

Consolidate the Victory Day spirit

We need it to fight extremist threats

ALTHOUGH the occasion today is to rejoice in the birth of Bangladesh 34 years ago and recount our cumulative success through the vicissitudes of time that cannot quite outweigh the tally of blunders, it is the current challenge posed by the reactionary remnants of 1971 that cannot but occupy our minds. And rightly so, because the values of Liberation War are a reference-point we must always return to whenever these come under threat, so that we can renew our resolute pledges to the ideals for which this country was established in the first place.

The nation today is passing through a most difficult time. Ideological terrorists are taking innocent lives in a pernicious misinterpretation of Islam which is synonymous with peace. Bangladesh has long been recognised as one of the better nations having secular traditions firmly reestablished through an Independence war which the forces inimical to the ethos are now out to destroy.

Let us face the fact that this growing threat of religious terrorism has not emerged in a day or two. Call them religious extremists or fundamentalists; they existed in the country for years. While 1971 saw their defeat and we were able to put them in total disarray, there is no denying the fact that these forces slowly but surely have regrouped once again -- thanks to political patronage. But this was also possible, to a very large extent, because our major politicians and political parties remained continually preoccupied with fighting each other rather than recognising the danger of militancy growing by default.

What could be a stronger indictment on our lowering of the guard hitherto than the discovery made Wednesday of a huge cache of explosive materials readied for bombing -- even the Victory Day celebrations. If the current level of vigilance were shown early on, we would not have faced the problem we do today. We forgot that 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'.

If we are to defeat these evil forces there is no substitute whatsoever than for the major political parties to be united on the one-point agenda to fight off the forces of regression being duly imbued with the spirit of unity that basically delivered national independence against stunning odds. In the name and true spirit of the Victory Day therefore, we urge the ruling and opposition parties to rise above the political divide and rid the nation of the threats of extremism.

This is one battle we simply cannot afford to lose. We, in the media, are ready to play our supportive part for the cause.

Goldman list inclusion good cheer

Now Bangladesh has to make it happen

IT seems that the dark clouds of cynicism raised by the recent spate in militant bombings on the back of top corruption rankings are lifting from our investment horizon. The apparently pendulous swing from the negative perception to the positive outlook began with the visits of Bill Gates and Ted Turner to Bangladesh otherwise hogging headlines for the terrorist bombings.

Now comes the heartening news, almost like an extended but more elaborate vindication of the trust reposed in Bangladesh by Bill and Ted early on: Goldman Sachs, a prestigious US-based investment banking and securities firm has placed Bangladesh on its 'Next Eleven' list in terms of potential as an investment destination. It brackets Bangladesh as a key member of the group that includes Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, South Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Turkey and Vietnam.

The 'Next Eleven' takes its place after G7 and the BRICs i.e. economies encompassing Brazil, Russia, India and China. What a sense of elevation! The overarching consideration is that this is the Asian century and that the tiny economy of Bangladesh could 'power' the world economy in whatever modest way it might be. Bangladesh meets the criteria of macroeconomic stability, polity, openness of trade and investment policies and quality of education. As we can understand, comparison is the basis for value judgement.

Obviously, investors would be looking for booming economies, swelling populations and fast developing markets -- Bangladesh fits into the frame. That is all very good, but how much more we would have drawn the global attention had corruption been contained to tolerable limits and the insecurity brought on by the bombings been headed off. This is the challenge before us and it's through a combined political will reached through a national dialogue that we must strive to meet the world's expectations.

Fifteen years to go

A positive vision for Bangladesh at its 50th anniversary as an emerging economy and developing society is not only optimistic, but also realistic. Bangladesh has all the ingredients for such a prospect: natural wealth, food sufficiency, energy resources, dynamic society, international presence, vibrant culture, and a high level of political consciousness.

MANEEZA HOSSAIN

BD ANGLADESH lives at a higher level of precariousness than most nations: It is faced with the risk of disruption of its political life and its socio-cultural order, but it is also subject to the periodic onslaught of natural disasters, and it runs the risk of being effectively wiped out altogether in the coming century if global warming issues are not addressed.

