

The loss continues to haunt us

Thirty-four years since that day now the hour of reckoning for this nation has arrived once again. Unhappily, the saga written in blood and enormous sacrifice has not been faithfully commemorated. Distortions were made, falsifications introduced and myths and false heroes were invented with every passing year. And this doctoring of history has been going on till date.



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

JUST two days before the victory, the most heinous, cruel and sinister crime was committed by the occupation army and their collaborators, the Al Shams, Al Badr and Razakars. These were deliberate, calculated, and cold-blooded assassinations aimed at crippling the very backbone of the nation struggling for freedom from the clutches of the Pakistani hordes. The Pakistani army and its collaborators systematically rounded up the country's top intellectuals at the time including doctors, engineers, lawyers, litterateurs, academicians, journalists, also top bureaucrats and business elites, and killed them in cold blood.

After being subjected to more than two decades of exploitation and humiliation and with the ultimate brutality inflicted on a sleeping nation in the night of March 25, 1971, the people, although unarmed, rose in rebellion against the brute perpetrators. The founding premise of Pakistan ideology as also the objective of keeping the two parts of Pakistan intact through the jargon of religion even when the exploitation was at its worst was shattered. Islam cannot countenance the practice of Muslims brutalising and annihilating other

Muslims. But the stark reality of the demons of radical religious forces raising ugly faces surfaced in the form of torture and killing of the people in the then East Pakistan. The way the whole country meaning the then East Pakistan inhabited by Bengali speaking people suffered and witnessed torture, rape and massacre nothing could stop its 75 million people from going the separate way after that fateful night of March 25, 1971.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the fiery leader, was rounded up from his house that night and flown to West Pakistan. The ambition of Pakistan's then President and Martial Law Administrator Gen Yahya Khan to preserve his own position and supremacy of Pakistan led him to order his army commanders in the eastern wing to start the cleansing process. Major Gen. Tikka Khan, Governor and Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan, ordered his army commanders to start the cleansing process, wiping out the Bengali intelligentsia and valiant Bangalee nationalists demanding equitable share in business, finance, and educational opportunities. The victims had been listed during the days from March 7 to March 25 and now the so-called patriotic army of Pakistan was extracting a terrible vengeance. It is pertinent to recall what some top brass in the Army in the 16th Division headquarters at Comilla said at that time: "We are determined to cleanse East Pakistan once and for all of the threat of secession even if it means killing two million people and keeping the province as colony for 30 years."

People in the country still recount those dark days with shock and trepidation as the marauding Pak Army carried on its "kill and burn" missions. The horrifying acts of killing, rape, and destruction contin-

ued with little let up. If blood is the price of independence, then the people of Bangladesh have paid it fully during the nine months long war against the tyrannical occupation forces of Pakistan. At the cost of three million lives the nation got its cherished freedom. But just prior to the victory the nation's invaluable intellectuals, academicians, and men of letters in the field of science, literature, even physicians were picked up, shot or stabbed to death, and thrown into the marshes at Rayerbazar and Mirpur by the death squads comprising local operatives like Al Badr, Al Shams, and Razakars.

The victims' mutilated bodies were later discovered from these marshes. Similar heinous acts were carried out in other places as well outside Dhaka. Their crime was that they were Bangalee and enlightened. They after all represented the main driving force of the nation. They were also ardent patriots who believed that some day the nation would be free. They advocated the creation of an independent secular state as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman articulated in his historic address at Race Course Maidan on March 7, 1971. By all reckoning, the nation became poorer at the loss of those best sons of the soil who were our pride.

Only days before the Pakistan Army faced defeat, the Al Badr, Al Shams and Razakars with their faces masked, broke into the houses of famed personalities in the country and picked them up and killed them in cold blood. These operatives including their mentors apprehended that their days were numbered and a humiliating defeat imminent. In such a precarious moment of their existence, they resorted to the last heinous attack on the nation's intelligentsia. As the freedom fighters were advancing to the capital city destroying every

form of resistance the Pak Army put in, the capital city was virtually coming under the control of guerrillas. Finding all their grand ambition falling into pieces, the vile murderers made the most cowardly design to rob the nation of the best brains so that a big void in the field of education, science, journalism, medicine, etc. would remain for a long time.

