

Terror turbulence and martyrs' legacy

Missing them sorely today

In the long run of the annual reminiscences about their heinous extermination by the marauding occupation forces in a scorch-the-intellectual wealth-policy at the first light of our freedom in 1971, this is one year perhaps that stands out palpably. It's closing on a note of self-realisation that the memory of the martyred intellectuals has been enlivened as never before by some current events.

The forces opposed to our liberation, those who had collaborated with the then Pakistan establishment to snuff out our best brains and icons in various professions have had a reincarnation, not in any conventional interpretation of an evolution, but in the dangerous surge of ideas being spearheaded by the language of bombings. Ideological terrorism of a minority, even though minuscule, has shown its hand; actually, its armed teeth. That is the challenge we face today as we commemorate the martyred.

The facts are known; their recital has been ritualistically annual; our indebtedness to them has again been recounted year after year, but have we lived up to, or are we fighting for the ideals in danger afresh that they had laid down their lives for? We thought that by raising a memorial for them and having their living relatives recount the lives and works seasonally we have done our duty towards them. On the contrary, we feel that we have done a lip service to their memory that is a pretty crystallised impression inside of us.

They were people of such outstanding calibre, and of towering strength in terms of experience and knowledge they had commanded in their respective fields that the voids they left have not been truly filled even to this day. They were themselves assets and were the creators of intellectual wealth which together sums up the sense of loss through a decline in the quality of commitment and professionalism in various domains of national life.

What is their place in the text books today? Have their works been put together and made available to the new generations?

Leaders led; workers, students, peasants fought shoulder to shoulder with soldiers and policemen who took up arms to free the motherland but the martyred intellectuals were the soul mates of the freedom fighters, the torch bearers of our independence struggle and the ideological mentors of the war cry that reverberated through the length and breadth of Bangladesh for what we are today.

Eavesdropping on telephone legalised

A danger to freedom

THE other day while commenting on a news item that the government was about to legalise telephone-tapping, we urged them not to do it, but those entreaties have unfortunately gone unheeded. So, we see another black law in the annals of Bangladesh which we are constrained to protest. In spite of the broader society calling on the government to desist from taking such an action, an ordinance legalising telephone tapping has been promulgated.

Our experiences of draconian laws in our country are very painful, primarily because those have been largely used as tools of oppression and vendetta against political opponents.

Fighting extremism does not have to involve an abridgment of the rights of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution. And should there be the need for any special measure dictated by the demands of national security, there are provisions of law that the government can resort to, on case to case basis. Giving a carte blanche to the agencies will subject the citizens to the possibility of harassment against which one cannot take recourse to the law.

Apart from the fact that it will be an invasion of privacy of the common man, our fears are compounded by the demonstrated proclivity, of many in the government and the administration, to gag the media; we wonder whether this would not be used to muzzle the media, the press in particular. The worrisome aspect is that under the provision, the government can force a telephone service provider to suspend service for any length of time. Nobody can put it past the government to use it against journalists and other media men, whose primary mode of communications happens to be the telephone.

While the question of national security must reign supreme, no civilised democratic society can endure curtailment of its basic rights, particularly through those enactments whose underlying philosophy may be less than holy.

We look upon the unprecedented measure with trepidation, condemn it and urge the government to scrap it sooner than later.

Our martyred intellectuals

DR. RASHID ASKARI

INTELLECTUALS are the best brains of a country and the conscience of a nation. They are the friends, philosophers, and guides of the people. They are connected with the ability to think in a logical way and are determined to get at the truth. They keep the torch of idealism alive. So, the powerful vested interests are the antithesis of the intellectuals.

Our great Liberation War was an inevitable outcome of our social, economic, cultural, and political awareness generated by our intellectuals and quickened by the political leaders. The intellectuals' ideals and actions earned them the enmity of the people with vested interest who stood against the Liberation War.

So, while the marauding Pakistan Army along with their accomplices, the Razakar, the Al-Badr and Al-Shams, were on the verge of defeat, they planned to surrender and shot their last bolt at the formidable intellectuals of our country. The distinguished Bengali intellectuals including poets, litterateurs, journalists, artists, physicians, engineers, lawyers, educationists, philosophers were brought from their houses and killed at Rayerbazar badhya-bhumi and Mirpur in Gestapo manner.

