

March 26 without Bangabandhu

From distortion to falsification of history

ONCE again we cannot help but note with distress the lengths that certain segments of the media and the polity are apparently prepared to go in order to erase Sheikh Mujib from history. This year, much more than has been the tendency in the past, the official media and most of the private media (with one or two honourable exceptions) have done their level best to exclude any mention of Sheikh Mujib and his central role in the creation of Bangladesh in their coverage of March 26.

The movement to marginalise Bangabandhu and deny his unique contribution to the nation's history is not new, but it has picked up speed in recent years. It is bad enough that we have seen history ignored and distorted and politicised over the years, but the shameless and shameful attempts to falsify history that we are now seeing are completely beyond the pale. Such an undertaking is the greatest of follies and self-destructive to the nation in the extreme.

It must be seen as a weakness in us as nation and a people that we cannot find it within ourselves to honour or heroes. To eliminate Sheikh Mujib from the narrative of 1971 as some would like to do is to dishonour the truth, our history, and indeed nothing less than our proud national heritage.

Let there be no mistake about it. Sheikh Mujib was the central figure of the independence movement and the liberation war. He was not the only hero and we should also rightly hail the contributions of leading figures such as Colonel Osmany and President Ziaur Rahman and several others. But no one was more crucial to the struggle for independence and our ultimate success than the Sheikh.

It was he who unified the nation and brought us together to a height we have never reached either before or since. Indeed, lack of unity had been our flaw before independence and remains our fatal flaw since then. To have been able to unify us and bring out the best in us is Bangabandhu's great achievement, and one that we must recognise and honour if we are to truly honour ourselves as a nation and a people.

To try to erase Bangabandhu from history and the memory of the people through a systematic campaign of falsehood demeans and diminishes all of us.

Rab into the second year

Needs changing methods

RAB, the elite anti-crime force, has completed one year of its existence. When it started out in March 2004 on its mission of containing crime and improving the creaking law and order situation with sweeping powers, there was a sense of unease much that everybody wanted effective containment of the rising curve of lawlessness. Initially, there was some visible improvement in law and order with the number of crimes going down. Soon thereafter, excessive use of force came to be noticed.

At the end of the year, we have to ask ourselves at what cost the improvement was achieved. There have been over 200 deaths of alleged criminals in so-called 'crossfire' without reference to any trial or going through prescribed judicial processes whatsoever. The statements issued after each such death have had a surprisingly identical tone, tenor and content. So the credibility of what were claimed to be crossfire casualties has never been above question. The deaths were seen as extra-judicial killings in the absence of any proofs to the contrary.

Regrettably, what has happened is patently antithetical to norms of civility, the rule of law and the constitutional principles guaranteeing the citizens' right to justice, even if they are suspected or accused of criminal offences.

We have also witnessed some brazen examples of the truism that power corrupts; more than 100 Rab members have so far been brought to book for taking bribe and some of them were even caught while committing robbery! It is welcome news that the authorities have taken action against the errant members. However, corruption in an outfit like this might have already eroded people's confidence in it.

An assessment of Rab's performance in the first one year will show that the gain it had made in terms of initial improvement in law and order has been negated by the methods used by it. Into the second year, we would like to see it fully conform to the standards of human rights, rule of law and due judicial processes.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

OF late, a fresh element which was dormant so far has become very pronounced, causing acute discomfort to the authorities, and has added to the relentless confrontational politics in Bangladesh. Increasingly, the donor countries and institutions, dismayed at the deterioration in governance, perhaps overstepping the bounds of diplomatic niceties, have publicly taken the government to task for its repeated failures to effect structural and regulatory reforms promised them earlier and for failing to arrest the slide in law and order in the country so central to the development process.

Professor Nurul Islam describing Bangladesh authorities and donors as unequal partners in his book *Making of a Nation*, finds it ironic that the donors who have been emphasizing right from the sixties on the need for implementation of appropriate macro and micro policies have continued even today to nudge forward Bangladesh development strategy instead of it being country owned. Over the years, writes Professor Islam, the donors' priorities have ranged from basic needs, poverty, human development, environment, gender, children to participation, social inclusion, human rights, and political freedom.

