won't be ostracised for forging ties with dictators!

As a friendly gesture, the government could start airing documentaries; educating the public through TVs and radios about Meander's history, its social, economic and political environment and most importantly its future relationship with us. In the past, the shackles of the bureaucrats have been a formidable hindrance to any positive strategic decision-making. This time, we hope our elected representatives will take matters into their own hands and do what's best for the country.

All the good wishes for the forthcoming fair!

Muksitul Islam
IBA, Dhaka

Weakness is civil construction projects

The faulty construction and supervision of the overhead pedestrian bridges has spotlighted one aspect of the civil construction tenders and the strict supervision of the day to day work.

Since there is huge scope for making money on the side on such projects through substandard work, it is noticed that civil engineering tenders are floated from different authorities as quickly as possible, and then its subsequent utilisation is neglected after completion of the civil works.

One example is the development of the bazaars (wet markets) in the DCC area. Later these small shops are not being opened for business for months for reasons not explained by the authority. The other example is the poor quality of road repairs or construction of new roads. In the private sector, the private sponsors supervise quality control to some extent, as they have to make profit, and get the investment return, including repayment of the bank loans and other financial aids. In the public sector, this profit-loss equation does not count much. Public funds are wasted to a huge extent due to human system losses -- this is an open secret.

Therefore the government may review the present rules and procedures for better quality control during the field project stage, and enforce it for public safety and security. There are many loopholes in the tendering process with extreme examples of favouritism and nepotism (including gun battles), and bypassing stringent inspections and written objection.

A frustrated citizen
Dhaka

Singapore visa problems

The recent visa restriction imposed by the Government of Singapore has caught all Bangladeshis by surprise. Having to wait 14 working days for a visa has led to a huge decline in travelling to Singapore, which otherwise, was one of the most popular destinations in Asia for Bangladeshis.

As a Travel Agent, I cannot stress enough on how much of an impact this decision has created for all of us in the industry. But I am sure that Singapore Airlines, Singapore Tourism Board and the Singapore Hospitals and Hotel industry must be feeling the pinch also, keeping in mind that these three sectors bene-

fited the most from the Bangladesh travellers. The visa seekers are frequently asking us (The Travel Agents) as to why such a harsh stance was taken by the Singapore Authorities, which makes it equally difficult for us to answer as it was done so without any warning. There has always been a general feeling that the ties between the two nations had been a strong one, but in the wake of such a swift decision, it is only fair that we (the Bangladeshis) know exactly why this decision was made by the Government of Singapore.

I would request the Singapore Consulate in Dhaka to respond to the questions that the passengers to Singapore are asking. Meanwhile, the recent meeting of our Prime Minister with the Honourable Prime Minister of Singapore to discuss the above, amongst other bilateral issues has been a positive step towards solving this issue, but now we need our Honourable Foreign Minister to immediately follow up with his counterpart in Singapore and come to a positive conclusion.

Farhan Quddus
Old DOHS, Dhaka

BNP promises

As Thomas Jefferson said in 1785, "He who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world's believing him. This falsehood of the tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions."

That puts our entire jumbo cabinet and the Opposition up the proverbial creek without a paddle.

Bastiat

Pauper teachers of rich schools

I am at one with the points raised by 'A worried parent' in his/her letter 'Pauper teachers of rich schools' (March 5). He/she has very exquisitely depicted the sad picture of the mushrooming English Medium Schools.

I feel the miserable, deplorable and pitiable situation of the schoolteachers and its deteriorating impacts on our total education sector. We are really shocked, dismayed at the attitude of the school owners who have already registered their names in the moneyed class through this growing profitable school business, but the exceptions providing the society with proper education to some extent, are not the subject matter of my discussion.

I beg pardon to use the word 'business' with 'school'. But it is only because of their end behind establishing such institutes. They concentrate their eyes not on the quality education, but on money, not the mental development of the students but on the structural development of the institute and it is the irony of fate for the young, energetic and promising teachers who come here with some hope but eventually become disappointed when they take the real taste of these fashionable English medium schools. Some put up with this disagreeable situation and helplessly surrender themselves

Dhaka

Dhanmondi residential area suffers?

