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Return of a valiant son

As a Bangladeshi living abroad for years, I feel tremendous pride in the efforts taken by the current rulers of Bangladesh to bring back the remains of one of our valiant sons. Unfortunately, this should

have been done years ago by the previous regimes, especially the ones who claim monopoly over the liberation war. However, better late than never. We salute Sepoy Hamidur Rahman and

should express our gratitude to these forgotten sons of our land for their supreme sacrifice. Javed Iqbal Philadelphia Pennsylvania USA

Killing of intellectuals

I would like to share with your readers a poignant moment in my life, one that has left deep scars and now a deeper understanding of 1971. My story should leave no one in doubt (detractors please note) that the struggle in 1971 was indeed a struggle to liberate our soil from colonial forces bent on destroying our Bengali culture and heritage. I was an eyewitness to the horrific manifestations of an ideology, which was racist and violent in nature. It would stop at nothing to perpetuate the communal bias of the Pakistani ruling classes and its armed hordes. It didn't matter that the majority in East Pakistan were Muslims- what really mattered was that the Bengalis must never be allowed to be the managers of the state of Pakistan.

I was an eight grader in 1971 barely mature to comprehend the dynamics of 1971. We lived in Purana Paltan in an apartment complex that also housed several journalists. Our neighbours were Ladu Bhai (S.A. Mannan), Mohammed Akhter, Sayed Kamaluddin, Mr. Karim and Mufazzal Bhai. The fact that Purana Paltan was in close proximity to all the newspaper offices in Motijheel was a primary consideration for these journalists to live there. We had the good fortune to be exposed to foreign newspapers and my father enjoyed the complimentary access to local news, which some of these journalists provided.

I shall dwell upon my brief acquaintance with Ladu Bhai and Akhter Shaheb. He lived on the first floor and worked for a woman's weekly, no longer in circulation, and was called Lolona. He was a bachelor and hailed from Tangail. Ladu Bhai was originally from West Bengal and worked as sports editor for The Pakistan Observer. Since Ladu Bhai lived with his mother, sister, and two brothers, we met more often socially. He was unmarried.

Ladu Bhai was the quintessential gentleman and an avid soccer fan. Always dressed immaculately, Ladu Bhai never missed a smile whenever we crossed path. During winters he put on designed neck scarves and bright sports coats that essentially reflected his sports persona. He was extremely caring towards his mother, sister and the brothers. Ladu Bhai seemed apolitical and was really focused on sports. Akhter Shaheb, on the other hand, probably engaged in socio political discourse as his apartment had lots of visitors including

feminists, poets and writers. He had a rich collection of foreign journals and books. As a young man with the urge to learn I was always welcome to enjoy this privilege, the afternoons were the best time to visit him.

Around 12 December, early morning, several masked men armed with small firearms asked the darwan to open the collapsible gates to our apartments. All the residents were ordered to report and assemble on the ground floor. It was like the Nazis herding up all the Jews. We stood quietly in the cramped corridor, can't remember how many of us were there but it certainly was crowded. The murderers came prepared reading out names from a list. Mufazzal Shaheb, Ladu Bhai, and Akhter Shaheb were asked to leave the premises and to wait outside. Tara Bhai and my uncle, Sayed Kamaluddin, sensing imminent danger had exit plans which they put to use a couple of days earlier. Mufazzal Shaheb somehow managed to convince the executioners that he wasn't a journalist and was merely a press operator. Akhter Shaheb was wearing a silver Burmese Lungi and I can't exactly remember Ladu Bhai's attire.

If memory serves me correctly sometime in early morning of 17th the entire city was abuzz with the findings in Rayer Bazar. We arranged a ride immediately in Saleem Bhai's car (a neighbor). Soon we reached Rayer Bazar and walked into a shameful and brutal legacy of the defeated army. The bloated bodies of several men and that of Ms. Selina (a journalist) were either in the knee-deep waters of the brickfield or on the surface. It was a ghastly scene, one etched in my mind forever.

As I was little, I needed help to negotiate my way to the bottom of the brickfield. Several people were busy trying to recover Dr. Fazle Rabbi's decomposed body from the bottom. He was our family physician and had a practice in Baitul Mukarram. I positioned myself on top of some bricks making sure not to step in to the water, a subconscious act not to disturb the sanctity of the open grave.

