

# Bangabandhu's finest hour

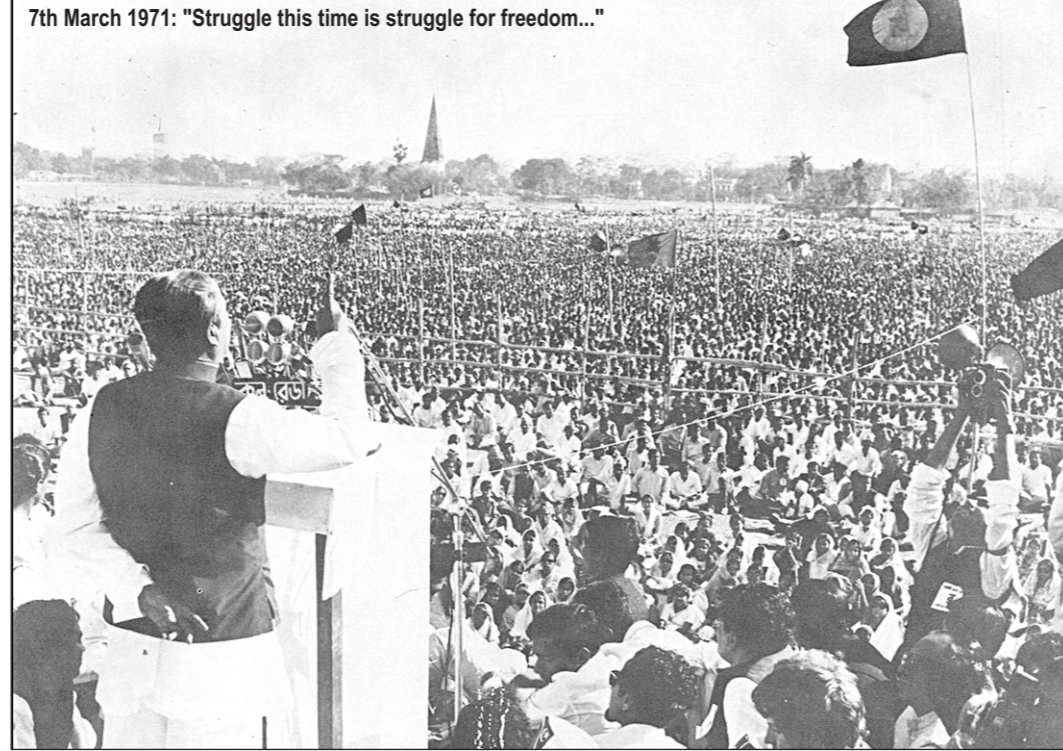
MAHFUZ ANAM

It is this writer's view that the 7<sup>th</sup> March speech was Bangabandhu's finest hour. He stood far taller than ever before and with him we too stood taller. He was always known for being a powerful speaker. But that day, 26 years ago, he outperformed himself a thousand times over, and a thousand times more empowered we felt that day. During that crucial March afternoon, and especially through the electrifying moments of the speech he stood towering above the nation, singly shouldering the burden of leading an unprepared people towards self assertion. However bravely we may talk today about those events so long ago, at that time we really did not know how things were to unfold. Yes, we all wanted our rights, and we wanted them right away. But how they were to come? Was freedom to come through negotiations or would it require us to wage an armed struggle? And what did we understand by armed struggle? We romanticised about it, but knew nothing of it. Things were becoming increasingly obvious that to realise our legitimate demands we may have to seek independence. But how is one to start an independence movement? What would be the consequence of making a declaration for it? Though we all talked about it, and some may have even said so in public, yet it

was for our elected leader to take us through that uncharted path. The man who should be the Prime Minister of whole of Pakistan by dint of his electoral victory had to take the right step at the right time. The critical question was when would the right time strike.

And this is where the speciality of the 7<sup>th</sup> March speech lies. It says everything without the elements that could be used to hold responsible for breaking up the legal Pakistan. For by then, the country had actually broken up in all other sense. To really appreciate the magnificence of this speech one has to understand the context in which it was delivered. Awami League had fought an election and won the majority of seats of the parliament of Pakistan. Following the results, Gen Yahya had declared that Sheikh Mujib would be the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and some conniving army generals who did not want to transfer power to someone whose electoral programme was to realise the legitimate rights of the Bengali people enshrined in the now famous six points. There were lots of indications about the impending betrayal of the verdict of the December '70 elections, yet it was not till the postponement of the session of the newly elected parliament that Bangabandhu could really give a call for an all out

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7th March 1971: "Struggle this time is struggle for freedom..."

movement.

When the session of the parliament was postponed on 1<sup>st</sup> March, '71, the fatal shot to the existence of united Pakistan was fired right into its chest. And it was on the night of 25<sup>th</sup> March, when Pakistani military cracked down on the civilian population of what was till then one country, that Pakistan was killed and buried. It was in the midst of this highly charged transition period -- from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> -- when events were unfolding at a break-neck speed that Bangabandhu had to give this speech.

