

Repeal Bill on Bangabandhu's Portrait Law



Portrait of a portrait

On 07 March, BNP lawmaker Shamsul Alam Pramanik introduced a bill titled "Father of the Nation Portrait Preservation and Display (Repeal) Act 2002" on the private member's day amidst desk thumping by Treasury bench members. The Awami League

enacted this law in 2001 making the hanging of Bangabandhu's portrait mandatory in all government and semi-government offices, statutory institutions and schools.

Mr. Pramanik argued that the "Father of the Nation Portrait Preservation and Display Act 2001" was misleading and confusing. First, "after independence there was an administrative order for display of the portrait of incumbent president and head of government, but there was no provision for the display of the portrait of late presidents or heads of government."

Second, the law denied the contribution of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman and other national leaders in the War of Independence. Third, there was no provision around the world for displaying portraits of any person by making legislation. Finally, "people of this country did not accept Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Father of the Nation and the matter is controversial." In fine, the repeal bill says that displaying and preserving the portrait of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in government offices and diplomatic missions by law is not logical. The bill was passed on 21 March at the private member's day.

The bill has added more fuel to the blazing political environment in the country. To avoid this tension, the issue needs calm and careful criticism. Much of the confusions and controversies concerning Mujib's role in our national life originates from mixing up his two identities that reflect two very different, often acrimonious, images. These two identities concern his roles as the leader of independence and the chief administrator of the Bangladesh government.

In his first role, he is called Bangabandhu and Father of the Nation. He acquired this recognition through his political leadership qualities; no individual or party bestowed him these titles or crowns.

After independence, Sheikh Mujib became just the chief AL leader and by that virtue, the chief administrator of the Bangladesh government. In this role, he must be judged by his perfor-

mance as the chief administrator. It is well known that he failed miserably in doing this job. His personal honesty and integrity were never in question. This, however, does not relieve him from his failure in executing his responsibilities as Bangladesh's chief administrator.

However, Mujib's administrative roles are of little consequence to us now, for he is dead. The only reason we are interested in him is due to his role in our independence movement. We often fail to appreciate this important point, because we mix up his two roles. This point is extremely important in analysing the repeal bill on Bangabandhu's portrait law that.

March is the most magnificent month in our national life. We declared our independence in this month, whose process started on the 7th instant. Mr. Paramanik introduced his bill on the historic 7th March and the bill was passed before the Independence Day. These events do not seem to be mere coincidences. They appear to be well thought-out plans to undo what was achieved in this month in 1971. The process will begin by humiliating the memory of the Father of the Nation. There was no law to respect his memory. Since he was deprived from his due respect, AL enacted a law last year to stop it officially. The repeal of the law will put an official stamp of humiliation of his memory.

It is difficult to understand how AL, the party born to establish democratic rule, does not understand the basic principles of democratic ruling. If election is fair, the verdict is mandatory. AL cannot boycott or resign from the JS under any pretext. For, its members are not elected by the government. If AL resigns from the JS, it will lose the right to seek re-election. It should attend the parliamentary proceedings and tell the anti-liberation force, which is growing stronger around BNP, that it has no right to discuss Bangabandhu's status in the parliament.

Khandakar Qudrat-I-Elahi
Guelph, Ontario, Canada

dent Ziaur Rahman and thereby ushering his second death. The subsequent chain of events is likely to testify whether the nation will now have to see their second burials!

The AL and the BNP may be mutual political rivals but Bangabandhu and Ziaur Rahman were never so. Our politicians should spend some more time in studying history, instead of writing history themselves, to understand the roles of their leaders in realising independence for Bangladesh.

Dr. K. Maudood Elahi
Professor, JU

Regarding Bangabandhu's portrait

I am in total agreement with the PM's recent proposal regarding the portrait controversy. What she said was very logical. We should hang both the leaders' portrait and that no one should by force make us respect an individual. Awami League has no reason to oppose this move. Also Hasina should stop threatening that she and her party would resign from the Parliament.

People have elected them as the Opposition party. They are obliged to go to the Parliament. If they resign they will lose all the support they hold at time being. The general public is not stupid. They will never approve of anything so bizarre. The BNP government has not yet completed one year in power, and the AL are talking about resorting to tough measures? This only shows how backward they really are. Do they still think that people will approve of harkats? Well, you are in for a big surprise!

I congratulate our Prime Minister for trying to resolve the portrait controversy and hope that she would now put her attention to the law and order situation prevailing in the country, which is more important than whether it is Zia or Mujib's portrait hang on the wall.

Ariful Islam, on e-mail

Bangladesh in the 21st century

I am a British Bangladeshi living in London. I am proud to say that my father was a local fund-raiser and organiser of resistance to the Paki-

lists of Freedom Fighters. Can it really be that 31 years after independence, when Bangladesh is still the second or third poorest country in the world, that our leaders are fighting about events in the last century?

