

The portrait partisans

When the Awami League passed a bill to make it mandatory to display the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman many citizens did not agree to the enactment of the new law. Most Bangladeshis respect Bangabandhu as a great patriot and accept him with all his virtues and vices. But the majority was not willing to consider him as the Father of the Nation. In fact the way the Liberation War proceeded without the presence of Bangabandhu, we can say that a new country called Bangladesh which was born through a bloody war in 1971 do not need a Father of the Nation. We will respect our leaders but we shall not worship them. That is the essence of freedom.

Therefore the law repealing the hanging of the portrait of Bangabandhu is accepted and welcome. The Prime Minister has rightly said the people do not want to be burdened with the law to hang a particular picture in the government offices.

However saying the above I would like to draw attention to the new proposal of the PM wherein she proposed to pass a new law which shall make it mandatory to display two pictures, one of Bangabandhu and the other of Ziaur Rahman.

As a free citizen of a free country I do not think the proposal is justifiable. No one disputes Zia's contribution in the Liberation War and his contribution in nation building after 1975 episode, but to make a law to display his picture is a bit of excess and similar to what Awami League did earlier. While we had been considering one picture as burden, is it not a fact that two pictures would be double burden? Is not the nation already overburdened with enough and unnecessary loads created by our political leaders? We definitely need a break.

Nurul Basher
Khilgaon, Dhaka

The nation has been beset with the politics of portrait. After 31 years of independence, we are looking back to seek our identity. Sheikh Mujib's leadership before independence was unquestionable. But as a chief administrator he failed miserably. However, we respect Sheikh Mujib from the core of our heart for his contribution regarding our independence.



Portrait of controversy

Ziaur Rahman was a valiant freedom fighter and created a new political stream in our politics. Both of them played their part from their respective positions. History will give due honour to these two national leaders. It cannot be determined by political process. Neither Mujib nor Zia should be confined to the frame of photogra-

phy. The issue of portrait is therefore unnecessary. There are more important issues to handle than this one.

Parvez Amed
SCPSAC, Savar

The Law for mandatory display of the portrait of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been scrapped. We should take lesson from this that whatever goes up without public support must come down eventually.

The new proposal being aired by some in BNP circle that all government, public offices and educational institutes should display the portraits of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ziaur Rahman, the President and the Prime Minister is preposterous. The wall will look like a picture gallery.

A new law should be enacted that only Sheikh Mujib's picture would be mandatory minus his epithet of the "Father of the Nation." Beside his portrait, any one of the following may be chosen:

Ziaur Rahman, Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy and the incumbent President.

That should satisfy all.

Iskander Meah
Dhaka

I agree with Nafees K's idea but don't like the idea of removing Bangabandhu's portrait. He is the Father of the Nation whether we like him or not.

The government could do many constructive things instead of provoking the Opposition. By scrapping portrait law the government has foolishly given the opportunity to the Opposition to resort to agitation.

Wahed Nabi
Sheffield, England

"Should our sons come back?"

This is in reply to Mr Mahmud and Cryptic Fate's letters.

Mr Mahmud, I was trying to be derogatory towards those who stayed back and especially the ones in the white-collar professions. I think they are selfish people, one of the less welcome traits that America instils in you. For your information I am back over three years now but I visit US twice a year.

Cryptic Fate, I honestly hadn't thought of you when I wrote that letter. But now that I think about it, you are just the kind of person I was addressing. I completely agree with you that there are many Bangladeshis who are far better off staying in the US and more power to them. I am not asking for the mass return of B.Com pass cab drivers or the waiters in the *deshi* restaurants.

You however, are the very epitome of the kind of person I want back home. Your family is superbly established in Bangladesh, you

the Jews were systematically persecuted, killed or forcibly converted to Christianity by the Christian zealots all over the Europe for centuries, the Muslims gave them shelter. To destroy this goodwill and amity the Christian crooks of the West, England and France as the spearhead hatched some brilliant plan. They set up the Jewish State of Israel in the heart of Palestine displacing the predominantly Muslim local residents. If England and France were so benevolent then they could offer their own land instead. Now we can see how the spiral of violence is engulfing the Middle East. (How I wish to go back to those peaceful days!)