Quite realistically the occupation forces reasoned that intellectuals were a major threat to them. It was here that the seeds of rebellion had been sown. It was from here that the voices of protest got the loudest and from here that the courage to defy authority stemmed. So if the source of strength could be cut off, the remaining task of keeping them under subjugation would be easier. With such a diabolical plan, the assassins worked and to a great extent succeeded. Now after 34 years since that terrible day, we not only mourn the loss of those brilliant minds, but also the intellectual and psychological void created by their untimely deaths.

According to documents released after the liberation war, more than 100 intellectuals belonging to different levels of the society were murdered. The plot to eliminate the intellectuals was drawn by Gen. Rao Farman Ali who was assisted by Brig. Bashir and Captain Quayum along with Bangalee masterminds like Ghulam Azam and Moulana Mannan, to name a few. Around November, 1971, it was knowledgeably learnt, the occupation forces with its sub-zonal Martial Law Administrator headed by Brigadier Bashir began briefing the Al-Badr, Al-Shams about their plan. From December 4 curfew and blackouts were imposed to facilitate the plan. From December 10 the operations were in full swing.

The Al-Badr during the blackouts went from house to house capturing the listed intellectuals and taking them away, never to be seen again by their loved ones.

The Al-Badr group led by Chaudhury Mainuddin, a Bangalee clandestine character along with his criminal associates did the most nefarious job. Dressed in black, they captured the intellectuals, put them in concentration camps in Mohammadpur Physical Training

Centre, Dhanmondi High School and MLA Hostel. After inflicting merciless torture these people were taken to a brick field at Rayerbazar and a killing field at Mirpur to be brutally executed.

Occasions like Victory Day and Martyred Intellectuals Day, despite being recurring annual events, are far from a repetitive experiences, and each year they carry an emotional load. Not only did we win the freedom, we paid an enormously high price for it and proved to the world that we are capable of exacting our freedom from an absolutely tyrannical regime.

Thirty-four years since that day now the hour of reckoning for this nation has arrived once again. Unhappily, the saga written in blood and enormous sacrifice has not been faithfully commemorated. Distortions were made, falsifications introduced and myths and false heroes were invented with every passing year. And this doctoring of history has been going on till date.

Through half-hearted homage paid to the liberation heroes and fallen martyrs, the significance of the liberation is not properly maintained, but rather greatly minimised. Official insincerity is flagrantly demonstrated when it comes to recognising and honouring those who survived but are permanently consigned to the wheelchair. They symbolise in their persons the price that has had to be paid for our freedom.

Our best tribute to the martyred intellectuals can only be paid through whole-hearted upholding of the spirit of liberation in both words and deeds.

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Bloodied democracy?

These young men and women facing abuse by the naked force of the state from Central Asia to Middle East and Africa are tomorrow's suicide bombers. They are the ones who face utter helplessness, powerlessness and humiliation when their right to peaceful change of government is snatched from them.

SAAD S. KHAN

THE worst fears about Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections have come true and the worst apprehensions about the aftermath, let us hope and pray, may not come true. That the elections would be brazenly and shamelessly rigged, was hardly in doubt, neither was the people's will to reject the false results. Enthused by the success in nearby Ukraine, Azeri people did come out time and again in tens of thousands, since the elections have taken place. On the government side, sanity has not prevailed in the past few weeks and is not likely to in future, if the world community does not intervene now. As I write these lines, a bloodbath of the scale of the last May's Andijan massacre in neighboring Uzbekistan, may well be the fate of many blossoming young Azeris. Since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, people of the new generation across the developing world, have been facing the brunt of state brutalities.

The past few months saw a rare parade of democracy on all the four corners, first, it was at Zanzibar in Africa; second, Azerbaijan in the Caucasus; third, Egypt in the Middle East, and fourth and more recently, in Kazakhstan in Central Asia. Then I stopped counting out of sheer frustration.

We are trying Saddam Hussain for massacres in Dujail and Halabja and are looking for Radovan Karadzic for massacres in Srebrenica, but are at the same time permitting Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan to oppress his people to his heart's content. Just like, a few months ago, we permitted the butcher of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov to write fresh narratives of bestiality by killing 745 unarmed civilians, mostly women and children at point blank range at Andijan. Of course, we are keeping the records handy that if he goes against our political wishes at any time, we will suddenly be "guided by God" to remove him "as our moral duty" and then we will try him for crimes. But at that time, we will find ourselves appeasing other dictators elsewhere.

