

Ami Ki Bhulite Pari?

Let us honour our language in a meaningful way

HERE can be no doubt of the centrality of February 21 to the Bengali identity. February 21, 1952 was more than just a movement for the Bangla language, it laid the foundation for the sense of our nationhood that found full expression nineteen years later. Ekushey was a vital turning point in the history of the movement for a distinct cultural and linguistic identity that set us inexorably on the road to full independence and nationhood.

This is why we commemorate the events of that fateful day and honour the memory of the fallen martyrs. Those who gave their lives that day were fighting not just for the freedom from colonial domination, but were striking a blow for the right of self-determination -- in all its manifestations. The message of February 21 is that freedom is indivisible and that the freedom to speak and read and write in one's own language is the most basic and fundamental freedom of all.

But now is also the time to reflect on how well we have honoured the sacrifices of the martyrs of the Language Movement and how well we continue to honour the rich history and tradition of our beloved language. February 21 brings out the best in us and no one can fail to feel proud and moved by the celebrations at the Shaheed Minar and elsewhere around the country as the event is memorialised with due solemnity. But we should take seriously the idea that Bangla deserves our respect and support every day of the year.

One way in which to truly honour Bangla is to ensure full literacy of the population. How can we say that we honour our language if its deep literary tradition remains out of the reach of millions? In addition, the teaching of Bangla has deteriorated to the point that the general standard of written and spoken Bangla leaves much to be desired. This must change. Similarly, honouring Bangla means that the publication and production of books should be given top priority, with Bangla translations of world epics and classics widely available, and vice versa.

There are so many ways in which we can strengthen Bangla and in doing so meaningfully accord it the honour it deserves. Let us use this February 21 as an opportunity to make a vow to reenergise and reinvoke our language, to extend the gift of literacy to all, and to bring about an explosion of creativity and inventiveness that will truly do honour to the language and the martyrs of 1952.

Message of Ashura

There is a lot to learn from the tragedy

EW episodes in history had such a profound impact on the events that followed as the tragedy of Karbala in which Imam Hossain (RA), the beloved grandson of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh), embraced martyrdom in defence of truth and justice. He refused to bow down before the evil forces and finally laid down his life, setting an example of great courage of conviction for the principles he held dear.

The deaths of Imam Hossain (RA) and the members of his immediate family are being mourned with the same intensity and grief over 1300 years after the tragic episode took place. The believers have learnt from the tragedy that faith is more valuable than life. The tyrant Yazid's army committed one of the cruellest acts in the history of mankind for the sake of mundane gains, but the glory of the day belonged to those who died for a cause.

A deeper look into the tragedy would surely reveal that the martyrs were only following the dictates of Islam which teaches its adherents not to capitulate before what is wrong and unjust but to fight these to the last.

The moral of Karbala tragedy is that Yazid retained power temporarily, but Imam Hossain (RA) and his family are the eternal moral victors.

The observance of the day is specially significant in today's world. We watch many excesses being committed in the name of religion that affect social equanimity and undermine the good name of the country. We should learn to fight the evil in all its manifestations and under all its guises, so that the true image of Islam cannot be tarnished by the machinations of a few.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ONCE again like a recurring nightmare North Korean public acknowledgement that it possesses nuclear weapons and is pulling out of the six nation talks on denuclearization has put the world in a difficult situation. Apparently the North Korean move to strengthen its nuclear capability is to counter an alleged American plot to overthrow the present regime in DPRK. Though President Bush in his State of the Union address made only a passing reference to US engagement with Asian countries "to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambition," a climb-down from his speech last year in which he described the country as a member of the axis-of-evil, North Koreans were reportedly unhappy over Condoleezza Rice's branding of North Korea as an "out post of tyranny" during her confirmation hearing as the new Secretary of State.

While visiting Europe in her new capacity recently she voiced her apprehension that North Koreans were "only deepening their isolation because everyone in the international community, and most especially North Korea's neighbours, have been very clear that there needs to be no nuclear weapons in the Korean peninsula in order to maintain stability in that region."

She assured North Korea that the US had no intention to attack that country, the last outpost of Stalinism, an Orwellian nightmare for its hapless citizens, a regime that thrives on asphyxiation of its people and feeds on Draculian xenophobic nationalism in a world where sovereignty is being increasingly pooled for politico-economic betterment of the people. This pursuit of xenophobic nationalism stands in stark contrast to President Bush's promise that America will stand with its allies of freedom to support democratic movements with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world.

Though President Bush's promise to usher in democracy was primarily aimed at the Middle East, his attention did not waver from countries like DPRK which pose clear and present danger to international peace and security, as DPRK had not yet graduated from its axis-of-evil status to a country with internationally acceptable level of civilized conduct. North Korean behaviour only strengthened Richard Armitage's (former Deputy Secretary of State) 1999 report that con-

cluded that brinkmanship paid.