There are more such examples of Western obsession of ruling the world by either annihilating others or by planting seeds of animosity to facilitate reaching their evil goal; but I think only two examples will suffice for the time being. No wonder that Karen Armstrong observed "it was not Islam but the Christian West which found it impossible to coexist

no magnanimity in forgiving the War Criminals. May I point out that had the War Criminals brought to justice or even a sincere effort made, the face of Bangladesh would have worn a different look and surely a better one.

I am proud of our unique struggle for Independence which I have seen from very close quarters. Not only that I lost a brother who by all counts was a valuable asset to this country and a champion of Bengali nationalism. It is time for us to turn our heritage into a total economic emancipation or else history shall not forgive us and sure to make a mockery of all that is or was glorious.

As for the observations made by Puspa Jabin, I say thank you. I am however somewhat confused when she says that our Independence Day celebration should be "of our unique heritage, Multiculturalism and identity". I believe we should make it a celebration of our determination to wipe out abject poverty, ethnic discord, discrimination against women, downright demeaning and irresponsible behaviour of our political hierarchy. We indeed may have a high profile of cultural and historical heritage but trust me, these are now being dealt with by some partisan or selected defenders and peddlers of our cultural heritage.

Thus I for one would like to spend the day meditating and thinking of how best we can march forward.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

Distortion of history is the name of the game

Khaleda Zia in a recent address to the freedom fighters stated that the Bengali nation went for the Liberation War in 1971 at the call of Major Zia on March 26, 1971. Has she totally lost touch with reality not to mention history? Can the distortion of history based on party politics in Bangladesh go so far?

If anyone really bothers to listen to Ziaur Rahman's declaration on that day again, he will hear that he states quite clearly that he, Zia, is declaring the independence of Bangladesh on behalf of the nation's supreme leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Zia when he was alive never claimed to be on the same pedestal in the nation's historic independence struggle as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib.

Khaleda Zia's insistence that Zia should be placed on the same level as Mujib really points to the bankruptcy of ideas of party politics in Bangladesh and also a thinly disguised attempt to detract from other

far more important matters (namely law and order situation and the economy) where her government has shown little to no progress in the past few months.

Zia does not belong in the same place in the nation's independence struggle as Mujib, but at the rate our Prime Minister is going, this second Khaleda Zia administration may well replace Mujib's post-independence government (1972-75) as the most inept one in the nation's history.

refuse, which they do not do at present. In Gulshan area they used to have cement enclosures at the end of roads and at market places, but as these were not cleaned the residents complained of the stench. DCC demolished those and not replaced those with anything. So people started throwing their garbage on the roadside and into open drains.

All house owners pay municipal corporation taxes, which covers

Bangladesh. Our policymakers are more interested in suppliers credit than private foreign investment due to the question of commission/personal gain.

I have tried once in 1998, when Bangladesh Government was trying to attract foreign investment. I, along with an US investor, sent a power plant proposal (BOO basis and rate \$0.03815/unit) based on coal from Barapukuria and/imported from Indonesia, including some down-

A 'slim' government through lottery

In Bangladesh whoever gets elected an MP, and if he belongs to the treasury bench, he thinks himself eligible to become a minister. So if he is denied a portfolio of a minister or at least a state minister by the PM, this creates profound displeasure in him. This sentiment of the Members of Parliament is one of the main causes why a jumbo cabinet is usually formed in our country. After all the sentiment of the MPs are more important than the financial condition of the country!

The present cabinet has as much as 60 members. Our politicians in power may not care a straw for the criticism at home for forming such a jumbo cabinet in a poor country like ours, but the pressure from the 'donor' countries and agencies to reduce the size of the cabinet is hard to ignore for them.