The way those famous sons of the soil were killed was

extremely barbaric. Their hands

were tied back and they were shot in the head. Some were buried alive and some found with their eyes plucked. Many of the distorted corpses were barely recognisable. From the badhya-bhumi, the dead bodies of Professor Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Fazle Rabby, Dr. Alim Chowdhury, Dr. A. Khair, Dr. Kamal Uddin could be identified, while those of Sahidullah Kaiser, Professor Munier Chowdhury, Professor Mofazzal Haider Chowdhury, Professor Ghiasuddin Ahmed and many others could not be recognised.

We have heard of the blood-curdling story of atrocity of the gas chambers of the Nazis. We could not even think of the recurrence of such a heinous act. So we wondered at the harrowing fact and felt numb with terrible shock. The whole nation became mute and motionless. We suffered too heavy losses!

The paramilitary force Al-Badr, which was formed in

September 1971 under the auspices of General Niazi, chief of the Eastern Command of the Pakistan Army, was the instigator of that hideous massacre.

Their objective was to strike panic into the people by abduction and killing. It was the military adviser to the so-called Governor, Major General Rao Forman Ali who masterminded the whole conspiracy to extinguish the intellectuals and the higher educated class. Had they had one week time more, they would have killed all the Bengali intellectuals, which was a part of their master plan. The Badr force was in fact a special terrorist faction of the then Jamaat-e-Islami led by Moududi, Golam Azam, and Abdur Rahim.

A careful analysis of the incident of intellectuals killing reveals the fact that the killing occurred in three phases. The first phase includes the random killing of the intellectuals until the first week of April 1971 in different places of the country,

including the universities. On the night of 25 March 1971, ten most distinguished intellectuals were killed at Dhaka University. The killing was a part of the genocide launched by the Pakistan Occupation Army. The planned killing had not yet started.

Secondly, Jamaat-e-Islami as part of their party policy had planned to kill all intellectuals except for the orthodox and fanatic ones. Some unscrupulous, greedy, and extremist intellectuals joined hands with Jamaat, who carried on with the killings from April to December 1971.

The third phase included the intellectuals who were killed from the last week of November to the last week of December. Being the victims of a deliberate international conspiracy, they were killed in an operation directly conducted by the Pakistani generals. Among the martyrs of the third phase, some were the targets of only Jamaat, some of international conspiracy, and some of both.

The leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami submitted their intellectuals exter-

mination plan to Rao Forman Ali. The unprincipled and opportunist anti-liberation intellectuals joined that conspiracy and helped the Pakistan Army locate the targeted intellectuals. To execute the plan for abduction of the intellectuals, comparatively young university students and so called journalists were used. Considering the abduction operation unbecoming of regular army, Rao Forman Ali made use of the Badr force in intellectuals killing.

Immediately after submitting the killing plan, Golam Azam, along with the chief of the Razakars, Mohammad Yunus, and the liaison officer of the Peace Committee, Mahbubur Rahman Gurha, went to see the training of the Razakar and Al-Badr at the Physical Training College. From then on the Student Sangha all over the country was transformed into Al-Badr and in the last week of November and first half of December the list of the intellectuals was handed over to them for abduction and persecution.

On December 4 began the imposed curfew and black out to pave the way for abduction. The preparation for abduction of the intellectuals extensively started from December 10. Amid curfew and black out, an Al-Badr bus, stained with mud, picked up the listed intellectuals from their residences. Then they were taken to the Al-Badr headquarter at Mohammadpur Physical Training College for interrogation and persecution. At dead of night they

were taken to Rayerbazar brick field and killed. The killing also took place at Mirpur.

The killing of the progressive intellectuals in this soil by the extremist and reactionary forces has not come to a halt even thirty four years after our Independence. This trend of intellectuals killing and persecution is presently on the increase. Many have already been killed by the fundamentalist forces. The pro-liberation intellectuals are being threatened with extinction across the country. They feel a growing sense of alarm. The successors to the defeated anti-liberation reactionary forces seem to have vowed to avenge themselves on the pro-liberation intellectuals. This is a serious cause for concern.

If we are to ensure the promotion of the ideals of our great Liberation War and the furtherance of our national development, we cannot but be enlightened by the ideals of the martyred intellectuals, who were killed a few hours or days or months before the great Victory in the Liberation War.