The report warned that the 1994 Agreed Framework concluded with the Clinton administration providing for freezing the existing North Korean nuclear programme in exchange for two light water nuclear reactors and half a million tons of heavy water annually had only created a cycle that would lead Pyongyang to believe that it could extract concessions. Paul Wolfowitz (currently Deputy Secretary of Defense) had expressed doubts that a regime which cared so little for its own people would be willing to

reject outright the most recent demand of DPRK for direct talks with the US outside the six-nation negotiations on the grounds that the matter is not a bilateral one but of regional concern. A few days earlier Condoleezza Rice while on her European tour confirmed that, "North Koreans should have no reason to believe that any one wants to attack them. The President of the United States said in South Korea that the US has no intention to attack North Korea (and) they can have multilateral security assurances if they will make the important

The great powers, he adds, do not merely want to be the strongest power, their ultimate aim is to be the hegemon -- the only great power in the system. It should, however, be noted that hegemony is a consensual order which can decline as a result of legitimacy deficit of the hegemon though its coercive powers remain intact or even can increase.

As the Iraq invasion has amply proved, the Bush administration's emphasis on "hard power" as defined by Harvard Professor Joseph Nye in terms of military and

second scenario, DPRK would be willing to barter away their nuclear weapons in exchange for iron-clad guarantee that the US would not attack DPRK to effect a regime change. In the third scenario, DPRK would like to possess both the nuclear weapons and also have normal relations with the US and regional powers. Such a case would mean international recognition of DPRK as a nuclear power. It would also mean that possession of WMD is the surest way to ensure sovereignty, nullify NPT and subsequent non-proliferation measures.

the safety of its people as long as economic desperation and injustice can mingle with tyranny and fanaticism." The enemy shrouded in the mystery of many identities like a chameleon, a non-state actor nursing vitriolic hatred for democratic values on the pretext that their abdication will be in contradistinction of "purist" interpretation of scriptural literalism, in the words of Condoleezza Rice, "are swimming against the tide of human spirit (and) and dwelling on the outer fringes of a great religion they are in revolt against the future."

Besides them, the world also has aberrant nations like North Korea who, being on the brink of failure, would like to blackmail the world with apocalyptic disorder. Now that the second Bush administration appears to have taken the initiative to mend fences with its transatlantic partners derided by Donald Rumsfeld as "old Europe," Ms. Rice, during her first visit to Europe as Secretary of State, has conveyed the resolve of President Bush to strengthen transatlantic ties.

One hopes that the US would be willing to listen to European wisdom distilled through centuries of war and peace in order to find solutions to the interwoven threats we face today in terms of terrorism, proliferation of WMD, regional conflicts, failed states, and organized crime. But if DPRK continues to be obstinate in pursuing its nuclear ambitions then the world may be faced with a country, in Richard Perle's words, as "the nuclear breadbasket of the world or at least the underworld of failed states and terrorists."

In that case, the Bush administration would have to make its final determination as to whether to accept DPRK proposal for bilateral talks or to insist on six nations talks which the North Koreans appear to have rejected for now. In the ultimate analysis, the global powers will have to decide whether diplomatic and economic engagement with aberrant nations will suffice to nip in the bud emerging Frankensteins, or should the UNSC decide that enough is enough, and that global peace and security cannot be held hostage by a few outlaw regimes

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give up its ultimate weapons of blackmail in exchange for power reactors. Despite Ellen Bork's (of The New American Century) skeptical conclusion that, due to divergent Sino-American interests in North Korea, the US should remove China from the list of countries for "constructive engagement" for solution of such crisis; China wants a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, and is concerned that a nuclear North Korea could trigger a chain of nuclearization of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, adversely affecting Chinese security interests.

China is also acutely aware that North Korea prove to be right in its belief of an invariable ambition of the US to invade DPRK and dominate Asia with the Korean peninsula as the spring board" then it may be faced with American troops stationed on its border.

Paradoxically, China may also find it uncomfortable with a unified Korea, with the North armed with nuclear weapons and the South with its affluence. This, however, may not be necessarily so if one were to consider that the unified Germany, with continued membership of NATO, posed not only no threat to Russia, but became the largest creditor which perhaps was an expression of gratitude by Helmut Kohl to Mikhail Gorbachev for not obstructing the unification of Germany. The Russo-German detente found further expression in their opposition (along with other countries) in the UNSC to the Anglo-US invasion of Iraq.