A cabinet comprising 25 ministers and state ministers is big enough to run smoothly the government in Bangladesh. The ministries of Home, Finance, Foreign and Information are very important. After selecting ministers for these four ministries, the rest 21 ministers and state ministers can be chosen through a lottery among the elected MPs of the treasury bench. No MP will feel himself ignored for not having a portfolio, if a cabinet is formed in this way. So let us try the lottery to cut the cabinet into size. It will be something new in forming a cabinet of a country in the history of the world! What else can we do while being sandwiched between the inconsolable sentiment of our MPs and the pressure of the donor countries and agencies?



Cabinet or public meeting?

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

HB
Adelaide, Australia

"Grab a spade and clean, The PM sets the ball rolling"

This was one of your headlines of 21 March issue. Laudable no doubt. But how many of us would be handling fairly fresh vegetable leaves piled in a nice clean surrounding with a brand new spade and basket, and having a woman to hold the basket for us? Also it was not shown where the refuse was ultimately disposed.

The Prime Minister also handed over keys to the new trucks of Dhaka City Corporation. I wonder how often these trucks will go round collecting refuse. The present performance has made me sceptical.

DCC need to supply street/road refuse disposal bins. Their trucks should go round daily collecting

conservancy, so surely they can expect that their rubbish will be collected and their environment kept clean.

The DCC inspectors have to be more in evidence and active to ensure that the people are observing environment cleanliness. Perhaps, like Singapore, fines have to be imposed to realise the Prime Minister's objective to 'Make our country a beautiful place to live in'.

JH Kabiruddin
Gulshan, Dhaka

Apathetic Bangladesh and foreign investment

Recent news of reorganising the structure of BOI and the refusal of Finance Minister to allow the construction of Barapukuria power plant on expensive supplier credit loan has once again encouraged me to look for investment possibility in

stream industries related to coal and power plant by-products to the Chairman of BOI. After long communication and commitment of having discussion on this proposal by proper authorities, we went to Bangladesh on February 1999.

We went to BOI office at around 9 A.M. While we were waiting for our contact director, we wanted to talk to BOI chairman, who just arrived in the office. We explained the reason of our visit to Bangladesh and BOI office and our desire to meet the Chairman. After a few minutes, the office bearer returned and wanted to know whether we have an appointment with him or not. We were surprised and stunned. Later on, the contact director came, and he did not show even the simple courtesy of introducing us with the Chairman. We have found BOI has done nothing on our written proposal (sent at least three months before our arrival) except making few appointments with few related secretaries and chairman, although BOI has

invited us to come to Bangladesh for discussion on this proposal. Many of the appointments were cancelled due to their busy schedule.

Within a few days, we realised that we made a big mistake by coming to Bangladesh for investment. All are propaganda and the authorities are more interested in supplier credit loan rather than sincere foreign investment. The US investor left the country within four days and I stayed one week more to explore further the investment feasibility. I went to the Secretariat to discuss with State Minister for energy, who was found to be extremely busy with party people or others. His PS suggested me to leave the proposal with him and assured me that the proposal will be given to the Minister. Later on, I talked to the director of power cell and director of planning. At the end of two weeks, I have concluded that "Foreign Investment in Bangladesh is impossible without proper connection and BOI has nothing to do with investment decision or even simple influence".

The progressive step taken by the new government and cancellation of all supplier credit finance projects encouraged us to look again the investment possibility in Bangladesh. But we don't want to make the same mistake. My proposal is directed to the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister, Industry Minister, Commerce Minister, Mineral Resource Minister, Science and Technology Minister, BOI Chairman, Petro-bangla Chairman, PDB Chairman and related authorities. I want an open comment from them on newspaper and also the proper way to proceed with the proposal.