Rules and codes are usually meant for public welfare. However at times, some rules may cause injustice and hardship to the citizen. In Dhanmondi Residential Area, the plot owners are suffering from a similar rule. In this area, buildings are permitted to be built up to six storeys only. While in other areas, there is no such restriction. Even in

Accusing the Opposition

This is the fourth commentary ("The mystery of rising crimes is 'finally solved'") by Mr. Mahfuz Anam since the BNP government took up the office five months ago. It shows his concern for the well being of the government and the Opposition. The commentary was very timely and quick.

I consider the statement of Mr. Anam if not fully but with a load of sarcastic comments or assumptions. He has taken everything (that is all those illegal and criminal stuff happening around these days) to match what the PM accused the opposition of. We the general and ordinary people do realise that all crimes that take place can be associated with or relates to either government or to other political parties.

! To the government in the sense that whether the minister's coteries, gangs, cadres are involved or police and other agencies have interest in it.

! To the political parties in the sense that when our whole machinery or functionality, that is, the legal system, social system, governing agencies, media are weak, ineffective or biased, they do take advantage to discredit the government directly or indirectly.

There are plenty of examples even in print media in this regard (Mr. Anam should know this better than any ordinary citizen). In your daily, examples are plenty of examples to support my claim. Unfortunately you seldom print anything against the other parties (There is no single commentary by you, should we consider that 'all are well' with them?). And that is my point.

When you have jumped to such comments, the government has 'solved' all problems or has shrugged off the responsibilities of solving or containing the whole thing also appears as embellished as do the others. They couldn't conceal their miserable

the adjoining areas of Dhanmondi R/A, one can build high-rise buildings without any limit or restriction. If you happen to be just 10 feet away from Dhanmondi R/A (D.R.A.), there is no construction limit or bar for you. This is a gross injustice and unequal treatment meted out to the D.R.A. plot owners.

It is explained that in order to keep D.R.A. clean and clear (in

Divisional co-ordination minister

Now that it is time for reviewing the performance of the ministers in the cabinet, the idea of posting the ministers at each of the four divisional headquarters (except Dhaka)



Good teacher, bad education

to the maltreatment. For this the students don't get the teachers at their best, and vice versa the teachers lose their quality gradually.

I urge the authorities concerned to come forward with some effective measures and guidelines for the development of English Medium Education.
M Mustafizur Rahman
Dhaka

respect of crowd and traffic jam), such rule was made. In reality, the rule has no usefulness and justification for some distinct reasons: because, high-rise buildings are being built in large numbers just outside Dhanmondi R/A. And as these areas (adjoining D.R.A) are connected with the Dhanmondi R/A by a simple extension of link roads/lanes (having no other outlets/inlets) its crowd, traffic load and other allied loads and fall outs are poured into Dhanmondi R/A, on its roads, WASA lines, gas lines, electric lines etc. Thus, the original purpose of this rule becomes nullified. Consequently, Dhanmondi R/A plot owners are suffering in two ways: because of the restriction clause of six storey buildings and from fallout and loads of outside area (adjoining D.R.A.)

In view of the above, the above mentioned rule may kindly be amended forthwith suitably and fairly.

Imran Khan
Dhanmondi R.A, Dhaka

Why Minto as mayor?

I don't understand why Minto's name has been in the limelight lately as the future Mayor of Dhaka? We, the Dhakaities want to see a local as a Mayor and not a man from Noakhali. May be Mirza Abbas or Sadek Hossain Khoka are not from Dhaka but at least they are MPs from Dhaka and therefore deserve to compete for the mayoral post.

Babban
Singapore

Our national dress

Almost every nation of the world has its national dress. But it is very unfortunate that we have none. During the reign of H. M. Ershad a tender was called for designing our national dress. But there was no positive outcome, as the designers did not participate in the said tender.

Till today no such move has been taken and still we don't have any national dress. Our national dress should be in accordance with the cultural heritage of the country as well as the religious values. After determining the necessary criteria it is very urgent to declare our national dress. Hope the new government would consider this matter seriously.

M.H. Bari
Khulna

for proper co-ordination should be considered.

They will attend the cabinet meetings, and provide direct feedback. It will give the people in the divisions a sense of participation and closeness, without undermining the administrative role of the Divisional Commissioners, who look after the implementation of the government policies.

