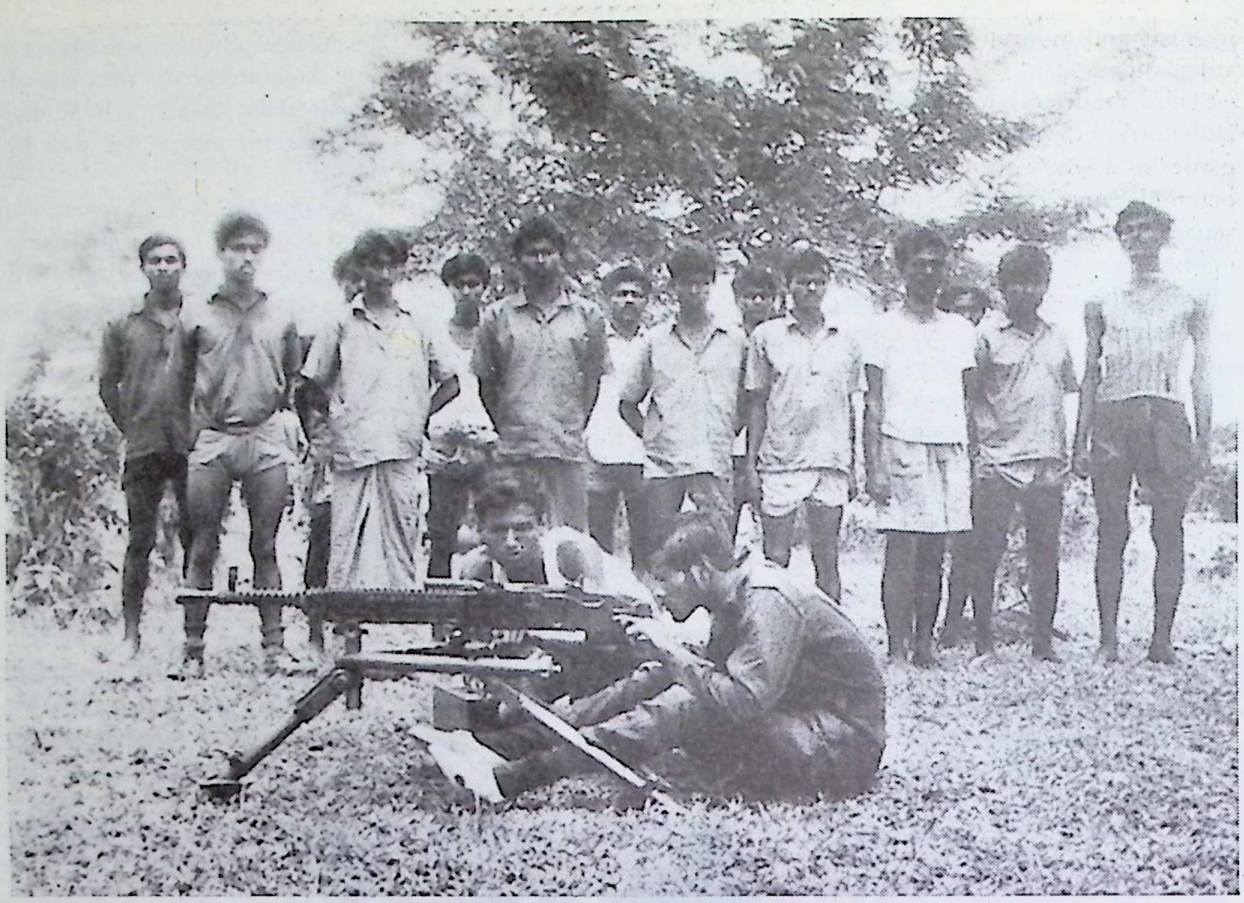


poor man's war, continues to be largely a poor man's burden.

Finally, the pragmatists' focus on the present is interesting because it

We do not have to look very far. The critical decision to forgive collaborators and include them in mainstream politics has, after three decades, come to haunt us. The choice of not dealing with the past, combined with other realities in the domestic and international front, is breeding the challenges for today. Our desperate desire to compartmentalise and fragment our own history has meant we now have a serious problem to deal with, and in so many ways, so inadequately prepared to contend. This is one of the many legacies of 1971. These are the many prices we pay.

Forgive, forget, move on and reconcile within our own selves, the horrors we witnessed and the scars we bear, not just as survivors, but as a nation, that has been systematically denied its right to a continued, comprehensive history of its emancipation. Implicit in this call to forget, is the message that it is not yet time. Perhaps, according to some camps, a transitional society, with a weak, non-existent rule of law and a host of post conflict reconstruction challenges can offer this argument (although in some cases as in Rwanda, Bosnia, East Timor, Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the need to address justice has gone hand in hand with the necessity to deliver peace).

The question is, does this message apply to Bangladesh? Has this period of waiting -- thirty seven years of waiting with hope and resigning with despair -- been a sufficient period of time to hold out for demands for accountability? How much longer should a nation have to wait for deliverance, or at least an acknowledgement of their demands? Can the pragmatist look survivors in the eye and tell them what they mean by the "right" time and when it will come?

Is there ever a good time, a right time, to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide? Does waiting, and biding for the ideal moment to try systematic rape, torture, destruction of villages, slaughtering of civilians, massacre of intellectuals, forcing women to have children born of sexual violence, make the issue of seeking justice any easier?

Waiting for the right moment can perhaps only mean one substantive reality -- the loss of more eyewitnesses, the loss of momentum in creating documentation for trials and truth commissions, and a continued fostering of a sense of resignation of survivors that the state will never hear their voices, because they were never important.

Tazreena Sajjad *worked in transitional justice and the rule of law in Afghanistan and is a member of the Drishtipat Writers' Collective.*