

The rebel poet

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M. MIZANUR RAHMAN

IT is our privilege that Kazi Nazrul Islam was made the national poet of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Nazrul's song *Chal-Chal-Chal Urdu Gogoney Bajey Madol* was adopted as the national military song of Bangladesh.

On December 15, 1929, Kazi Nazrul Islam was given a rousing reception led by the noted Bengali scientist Acharya Profulla Chandra Ray, an eminent litterateur S. Wazed Ali, and the legendary commander-in-chief of the Indian National Army, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at Calcutta Albert Hall, and was declared as our "National Poet." That was the time when the people of India were struggling for independence from imperialist ruler. Nazrul was fighting against the rulers vehemently through his rebellious poems and songs, but he always professed humanism against tyranny and misuse.

In 1971, our patriotic freedom-fighters were inspired and invigorated by Nazrul's rebellious poems and songs during the war of liberation. Nazrul's inspiring patriotic poems and songs speak up against all sorts of tyrants and exploiters of the people.

After the independence of Bangladesh, most governments came to power with the solemn promise to give succor to the impoverished and war-torn people of Bangladesh, and to root out all evils in society to make it a corruption-

free and exploitation-free state. But people's sufferings increased to a great extent. Those people in power could hardly check the temptation of receiving kick-backs from different sources, whereas the people suffered in all respects. Bangladesh topped the list in the state of corruption as well as being a least developed country.

Kazi Nazrul Islam had lashed those impostors long ago in his poem *Raja-Proja* (king and subjects):

"Friends, this is what happens. The people fought the enemies and came out victorious But the victory was declared in the name of the king!

The people used to procure provisions, remunerations and uniforms

For government employees But they are not the employees of the people,

They are the employees of the king!

Oh what a farce of justice! We have to salute our paid servants!

Oh look here, look here at the face of 'The Public Servants'!

Turn the wheel of the time, One and a half crore thieves ride on the shoulders of one and a half crore human beings!..."

But Nazrul never gave up hope. He said:

"Not to be disappointed, yet we are hoping for the day that is not so far away when the voice of the king would let us hear the victory of the

subjects!" (Sarbohara, Raja-Proja, p.19, 3rd edition, Calcutta.)

Of course, this poem was composed to portray the behaviour of the alien British Raj and its government servants.

Till now, in political processions, Nazrul's voice is echoed in chorus. Every citizen of a sovereign country must have his/her social, political as well as economic rights. The people without human rights are said to be no less than slaves. Nazrul raised his mighty voice against such slavery. He dreamt of free Bangladesh. While appreciating the freedom fighters he said: "Till today the sons of Bengal are sacrificing their lives for freedom with extreme courage and determination that would be written in history in golden letters." And he advised us: "Teach these ideals to the Bengalis and their children:

"Ours is sacred Bangladesh -- this is for the Bengalis. We will beat down and expel all the alien thieves and robbers, we don't fear..." (Navayoug, 3 Baisakh, 1349BS).

Moreover, Nazrul wanted those dedicated patriotic souls to engage themselves in building the nation, with dignity of labour and justice and fair-play, and to be above all temptation and allurements. *"Those people whose entire hearts and souls are wetted with love of the soil,*

The rudder of the vessel of this earth would remain under their control."

We should always remember our

national poet who prayed: "Give us strength and courage and tolerance

And give us heart, O God! Give life to the dead, put infinite strength and courage

In those fearing hearts, O God, the Omnipotent.

Give us health, give us longevity With ever fresh light and air, And make our free mind, and give

us accurate knowledge, O God, the Omnipotent.

Give us divine grace in our body, Give us bliss, and peace at home

always,

Give us virtue of sacred love And welfare-oriented devotion

So that we can keep our head aloft And remain straight beyond any

fear of proscription.

Whatever we want, we must earn it by our labour

But not by drawing gifts or begging alms from anywhere,

O God, the Omnipotent."

Thus, our national poet Nazrul

became the symbol of love, beauty, truth and welfare of all. He had given us proper way to come forward towards working for the benefit of the people, where the each individual must have his/her due share.

One must not get involved in any activity that is detrimental to the national cause. Rather anything that goes against the interests of the country must be removed to improve the state of a nation. We must pay proper respect to our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. His words are beneficial to our national cause and must be given due value.

A nation that does not pay proper respect to its national poet must fail to achieve its ends. So, against the backdrop of social, political and economic perspective

of Bangladesh the importance of the national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam is immense.

Not fear or frustration, but the practice of love and amity between people is much more effective. The principles of justice and fair-play would do a lot to eradicate the root cause of corruption from the body of the nation which is affected thoroughly.

Our national poet, who taught us ideals akin to ideals of Islamic equality, seems to be the panacea.

"None is high or low, all men (and women) are equal, And none is either king or subject of anyone."