Still, a positive vision for Bangladesh at its 50th anniversary as an emerging economy and developing society is not only opti-

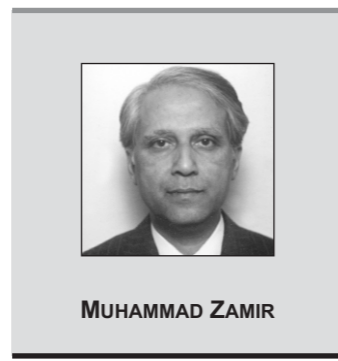
mistic, but also realistic. Bangladesh has all the ingredients for such a prospect: natural wealth, food sufficiency, energy resources, dynamic society, international presence, vibrant culture, and a high level of political consciousness.

To create a Bangladesh Miracle out of these ingredients is not a far-fetched proposition. With much less -- and with much more devastation facing its infrastructure and society -- South Korea rose from its ashes to offer its citizens at the turn of the millennium a standard of living competitive with any on a world

We must reaffirm the spirit of Bijoy Dibosh

POST BREAKFAST

We send our international peacekeepers abroad to maintain peace and ensure stability elsewhere. But why can we not maintain peace within our own country? We are today under attack. We must be victorious once again against the scourge of misguided terrorism. We owe it to the millions of martyrs who gave their today for our tomorrow. We owe it to our children and the future promised to them on December 16, 1971.



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

DECEMBER has a special significance for the citizens of Bangladesh. These last few weeks of the year symbolize all that is best in our national psyche. On December 16, 1971, we reaffirmed certain principles through our sacrifice -- both individual and collective. We did not hesitate when we came to the crossroad. We took that extra step that established an independent country on the map. Despite genocide and political crisis, we cross the divide. Our liberation struggle in a manner of speaking was a vote against injustice, militancy, fundamentalism, and discrimination. We ushered in democratic promises and reiterated equality, equity, and fundamental freedoms. We upheld human rights in our pursuit of a brighter future filled with dignity and absence of fear.

Many queries have however now surfaced as we continue our march through our thirty-fifth year of independence.

Several factors -- social, political, economic, and cultural are beginning to shred the moderate image and the matrix that our nation has been used to. Our nation is now under attack and time has come for renewed soul searching and introspection.

Recent events have sharply underlined a persistent slide in the maintenance of law and order. Instead of moving forward, the state of governance under the present alliance-led administration has taken the country on a roller coaster ride that is not only chaotic but also serious in its political dimensions. At every turn we are being branded with the red-hot irons of the corruption perception index and terrorism. Militancy, malpractices of partisan politics, and criminal nexus between politicians and profiteers have created a bleak scenario.

This situation has been further compounded by the fact that we have only a few months before the tenure of the current administration comes to an end. We also have unresolved political issues that need to be addressed before end-September 2006. This includes the apprehension of fourteen political parties about the possibility of holding a free, fair, and impartial general election under the next caretaker administration.

As a former student of English literature, I am tempted to suggest that there is a Shakespearean touch to the next act in our national political drama. I am reminded in this regard of a few lines from the soliloquy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark in Scene 1, Act 3 of that immortal play which bears the Prince's name:

"Ay, there's the rub, for in that sleep of death (caretaker governance) what dreams may come (administrative changes and electoral engineering) when we have shuffled off this mortal coil (the current alliance administration) must give us pause."

There is no denying the fact that this spectre has created a spirit of disquiet and is affecting the body

politic of the country. It has, quite justifiably, also resulted in demands for reforms both within the Election Commission and the format of the future caretaker government.

Bijoy Dibosh is an eventful occasion. We remember it and observe its anniversary because of the portals that this day opened for us. It is also a symbol of what might happen when an entire nation is unified. It is also a metaphor for the strength that can be generated when the political leadership and the civil society can work together to resolve problems and outstanding issues through discussion, negotiation, and compromise.

Our prolonged War of Liberation initiated democratic norms and paved the way for our Jatiya Sangsad. Unfortunately, today we have a disappointing, non-functioning parliament whose partisanship has destroyed its essence. This has resulted in the absence of meaningful discussion of controversial issues in that body. Democracy has not been allowed to thrive there. Instead, one has watched with dismay the Speaker categorically rejecting Opposition lawmakers' demands and notices for discussion of subjects like rise of militancy within the country and the abnormal price hike of essentials. Newspapers have reported that the Speaker took this decision after pointing out that it was not possible to hold discussion as the police administration and government intelligence agencies were already taking necessary action in this regard. Such an approach has not helped to persuade the Opposition that meaningful discussion can take place within the Parliament. No wonder that they are boycotting this august institu-

tion.