It is inevitable that the donors would ask for good governance from recipient countries. After all, aid money, despite its declining importance as a percentage of GDP or public expenditure (it declined from ten percent of GDP in the seventies to less than three percent in 1998), comes from taxes collected from the citizens of the donor countries, and the donors are accountable to their respective parliaments and in turn to the electorate. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the donors insist on good governance, meaning accountability, transparency, participation, and predictability. The donors, regardless of the quantum of aid being given, are thus upset at the slow progress of reforms and the failure of the authorities to improve governance. According to the World Bank, bad governance has a high cost that retards the rate of growth and particularly hurts the poor.

Bangladesh is counted among the poorest countries of the world. Most of the people have insufficient income to provide for a minimum

standard of living, there having been no appreciable reduction in the number of people living in extreme poverty. In Marxian analysis, the poverty-stricken masses have nothing to sell but themselves, as opposed to the few whose wealth increases constantly. Inevitably the process of accumulation of wealth is corruption-ridden.

Yves Meny has ascribed four invariant characteristics of corruption: (a) violation of social rules and norms; (b) secret exchange among political, social and economic markets; (c) illegal access given to individuals and groups to the process of political and administrative decision making; and (d) resistant tangible benefits to the parties

things to come, then countries like Bangladesh in these days of abridged sovereignty may wish to avoid display of aggressive nationalism despite seething anger felt by the authorities at the exogenous intrusion in our internal affair.

Let us forget, the question of morality is being raised in judging both the national and international behaviour of states and the evaluation of the code of conduct, more or less uniform in character, prescribed to be followed by the civilized states have placed morality as the centre-piece in the global theatre. Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of decolonization has been the imperceptible regression of presumptions relating to "racial

committed the sacrifice of pointing out that though some among the "natives" were indeed cannibals, a vast majority of them were adorned with etiquette and mores which were far superior to the ones the metropolitans were determined to impose on them. In effect, both in their own lands and in the conquered territories, the colonizers were subscribing to the first principles of Scottish socialist philosopher Robert Owen, who theorized that it was necessary for a large part of mankind to exist in ignorance and poverty to secure for the remaining part such degree of happiness as they now enjoyed.

During and after the process of decolonization, the newly and

pledged by the developed world decades ago. The US and EU are yet to get rid of farm subsidies which are many times more than the assistance given to the developing world. Tariff and para-tariff barriers imposed by the developed countries on the exports of the developing nations are yet to be removed. Debts owed by the poorest countries are yet to be written off.

The question which can be asked of the Bangladesh authorities is whether they would advance the dependency theory of development as an excuse for their inability to further socio-economic development of the country. Danish expression of serious concern at the deterioration of governance situation

seeks to maximize economic efficiency and growth while minimizing the social ills and injustices which unfettered capitalism can throw up. Though for the market system to operate perfectly would theoretically demand withdrawal of the state, experience has shown, particularly in the third world, the role the state must play to ensure proper development of the market economy. In short, the state must ensure that the system and services needed for a market economy to function efficiently exist. Importantly, the legal system embodying the commercial and corporate law must exist. The state must also ensure an environment of competition, and both Adam Smith and Karl Marx agree that capitalists naturally do not want competition and try to avoid it. The basic infrastructure and social services must also be provided by the state.

The point in question currently being debated is the limit put on sovereignty through infusion of transnational capital, be it in the form of aid, loan, or investment. Despite Professor Niall Ferguson's exhortation that the US should take up the call of history and behave like an empire, because otherwise the power vacuum would be filled with "[an] anarchic new Dark Age, an era of waning empire and religious fanaticism, and civilization's retreat to a few fortified enclaves," the relentless erosion of Westphalian sovereignty continues to frighten.

In the ultimate analysis, umbrage taken by Bangladesh authorities over public criticism of its domestic behaviour lacks moral clarity. Political dystrophy and dissonance, destroying the present and shrouding the illumination of the future, cannot but invite international criticism. Space must be given to all shades of opinion to air their views, so that inequality, polarization, poverty and misery do not lead to social exclusion of a large number of people. Satow's guide to diplomacy and the Geneva Convention on diplomatic practices are not immutable religious texts, but are subject to interpretation and integration of new commentaries. Sovereignty should not be so brittle that it cannot withstand constructive criticism. The solution lies in mending one's aberrant ways and to be in total compliance with the internationally accepted code of conduct.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

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involved in the transaction.

By any definition, corruption is illegal, and in the first instance results from collusion between political and money elites -- the first party abuses the public trust for private gains of both parties. The former country director of the World Bank in Bangladesh was candid enough to publicly point out the "system loss" in the power sector resulting from collusive theft by the employees of the sector and the consumers, port inefficiencies costing over \$1 billion a year, governance problem and inefficiency in the banking sector slowing down GDP growth over one percent per annum, and Taka 30-40 crores of public procurement lost every year due to corruption.