The Bush administration has

decision to give up their nuclear weapons program." Yet one should be reminded of President Bush's "soft power" in terms of values, culture, ideology, and institutions, has cost the US the possibility of assuming the role of global hegemon despite its unchallengeable military prowess. Mearsheimer argues that China thirty years from now with a much larger GDP and a more formidable army may try to push the US out of Asia -- an argument dismissed by Brezinski as China's neighbours including India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Russia, and Vietnam may join the US to contain the Chinese power. Echoing Brezinski Thomas Donnelly (of the American Enterprise Institute) believes that while China has the potential to become the canonical "global peer" of the US, the global "correlation of forces" is in favour of American preeminence. While all these futuristic scenarios are in the realm of speculation, it is unlikely that in the North Korean case China would disassociate itself from its stated position of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

The question that agitates many minds is why North Korea is so insistent on acquiring nuclear weapons so vehemently opposed by the international community. Political analyst Philip Saunders provides several scenarios. In his first scenario, the North Korean leaders have already decided that possession of nuclear weapons is essential for their survival. They also believe that had Saddam Hussein possessed WMD then the Anglo-American forces would not have dared to attack Iraq. In Saunders' party over the Chinese people.

But Professor John Mearsheimer (Chicago University) believes that China is likely to dominate Asia in the same way that the US dominated the Western Europe. He believes that an increasingly powerful China is likely to push the US out of Asia as the US pushed the European great powers out of the western hemisphere. Professor Mearsheimer theorizes that the mightiest states' attempt to establish hegemony in their region while making sure that no rival great power dominates another region.

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How would then the US as the global hegemon deal with crisis like that of North Korean nuclearization? British historian Niall Ferguson would like the US, like the UK before it, to act as an empire. Ferguson perhaps goes beyond the neo-cons of the Bush administration and observes that if the US does not embrace history's charge and acknowledge itself as an empire the world could suffer "a new Dark Age of warring empires and religious fanaticism ... of economic stagnation and retreat of civilization into a few fortified enclaves." He argues that if the US had sent more troops to Iraq and conducted a more aggressive campaign of fighting the "insurgents," as past successful empires were not afraid to use the forces at their disposal, then the Iraqi situation would not have turned into a quagmire that it has.

Ferguson's argument that the US should have acted as the British had done in the centuries gone by falters on the ground of changed realities in the world after the Second World War. Had the strategy used by the Roman empire centuries back been possible today then Colin Powell in his most recent article in Foreign Policy magazine would not have stressed on the need for "economic development in the world's poorest societies" because democracy, development, and security are inextricably linked with one another.

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Powell rightly observes that poverty breeds frustration and resentment used by "ideological entrepreneurs" for recruiting terrorists and that no nation "can assure

And it must integrate and unite; therein lies the strength to do the heavy lifting required for nation-building that has eluded us for long. Compromises must be found in that language so that every citizen owns a stake in the nation to want its welfare.

Today's harsh and divisive language neither portends solutions nor any progress. Most importantly, the new language must clearly define our identity as a nation. As Muslims, non-Muslims, "and" Bengalis, as liberals or conservatives, as men or women, as young or old, as thinkers or doers, as rich or poor, as political or apolitical, and as whatever other entity we choose to be represented as, we must begin the process of rebuilding a constructive language of peace and harmony that is inclusive, accommodating, and futuristic. Finding such language will require enormous patience, sensitivity, and hard work. Only then can we expect emancipation for all from these difficult and forlorn times.

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In language lies emancipation

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

is tearing this nation into shreds. At the confluence of liberal and reactionary language, matters have become murky and convoluted while its undertones have turned acerbic, vitiating, and dangerous. It is the same language that was once friendly, soft, gentle, kind, understanding, nourishing, and accommodating.

More than a mere conveyor of information, language defines social life. By "classifying, coding, prioritizing, and justifying reality," it makes organized life possible. Conversely, by its malicious, inadvertent, or callous use it can make the same organized life impossible. The language that we use today moulds the thoughts we hold,

tional behaviour or it can ameliorate our ways; it can divert us from the path of progress or it can keep us goal directed. The question that we must ponder today is, "How should this otherwise rich and gracious language be harnessed and used and who should lead the process?"

A poet had once said, and I shall paraphrase it: Whoever controls

against an external oppressive force, today, endures the voice of the minority in an inexplicable silence that is deafening.

What kind of democracy are we living in? Where are the voices of reason that only speak in hushed tones? Will they please move to the front seat? Why are they shy? Or are they afraid? Is this nation not

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Today, as dark clouds hang over the fate of this nation, it is vital that more voices, saner voices, emerge from all corners to help find the language that offers real solutions. This language must try a different twist imbued with wisdom, justice, compassion, and a deep understanding of the needs of its different constituencies. It must root out ignorance for it has been said that "In the house of ignorance, there is no mirror in which to view the soul."

language controls the race! Today that control is in the hands of very few, whether it is the government, the opposition, the marginal political parties, the media, the religious institutions, the military, or other niche groups. These entities, I believe, represent the minority, and yet their voices continue to drown out others that may offer more palatable and viable perspectives that this nation must hear and weigh in its pursuit of salvation and emancipation.

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