I now turn to the "bhool" of militancy, extremism, and associated terrorism. It is sad that a nation that has always prided itself on its mosaic of music and moderation should find itself today in the unenviable situation of being a hostage in the hands of terrorists.

The stakes have been raised higher with the mayhem and carnage unleashed with high-powered explosives in Chittagong, Gazipur, and Netrakona. These incidents have also underlined the necessity for the government machinery to be seen to be effective. We have had a gaggle of comments from the Prime Minister (also in charge of the portfolio of the Home Ministry) and her many cabinet colleagues -- and they all appear to be rather superficial. At every opportunity, acts of terrorism and militancy are being passed off, most conveniently, to the doorsteps of others.

It was, as such, particularly welcome to see the High Court intervening through the issue of a Rule on the government on November 30, 2005. This was due to an interesting writ petition seeking an Order, whereby the government would have to submit progress reports to the High Court every two weeks on the investigations into the militant attacks on the various court premises. The government, as expected, has appealed to the Supreme Court. The move however assumes significant because it asks the government to show why government omission in taking adequate and effective measures to ensure security of the members of the judiciary and court-users should not be declared to be a failure to protect fundamental rights of citizens.

A friend in need

His greatest act of courage was the sending of the "Blood Telegram." In one of his first telegrams sent to Washington after March 23, Blood used the term "selective genocide" to describe the deliberate targeting of intellectuals, university faculty, students, elected representatives, Bengalis, and Hindus by the Pakistani army. He urged President Nixon and Henry Kissinger to intervene and stop the killings.

WAJEDA J. RAB

ARCHER K. Blood was no ordinary diplomat. He was described as a "dissenting diplomat." He was also described as a "true foreign service hero" and an "American hero." To those of us of Bangladeshi origin, Archer Blood will forever be a "Bangladeshi hero."

Blood arrived in Dhaka, East Pakistan as the US Consul General in 1970. Little did he know he was destined to stumble upon two catastrophes within a short span of time. On November 12, 1970 a frightful cyclone hit the coastal areas of East Pakistan with winds howling at 150 mph and whipping up waves up to 30ft. high.

The loss of life due to nature's fury was enormous. At least 250,000 people perished along the coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal. Within a few months, he witnessed man's fury when the Pakistani Army struck and

massacred civilians and the police force during the night of March 25, 1971. Thus began the War of Liberation which culminated in the creation of Bangladesh.

Archer Blood chronicled his experiences in East Pakistan in his book: "The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat" published by the University Press Ltd., Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2002. Although his friends urged him to write a book on his Bangladeshi experience for quite some time, he did not believe he could do justice to the topic by relying on his memory only. He waited until the documents were declassified in 1998. Old and frail, he poured over the documents painstakingly, and they also served to jog his memory. The result is a wonderful organization of socio-political events and diplomatic efforts relating to the Bangladeshi struggle. Interwoven with the telegrams and documents

are his unbiased and profound analysis of leaders, events and little glimpses of his friends and family. The book is a valuable historical resource and we are extremely lucky he was able to complete it just 2 years before he died.

In the aftermath of the 1970 cyclone, he methodically went about making an assessment of the cyclone damage instead of just relying on the figures given to the diplomatic corps by the government of East Pakistan. He arranged for a helicopter force of 16 and designated Task Force 182 to distribute relief goods to the inaccessible disaster zone.

His greatest act of courage was the sending of the "Blood Telegram." In one of his first telegrams sent to Washington after March 23, Blood used the term "selective genocide" to describe the deliberate targeting of intellectuals, university faculty, students, elected representatives,

Bengalis, and Hindus by the Pakistani army. He urged President Nixon and Henry Kissinger to intervene and stop the killings. But the silence of Washington was deafening.

The Blood Telegram was signed by 20 members of the US diplomatic corps in Dhaka. Once it arrived in Washington, 9 more officers of the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau signed it. It charged: "Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to take forceful measures to protect its citizens while at the same time bending over backwards to placate the West Pakistan dominated government. Our government has evidenced what many will consider moral bankruptcy."