Giving a detailed analysis, Frederick Temple concluded that Bangladesh was losing 2-3 percent of GDP growth a year due to corruption. His successor Christine Wallich was more circumspect yet no less pointed in her assessment of governmental inadequacies holding up the growth rate of our economy. The GDP loss should be seen in the context of global interpersonal inequality in which the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. If the nomination of Paul Wolfowitz for the presidency of the World Bank is any indication of

superiority and civilized mode of behaviour" of the metropolitan people vis-a-vis those living in the periphery, and the gradual metropolitan recognition that the subalterns, at least some among them, are no less qualified than they are.

There is, however, no denying the fact that the world divided as it is into First, Second, and Third (or even Fourth), does testify to the great existential divide among the people living in these well defined worlds where division is more vertical than horizontal and promotion from one to another is well-nigh impossible. As it is from the beginning of history social stratification or societal division based on wealth, power and status has been a defining characteristic of civilizations. Social stratification took global shape with the advent of colonization, and poverty began to be distributed among the people living in the periphery and the wealth of the periphery was shipped to the metropolises.

One of the most bizarre aspect of colonization was the self-assumed patriarchal attitude of the colonizers towards the colonized, and their missionary zeal to carry on their shoulders "the White Man's Burden" of educating the "natives" unable to stand on their own two feet. Little heed was paid to the scholars who

aspirant independent countries began to question the hypothesis inherent in the modernization theory which explained underdevelopment in terms of lack of certain qualities in the "underdeveloped" societies such as drive, entrepreneurial skill, creativity, and problem solving ability. The articulate among the freed people, rebelling against intellectual dystrophy and sanitized academic orthodoxy, by and large put their faith in the dependency theory, which explained that the continued impoverishment of the third world was not internally generated but was a structural condition of global domination in which the dominant forced the dominated to be producers of raw materials and food stuff for the industrialized metropolitan centre.

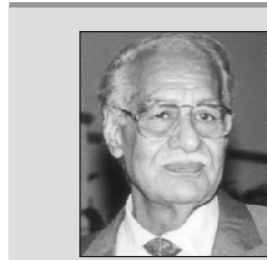
However, the entire colonial discourse should not be seen through the binary structure of good and evil, because the colonizers were not totally exploitive in nature but were also donors of liberal values and compassion shown by the West through aid to tsunami victims and the expected financial pledge following publication of the report by the Africa Commission. But lot remains to be done for the developing countries to move forward. Foreign aid is yet to be given at the 0.7 percent of GDP

especially of the law and order situation and German readiness to enter into a dialogue with Bangladesh authorities on how to ensure free and fair elections should be treated as constructive advice given by friends.

More importantly, the donors' developmental aid and assistance policy these days includes good governance in the recipient countries where they would like to see multi-party democracy, respect for human rights and rule of law, government with the consent of the governed, accountability, equity, and poverty concerns are being addressed. Many of the demands made by the donors of the recipients may not be readily available in those countries yet to make "developmental transition," and excessive donor influence also raises the question of incursion into sovereignty of the recipient countries. In the tussle between the donors and the recipients, particularly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the developing world is still struggling with the question as to whether capitalism is the right path to development.

Sir William Ryrie suggests "market economy" is the way to go for the third world -- where market economy is defined as "property regulated capitalism," a system which

BJP gains from Congress missteps



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

IT appears that the BJP is beginning to retrieve the territory it had lost. After the defeat at the Lok Sabha polls nearly one year ago the party was in the dumps. The media paid it hardly any attention. The BJP tried to play the Hindutva card but made no headway. There was no response to even the emotive issue of building a temple at the place where the Babri masjid stood once.

The ruling Congress itself is responsible for making the BJP relevant. Initially, the stalling of parliament rattled the Congress unnecessarily. The more the government sought the BJP's cooperation, the more intractable it became. This was the game that the Congress too had played when it was in the opposition. It should have figured out how to face such situations.

What really put the Congress on the defensive was its effort to grab power, first in Goa and then in Jharkhand. The party adopted the same old methods to get into the seat through the Congress-appointed governors even though the party and its allies had not the necessary numbers. People were

shocked to see the flouting of constitutional methods.