Where is the debate about economic development, restoration of law and order, development of

We need a Messiah



History's long ride

The controversy and political bickering over the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is a boon for both AL and BNP.

It has rid AL of death of issue for *andolon* (political upheaval). On the other hand, it can help BNP deflect and distract the attention of people from their failures of combating crime, curbing unemployment etc. But it is certain that such political squabble only drags the economy of the country down to the wriggle of bleak future.

We, the common citizens, strain at the leash to be out of this nasty plight. The politicians, however, have hardly any time to be sincere about that except feign seriousness. In this critical moment, is there anyone who could unfold the way of being rid of these parasite politicians?

Khairul Chowdhury
UK

technology and industry, preservation of the environment, the danger of global warming that threatens to drown Bangladesh in the next 50 years, global terrorism and the attack on Muslims?

The world today is very different from 1971. The gap between Bangladesh and the developed world is larger now than it has ever been. Technology is speeding the world to a new uncharted future, while Bangladesh still struggles to generate enough electricity to keep the lights running. We face all the problems that the West faces, and we face a thousand more.

I appeal to BNP, AL, Jammat, JP and all the rest— please stop this nonsense. Pick up a British newspaper or an American one. Read what the leaders in those countries are thinking, debating and acting on. They are leading their countries through the 21st century. Where are you leading us?

Raouib Shamsad
UK

Father of the Nation

My first reaction to this typical BNP revenge tactic would have been to remind them that a mandate for change didn't include portraits, something most people outside the two dynasties hardly care about. But although I still find the BNP, petty, corrupt and power mad, the PM's compromise solution is surprisingly sensible. For once she seems to have made a mature suggestion that might force AL to do its job as the Loyal Opposition.

I think it's a fine idea to display the portraits of both Bangabandhu and President Zia along with the Head of State.

The bill that was repealed, does this include the bit about making it illegal to malign the Father of the Nation? We should have the right to insult and malign any political figure if we wish.

MA
Dhaka

Of priorities and Editorials

What prompted me to write this letter is your Editorial on the repeal of Bangabandhu's Portrait Act. As you have rightly pointed out the need of the hour is to fix our priorities and proceed accordingly. But my question is do some of us who propagate this philosophy follow the line? I am all for history and heritage. No nation worth its metal can survive with dignity without a conscious effort in understanding that element. But as we go along I find that we are deliberately using and abusing our heritage. Over three decades have passed to this day our so-called intellectuals continue to engage much of their valuable time in aligning and realigning our history.

I come of a family whose contributions and sacrifices for the nation of Bangladesh surpass many. Yet there is hardly any talk of "the contributions" made. To my mind Bangladeshis love to cling to their past, by nature they are backward looking and if I may say so anti-progress. My brother who was one of the leading intellectuals of the country met a brutal end at the hands of what we often describe as anti-liberation forces. I am angry and unhappy too yet the fact remains that the time for lamentations is over. The best tribute we can offer to all our Heroes, who laid down their lives so that we can live in a free land without fear and intimidation, is to concentrate all our efforts in an all-round socio-economic development of the country.

Sorry for the deviation, I was talking about "priorities" and if some of us who so frequently talk about do really practise what we preach. In this regard I believe the print media has the biggest role to play. I find it rather strange that the media speaks of priorities only when there is an issue like the Bangabandhu's portrait and the likes. At the same time it ends up giving a full detailed and sensational description of all that is connected with the issue.

Frankly speaking the media (more specifically the newspapers) would do us a favour if for a while they would talk of only of such priority issues like poverty alleviation, people's access to proper and affordable health services, bringing to book those responsible for degradation of the environment, improvement of law and order including improvement of the public transportation systems. For a while let the masses have the feeling that they

and they alone can do it if the political parties are incapable. For a while let us forget about our politics and political parties. For a while let us make an attempt to see whether we can move forward without leaning on the glories of our War heroes. For a while let the media put in print continuous follow up stories on issues mentioned above and nothing else.

When you come to think, it hardly matters as to who did what to whom.

Hasina's rally



Of Fathers and daughters Bangabandhu is out of bounds?

I am not surprised that Ms Hasina said these things. But I do hold that Matia Chowdhury, especially in light of the well-deserved praise that Mr Mahfuz Anam heaped upon her in his editorial, should not be an accessory to this.

Bastiat
Dhaka

At either governmental or at the opposition level, what matters to the majority of the country's population who live beyond poverty line whether or not the next meal is assured. When the chips are down I strongly feel that we are a poor people not in body alone but in our minds too. As I say this I feel that I too have been often guilty of the same.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

Lost portraits of Bangabandhu

The Jatiya Sangsad of Bangladesh on March 21 scrapped the Act for preservation and display of portraits of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Mujibur Rahman with late President Ziaur Rahman is self-contradictory. She did a great mistake comparing Bangabandhu with late military ruler Ziaur Rahman.