Although Mr. Blood did not actually sign the telegram, he forwarded it with his own comments. He wrote: "I believe the views of these officers, who are among the finest US officials in East Pakistan, are echoed by the vast majority of the American community, both official and unofficial. I also subscribe to these views but I do not think it appropriate for me to sign their statement as long as I am principal officer at this post."

He also correctly predicted the establishment of an independent

Hopefully, both the ministries of Law and Home Affairs will now take things more seriously and be seen to be effective in discharging their duties by bringing the perpetrators to justice. One would also expect intelligence agencies to employ themselves more gainfully in deterring militancy rather than keeping watch on BNP party members who differ with their high command over the treatment and handling of the militancy issue. Dissent within the party is a sign of democracy at work. The government should be judicious enough to understand this and permit the carrying out of anti-militant activities without interference and intervention. The necessary political will must also be found whereby the police and law and order personnel feel reassured that they will not be subsequently victimized for their impartial action. The greater interest of the state demand this.

We must remember that when democracy does not work, the very foundations of the country are affected. We need to learn from other practicing democracies. I am not a great fan of Prime Minister Blair. However, what happened on November 9, 2005 in the House of Commons demonstrated the quiet strength of parliamentary democracy. On that date many members of the ruling Labour Party defied Prime Minister Blair, opposed and defeated a Bill sponsored by him (aiming to restrict freedom in the name of fighting terrorism). Prime Minister Blair accepted his defeat with grace. This also consolidated democratic traditions in that country.

It must be understood that dissent does not mean disloyalty. The process of pluralism of thought was the essence of the struggle that culminated in our Bijoy Dibosh. Without this we will be guilty of shredding the ethos of human rights. This can eventually unleash a totally unwholesome ripple effect.

I mention this because like some others I am worried about efforts to curb the independence of the media. I agree that journalists have to be responsible. However, their ability to express themselves must not be shackled through

Bangladesh in the same telegram. The Blood Telegram influenced US Congress to act in favour of Bangladesh and moulded American public opinion in favour of Bangladeshis in their struggle.

The telegram was sent under rules initiated in 1969. To create more openness all posts were encouraged to send divergent views and a "dissent channel" was established by a task force. Nevertheless, Archer Blood was recalled by Nixon. His career suffered, but he later said in an interview to the Washington Post that he had no choice, and "the line between right and wrong was just too clear-cut."

His conduct stands out as a lesson in the use of the dissent channel. His colleagues in the American Foreign Service voted to honour him as the recipient of the prestigious Christian A. Herter Award for extraordinary accomplishment involving initiative, integrity, intellectual courage and constructive dissent by a senior Foreign Service Officer.

In his 2001 book: "The Trial of Henry Kissinger" Christopher Hitchens described the cable as "the most public and the most strongly worded demarche, from the State Department servants to the State Department that has ever been

threats of punitive action. We need to understand that they are the conscience of the country. They reveal existing weaknesses and give us the opportunity to correct ourselves. Their efforts with regard to curbing corruption and militancy must be seen from this point.

We are faced today with a national emergency. The threat of Islamic militancy and intolerance has to be contained in the same manner in which we undertook our struggle in 1971. As a group, they are highly motivated and organized. They are obviously also able to work as a dedicated group and maintain secrecy in their planning.

Such a situation requires unity and a bi-partisan approach. Our way of life throughout Bangladesh is at stake. We have to create an effective resistance against this misuse of religion for narrow sectarian ends. The government must be seen taking meaningful steps. Mere denial of being associated with these misguided people is not enough. Till now, the measures taken have been woefully inadequate. Common people continue to live their lives in anxiety. Educational institutions, courts and mediums of transport have come under attack.

We have heard ministers mention that this militancy will be overcome in two months. If this cannot be done, then, please resign. Many other governments have stepped down for much less. Do the honourable thing. Call fresh elections and renew your mandate if you can.

We must not allow Bangladesh to drift towards being a failed state. We send our international peacekeepers abroad to maintain peace and ensure stability elsewhere. But why can we not maintain peace within our own country? We are today under attack. We must be victorious once again against the scourge of misguided terrorism. We owe it to the millions of martyrs who gave their today for our tomorrow. We owe it to our children and the future promised to them on December 16, 1971.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

recorded."