Defeat either evokes defiance or the desire to compromise. The Congress has opted for the latter. Maybe, it has found that the BJP leaders, from L.K. Advani to Sushma Swaraj, are too ferocious for the Congress to challenge with the timid and the inarticulate lot it has on its side. Maybe, the Congress has decided not to join issue with the BJP. Whatever the reason, it is apparent that the Congress does

Modi does not come as a surprise. Washington's step was an act of discretion and, hence, highly objectionable. The State Department could have ticked Modi off by withdrawing the diplomatic visa while sustaining the ordinary one. True, America bungled. But the pitch to which New Delhi took the incident was so disproportionate that it made Modi look like a martyr. He is responsible for the Gujarat carnage and remains unrepentant.

The BJP's attitude was under-

Modi is himself exploiting the visa's denial and saying all kinds of things to divert attention from the real reason: The report by the National Human Rights Commission on his complicity in what happened in Gujarat. Modi's one vignette is that President Bush has punished him because he has enacted the anti-conversion measure. Another Modi quote is that human rights activists should be punished for their "foreign links." That Washington has again refused him a visa is unfortunate. But it is a

Chatterjee's conference of State Speakers. His idea was not to confront the judiciary but to point out that the Jharkhand judgment indicating guidelines to the state legislature might upset the fine balance which the judiciary and the legislatures had maintained after independence. The constitution gave legislatures unrestricted powers to conduct affairs in the house. Even unwittingly, the supremacy of the elected should not be watered down.

is mistaken if it believes that going along with the BJP is possible. Some political experts are indulging in a guess-game that the Congress and the BJP can develop an understanding of sorts. L.K. Advani's comment in a television interview that the two have not been talking to each other "enough" is considered significant. Lord Meghnath Desai, an Indian economist based in London, has gone to the extent of saying that the Congress and the BJP should cooperate "in the interest of country's progress."

The Congress is wrong in its assessment. The BJP will continue to create more and more difficulties for the Congress because the BJP wants to step in its place at New Delhi. It has also begun to nourish the hope that the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which includes both the Congress and the Left, may disintegrate in 2006 when the two will be in direct electoral clash during elections in West Bengal and Kerala.

What is sad about the whole thing is that the Congress, which should be fighting the BJP on every front, is seen compromising with it. The Congress does not realize that its strength lies in taking an unequivocal stand against the communal forces. The more it dilutes its stand, the more distant it will go from the people who defeated them in the last election. The Congress should have at least understood by this time.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

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not want to pick up the gauntlet which the BJP throws down so often. Those who saw Congress president Sonia Gandhi taking on the then prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in the Lok Sabha are disappointed over the squeamishness of the Congress leaders. Something has gone wrong somewhere because Sonia is still the party president. Either Sonia has some other considerations in view or her advisors have given her poor advice.

Therefore, New Delhi's overreaction to the denial of US visa to Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra

standable. It had to go to town because it had been groping for an issue for a long time to be in the limelight. The party converted the visa's denial into an issue of "national pride."

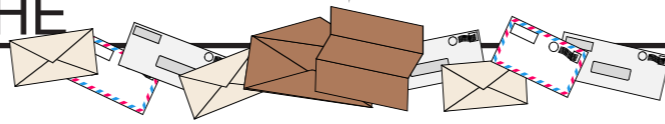
When in power, the party did not say a word over the stripping of George Fernandes at New York, although he was India's defence minister at that time. L.K. Advani was then on a different trip: how President Bush dropped in when Advani was sitting with Secretary of State Powell. The party wanted to take credit for proximity with America.

non-event, not the end of the world as the BJP is trying to project. Why should the Congress play into its hands? Perhaps the government has an eye on the smooth functioning of parliament. Is this the price?

The Congress is, however, wrong if it believes that the BJP will show any accommodation to the government. This is clear from the manner in which the BJP state governments have refused to introduce VAT, a tax which is to be levied throughout the country from April 1.

The same non-cooperative attitude was behind the BJP boycott of Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Smart people's English!

I cannot help but respond to the letter with the heading "Esports or sports" published in the March 22nd edition of the DS. It is really sad to see how we still use knowledge of English or pronunciation of English words to measure smartness. The writer would be surprised to see how many "smart people" (in the true sense of the word) with far inferior pronunciations than the BTV announcers she has complained about, have been placed in important research, teaching, medical professions in the U.S.

And the last time I checked, nobody complained about their not being smart because they pronounce words differently. On a side note, using curse words like, "what the hell?" does not make one any smarter either.