The mass media should create pressure on the present government and counsel them to step back from the path they have taken showing respect to the national interest.

We would like to express our disillusionment against such moves of the government to downgrade our spirit of the Liberation War. The government has kept to the path of giving one provocation after another to the Oppositions.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's role in the liberation of Bangladesh is of paramount consideration. The entire Bengali nation should honour Bangabandhu for his

incomparable contribution to the nation.

Delwar Jahid
Pontevedra, Spain

Repeal of Portrait Display Bill

There is no confusion, Mr. Editor ("Portrait display repeal bill passed", editorial March 23). And there is no crisis, as envisaged by you, due to passing of the repeal bill. If there was any crisis or controversy over the showing of the portrait of Sheikh Mujib in the government offices it was created by the Hasina government in the first place.

Legislative action to show respect to a leader is peculiar and unprecedented in the world. In fact it was Sheikh Mujib himself who lost credibility and respect by his own deeds and the last nail in the coffin was driven by his daughter Sheikh Hasina with her herds of sycophants by hacking his image and stature and enacting a law to force the nation to show respect to his portrait. By contrast a few countries, which have their founding fathers, do revere and venerate them for ages without prompting or pushing.

If we did not show respect when (he was) alive and killed him, how would you expect us to show respect now to his portrait? You could not compel a nation to show respect to one of its politicians by enacting law or by threatening of punishment if that respect and esteem is not natural and automatic. If a leader is respected spontaneously from the core of heart that is the lasting respect with dignity.

I am aghast how such law could have been conceived in the first place? If such an obnoxious law (likewise inheriting Gono Bhavan) was enacted by the AL government, the question of disgracing such a leader by repealing the law would not have arisen. And for all these happenings the blame goes squarely to Sheikh Hasina and her advisers.

If, however, the opposition party is intent on giving more importance to hanging of their leader's portrait in government offices, then attending the Parliament for which they have been elected, I do not know where we shall end up! In order to stop the unnecessary squawk, let there be then a few portraits of the founding fathers including Sher-e-Bangla, Bhashani, Sheikh Mujib and Ziaur Rahman. And yet if this suggestion is not workable or acceptable let there be none, except the portrait of the head of

government.

AF Rahman
Dhaka

How many times will Bangladeshis hang Sheikh Mujib?

Some years ago we had an able, educated and a patriotic ambassador (a rare individual of such quality in Bangladesh Foreign service) Dr Afsarul Kader posted in Nairobi, Kenya. When time came to carry out a government decision to hang Bangabandhu's portrait in the Embassy, there was a ceremony in which I was asked by him to say a few words on behalf of the Bangladesh community. While I expressed my satisfaction on that decision that finally we are giving

nise George Washington as the founding father and at the same time giving due recognition and respect to its other great leader like Thomas Jefferson, John Adam and Abraham Lincoln. Why Bangladeshis have to create chaos and social disorder on an issue like the portrait of Bangabandhu. No doubt Ziaur Rahman was a good leader and history will provide space for his leadership role in Bangladesh, as he deserved.

It is a pity to see on television news that people cannot take bath for a week for non-supply of water in certain parts of Dhaka city. People remember leaders who leave something behind for others to benefit not for propagating the family glory.

Munim Chowdhury
Dhaka

Paying respect to Bangabandhu and Shahid President Zia!



Zia: Shahid's portrait?

It was a momentous step by the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for acknowledging the fact that Bangabandhu and Shahid President Zia do not belong to any specific party.

Both of these leaders owe respect from the nation and we must offer our gratitude to them for their contribution. Please, remember that we do not need a new law to express our love and affection for these two leaders. A mere acceptance by the two political parties of their deeds will solve this un-called for bitterness and fight over the past.

I take my hats off to Prime Minister Khaleda



Father figure?

Zia for calling to forget the past bitterness and stop dividing people for once and for all. I propose a "Presidents Day Holiday" to commemorate the achievements of these two "Great Leaders" by unifying the people, and pay proper respect to them as a civilised nation.

Mutual respect can only pull us out from this abyss of confrontation and hatred. My ardent appeal to Awami League and BNP is to listen to the people and pay heed to the call of the time for reconciliation.

Nafees. K
USA

due recognition to the founding father, I also expressed my fear that some day some leader will emerge and decide to remove it again. A Pakistani friend asked me, "If you guys can kill your father, how any one can trust you?" All recognised species have one mother and one father". Can we have more? There is no problem for the U.S. to recog-

The AL legislators during their rule did bring about a second death to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by enacting law making mandatory the display of his portrait in government institutions. The BNP legislators have committed the same mistake by enforcing a similar law to display portrait of late Presi-

stanis in 1970. When his activities were discovered, our family had to flee East Pakistan in fear of our lives. I am now raising my children—who have only visited Bangladesh once—to be proud of their roots.