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Denigrating democratic values and the opposition

DR. ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

B NP Secretary General AM Bhuiyan suggested that Awami League, instead of solving the militancy issue, want to exploit it as a political weapon. He asserted that in a national crisis people want to see all the political parties, civil society, and professional groups join hand in hand to thwart the fiasco. (Statesmanship Score: A-).

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman appealed: "When the militants are threatening to destroy different national institutions we all should come forward to save them." (Statesmanship Score: B+)

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed commented that AL's rejection of the dialogue deepened the public suspicion over the party's hand in the recent string of bombings. (Statesmanship Score: D-). What a prosaic and self-serving statement!

Although Mr. Bhuiyan was courteous in his comments, his assertion that AL, instead of solving the militancy issue, wants to exploit it as a political weapon, is vacuous. How would AL help solve the militancy problem by participating in a dialogue? All available evidence indicates that AL had all along been the target of violent attack and the ruling alliance, not even once, had to face what AL had been subjected to.

Mr. Bhuiyan's contention about the AL leader's refusal to receive the PM's letter of invitation for dialogue as "unfortunate and discourteous," although apposite, is somewhat self-serving as well. The courtesy is nothing compared to the denigration she was subjected to over the last four years. The opposition leader (a former PM herself) is no less a statesman and celebrity than the current PM by any measure of civilized norm.

In his recent commentary: "The world has changed, our leaders

have not," Mr. Mahfuz Anam has stated: "From the outset the same old vicious campaign was let loose against the opposition that they were behind the terror attacks. In fact, save for one occasion on November 30, 2005, all other public utterances by the PM on this topic left no doubt on any reader's or listener's mind that she held the AL responsible for all the terrorist attacks."

The sarcasm is that these asinine accusations continued unabated even in the face of confessions of guilt by arrested JMB members. How could the PM conceive that the former PM and the current opposition leader of the country would involve in al-Qaeda type atrocious activities against her own people?

Mr. Anam added: "They also have damaged the functioning of democracy by misusing the power and influence of their office in denigrating the opposition in this manner." He contended that the government's lukewarm action and investigations may have intensified and culminated in the current fervour of the terrorists' eruptions.

The observation that the ruling alliance "damaged the functioning of democracy" by denigrating the opposition through malicious propaganda and misuse of official power will probably be recorded as the hallmark of alliance government's five years term of office.

After being PM for the second time and opposition leader once in-between, how could the PM not realize that the effectiveness of the party system in parliament rests largely on the rapport between the government and the opposition parties? In general, the

opposition, among a multitude of roles, is expected to:

- Contribute to the formulation of policy and legislation through constructive criticism (BNP ignored and often slammed opposition views);
- Oppose government proposals as it considers unacceptable; initiate amendments to government sponsored bills (AL was consistently smeared and shut out whenever government policies were criticized or objected to);
- Lay down its own policies in order to advance its chances of winning the next general election (BNP made sure that opposition initiated no such moves);
- Promote lively and reasoned debate projecting citizens' preferences, values, and ideologies into policy, law-making, and in the budgetary process (BNP took control of everything as its sole legislative prerogatives);
- Present a viable alternative to the incumbent government by devising alternative ideas, principles and policies for the country (BNP was afraid about this and denigrated the AL as the country's enemy);
- The role of opposition in any democracy is to check and prod, but eventually to replace the ruling party. Because electoral standing is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of government legitimacy, voices of the opposition act as deterrence against disparaging the ongoing test of legitimacy which transpires through the go-between of the legislature and the legislative opposition.

A dynamic opposition in Parliament is the principal fortification against the lure to force majeure and the making of a bureaucratic realm. The people voice their frustrations and aspirations through the loyal and responsible opposition as well as the ruling party ministers and lawmakers. There is virtually no substitute for the "checks and balances" which are brought into play in the representative and watchdog functions acted upon by members of Parliament.

The PM and her elected party functionaries must do some soul-searching to assess the extent they have neglected their obligations to develop a healthy understanding with the opposition. They trampled the opposition's right to perform their constitutional role at every opportunity. Did the PM intervene?

Why would she? She failed to realize that after becoming the PM, she has ascended to the position of the country's leader for the next five years while remaining her party's leader as well. By all measure, she failed miserably to fulfill the compulsion required for both roles. She probably thought by marginalizing the opposition, her party would get a free ride to run the country as they please. Has that actually happened?