Proposal No. 1: We are interested to build a power plant at Barapukuria based on coal on BOO basis with a power purchase contract at a reasonable price. We will also invest 300 to 400 million dollar over a few years period on downstream industries based on coal and by-products of coal based power plant. This will create a huge employment

Shah AMS Kibria vs Faezul Haque

A new debate has started between Faezul Huq and AL's SAMS Kibria. It's a pity that if any one has anything to say against the Awami League he/she is bound to be attacked by the AL leaders, supporters and pet columnists. And if any Awami Leaguer or a former Awami Leaguer criticises the party then he is in trouble for sure.

I'd like to ask Mr Kibria two questions:

1. "A lot of people in the country are wondering why Faezul Huq has chosen to launch his attack at this time..." How did you come to know about 'people's mind'? Are you not circulating your own opinion in the name of 'a lot of people'?

2. It seems you wanted to make some point about the role of Faezul Huq in 1971. Would you speak out clearly? Wasn't Faezul Huq a freedom fighter? How come? We have known for a long time that all the leaders and supporters of AL are freedom fighters. Whatever role they played during 1971, they become freedom fighters if they join AL, because AL is '*muktijudher shapakhayer shakti*' (pro-Liberation). Do you mean to say that the converted *muktijudhas* regain their original face if they leave AL?

Shawkat Hossain
Mirpur, Dhaka

Extortion

Today I was visited by a group of young men from DU, raising funds for a classmate of theirs suffering from Leukaemia.

Exceptionally their story was true and they are actually collecting money for her. But that does not mean that this was not toll collection.

If vigilantism is wrong, then door to door collections for starving/dying/suffering friends/relatives/classmates is still toll collection and should not be permitted.

Bastiat
Dhaka

"Pauper teachers of rich schools"

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

I can feel the miserable situation of the school teachers and its deteriorating impacts on the total education sector. We are shocked at the attitude of the school owners who manage to earn a handsome amount of money through this profitable school business. There may be some exceptions but they are only a handful.

I beg pardon to use the word 'business' with 'school'. But these school owners' only intention is not quality education but raising money, as they are least bothered about the mental development of the students. It is apparent that superficial development of the institutes is their primary concern. Such attitude is surely undesirable for any young, energetic, promising teacher who enters these schools with a hope to provide good education and eventually get disappointed when they become aware of the circumstances. 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 the prevailing state in the English medium schools.

M Mustafizur Rahman
Dhaka

HC verdict on ETV



Getting used to ETV dues and taxes diligently to the government which includes the license fee of 2.5 crore taka to BTV, I strongly feel ETV deserved some lenience for the procedural glitch.

Thanks for the timely editorial on ETV. At a country, where virtually every single tender is manipulated, singling ETV out for it and putting such a high penalty seems too harsh. For an entity which has revolutionised the Broadcast medium in Bangladesh and that has been paying all its

We should not forget that international investment arms like Citibank had invested heavily in ETV with its terrestrial broadcast being the main investor appeal. Taking its license off and putting it off air will send a very wrong and loud negative message to international investors about investment in Bangladesh in future.

I hope some reasonable settlement can be reached with keeping the general public interest and good will towards ETV in mind and at the same keeping the rule of the land upheld. However, taking ETV's terrestrial license off should not be an option.

Asif Saleh
New York, USA

have several flats and houses as well as other businesses in Dhaka. And I doubt if I know anyone else with your extent of family connections. Yet both of you and your sister are probably not coming back.

Its people like you who have to come back home; the ones who used to play cricket for Scholastica and put together bands that played horrible MTV Unplugged type music. Elitist I may be, but it's you and our friends at JP Morgan or wherever, who will save this country.

MA
Dhaka

Seeds of animosity planted by the west?

For centuries Muslims and Hindus in India had lived side by side as friends and neighbours in perfect harmony, but as soon as the British colonial power sneaked in into the picture posing as mere traders, the problem started. They planted hatred between these two previously compatible communities to such an extent that even today, after the British left this sub-continent more than 50 years ago, racial hatred and communal violence is ripping through India claiming innocent lives.