We all share happiness and sorrow equally. None

Has the right to hoard. Would some shed tears

To put light on to another's room to enlighten the fate

Of the few keeping the millions remained ill-fated?

It is not the law of Islam."

Nazrul had his humanity in the light of Islamic liberalism. He had profound faith in Islam. "Love for humans is the best prayer of Allah." He said: "When you do not expect sorrow, pain, torment and indignity for yourself, you must not wish them for your brothers. Do not take your meal keeping your neighbours starving."

We cannot avoid our duty and responsibility by only observing the birth and death anniversaries of our national poet, because we cannot evaluate him this way. He must be brought to the fore of the national importance in social, political and economic perspectives, so that in words and deeds every individual of the nation becomes inspired with his ideals. In memory of the poet, let our all welfare-oriented works speed up.



"I sing of equality-that there is no great and magnanimous thing than the human.

Irrespective of countries, nations, and faiths,

He exists as the relative of the human beings in each and every abode

For all times for all countries..."

This "He" is the great creator of all in this universe. He is never anyone's monopoly.

"He" is divine truth and beauty of Nazrul. The poet was confident in the divinity of the existence of this beauty in himself. Our every movement is fulfilled with the existence of that divine beautiful relative Person. Therefore, we should not fall in the trap of the devil Satan.

Nazrul did never believe in distinctions between human beings on the perception based on different faiths. That is why the language of his poems and songs of equality speak of humanity.

"Ising of equality, Where every barrier has been shattered and converged in oneness.

Where Hindu-Buddhis-Muslim-Christian converged in oneness.

O stupid, O foolish and weak-minded person,

Learn truth which is greater than scriptures.

Nothing sort of Kaba-Mandeer is better than this (Human) heart..."

In the poem "God" Nazrul said: *"He is revealed in everything everywhere among everyone*

Having seen me I came to know of my Creator."

For Khaled of Islam, Nazrul composed the poem "Khaled" in which he reproached the bigots who stand on the way to progress.

"When the world is on the progressive way,

We are sitting still researching The Feka and the Hadith for edict Of divorcing wife."

From this it is evident that where hypocrisy prevailed in the name of

religion, falsehood raises its head against truth and beauty. Nazrul is there in his rebellious mood to stamp out the liars and hypocritical bigots in order to save the nation. He sang for everyone's welfare for waking up the people with rejuvenation, expecting great and prosperous future for coming generations.

"Let's have victory to peace, victory to equality,

Victory to truth -- let's have that victory.

Let all evils, all torments, all disturbances,

All persecutions, all cowardliness, falsehood

And frustrations wipe out. Let all wants,

Diseases, sorrows and unnecessary hatred go.

Let's win victory over death gaining immortality.

Let the weak become strong and fearless.

There shall not be any disorder in this orderly life.

Let the prison be shattered, let's cross the persecuted

World of desert barriers, and let this world become sweet

And fully of love. Let's have victory, victory and victory only."

And with this end in view let us have our Bangladesh free from all evils like corruption, falsehood, hypocrisy, and superstition, and let us win the victory for the well-being and happiness of the people of Bangladesh by implementing the ideals of Nazrul, appreciating him truly as our beloved national poet.

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Looking beyond election

Please clean the Augean stable of corruption from the body politic of this country once for all. Remove the cancerous growth of black money and muscle power from our national politics. Restore politics as a noble profession for men and women of honour and dignity to serve the people and the country. Send politics, which degenerated over the years in this country as a lucrative business for making personal fortunes, packing, together with businessmen-politicians, to the museum.

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

WITH the arrests of Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia there should not have been any doubt in any quarter, especially among the detractors of this caretaker government, that the government will not waver in its resolve to cleanse politics from the garbage of crime and corruption -- the twin banes of this nation.

The latest round of high profile arrests of Moulaana Motiur Rahman Nizami and other BNP stalwarts in the notorious Gatco Graft Case should put to rest any thoughts that the government can be derailed from its principled stand on bringing those who have plundered and looted our state wealth and property to justice.

This caretaker government is different from previous caretaker governments. It is unique in the sense that it is focused not only on holding a credible, fair and free parliamentary election but also on what is to follow beyond the election. It wants to see a viable and sustainable democratic system of governance emerging in this country following the election.

This is why it has taken upon itself the task of undertaking genuine essential democratic reforms of the political system. This is why a drive has been launched against crime and corruption.

Taking to the streets and creating a law and order situation through violent political agitations, which both BNP and AL are good at, will not succeed this time around with most of their tainted leaders in jail. Let good sense prevail on all those who are nursing wishful thinking that mass agitation and protest can force this government to release Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia and withdraw the cases of corruption against them.

You can launch a movement and succeed only if the cause you are fighting for is just and legitimate. Let there be no doubt that neither Sheikh Hasina nor Khaleda Zia is a political detainee. They have been arrested on specific charges of corruption, and their release may jeopardise the process of trial and justice.