A rotating system might be introduced later on for other ministers (who are not so experienced), so that they can learn from their experience. With the reorganisation of the local government elections it is the time to evaluate this suggestion.

Remote monitoring at high level is better than nothing. And the ministers in Dhaka can be involved more actively. The decentralisation process cannot be avoided. It is time to sort out the implications.

Aja
Dhaka

"NCC Bank opens education centre"

I wish to thank Mr Nurul Islam, Chairman of National Credit and Commerce Bank (NCC) Limited for his unique vision to inaugurate "the Bank's centre for continuous education" for the bank executives and officers (March 5).

It is a pity that some of the bank officers have poor idea and knowledge of baking system. I strongly believe that the competitive world calls for updated knowledge, vision, courage and faith in us to do good for the common people. The sooner the positive attitude is developed the better for the nation to retain our heritage and culture in all aspects of life and living.

Let us hope that the other banking organisations take up similar steps in order to ensure efficiency and perfection in this sector.

Abul Ashraf Noor
Dhaka

Unfair jurist

I hail the gut feeling of Mr. Nasir, which was expressed in his letter "AL's Human Rights Convention" (February 15).

In this context, I would like to mention that had the foreign participants read the above letter then they would know the other half of the story.

However, one is confused by the saying of the American Jurist William Sloan, "Now today, I understand



Law and order

failure, containing the growing crimes and started blaming others.

We ought to appreciate your concern but the way you have presented your points, should create more resentment among many and also encourage the foul talking Opposition leader to take shelter under your assumption. Presumably these kinds of embellishment make thing biased and loose their credibility. May we expect something meaningful and credible for the nation?

M M Haque
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

why the government has been denying what is happening here", in the convention on Crime Against Humanity which began on 14 February 2002 at Dhaka.

Maybe, Mr Sloan was following the situation like many of us, but certainly to cast such an oblique comment one needs to go through detailed investigation.

Isn't it unfair on the part of a jurist to pass such a comment without conducting a proper enquiry?

In contrast the former speaker of Nepalese parliament Dr Durgana passed a staid type of comment avoiding the use of word like "rape" or "barbaric" and gave a pragmatic suggestion on how to investigate the allegations, but didn't jump to a conclusion like the American jurist.

Billy I Ahmed
Dhaka

Modernise municipal management

All the time we are talking about human and administrative system losses in various sectors. It is time to carry out a high-level survey, with the attachment of international experts, on the poor level of outdated municipal management and administration practise prevailing in the centuries-old institutions since the colonial days. The only modern evidence is the Nagar Bhavan, which is hollow inside, with gun-toting terrorists controlling the tender boxes (unfortunately this is the popular image).

This type of probing activity has become imperative after the series of collapse of overhead footbridges in Dhaka. The loss of life has to be accounted for and the culprits prosecuted for homicide or other offences as defined by the law. It is not clear whether such accidents are covered by insurance for the benefit of the suffering parties.

The inspection and monitoring systems are clearly not doing their jobs. This callousness is prevailing

in the public offices and the ruling political masters do not seem to be actively interested in such boring back-room exercises.

Both the political and bureaucratic wills are misdirected (as is well known). Fast decision-making at the top, so that the new policies can be implemented quickly and firmly. The practical solution (one of the many) is immediate computerisation of the Secretariat, this will indirectly encourage the local computer industry, which can take up the challenge. How many Section Officers and the chain of Secretaries have computers on their side tables for self-operation and data display? Inter-ministerial co-ordination is slow and the communication gap has not decreased in decades, because there are no projects to reduce the time and paths in the labyrinthine, silted communication channels within the Secretariat.

Alif Zabar
Dhaka

BTMA riposte

It's amusing to see the BKMEA, BGMEA and BTMA squabble over how many hundreds of crores were disbursed by the government. To spice things up, how many of the respected members of these associations are MPs? Conservatively I'd say about a dozen or so.

Another fun fact, out of the 25 per cent cash incentive, about 5 to 10 per cent (ministers without portfolio probably get the lower rate) is distributed between the exporter's commercial banks and the Bangladesh Bank as lubricant.