But the situation in the Middle East is gloomier. The Muslims and the Jews are fighting with each other making the prospect of co-existence almost impossible in a land where they lived in comfort for the last fourteen hundred years.

The Christian Nazis killed six million Jews in the holocaust during the World War II. Not only that while

with others".

As you sow, so will you reap. Looks like those who sowed the seeds of hatred all over the world haven't started gathering their crops yet. I wonder how their harvest would look!

Shukla Mirza
USA

Bangladesh's birth-day blues?

I wish to congratulate you on the letters published in your daily related to the celebration of our 31st Independence Day. I would however like to make reference to two letters, one by Mr. Esam Sohail from and the other by Pushpa Jabin.

While dealing with the letter of Mr. Sohail I would like to make a few observations.

To begin with, I am in full agreement with Mr. Sohail with regard to the uniqueness of our Liberation Struggle. His observations with regard to the extraordinary roles by concerned members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces directly or indirectly cannot be disputed.

Although at the risk of annoyance to some, one cannot undermine the sacrifices made by the Indian Army. History also has it that many other nations of yesterday have made no less sacrifices for their independence spread over a longer period of time compared to that of Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the reference made by Mr. Sohail regarding forgiving of the War criminals and the Collaborators as an act of magnanimity. I strongly believe that there is

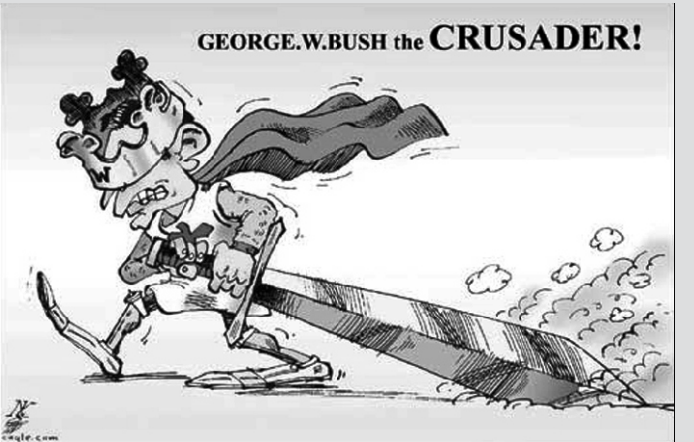
Bangladesh, more than any other country in recent years, has seen the results of war caused by someone else's desire for power. In their case it was Bhutto and millions paid the price for the freedom of Bangladesh from Pakistan. As someone who has visited your beautiful country on four occasions, I congratulate you on the anniversary of your Fight for Independence. I was in Bangladesh in March 2000 and still I can hear the singing of that great song of peace "We shall overcome". Today I feel with you, for those who gave their lives for freedom, just as I remember watching the scenes of your war in 1971, on TV in England.

Kathleen Haq
UK

Interesting quote, "To announce that there must be no criticism of the President or that we are to stand by the President right or wrong is not only unpatriotic and servile but morally treasonable to the American public." Theodore Roosevelt, 1918.

Having said that, there should be no doubt that the US is fighting a war to preserve its way of life and (possibly) civilisation. The sneak attack on Pearl Harbour drew America into the World War II and ultimately changed the world. In contrast to an equally devastating and far more cowardly attack, Bush has acted with great restraint. He did not flatten Afghanistan as might have been expected. Instead he chose the more dangerous route to destroying the Al Qaeda and the Taliban, risking the lives of his own soldiers.

A genocidal madman who is a threat to the stability of the entire Middle East and the economic strength of the world rules Iraq. He



should be destroyed.

The US (& UK) have not declared they will use nuclear weapons to remove Saddam Hossain. They have not ruled it out. But nuclear weapons would only be used in self-defence and play a very important role as a deterrent to power mad dictators.

You my friend Ben Burch ("A letter from a concerned American"), should watch Kubrick's 'A Clockwork Orange'. You'll get a taste of what happens when woolly headed liberalism leads you to not fight for your own security.

Dorji
Dhaka