And here lies the beauty and the craftsmanship of this speech, which transforms it as a classic in political oratory.

The speech had to live up to the high expectation of the people who wanted their independence and yet there should be nothing in it that could give an outright excuse to the Pakistan army to start military action against the unarmed Bengali people. In fact, Tikka Khan's hands of killers would want nothing better than to be given a publicly announced excuse for a genocidal action. So Bangabandhu had to say

everything, and yet not give the excuse that Pakistan military was looking for. He had to stand steadfast and yet keep open the doors for negotiations. Under no circumstances could he appear to be the one responsible for the breakdown of the talks. And yet he had to take his people forward and give them the right directions, maintain the militancy, ask them to take all the necessary preparatory steps, and clear people's minds about the final goal. It was a political and intellectual challenge of the highest kind, and it could be tackled only by a speech of the type that Bangabandhu delivered that day.

Take for example the content of the speech. In it he gradually builds up the whole rationale for the movement that has been going on. He argues, cajoles, pleads, demands and finally warns, not to take lightly the demand of a people who have realised their strength through struggle. He talks of peace and yet gives clear signals that peace cannot come at the cost of capitulation. He talks of sacrifice, but not in terms of a helpless people who are suffering because they are weak, but in terms of a courageous and bold people who have knowingly taking upon a task which they know to be arduous, and for which they are ready to face any consequence. There was superb cleverness in the construction of the speech by which he said all that he

needed to and yet the enemy could not hold him responsible for having said anything which was illegal.

The voice in the speech is one of its most magnificent aspects. It was so bold that the whole nation could and in fact did, take strength from it. There was an unhesitant enunciation of everything that needed to be said. There was such appropriate modulation of voice that every word uttered seemed irreplaceable. Throughout it all the strength of the man came out and touched all those who heard him, drawing all close to him and making all trust and repose faith in him.

If ever a speech united, strengthened, enthused, inspired a people, and gave courage to them to become bolder and more determined than they usually are, it was Bangabandhu's speech of 7<sup>th</sup> March 1971. If ever one single speech became the most effective motivational weapon for a nation at war then this was it. If ever a speech of a leader became the constant companion for young freedom fighters facing an enemy known for their proficiency and ferocity and which acted to link us all in a spellbinding string of words and sounds, then this speech was so for all of us, the freedom fighters, spread throughout the nook and corner of what was then our enslaved motherland.

The above is a reprint of the article published earlier.

# Bush's visit to Europe: Mending fences with allies?

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

RENCH statesman Charles De Gaulle had once said, "America is nothing but daughter of Europe." What, then, went wrong between the "mother and daughter" that it needed fence mending? The simple answer is that 'mother' Europe felt her 'arrogant daughter' America had not been paying enough attention to her words of wisdom. The issues involved are complex and sensitive, and require briefly recalling the developments of the recent past.

Sitting in Paris around the last millennium and beginning of the new, I had seen the beginning of the current trans-Atlantic divide. Bush's predecessor Bill Clinton, a Rhodes scholar, had won the heart of the Europeans through his charisma, intelligence, and political acumen and,

more importantly, due to his capacity to listen to them and work out a consensus for trans-Atlantic action. When Bush assumed the Presidency, the Europeans felt that his administration was not showing the traditional sensitivity to their areas of concern and was opting for a more unilateralist approach. Washington's refusal to join the Kyoto Protocol, the Land Mine Treaty and International Court for trial of military crimes, etc badly hurt the Europeans as they had worked for years to build consensus on those issues.

Then came the 9/11 terrorist attack and the Europeans, despite their apparent displeasure with the Bush administration, openly expressed their full support for and solidarity with the Americans in their fight against global terrorism. I was pleasantly surprised when the renowned French Socialist

Despite their differences, the leaders on both sides of the Atlantic expressed their resolve to put their past discord aside and to make an effort to evolve broad contours of future trans-Atlantic cooperation. Both sides should also recognise some realities on the ground. After the dissolution of Soviet Union, a new unified Europe has emerged that no longer needs security protection from Washington.

piece, Le Monde, came out with the headline, "We are all Americans" on 12 September 2001. The Europeans were, thus, somewhat disappointed when Washington went pretty much on its own to launch the military offensive against the Al Qaeda terrorists and their sponsor, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. After the initial military offensive, the Europeans, however, came forward and helped Washington cope with the post-war reconstructions and maintenance of security in

Afghanistan. Most of the European countries have sizeable Muslim population. Israeli excesses in the occupied territories in the wake of 9/11 and its endorsement by US, and large-scale arrest of Muslim militants from across the globe by Washington, and their prolonged detention at the Guantanamo military base, also created delicate internal political problems for those countries.