We have given a blank cheque to all the criminals to kill whosoever they like, if he could take the trouble of a slight mention in a public speech later on that the killed ones were all Islamic fundamentalists, so we make the killings politically less costly for our domestic audience. Or probably that for something called conscience, which I do believe, somewhere deep in the heart must exist even in George Bush and Tony Blair.

These young men and women facing abuse by the naked force of the state from Central Asia to Middle East and Africa are tomorrow's suicide bombers. They are the ones who face utter helplessness, powerlessness and humiliation when their right to peaceful change of government is snatched from them.

Rather than hating the "values" of the West freedom and democracy these young men and



A polling observer at the Azerbaijan parliamentary election.

women actually love democracy and want it to be extended to their homelands. They watch the lavish lifestyle of America and Europe on the television sets and are convinced that this is because of democracy. They come out on the street to call for democracy and social justice, and an end to authoritarian brutalities. They are then shot at point blank range. The ones who go back "intact" lose the capacity of facing the same humiliation again. They want power and the suicide bomb gives it to them. Most people from the Muslim world who kill Americans like that, do not have a record of praying even at Friday congregations.

Coming back to Azerbaijan where the election was nothing more than a joke, the ruling New Azerbaijan Party of Ilham Aliyev has romped home with 63 seats in a house of 125 with opposition alliance gaining just six, and the remainder going to parties and independents allied with the president. Primarily to look good in the Western media, ruling parties in totalitarian or semi-totalitarian states, no longer give themselves 120 of the 125 seats, up for grabs. Suffice is to leave the opposition with a handful of symbolic seats and distribute the remaining lot among the loyalists with multiple political labels, so a facade of multi-party democracy could be sold to the mentors in Washington.

Since independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has remained a cross breed of monarchy and dictatorship. The all-powerful head of state is known by the politically-correct term "president", not "king," yet the president gets "democratically succeeded" by his heir and eldest son, who then starts perpetuating his rule in an equally "democratic manner." Veteran Communist leader Haider Aliyev, ruled the country through an iron hand since 1993 and exactly a decade later, in a fake electoral exercise, he was succeeded by his prime minister, Ilham Aliyevit was purely coincidental though that the prime minister was none other than his playboy son. Those who questioned the fairness of the polls are still in jails serving harsh sentences. This is not something unique in the region. Syria's Hafiz el-Asad was succeeded by his son Bashar el-Asad;

North Korea's Kim Il Sung was succeeded by his son Kim Jong Il; even Iraq's ousted dictator Saddam Hussein was grooming his playboy son Uday Hussein to replace him. In the circumstances, Ilham could hardly have been expected to be a better version of his father.

His rule is infested with the crisis of governance reflected through stifling of political dissent, gagging the media and crony capitalism. His hard hitting tactics against the peaceful demonstrators are jeopardizing the stability of his country. Then why is the West silent? Can one argue that the Americans are turning a blind eye so that they have more control over the country's oil resources. Everybody in the State Department and Pentagon has to be lunatic to assume this after their experience in Iraq.

Admittedly, the leaders of new found democracies are more dependent on the West for support and security, and are more likely to be pliant, as the new leadership of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan has shown. Plus the nascent countries are likely to remain in stable over longer periods. Ilham Aliyev may be doing the bidding of the US oil companies but so will any of his democratic replacement. If he is allowed to stay, he will brutalize the whole fabric of the society. Azerbaijan may well be another Chechnya or Lebanon in the making. It would not augur well for anybody's interests, least of all those of the US companies.

The immediate concern at the moment are the lives of the citizens in Azerbaijan if the opposition gives calls for more demonstrations in January. If the governments are not responding, it may work if we, the world citizenry, start a letter writing campaign addressed to Azerbaijan's army and police canvassing them to refuse any orders to shoot into the protesters.

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Future of Asean and East Asia



ASEAN leaders hold hands after the signing of a declaration during the 11th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN

THE future of East Asia, or for that matter, Asia, will be in the hands of leaders from 10+3+1+2, represented by Asean, China-Japan-Korea, India, and Australia and New Zealand, when they meet on December 14 in Kuala Lumpur. Although the inaugural meeting will be very symbolic with fanfares, the future ramification is still unfathomable.

Obviously with Malaysia as host of the East Asian Summit (EAS), Asean is moving forward to strengthen its identity, despite uncertainties and divergences among member countries on the future course of the EAS.