As I survey today's news, the main topics occupying our leaders are the display of pictures of Bangabandhu, and the drawing up

Shame on the Bengali nation

I read your beautiful editorial on the repeal Bill of Bangabandhu's portrait. I applause highly for your concern over the reaction of the nation and the retaliatory action by the political opposition. We are such an ungrateful nation that we are unable to show our respect to our Father of the Nation.

Our ill motivated and sick-minded so-called politicians are destroying our history and the nation earned by the sacrifice of millions of martyrs.

The world knows Bangladesh by the name of Sheikh Mujib. So scraping his name and pulling down his portrait from the wall would not destroy his ocean like fame and popularity from the heart of the people.

The Razakars backed BNP government will pay for it sooner or later.

Mohammad A. Siddique
New York, USA

I believe the issue is whether Sheikh Mujib's memory should be smeared and his picture be taken down or not.

As far as Major Zia's contribution during the war is concerned, we did not hear anything except for that first radio announcement. It was either Khaled Mosharraf or Shafiullah whose names came up during this period, especially in Dhaka.

Most of us who lived through the nine months of 1971 have no trouble calling Sheikh Mujib the Father of the Nation. For AL it is probably time to go underground. Street agitation will only provide an avenue for BNP to blame AL for the miseries the country is currently suffering. Parliament is a useless exercise when democratic rule has eroded, life and limbs of everyone who is not a core

BNP are at risk. All we can hope for is democracy and prosperity for Bangladesh.

Shamim, on e-mail

We are ashamed!

I have been a supporter of BNP and have been active in many BNP activities in the United States for the last six years. The recent passage of the Bill which bars mandatory hanging of Bangabandhu's portrait is a reflection of the sick mentality of BNP. As such, many of us are leaving BNP and for that matter politics for good. We all appreciated Begum Zia's controlled attitude after the election when she advised all not to show disrespect to any pictures, which essentially meant Bangabandhu's picture. When people who know us as BNP supporters ask us why this new law was necessary as this only divides the nation further, frankly we have no answer to offer. We stammer and make up some stories that we all know in our mind are just not true! Every nation has an icon personality.... Bangabandhu could be one for us.

BNP is giving the ownership of Bangabandhu to Awami League although they could just own him, as they indeed should and challenge Awami League on important social and economic issues that they are capable of doing. BNP, because of its mean leadership is unable to reap the benefit of what it did to the nation. Shame on BNP and disgrace to the nation.

If Ziaur Rahman was alive, he would have said: "Stop this nonsense!". Unfortunately, Begum Zia has too many Jamat-razakar ribbon around her neck! Till she says good bye to them, here is our good bye to her!

Shopon Rahman
New York, USA

With the blessings of Internet, no willing person is far away from the center of events. The BNP govt. at last did what they wanted to do— eradicate Bangabandhu from any official business in Bangladesh. After insulting all the Bangladeshis around the globe, Khaleda put some more salt on the wound.

When Bangabandhu was planning to struggle and launch movement for the emancipation of East Pakistan, persons like Zia and others were busy making their career in Pak army. Many talented young persons at that time were busy making careers in civil service and in other professions too. Not that Zia and others like him were doing any crime by building their own career, but they were not making any planning for the emancipation and ultimately the independence of Bangladesh. What Zia and others were doing during Pakistani time was nothing but the act of middle class's class game— self-preservation. On the other hand, Bangabandhu and his political organizations were busy working day and night to mobilize people for the ultimate self-determination—the independence.

The BNP wallas talk about who declared the independence. Under the inspiration of Bangabandhu, everyone was his follower before, during and after the liberation war. Everyone was glad to do things in his name during that critical juncture of our history. Without Bangabandhu's name any act during liberation struggle was null and void. Zia and others were glad to be the foot soldier of Bangabandhu. Zia himself acknowledged that Bangabandhu inspired him and that was not unusual at all. Many other people also made significant contributions during our freedom struggle. Kader Siddiqi formed his own army to fight Pak military. ASM Rob, Sahajhan Siraj, and their friends were the first to fly the flag of



Sssh... its portrait time

Bangladesh. Some people can argue erroneously that Bangladesh was the creation of their mind, but we all know it and they know it they were all inspired by Bangabandhu—the father of the nation. Bangabandhu was the producer, director and the central character of the liberation struggle of Bangladesh—no buts and ifs. BNP-Jamat axis may disagree, but fact is fact. As I said history is history, and it will take care of the truth eventually—nothing but the truth. Does not matter what BNP-Jamat-axis thinks or does. In this issue, it does not even matter what Awami League thinks or does.

Dr. Nasir Ahmed
Louisiana, USA