The result is politicization, corruption, absence of rule of law, killing of journalists, violence on minorities, selective use of the rule of law (pardonning convicted murderers), World Bank admonishment, black money accumulation, massive bank fraud and loan defaults, mushroom growth of fundamentalist school of extrem-

ists in the name of Islamic education, and finally her own party's increasing disarray with the possibility of exploding into splinter groups.

Such a mismanagement of titanic proportion of the country's affairs could not have happened so fast and so all encompassing had the opposition been allowed to have a strong voice in the parliament and the oversight of "checks and balances."

In competitive multi-party politics, the elected majority party forms the government and seeks to enact into law various policies and programmes oftentimes consistent with their election pledges. It is imperative that the opposition recognizes and respects the authority of the elected government. Such norms form the basis for adherence to the values of tolerance, cooperation and compromise. No democracy can flourish without consensus building which requires compromise and tolerance. As Mahatma Gandhi famously argued, "Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit."

The BNP infringed on the constitutional rights of the opposition at whim and showed no semblance of tolerance of the voices of the opposition and reason.

Avocal and effective opposition is the nucleus of any democracy. It means that all diverse elements in a political equation -- however deep their differences -- share the fundamental values of freedom of speech, the rule of law, and equal protection under the law. The opposition is essentially a "government-in-waiting." For a culture of democracy to take hold, opposition parties must have the confidence that the political system will guarantee their right to organize, speak, and dissent from and criticize the ruling party. They must be assured that in due course, they will have a chance on an equal footing to engage in political campaign, win election, and rule the country.

The missing element is knowledge and the willingness to learn. The country needs a radical leader to innovate radical ideas. Please make your way out and bring relief to the people and the country.

After finishing this write-up, I requested a colleague to give me his comments. Two hours later he asked me: "Why don't you write this in Bengali for a much bigger exposure?"

I replied: "Those who cannot read English do not denigrate democratic values."

He then asked: "Do you really think politicians and bureaucrats would read your article, and listen to your suggestions?"

I said: "Most likely no, because if they see the title, they would know it is about them."

He then quipped: "Why are you wasting your time, then?"

I replied: "People write about safe sex not for the HIV/AIDS-infected people, but for those who are yet to be infected."

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Nobel Peace Prize: The case for Grameen Bank or BRAC

BOTTOM LINE

On the consideration of broad meaning of peace, it can be argued that Grameen Bank or BRAC deserve the Nobel Peace Prize for their unremitting efforts towards securing the mother of all fundamental human rights -- the alleviation of poverty and uplift of quality of life of poor people.


HARUN UR RASHID

THE award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its head Dr. Mohammad El Baradei has raised afresh the question as to what the term "peace" means and how the Nobel committee considers it while awarding the peace prize.

The term "peace" has narrower and broader connotations. In its narrower sense, it means absence of war. The broader meaning of peace is ensuring social harmony, human security, meaning freedom from want and absence of mental anxiety.

That is why, it was the environment in 2004 when the Kenyan environmentalist, Ms. Wangari Maathai, was awarded the Nobel

provided a model and inspiration to a new generation of social activists.

Peace Prize as criticism
It is noted that the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize to former President of the US, Jimmy Carter, was considered as disapproval of some of the foreign policy direction of the Bush administration, because President Carter had always opposed the gung-ho foreign policy of the Bush administration.

Many believe that in 2003, Iranian Shirin Ebadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for standing up against human right abuses in Iran.

In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi received the Prize for fighting in a

non-violent way for democracy in Myanmar (Burma).

This year, pre-empting any criticism, the Nobel committee chairman, Ole Danbolt Mojlis, said the 2005 Peace Prize was not meant as a veiled criticism of the US, often at odds with Dr. El Baradei on Iraq. He said: "This is not a kick in the legs to any country."

In the light of El Baradei's position in the Security Council before the Iraqi invasion in March 2003 in expressing suspicion of existence of any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, awarding the prize to IAEA and its head is seen by many as a criticism of US policy towards the IAEA's

objectivity in carrying out its task in limiting nuclear weapons.

Some argue that the prize also points finger at Iran's nuclear programme where IAEA has not yet fully satisfied whether Iran has disclosed everything to the IAEA inspectors. That is why Iran's spokesman reportedly said that "he had no comments to make" on the prize given to IAEA.

Role of the IAEA
The IAEA was created in 1957 by the UN as a watchdog to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. Since 1970, it has been the verifier of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (