

# Well said, your honour

**Proposal number one is about a commission. The background to this proposal is similar to the background which necessitates the Anti-Corruption Commission in Bangladesh. There is no dearth of reports about opposition to the War of Liberation and atrocities by the opponents of the war. Therefore, to formalise the investigations and prosecution in a legal manner, there must be a high powered legal entity.**

SYED MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM

I draw the attention of readers to what former chief justice of Bangladesh Supreme Court Mostafa Kamal told The Daily Star on October 27: "Now it is being said that no war criminal exists in the country. May be after some time it would be said that the Liberation War never took place. This will mean we will be deprived of the real history."

Not only as a citizen, but also as an active or armed freedom fighter of the Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971, I am shocked at the remarks leaders of a political party called Jamaat-e-Islami made to reporters after a meeting with the Election Commission on Thursday, October 25.

Chief Justice Mostafa Kamal expressed his suspicion that some day the detractors of the War of Liberation will deny the war itself. Justice Mostafa Kamal did not have to wait long.

At about 9.30 p.m. on Friday, October 26, in a television talk

show on Ekushey TV titled Ekushey Shomoy, Mr. Shah Abdul Hannan a former secretary to the government of Bangladesh said that there was no Liberation War of Bangladesh, instead what happened in 1971 was civil war in Pakistan. Mr. Shah Abdul Hannan, in all possibility, represents a thought process of like-minded people who have decided to deny the War of Liberation by calling it civil war. Mr. Hannan is not alone. We need to answer these questions or in other words resolve this issue once and for all.

Many said, in the past, that to raise the issue of freedom fighters and non-freedom fighters is tantamount to dividing the society or opening old wounds or impeding national unity. As a freedom fighter I strongly submit that I have no intention to include among my nation such people who do not recognise the War of Liberation.

The denial of the War of Liberation is something like a child denying the fact that he was

born of his mother and that his mother suffered much birth pangs during his birth. May I ask a question to Jamaat-e-Islami and Mr. Shah Abdul Hannan: "Pakistan government in 1971 used to say that the situation in East Pakistan in 1971 was an internal law and order problem. In 2007 Mr. Shah Abdul Hannan says it was a civil war. Question: Was Bangladesh born because of political struggle alone or because of the recommendations of politicians only?"

At least on five successive March 26s (that is in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006) Mr. Matiur Rahman Nizami and Mr. Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed of the Jamaat-e-Islami joined the ranks of other ministers at the national memorial at Savar, because that is the independence day of Bangladesh. Why did these two then-ministers go to Savar if they did not believe that March 26, 1971 was not the day of independence of Bangladesh?

On the contrary, if they believe the date to be the day of independ-

ence, then how can there be a civil war between two different countries (that is a country called Bangladesh and another country called Pakistan). It had to be a war between the forces loyal to Bangladesh and forces who were "occupying" Bangladesh.

Mr. Hannan and his like-minded colleagues must be made to answer, albeit in an honourable and gentlemanly way.

It is high time that we resolve this issue once and for all. No national reconciliation is possible with any segment of the people who deny the process of birth of this country. The blood shed by the millions of martyrs in 1971 will not pardon the present generation or more specifically the freedom fighters who are still living for not ensuring due recognition of the War of Liberation. In this context, I have three specific proposals.

Proposal number one is about a commission. The background to this proposal is similar to the background which necessitates the Anti-Corruption Commission in Bangladesh. There is no dearth of reports in the print or electronic media about corruption by members of the political governments between 1991 to 2006. These reports alone are not sufficient to prosecute the people. Formal efforts are needed, that is why the Anti-Corruption Commission does the investigation, charge

sheeting, and prosecution.

Similarly, there is no dearth of reports about opposition to the War of Liberation and atrocities by the opponents of the war. Therefore, to formalise the investigations and prosecution in a legal manner, there must be a high powered legal entity.

The name of the commission can be something like "Fact Finding Commission 1971" or "Political and War Crimes Finding Commission 1971" or "History Commission on Liberation War 1971" or some such. Wise people can find a good name.

The terms of reference may include among other matters:

- What role did the political parties of the then Pakistan/East Pakistan play towards materialising an independent Bangladesh during the period March 26 to December 16, 1971.
- What support, if any, was available to the Pakistan army in 1971 during its operations in East Pakistan, from the local political parties, or local businessmen, or local citizens.