For the time being, the priority is now being placed on the ongoing Asean Plus Three (APT) process. Some Asean members have expressed concern that without further consolidation of their 10-year old cooperation, the newly emerged EAS might be overwhelmed the APT process. To disarray this fear, Asean and China, Japan and Korea will sign a separate declaration among themselves stressing the imperatives of their cooperation and community building.

The grouping's staunch desire to construct the future rule-based community within East Asia among the APT has already caused uneasiness with India, Australia and New Zealand. While they are appreciative of being part of the EAS, they have not yet come to terms as to why they are not part of the emerging East Asian community. When this

In recent years Asean states have realized that they have to work closer together to tackle common problems, especially serious cross-border issues such as terrorism, haze and pollutions, people-trafficking and drug-smuggling, and contagious diseases such as bird flu and Sars. The law-binding charter will facilitate cooperation on such issues. For instance, if need be, in the case of anti-terrorism cooperation, there could be a speedy extradition of persons involved in terrorist acts.

concept was introduced in early 1990s, it was quickly turned down because it was viewed as anti-American grouping during the first year of President Bill Clinton's administration.

Soon, the international community will find out if the future of East Asia will stretch from Kashmir, India to Southland, New Zealand or simply limited to the APT. After almost two-year of discussion, founding members of EAS have not yet agreed if their summit will serve as a spring-board for the formation of an East Asian Community (EAC). As the summit approaches, they have not yet agreed on the nitty-gritty of the EAS modality.

When an East Asian Community three was proposed years ago by South Korea and subsequently Japan, it envisaged a much bigger community-building process that would link the region with the broader Asia-Pacific: the participation of Australia and New Zealand as well as India would complement this idea. But the idea of East Asian cooperation that Asean worked on was based on the APT and its enlargement.

In the beginning, hopes were

high that Asean would be more accommodating in allowing non-Asean EAS founders to do more and in the process gradually transform the EAS into a region-wide forum for community-building. However, that was a wishful thinking.

At the Kuala Lumpur summit, the APT leaders will again reiterate that the much-heralded EAS should be just a strategic dialogue forum for leaders to discuss important issues of common interest. It will be a forum with a loose structure and no fixed agenda. In that sense, the EAS will have nothing to do directly with community-building in East Asia.

Obviously, Asean views the community-building in East as an APT process with the Asean Community and Asean's bilateral dialogue partners with China, Japan and Korea as well as bilateral cooperation among the three as building blocks.

They will not speak of establishing a secretariat, as Malaysia has suggested in the beginning. Asean will lead and chair all future meetings, very much to the chagrin of Japan, which prefers other non-Asean countries to co-chair

meetings. In a nutshell, Asean will be calling the shots, as it always has done as in the Asean Regional Forum.

Asean leaders see the EAS as an Asian-type G-8 meeting, which will take up specific themes or issues, including invitations of specific guests. For example in the past year China and India were invited to join in G-8 discussions.

The Declaration on the Asean Plus Three Summit that will be signed by their leaders will ensure that the process that began in 1992 continues. Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia have been demanding that the APT be the main driving force and not be diluted in any way by the new forum.

A series of summit meeting that also including Russia will take place along with the announcement of establishment of an eminent persons group to prepare the drafting of an Asean Charter. The EPG group will study future scenarios for Asean beyond the current action plan for 2020. Whatever the group agrees to will be reflected in the charter. Prominent Asean personalities such as former Filipino President

Fidel Ramos, former Malaysian deputy prime minister Musa Hitam, former Singaporean foreign minister S Jayakumar, former Indonesian foreign minister Ali Alatas and former Thai foreign minister Kaseem Samosornkasemri have already agreed to join the group. They expect to finish the draft charter within a year. To help them, the Jakarta-based Asean Secretariat has a finished draft which encompasses important elements found in all Asean documents and action plans.

In recent years Asean states have realized that they have to work closer together to tackle common problems, especially serious cross-border issues such as terrorism, haze and pollutions, people-trafficking and drug-smuggling, and contagious diseases such as bird flu and Sars. The law-binding charter will facilitate cooperation on such issues. For instance, if need be, in the case of anti-terrorism cooperation, there could be a speedy extradition of persons involved in terrorist acts.