Dorji
Dhaka

Plight of bus passengers



Bus tales

We must admit that a lot of improvement has taken place in our transport sector. A lot of new buses have been introduced in different routes in the city. The latest induction of Volvo double-decker bus is worth mentioning. The service of BRTC double-deckers has also been improved. But the quality of private mini bus especially the so-called gate-lock direct services have deteriorated and exploitation of passengers with higher fares etc continues unabated. The middle-class city dwellers who mostly depend on bus services have become the worst sufferers.

Let me cite an example of direct gate-lock bus service from Mirpur No. 1 section to Gulistan. This so-called direct gate-lock bus charge Tk. 10/- from Mirpur to Gulistan. The fare is higher than the other buses but their services are not up to the standard. In a 29-seat capacity mini bus at least 40-42 passengers are usually carried. These buses pile up 10 to 12 passengers on the engine chamber itself. The driver takes two passengers on the gearbox making his gear box handle manoeuvring difficult. As a result, some times during emergency, the driver cannot control his vehicle and therefore accident occurs.

The seats are so congested that the passengers' legs are squeezed and they remain half-sited between the seats. Every year BRTA renew their Fitness Certificate without any physical changes. Our law enforcing agents, the sergeants never take care of these irregularities.

The concerned authorities should look into the matter immediately. People have no objection to pay a bit higher charges for better services and comfort. But surely they should not be exploited.

Asufferer
Dhaka

On "Bannya replies"



The flood of letters continue

confused and puzzled herself but tried to baffle all the readers by her tale of duplicity.

According to the singer "I recorded the song, *Jakhon Porbe na mor payer chinha ei bate*, for a Bangladesh Television programme in a duet with late Aminur Rahman Nijhu on a mono-recording system in 1984. The recording was not of a good standard and the songs were not intended to be transferred to any cassette. A cassette of duets sung by me and Nijhu was however marketed by a company named Concord. I objected to the inclusion of that song, and a few other songs I sang for TV, in that cassette made for commercial purpose."

From her statement, it proves that though she "objected" to the song's marketing she knew that her cassette was in the market. Whether "the company that marketed the cassette closed down sometime later" is a different aspect. According to her she has "no idea how that old cassette was again marketed by another company named Sangeeta giving it a new title Anandadhara" and that she "even did not know about the existence of this cassette until this controversy broke out". She claims that "then I got a copy of the cassette and found out that as a result of making multiple copies from a master copy the songs in the cassette have become over-used and the sound quality deteriorated to a sub-standard level." According to her it is because of the "over-use" and "deterioration of the sound quality" that Mr. Nazmul Karim and many others heard 'dhar gulay' in place of 'daar gulay'.

She again claims, "I am certain that the distortion is the result of making many copies out of an old over-used and worn out master spool which itself was of poor sound-recording standard."

Whatever attempt she took, it was all futile. She has miserably failed to justify her analysis. It is not possible that "over-use" and "deterioration of sound quality" can cause the word 'dar' to be heard as 'dhar'.

Sangeeta Rahman
Paris, France

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Ms. Bannya for enlightening the listeners of this latest sound technology in our country that there is a new recording procedure of songs which can alter/change/modify/adjust words according to the singer's choice years after the song has been recorded.

The listeners have unnecessarily blamed the singer for a 'wrong word' because unfortunately no one of these readers was exposed to this latest technology.

Rubaya Naheed
New Jersey, U.S.A

I was speechless after I read the reply of Bannya. The singer's testimony is baseless and inconceivable.

Even if I had to believe her story my question is not how the song was recorded 'without the singer's permission' as claimed by her but how it was recorded without the permission of Biswa Bharoti Music Board?

Osman Naki
Shah Jalal University, Sylhet

I have been monitoring the debate on 'wrong wording in a Rabindra Sangeet' since Mr. Nazmul Karim's letter was published.

To many readers the debate may be quite interesting and to some other readers boring. But what appears mysterious to me is the silence of the so-called 'scholars' of Rabindra Sangeet in our country.

We have so many 'intellectuals' in our country who never fail to give their 'valued' comment on almost every topic be it political or cultural. But I wonder why none of them has yet expressed his/her views on this topic.

And as for Bannya's reply, I find it totally hypocritical. Will any 'intellectual' please comment?

Reaz W. Shams
Dhanmondi R/A., Dhaka