Then came the Iraq War. Washington was predetermined to invade Iraq. The major European countries that have been dealing with terrorist problems in their own countries for decades, felt that the invasion of Iraq would inevitably weaken global consensus to fight against international terrorism. France and Germany, supported by China, Russia and a host of developing countries, wanted to give the UN a chance to peacefully resolve the issue. Washington went ahead with the invasion. Barring UK, most of the NATO heavyweights, like France and Germany, refused to join the US-led invasion. Italy, Spain and some East European states, under pressure from US, made some token participation, but it was Washington that had to bear the brunt. The situation turned really sour when the major European allies were contemptuously termed "old Europe", and their companies were barred from taking part in international tender for Iraq war-reconstruction projects.

After his re-election, Bush has clearly felt the urgency to restore normal climate in trans-Atlantic relations. The change in Bush's tone during the just-concluded visit was very apparent. Gone was the previous arrogance, and in its place a friendlier and smiling US President trying to charm the old European allies. Bush, in his "new era" speech at European Union headquarters in Brussels used the term "alliance" twelve times. It seemed as if Bush had discovered Europe after long four years, and the Europeans had decided to recognise him as the elected President of the sole superpower.

Behind the scenes efforts were made by both sides to hedge any open discord. The public pronouncements merely talked about 'common values' but did not set out any 'common strategy' for facing the current challenges. The Europeans were not sure whether Washington was prepared to give up unilateralism; Washington on its part was also not certain what it can obtain in return from Europe.

Washington's priority issues were greater European involvement in Iraq, stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear arsenal, taking concrete action to pressurize Damascus to withdraw troops from Lebanon, restoration of democracy in Russia, and lifting of arms embargo against China. On all these issues the trans-Atlantic divide was obvious, but both sides decided not to bring them in the fore.

Washington views the recent elections in Iraq as a great success, and felt that it was a good time to seek greater European involvement in war-reconstructions efforts in Iraq. The Europeans did not share the perception. France, Germany and other European powers felt that their opposition to the invasion of Iraq had been fully vindicated, as Washington had failed to produce any evidence of weapons of mass destruction or connection between Saddam regime and Al-Qaeda or other militant terrorist groups. They did not agree to get involved in Iraq, as Washington had wished, but nevertheless agreed to intensify their training programme of Iraqi security forces and provide other technical assistance.

On Iran, both Americans and Europeans believe in the same objective, that Iran should not have nuclear arsenal, but they differ in their policies. The Europeans believe in 'stick and carrot' policy: give Tehran some compensatory incentives to abandon the nuclear ambition. Although France, Germany and

Britain have not yet succeeded in reaching an accord with Iran, they would like US to join them in the current negotiations. On the other hand Washington, at the instigation of Tel Aviv, has a more rigid policy, and believes that the onus is on Iran, and any non-compliance on its part should be severely dealt with. A full-scale US invasion of Iraq at this stage looks somewhat unlikely, but if Europe-Iran negotiations fail, then it could very well encourage the hawks in Washington and Tel Aviv to undertake a surgical attack against Iran's nuclear installations. Europe is opposed to any military action at this stage.

Washington's effort to persuade Russia to stop supplying nuclear fuel and equipment to Iran also did not succeed.

Europeans, in view of their historical ties with the Middle East, believe that the peace process should be resumed to diffuse the current tension in the region and Washington should put more pressure on Israel. As regards the emerging crisis in Lebanon, they do not support the hard-line policy of Washington on Syria, and would like to continue with their diplomatic pressure on Damascus for withdrawal of their troops from Lebanon and non-interference in Lebanese internal affairs.

There are also disagreements on the issue of lifting of arms embargo on arms sale to China, which was imposed in the wake of the Tiananmen Square attack. Europe, as the largest trading power for China, would like to lift the sanction and develop closer ties with Beijing. Washington would like to go slow on this issue. Bush's meeting with Putin in Bratislava also fell short of target, as the latter neither agreed to Washington's prescription of Russian democracy nor to discontinue nuclear collaboration with Iran or supplying missiles to Syria. The only area of accord was their bilateral nuclear agreement that could reduce the potential threat of nuclear terrorism by speeding up the much delayed securing and dismantling of some of Russia's nuclear materials.

Despite their differences, the leaders on both sides of the Atlantic expressed their resolve to put their past discord aside and to make an effort to evolve broad contours of future trans-Atlantic cooperation. Both sides should also recognise

some realities on the ground. After the dissolution of Soviet Union, a new unified Europe has emerged that no longer needs security protection from Washington. This has also encouraged the Europeans to expand their EU cooperation, which has led to its emergence as the single largest unified market in the industrialised world. Yet Europe must recognise the obvious fact that they need Washington's military muscle to uphold the western values in this era of globalisation. On the other hand, United States, despite its overwhelming military superiority, needs the cooperation of its long-standing European allies for the latter's global standing and acceptability in its pursuit to establish global primacy. The new trans-Atlantic equation, therefore, has to be based on more equality and flexibility. The sooner both sides recognised this fact the better they would do.

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