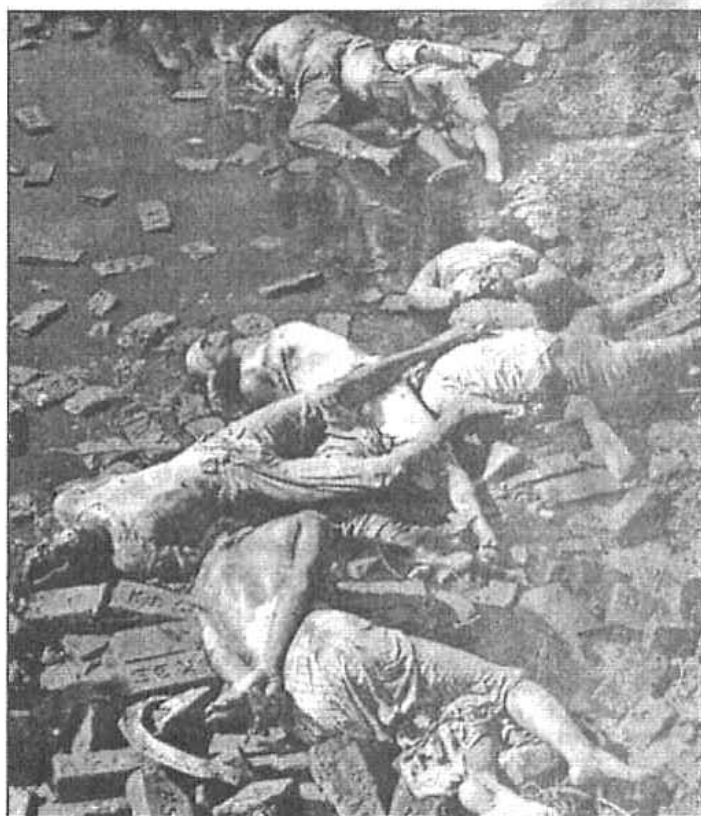
Priority is for a wide and deliberative enquiry into the entire range of crimes, but if wide ranging enquiry is not possible, then at least enquiry into the possibility of commission of war crimes by those who opposed the freedom fighters of Bangladesh, with armed actions or otherwise, must

take place.

The proposed commission may be composed of three retired chief justices or justices of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, three retired freedom fighter general-officers of Bangladesh armed forces, three freedom fighters of 1971 from among general citizens, three former vice-presidents of the Supreme Court Bar and three eminent lawyers of international repute or of international human rights organisations recognised by the United Nations. The composition is also open to further thought and refinement.

Proposal number two is related to the government's decision-making process. I hope and pray that the present government will take the courageous step of addressing this issue of formally identifying the forces opposed to the Liberation War of 1971 and crimes committed by the opposition.

Should the government feel shy or diffident to touch the subject, then the government may refer the matter to the Bangladeshi/Bengali Nation through an independent referendum or referendum-cum-election. But the matter should, repeated should, be addressed. In particular I appeal to the armed forces of Bangladesh who are directly the professional descendants of freedom fighters.



Proposal number three relates to our media. In the absence of an elected parliament, the media needs to play this vital role that I am humbly suggesting. Let all the independent TV channels of Bangladesh organise discussions on the screen, to raise an awareness about war of liberation, the activities of the freedom fighters

and the activities of the anti-liberation forces in 1971 so that the people of Bangladesh can take a decision.

We have paid enough price for neglecting the subject, we want to pay no more.

Maj. Gen. (retired) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim, Bir Protik, is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

# Will history repeat itself?

**In Pakistan, the insurgents are Muslim nationalists. They are drawn mainly from Pashtun peasants, but they enjoy broad support among the peasants as well as the middle classes all over Pakistan. On the other side, about a fourth of the Pakistan army consists of Pashtuns; and mid- and low-ranking officers are middle-class in their origin and orientation. Only the top military brass identify firmly with the elites.**

M. SHAHID ALAM

IN January 2002, when President Bush named Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the first targets in his "global war against terror" -- the putative "axis of evil" -- few noticed a curious omission. Pakistan was not on the list. The targeted countries -- we were told -- sought weapons of mass destruction. In truth, Iraq and Iran were targeted because they stood in the way of Israeli ambitions -- and they had oil.