Through increased cooperation, some of the key Asean members, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, hope that the member countries will talk less about the non-interference principle and opt for practical approaches. The discreet but sustained pressure from the Asean MPs Caucus on Burma was cited as a good example. As host of the EAS, Malaysia wants to leave a legacy that it has made Asean more engaging with the rest of the world and that EAS should be a non-exclusive entity. Not long ago Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi said he wished to see Asean be more open and down to earth. He is now working to make sure that this happens.

At the summit, the Malaysian leader will lead a scheduled 15-minute meeting between the representatives from Asean civil-society organizations and his Asean colleagues. It will be the first such major encounter, underscoring the host's desire to make Asean less elitist. There are at least 50 non-government organizations registered as Asean non-governmental organizations. But only a few, such as Asean-ISIS and the Asean University Network, are recognized and enjoy regular contacts with Asean senior officials.

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Maid from Bangladesh

MANEEZA HOSSAIN

BANGLADESH'S migrant workers heading to host societies in the Middle East and Asia are the invisible army of globalization, and an asset for their homeland. However, the proposition of Bangladeshi women relocating to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, or other countries as household workers has many troubling aspects. As Bangladesh approaches the finalization of employment terms with recruitment agencies, strict conditions and regulations should be applied to the transfer abroad of female workers, with scrutiny both from government and from social activists at home and abroad.

While her male counterpart can send home a small fortune from Dubai to Dhaka, or even return home with a small nest-egg to start his own business, the prospects for the Bangladeshi female worker abroad are considerably dimmer. Her earnings ceiling is considerably lower, and the household conditions in her place of employment are not conducive to any entrepreneurship. She may never hope to have the small fortune to which a man aspires. Instead, if the experience of her sisters from other nations is any indication, she is more likely to be left on her own in foreign lands and hostile domestic environments to fend for herself. The two main issues are economics and personal and moral welfare.

Bangladeshi female workers abroad will often earn considerably more than their sisters at home. More, however, might not be enough for their families to allow an eventual graduation from a newly redefined and globalized subsistence economy, a cyclical entrapment that offers neither Bangladesh nor her daughters anything to be proud of.

There is no prospect for Bangladesh in this system: like a welfare check in the West, low remittances from female workers abroad may insure the survival of their families no insignificant achievement however, they may also ensure their entrapment in a condition of dependency vis-a-vis the monthly bare minimum check. Upward mobility may thus be denied, as well as progress and development in Bangladesh. The alternative may be in providing training to enable women to seek more than subsistence wages for their families at home.

We have a responsibility to endow our citizenry with skills and a duty to insure that those who have them are at least given the opportunity to fare better in the new global markets. These markets, it should be noted, are not all similar. Bangladesh must work to encourage its women to seek employment in places like Malaysia, Oman, or the UAE where the economies are relatively liberal, and may

allow a relative margin for the entrepreneurial spirit to take root. In such countries at least, there is a remote chance for some female workers to move up from being household maids.

While economics are of natural concern, it is the personal and moral welfare of our sisters that preoccupies us first. Bangladesh's government should impose on agencies to adhere to a high standard of consideration for our foreign workers in the host countries. The basics of this standard are safe work conditions, psychological and medical welfare, as well as periodic access to consular officers in the country of residence. Beyond the basics, our standard should include the social welfare of our sisters. In all cases, it is imperative to have subjective personal rules that would ensure that there would be no physical, sexual, or psychological abuse.

There is a balance of power at question here, because the fact is that the host countries need Bangladesh's cheap labour as much as Bangladesh needs the remittances sent home from abroad. In many such societies, the attraction of Bangladeshi women workers (compared to Ethiopians, Philipinas, and Sri Lankans) is that their moral, spiritual, and social values are compatible with local ones. This advantage imposes on the host society the added responsibility to uphold the dignity and standards that the Bangladeshi women are bringing with them.

This responsibility must be quantified and monitored. Bangladeshi women in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and other Muslim countries after all, are going to imprint and help educate the youth in shared values between Bangladesh and these host societies. The respect of these values with regard to Bangladeshi women should be absolute and immutable.

As a result of this religious and socio-cultural affinity, Bangladeshi women might expect "better" treatment than her non-Muslim counterpart. However, it should be acknowledged that housemaids in many of these countries have been subject to abuse of many forms. If Bangladesh is to allow its daughters to provide the help needed in these societies, it is incumbent on it to ensure that "better" treatment is positively good respectable treatment.

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