Mr. Blood's courage did not end with the cable. Joseph Galloway, a senior military correspondent for the Knight Ridder Newspapers, was one of a handful of foreign journalists invited by the Pakistani Army to counter charges of genocide. The tour was tightly controlled and the journalists packed off when it ended. Mr. Galloway feigned illness and stayed behind in the hotel. The next day he made his way to the American Consulate (followed by the army security detail). Once inside, he met Archer Blood, the Consul General. Although "silenced" by Washington, Blood arranged for Galloway to meet with Bengali staff members of the consulate. They recounted accounts of atrocities, some personal, committed by the Pakistani Army. Thus Joseph Galloway became one of the few journalists to initially tell the world about the genocide of Bangladeshis. Mr. Galloway recounted in 2004 that he did not see Mr. Blood again, but he "never met a more upright and courageous diplomat."

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ability should be both periodic in the form of elections and continuous in the form of monitoring by civil society. Democracy is indeed a subject of national consensus. While its less than adequate application has led to dissatisfaction, and therefore procedural details should be addressed, the concept itself of a democratic system is too deeply rooted in Bangladeshi tradition to be questioned. At a time where some are projecting their grievances onto the national democratic ethos, this imperative has become a must.

II. Insist on an environment of responsible freedom, respect for diversity, and reconciliation between authenticity and modernity. There is no contradiction at all between the traditional values of Bangladeshi society, religious, cultural and national, and the vision of Bangladesh as a 21st century economic "tiger." In particular, Islam, which was at the core of the

emergence of Bengali identity, is not an impediment but an asset in Bangladesh's development and evolution (physical as well as moral) into the universal, global, humanistic civilization.

III. Practice sound economic and administrative management. Bangladesh's assets are of no value if not put to use properly, for the benefit of Bangladeshi society in a way that brings to reality their potential. Over the past few decades, Bangladesh was able to eradicate the endemic famine that plagued its history. Bangladesh was able to bring to fruition its agricultural potential. The next steps will be to leverage this agricultural self-sufficiency and the energy resources in the direction of heralding the country across an industrial interim phase towards an information age economy.

IV. Invest in Bangladesh's major resource: Bangladeshi youth. The

next generation of Bangladeshis can and should be on par with any developed society with regard to their education, exposure to global information resources, and competitiveness in the international markets of labour, ideas, and innovation. A massive technical education initiative should be designed and implemented to provide a population that has consistently proven that when offered an opportunity it is able to grab it, grasp it, and build upon it. Success stories of rags to riches of Bangladeshis overseas should translate into one collective success story of a Bangladeshi society provided with the tools to excel in the global market.

V. Declare Bangladesh's positive neutrality, regionally and internationally. Bangladesh was created, twice, in a conflict between India and Pakistan. The future of South Asia is by necessity a future of cooperation and integration. While

working towards such a vision, all Bangladeshis should adhere to an approach of constructive engaging positive neutrality, in particular between India and Pakistan. Bangladesh should never again be a battlefield for competing Indo-Pakistani interests, nor should it seek to leverage the two regional superpowers for short-sighted internal political interests. Neutrality is not indifference. Bangladesh should, and will assume a constructive mediatory role to diffuse any tension regionally and to support progress and peace internationally.

VI. Do not leave anyone behind. While ranking among the poorest of the world's nations, Bangladesh is a highly stratified society with many margins. The world, and Bangladesh have moved away from populist collectivism that promises without delivery, and fosters an environment of chaos and uncertainty. However, all strata and all

communities in Bangladesh need to be offered a stake, a genuine and substantive one, in the fate of the country. The attractiveness of radical ideologies to some segments of our own population is reflective of our failure to offer them a genuine partnership.

These "imperatives" and others that should be a part of the public debate in Bangladesh, if internalized, and appropriated, can cement the vision of a Bangladesh of prosperity, tolerance, and progress at the 50th Anniversary of a Liberation that removed the external injustice. The injustice that we have to deal with in the next decades is internal. We Bangladeshis have the solution and all the ingredients for a prosperous future. The hope is that we will act towards it.

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