I didn't quite expect to find Ladu Bhai and Akhter Shaheb in Rayer Bazar and was hoping they would come home soon. Sadly it soon transpired that I was wrong. There they were in a far corner mercilessly bayoneted all over the body just as they had done to Ms. Selina. I had some difficulty trying to recognize Akhter Shaheb but the

silver lungi gave him away. We gathered around them for some time. It suddenly dawned on me that that there was a duty to inform. But honestly I don't remember what happened next as in most bad dreams. Unfortunately the passing of Ladu Bhai and Akhter Shaheb wasn't a bad dream. It was a tragedy, which unfolded on our soil in 1971, and the local perpetrators now seem to suffer from dementia. Shaheen Subhan Simpson Mill Lane Duluth, GA

Seminar on 1971 genocide

On a cold rainy Sunday afternoon (9 Dec 2007) we the Bangladeshi expatriates in New Jersey and surrounding areas were presented with an excellent retrospective on the genocide in our Motherland committed by the Pakistani occupation forces and their local Bengalee collaborators in 1971. This seminar and exhibit under the auspices of the Department of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Kean University was largely the work of a few young people of Bangladeshi origin at Kean (who were born at least a generation after 1971) supported by a professor of English, Dr. Bernard Weinstein. The seminar was preceded by a moving exhibit of rare photographs painstakingly collected from scattered sources around the world. This well attended seminar started with a moment of silence for the three million martyrs due to whose sacrifice Bangladesh is now a free country and a short film documenting the history of the Liberation War. It was addressed by Dr. Farahi, President of Kean University, Dr. Rounaq Jahan of Columbia University and a number of scholars, freedom fighters and noted personalities. The highlight of the seminar was a segment consisting of short talks by family members of genocide victims and survivors of the genocide. Every participant at this seminar (who came from various parts of the USA) left the auditorium with a strong feeling that as civilized humans we must make every effort to ensure that a genocide of the likes of what happened in Bangladesh must not be allowed to happen ever again.

As a person who lived through 1971 as a teenager in Dhaka, having dodged death at the hands of the Pakistani soldiers more than once, I have been progressively disheart-

ened by the rewriting of the history of our Liberation War and the systematic rehabilitation and rewarding of the war criminals and razakars over the last thirty-six years. Having seen the level of awareness of our new generation living half a world away from our Motherland and their effort to highlight and disseminate to the world our glorious history using the most powerful tools available today, I feel comfort in the thought that the sacrifices of our brothers and sisters have not gone in vain.

Victory for Bangladesh!
Dibosh Rajani
New Jersey, USA

A fresh start

We will never move forward as a nation (even after 36 years) until or unless every single rajakar still living amongst us is brought to justice, including those who until very recently occupied seats of power. I understand that "to forgive is divine" but we do need a fresh start very badly and the only possible way we can continue our journey as a nation is to make these people face the music which they thoroughly deserve. We cannot continually live with this wound in our hearts. The genocide of our people in 1971 is officially ranked second only to the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews during the Second World War. How can we pass another day without batting an eyelid?

It's never too late to get our act together and close this chapter in our nation's history as there are many other pressing issues to deal with. The CTG has the golden opportunity to do what the AL, BNP and JP governments failed to. However, will common sense prevail once and for all in Bangladesh? This may just be a mute question.

This quotation by Bruno Jasienski just happened to spring to mind while I was writing this letter:

"Do not fear your enemies. The worst they can do is kill you. Do not fear your friends. At worst, they may betray you. Fear those who do not care; they neither kill nor betray, but betrayal and murder exist because of their silent consent".

Yamin Ibrahim
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

A freedom fighter's son

My father SM Momtazur Rahman was brutally killed on 27 November 1971. My mother did not get her husband's body. My mother has passed 36 years since 1971. I was the youngest of her five sons- one year old at that time. My elder brother was eighteen only. Now he is a professor of sociology at Rajshahi University. After a long time, I am thinking about my helpless father who sacrificed his life for the country silently, vigorously but his name was not enrolled as a freedom fighter in the list of freedom fighters prepared by the government. My father's offence?

He was a honest and free-thinking teacher. He loved his country. We do not know, even after 36 years, how my father was killed and where he was buried. Once, I thought, when I was a student of university and competed for BCS exams, if I had a certificate (like my many friends who are now govt service holders as their fathers were certified freedom fighters). Mahbub Momtaz Lecturer Tejgan College Dhaka

Trial of war criminals

In relation to Mr Moinul Chowdhury's analysis of my previous letter, I feel it is necessary to say a few things. Firstly, I would say that Mr. Chowdhury is not listening to the Law Adviser. He has given all the answers Mr Chowdhury requires. I would also suggest the CTG to take action against the previous ruling parties for not taking any action against the anti-liberation forces. I totally agree with the Law Adviser in saying that no individual has a right to file a case of treason against any citizen of Bangladesh.