Although Pakistan has been unlucky in oil, it could make stronger claims as a target for American and Israeli ire. It is the only Muslim country with nuclear weapons, the Taliban's chief patron, and a sponsor of jihadis in Kashmir.

Why, then, did the US not target Pakistan?

Six years later, this question is not less pertinent: and for two reasons. After being stalled by the Iraqi resistance, US plans for war against Iran are again gathering steam. If Iran is such a tempting target, why not take a few potshots

at Pakistan also?

In addition, since their rout in Afghanistan, bands of Muslim extremists have found safe havens in Pakistan's northern districts, as well as Quetta and Karachi. More ominously, last July, the Taliban challenged the authority of the state in Pakistan's capital.

Yet, there has been little talk in Washington or Tel Aviv about adding Pakistan to the "axis of evil." This is the Pakistani paradox.

This paradox has a simple explanation. In Pakistan, the US had effected regime change without a change of regime. Almost overnight, following the attacks of 9-11, the US had drafted the Pakistani military to wage war against Muslim extremists. The US had gained an army; and Pakistan's military dictators had gained longevity.

Yet, could the Pakistani military deliver on its promise to fight the Taliban and Al-Qaida? At first, it appeared that it was succeeding. General Musharraf boasted that Pakistan had collected \$50 million

in exchange for extremists handed over to the US.

These losses, however, did not deter the extremists from regrouping; and before long they were attacking Nato forces in Afghanistan from bases inside Pakistan. As Nato casualties rose, the US ratcheted its pressure on Pakistan. And by August 2004, Pakistan had deployed 100,000 troops to guard its frontier with Afghanistan.

The extremists now began targeting Pakistani troops. In September 2006, in the face of rising losses, Pakistan pulled out its troops from Waziristan in return for a Taliban promise not to mount attacks from bases in Pakistan. It was an improbable truce. In reality, the Taliban had "liberated" Waziristan.

The US was unhappy about the truce. And with good reason: Taliban attacks in Afghanistan began to rise after the truce. Since then, US has been ratcheting its pressures on Pakistan to hunt down the extremists operating out

of bases along its northern frontier.

According to the Newsweek of Oct. 8, the Pentagon is now demanding that General



Musharraf "turn much of Pakistan's military into a counter-insurgency force, trained and equipped to combat Al-Qaeda and its extremist supporters along the Afghan border."

This Latin American approach to counter-insurgency is not likely to work in Pakistan. Their military juntas were firmly rooted in the elite and middle classes, set apart

Muslim nationalists. They are drawn mainly from Pashtun peasants, but they enjoy broad support among the peasants as well as the middle classes all over Pakistan.

from the leftist insurgents -- mostly Amerindians or Mestizos -- by both class and race. The tension between the adversaries in Latin America was firmly drawn.

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On the other side, about a fourth of the Pakistan army consists of Pashtuns; and mid- and low-ranking officers are middle-class in their origin and orientation. Only the top military brass identify

firmly with the elites.

In Pakistan, the boundary between the opposite camps is not as firmly drawn as in Latin America. As a result, as the Pakistan army escalates the war against its own people, this boundary has been shifting, shrinking the support base of the military elite.

If this is the irreversible dynamic behind the US-inspired counter-insurgency, it is unlikely that Pakistani elites can long sustain their decision to fight America's war against Muslim nationalists.

Recent events support this prognosis. As the military has escalated its offensive, its reputation has plummeted. Hundreds of soldiers have surrendered or, more likely, defected. General Musharraf has rescinded corruption cases against Benazir Bhutto to court her party; but this has eroded the standing of her party.

How is this "civil war" likely to end? In one scenario, at some point, an alliance of Muslim nationalists -- the fighters and their allies in the army and civil society -- will enforce their own regime change, and create an Islamist Pakistan.

This will end the civil war, but not Pakistan's troubles. Instantly, US and Israel will clamour for a regime change of the hard variety:

through covert operations, air strikes, invasions, and civil wars.