Babar Anwar
Dallas, US

UN ban on human cloning

Finally the United Nations has called on countries to ban on all forms of human cloning, as cloning is incompatible with human dignity.

A timely and wise decision indeed! But I am afraid if this UN declaration will really make countries, which have already achieved significant progress in human cloning to abandon their projects. Can't the United Nations commission a strong body to help check human cloning activities?

Prof. M. Zahidul Haque
Chairman, Department of Language, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

Millennium harmony

As I grow older, entering the new millennium is no consolation. I feel like retiring more and more into my retirement. The failure of human

endeavour baffles me. Modern life is no longer simple and unaffected. Too many after effects.

The scientists are now chasing the environmental effects, natural or unnatural! The company you keep (up with) in this mini-globe, thanks to the ICT bombardment. The cacophony of silence (incompatibility) at the higher levels. Lead to turn others into lead. The human touch is missing.

There are cracks in the leadership, local or global. Too many leaders chase too few kingdoms. Mental cracks, lathi cracks, boot cracks, cracking of explosives, large and small; using hand, barrel or aerial showers. Divine *rahmat* is symbolised by the rain, dew, snow-fall, the gentle breeze, or the swaying of the spring branches. Tagore is out of date so soon (but Rabindrasangeet is still very, very popular!) Hum a tune as you read along.

I was watching from my veranda the school children practising in the park in front for the coming sports. A

small toddler (still too young for the playgroup), was strolling and observing the grazing goats, and prodding them (or caressing), and then running to his mother for dear life; to return to the game of life. He was trying to establish empathy. Shame on us adults!

Man-made theoretical knowledge is failing right and left. Politics is in shambles, and economics has no head, tail or body. Religion, millenniums old, cannot tackle modern societies. Religion and change are apparently incompatible, as yet. There is a shortage of new type of preachers. What is the difference between Palestine (conflict); Palestine as a country does not exist) and the struggle' in Bangladesh (political and religious)? Never mind, or it matters?

History needs no theories. It is assembled facts. But look at the *ganjam* (snafu) it has created. Polarisation and neutrality are the bugs in the global village. Differ

and rise! Primped and lie low. Lie low in the background, and suddenly flash on the front stage. The entire world is a stage (thank you, Shakespeare!).

Go one step further than the old divide-and-rule technique. Leave nothing for division. Divided oil cannot flow. Nor divided loyalty. The latter is public property now, hence privacy cannot be maintained. What is left? Nothing is right.

The Islamic world is facing trials, tests, and tribulations. Too much disunity and communication gaps vertically and horizontally. The winds of change will also demonstrate the last lap of the lone superpower in its marathon race.

Remember Tolstoy's short story "How much land a man needs?" Something like six feet, by six feet, by three feet. The macro Cosmos rules the micro mind.

A Mahasen
Dhaka

Do we need student politics?

Do we actually need student politics right now? Or is it really very impossible to keep the big public universities out of politics? Or is it very necessary to turn the young, innocent students into mere puppets of political games? There was a time when students had significant impact on our political history, for example during 1952, the language movement, in 1971, the liberation war and during Ershad regime. But now the situation has changed. In these days students involved in politics are not doing anything constructive, moreover they are instrumental in deterioration of the peaceful environment of campus. With or without any issue, strikes are called off and on.

Student politics is one of the reasons of educational session jam. It would have been great if something could have been done to save those important educational years!

The general students would have remained grateful.

Actually we don't want to solve the problems and that is another big problem. Either we are scared to do it, or we deliberately want to live with those problems.

Cantara Wali Ruh
DU

Debate on caretaker government

Recently Awami League (AL), the main opposition party of Bangladesh put up a proposal to reform the existing caretaker government system of our country. This interim government system was introduced in our country through the 13th amendment of the Constitution.

Actually, AL at that time was very much desperate and aggressive for a caretaker system in our country. They took to the streets and almost forced BNP to pass a bill to introduce caretaker govern-

ment system so that election is held fairly and freely. Since the caretaker system has derived from the skepticism of the political parties, they may debate on this issue when they are cynical. But they should not forget that it is an innovative interim government system under which we can expect a free, fair and impartial national election. Alarmingly, AL became very disheartened at their election debacle in 2001. They questioned the neutrality of this system. They tarnished the image of this body.

They should not make this system controversial. They should come forward to reform the electoral system. For this the parties should pressurize the government to take steps to reform the Election Commission. The commission should be given more freedom to conduct a fair election that is acceptable to all.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, DU