I still believe the caretaker government's top priority is to try those corrupt politicians and bureaucrats who made enormous wealth out of people's misery making my country nearly bankrupt. How a sensible and patriotic person can ignore the fact that the country has been looted by a few people in the name of politics. I love my country more than anybody else and I will go on about it because I feel I am robbed in a sense that I contribute to my country's economy too. The whole world is stunned to see the scale of corruption in Bangladesh. All in the name of politics. If politics sucks the blood of poor people of my beloved country instead of their betterment, I do not need that politics. If politicians only think about themselves amassing huge wealth through unfair means I do not need those politicians. If political parties politicise all the institutions of my country I do not need those political parties either.

Finally, I would request all sensible and peace-loving citizens of Bangladesh to come forward with a view to rooting out corruption. It is such a debilitating disease in our country that we cannot move forward without eradicating it. The government is trying its best to unmask those corrupt enemies of the land but we should not be sitting down as idle spectators. We need to be proactive and eyes and ears of the law enforcing agencies. We, as a nation, deserve some respect in world stage rather than a part of the league table of the most corrupt countries in the world. Democracy and rule of law will remain a far cry unless and until we eradicate poverty as well as corruption.

M Ferdaus Mashud
London, UK

Mr. Moinul Chowdhury is right in his assertion (Dec:7) that the anti-liberation forces have to be tried; and the necessary government permission as pointed out in the dailies on 7 December, that citizens have no right to bring sedition cases, needs to be given legal cover.

Such razakars and anti-liberation activists were not tried possibly for Sheikh Mujib's misplaced magnanimity. Also those were troubled times; our country had to be reorganised from scratch; and there were more critical issues that needed priority. Subsequently, however, after the heinous murder of the father of the nation, there was a period of total instability as coup followed coup. I am sure the anti-liberation activists took full advantage of the prevailing circumstances which were confusing, to say the least!

For this in my opinion the BNP has more to explain than the AL. President Zia allowed the ex-Razakars, murderers of the father of the nation, and all types of anti-liberation forces to be politically rehabilitated to strengthen his hold on politics! Shamefully, that is the true history of the birth of the BNP. Now all are clamouring for the CTG to do what they never did, when they were in power, because they

used these ex-razakars to satisfy their personal greed and ambitions. It is shameful that subsequently even the AL also veered away from taking on the anti-liberation forces! They were more focussed on bringing Sheikh Mujib's killer to justice which was and is never the BNP's objective! One can only wonder why.

I however believe that the trial of Sheikh Mujib's killers and razakars and identified and known anti-liberation activists must be started, if we want to leave a proper legacy for posterity!

S.A.Mansoor
One-mail

I wasn't in the days of 1971. But reading the journals and books I have developed some ideas which I want to share. Today there is a debate on the war criminals and their trial. Let's see through it.

See, human psychology is a complicated thing. Different people see things differently. The same matter can seem blasphemous to someone, and to someone it may seem right. While some people

the Jamaat, but also in other political parties. Without their help and support the Jamaat couldn't have been so rich and powerful today. Today they disobey the motherland and openly claim that there was no war, there was no war criminal." If there was no war criminals, then who are you guys?" I ask.

The most intolerable fact is that the war criminals never seemed to have been sorry for their shameful position in 1971, they never seem to repent.

Instead of being apologetic, today the war criminals tend to dishonour the sovereignty of the country.

War criminals, no matter who they are, should not be spared. Many of the war criminals are in good position today. Many have been ministers, MPs; they own luxurious houses and cars. They live better lives than many fellow Bangladeshis, better lives than many freedom fighters!

In the name of forgiveness, we can't dishonour our great Liberation War.

Cantara Wali Ruhi
Dhaka



treat a way to be the only option, some may think there might be other ways left.

I am trying to be reasonable, and thoughtful. I'm trying to think with an open mind.

Some elderly people in the pre-liberation days may have thought that it was better if the country was not divided. Some supported this view explicitly, while some did so implicitly.

At that time people had strong and opinionated and constructive discussion at the offices, houses, tea-stalls ...and where not despite the adverse political situation, and the topic was only the liberation war. But when the reasonable and patriots saw the brutality of the Pakistani army on the night of 25th March, their hearts were filled with hate and anger toward the Pakistanis and they changed their mind. But not all.