As these events unfold, the US may well decide to start a war against Iran. This can only advance the timetable for an Islamist take-over in Pakistan. When that happens, the US and Israel will be engaged in a major war along an Islamic arc stretching from Lebanon to Pakistan -- and perhaps beyond, to the north and the east.

Is this the "clash of civilizations" that the Neocons had advocated -- and have worked so hard to advance? Over the past century, the nations that initiated the two major wars eventually came to regret them. Is it likely that this history may repeat itself?

Once begun, the course of wars cannot always be foretold. Germany, Japan and Italy learned this lesson the hard way. With some wisdom, the US and Israel could learn this lesson the easy way -- from the mistakes of belligerent nations before. Even now, it may not be too late to take this lesson to heart, and avoid a major war that promises to be catastrophic for all sides.

M. Shahid Alam is Professor of Economics at Northeastern University, Boston. He is the author of *Challenging the New Orientalism* (North Haledon, NJ, 2007).

# Heroes of environment: Abul Hussam

**Dr. Hussam's innovative development of an arsenic filter to purify ground-water in Bangladesh, India and Nepal is an example that a solution can be found to have clean water if existing knowledge is applied judiciously and in an appropriate manner. It is understood that the center, which has the approval of the George Mason University, will also focus on identifying problems and solving sustainability issues without jeopardising the environment.**

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

IT was indeed an honour for the Bangladeshi scientist Abul Hussam and other important personalities that *Time* international magazine devoted a special issue to them for their contribution towards the solution of an environmental hazard. The title of this special issue is: "Heroes of environment."

Bryan Walsh, senior environment writer of the magazine commented: "there are those ready with solutions, like Abul Hussam, a Bangladeshi chemist, who found a simple, life-saving way to purify poisoned water," while the editor of the magazine, Michael Elliott, had this to say: "some of our heroes walk deserts and jungles; others do no less valuable work in corporate offices or university labs -- such as Abul Hussam whose SONO filter removes arsenic from drinking water."

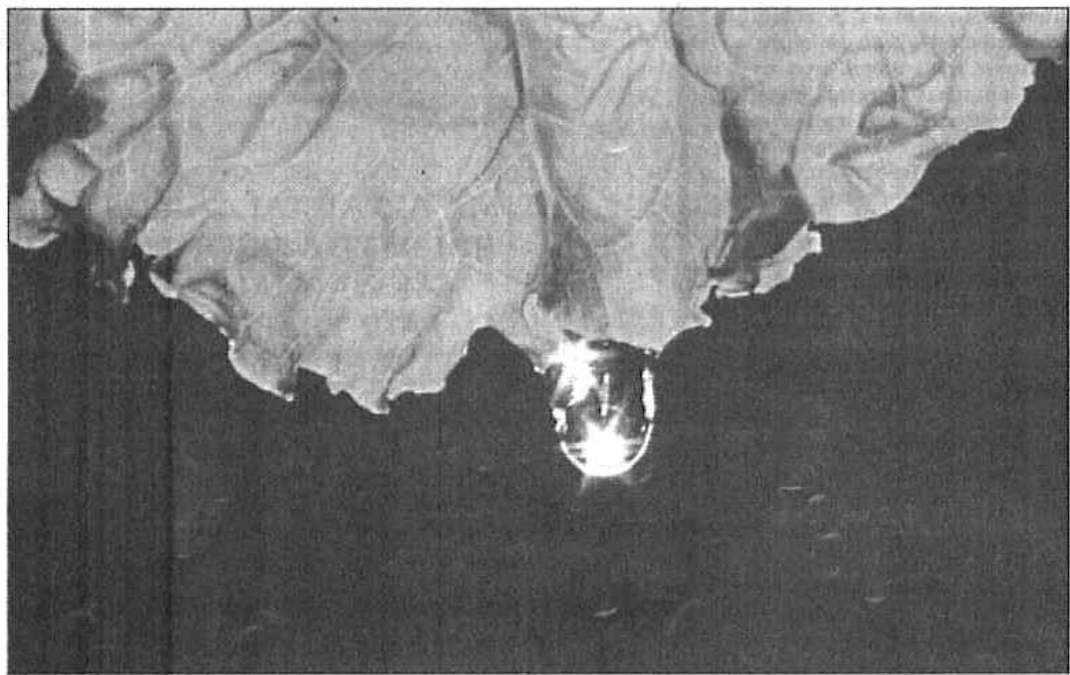
This special issue includes, among others, a contribution by

Al Gore, who received the Nobel Peace Prize this year for creating greater world-wide understand-

ing of the measures that need to be adopted to combat global warming. Mikhail Gorbachev, former

president of the Soviet Union, was credited by *Time* for transforming the closed and totalitarian Soviet society to democracy and openness, and creating greater ecological awareness.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was presented for spearheading a mission to reduce emission by at least 20 percent by 2020 by the European Union, and she also worked doggedly for the signing of the Kyoto protocol on climate change.



It is worthwhile to note that Abul Hussam was awarded the prestigious Grainer Challenge for Sustainability gold medal, and one million dollars, in February this year by the National Academy of Engineering of the United States for his innovative, inexpensive method of filtering arsenic from well-water.

It was preceded by the establishing of Abul Foundation by George Mason University in Virginia in honour of Professor Abul Hussam, who has been teaching chemistry in that university.

To start with, an amount of thirty thousand Dollars was invested in this foundation, which is designed to conduct research, development and dissemination of practical solutions to supply clean water to the needy people around the world. In most developed and developed countries arsenic contaminated water poses a serious health hazard. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure sustained supply of pure drinking water.

This Foundation will act as a nucleus body to raise funds from individual, institutional, and international donors to implement practical solutions to the clean water crisis. Arsenic, as one of the most serious natural pollutants in water, has been traveling without passport, and its removal

is a technical challenge. Clean water is fundamental to human existence. Without clean water, human beings will perish from this earth.

According to one statistic, 1.8 million children are embracing death every year due to water borne diseases; an estimated 500 million people are at risk of arsenicosis due to drinking arsenic contaminated waters for a long time, and about 25 million people in the United States alone are likely to be exposed to unsafe levels of arsenic from drinking water.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency has a list of six thousands contaminated arsenic sites, and the number could rise as the maximum contamination level of arsenic is lowered. One must remember that arsenic is just one toxic species; there are at least a dozen toxic species in water on the watch list. This is the reality in the present day world, and safe drinking water is the most important issue of our time.

Having this picture in mind, in addition to Abul Foundation, Professor Hussam has floated the idea of setting up a Center for Clean Water and Sustainable Technologies at George Mason University. The purpose of this new center will be to gather expertise and resources to address this

health hazard in a sustainable manner through the application of science and technology.

Clean water has become a global crisis. Therefore, the center will focus on ways and means to obtain clean water through "a process of measurement, characterisation, and mitigation method developments."

Dr. Hussam's innovative development of an arsenic filter to purify ground-water in Bangladesh, India and Nepal is an example that a solution can be found to have clean water if existing knowledge is applied judiciously and in an appropriate manner. It is understood that the center, which has the approval of the George Mason University, will also focus on identifying problems and solving sustainability issues without jeopardising the environment.

The expenditure for this project will be borne by George Mason University, which has committed a contribution of two hundred twenty two thousand Dollars initially. Funds will also be available from the College of Science. The center has a plan to offer an education component to train budding scientists and researchers on the techniques of evolving means of filtering arsenic contaminated water to save millions of people around the world.

The Abul Foundation will carry

out research work in collaboration with George Mason University. The research and development under this center will reach out to the public and scientific institutes through research journals. Another interesting development is the inclusion of the journal of Environmental Science and Health. This internationally reputed journal will be published under the banner of this center.

Presently it is published by the Chemistry and Bio-Chemistry Departments of George Mason University. This prestigious journal is widely read, and is distributed to more than one hundred countries. Dr. Shahamat Khan, one of the world's authorities on persistent pollutants, is the editor of this journal.

Dr. Hussam is the director of this new center. For the people who are affected by drinking arsenic contaminated waters, the Abul Foundation and Center for Clean Water and Sustainable Technologies will offer hope for a bright future. This is a project of Dr. Abul Hussam about which the people of Bangladesh should feel proud indeed. The center will promote excellence and undoubtedly promote the image of the College of Science and George Mason University.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, former Bangladesh diplomat, writes from Virginia.