Many actively disapproved the liberation war and became rajakars. They along with the Pakistanis started murdering the fellow Bangladeshis. They were betrayers, leaving the country and the countrymen apart, they associated themselves with the enemies. They did this for their own betterment, for security, to be trusted by the Pak Army, for a bright future if Pakistan had won at last.... The main thing is, "they wanted to be benefited". They're still trying to be benefited.

Yes, there are war criminals not only in

We had so many elected governments through elections, but no government could establish order in social life and the political arena. The outcome of the corrupt practices is the existing pitiful situation in the country.

The caretaker government headed by Fakhruddin Ahmed is trying to bring back an orderly situation in the administration and judiciary and also public safety and social order in addition to leading the nation to the next general polls.

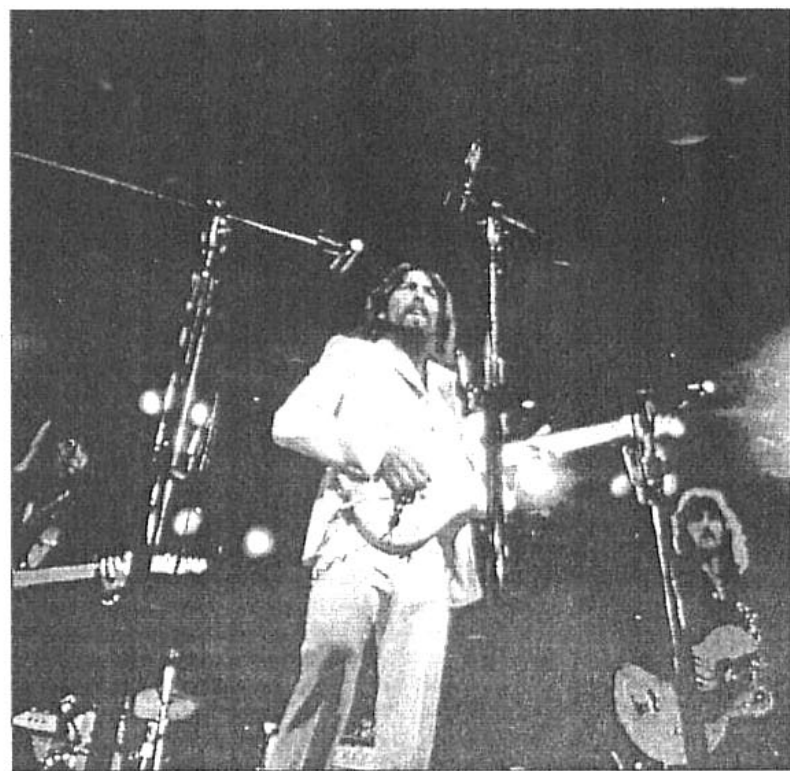
The present government is not only trying to eliminate bad practices but also trying to punish those responsible for it. We are looking forward to a peaceful atmosphere in the country.

Except those whose interest is being hurt by the activities of the present government, the people in general have confidence in the present government. But it cannot be denied that sometimes some advisers tend to ignore the public interest. The Law Adviser talked to journalists about the issue of bringing war criminals to justice and cited the limitations of the government, saying that these are complicated matters. He also questioned why the matter had not been settled in the last 36 years.

It seems the CTG is reluctant to hold trial of the war criminals.

Nur Miah, One-mail

Concert for Bangladesh



Two issues remain to be addressed for successful conclusion of our independence struggle. One issue, the trial of war criminals, has been discussed a lot in recent times. We, as a nation, owe it to the persons who gave their lives to free us, to the children who were denied their parents' love, to the parents whose dreams about their children never materialized, to the mothers and sisters who were violated by the criminals and to our next generation. Another issue is to express our gratitude and recognise persons, who supported and contributed tremendously to our freedom struggle. Of many such people, I will mention two who had enormous contribution in bringing our struggle to the attention of the world. Music maestro Ravi Shankar along with George Harrison of the Beatles had such a tremendous contribution in bringing the tragic Bangladesh situation in front of the western world through CONCERT FOR

BANGLADESH in Madison Square Garden, NY on August 1, 1971. We as a nation failed to give them due honour. I feel very sad that we will never be able to show our gratitude to George Harrison as he died in November 2001. His widow recently contributed half a million dollar for the children of Bangladesh and drew world's attention to the recent disaster. I hope it is not too late to honour Ravi Shankar as he is also not in very good health though still performing once or twice a year. It would be a tremendous expression of our gratitude to invite Ravi Shankar and the widow of George Harrison to Bangladesh and honour them, may be on the occasion of our next Independence Day celebrations. An ungrateful nation will forever carry the burden of guilt and unclear conscience.

Iqbal Mahmood
One-mail