Unfortunately, the two venerable ladies who have shaped our politics as it is, or whom politics has shaped into what they are, over the last three decades or so have been so involved

in corruption and wrongdoings that it is difficult to believe that an elected head of a government could harm the interest of his or her country to the extent that they have.

Ministers, members of parliament, ruling party activists, government officials, and even low-level employees in sensitive posts, made money and grabbed land and property with both hands. You could cause bomb blasts and kill innocent people at will, and there would be nobody to catch you because you enjoyed the blessings of the powers that be.

You could term it a golden age of crime and corruption. Imagine a Dhaka Electric Supply Authority clerk owning property worth Taka four hundred million. One could easily guess how fabulously rich have become our corrupt "Sirs" and "Madams." Politics changed their lifestyles. Money was no problem for them.

They would go to UK, US, Singapore, Thailand and Saudi Arabia for routine medical check-ups and for medical treatment of their minor ailments. They would go on pilgrimage to Mecca every year. They would not miss the opportunity of performing Umrah during

the holy month of Ramzan. These are the people who have trampled democracy and good governance under their feet, and have brought the country to such a pass. These are the people the ACC has caught in its dragnet. These are the people we need to keep away from politics if the election is to be meaningful in that it ushers in genuine and sustainable democracy.

Let us not be emotional as a nation. It is not Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who is standing in the dock charged with corruption. And it is not Khaleda Zia, the widow of Zia ur Rahman, who stands indicted with corruption charges. It is Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, two former prime ministers of this country, who stand indicted.

A word about the much-touted dialogue with the political parties. Those who have not practiced



Is their future as bright as their smiles?

democracy within their own parties, and have done little to democratise their parties so far, are unlikely to agree to any meaningful democratic reforms the government is contemplating.

It is good to have a consensus on essential political reforms. But it does not mean that there will be no reforms just because Party A or Party B does not like it. What is good for the greater majority of the people and the country has to be done, no matter what people of a particular party or parties may say to the contrary.

In this light, it is suggested that the government also engage members of the civil society, academics, members of various professional groups, prominent citizens, media personalities etc. in dialogue, and ascertain their views and suggestions on how and where reforms need to be undertaken.

Chief Advisor Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed and his cabinet colleagues,

with the support of the judiciary, the armed forces, the civil administration, the police, the ACC, the EC, the intelligence agencies and all other state stakeholders including the media and civil society etc., have done many a laudable work so far considering the enormity of the challenges involved and the paucity of time at their disposal.

As a citizen who has seen the birth pangs of this new nation and now in the twilight of life, I appeal to the government not to be deterred by any threat of street violence and political agitation by the followers of those very people who ruled this country as if it were their family property.

Please clean the Augean stable of corruption from the body politic of this country once for all. Remove the cancerous growth of black money and muscle power from our national politics. Restore politics as a noble profession for men and women of honour and dignity to serve the people and the country. Send politics, which degenerated over the years in this country as a lucrative business for making personal fortunes, packing, together with businessmen-politicians, to the museum.

God has given us the opportunity to save the nation from wayward politicians. Such an opportunity seldom come in a nation's life, and there glows a light at the end of the tunnel. Let us move along the road to real democracy and a truly people's welfare state.

Bin Geng Shamsuddin Ahmed (Retd) is a former military secretary to the president of Bangladesh.

Walk away

As the card shark in "The Gambler" concludes, the United States is now "plain out of aces." To save its weak hand it needs to know that the time has come to walk away from the deal and let the chips fall as they may.

SUMIT GANGULY

KENNY Rogers, one of country music's icons, has a line in the song "The Gambler" in which a card shark tells a greenhorn that he needs to "know when to walk away and know when to run." This piece of homespun wisdom may or may not have much value for poker players. However, in the game of international politics, where the stakes are considerably higher, it is invaluable advice. As the Bush administration enters the high noon of its negotiations with India over a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement designed to end India's decades-long nuclear isolation -- a result of unwillingness to sign the

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) -- the United States needs to heed the gambler's admonition.

After carefully negotiating the civilian nuclear deal with India over the past three years and after having shepherded the appropriate domestic legislation through Congress, the administration justly fears that the deal may collapse in India's fractious parliament. To save the day, key administration officials and a handful of critical congressional supporters have publicly urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Congress Party-led coalition government to swiftly conclude its internal deliberations as well as its ongoing discussions with the International Atomic Energy

Agency. Though entirely well-meaning, these efforts have had exactly the opposite effect within India.

India's two communist parties, quite predictably, were hostile toward the deal from the outset. They correctly feared that the agreement, if concluded, would end India's long diplomatic estrangement from the United States and result in closer Indo-US. strategic ties. In attempts to torpedo the agreement they raised every possible bogey about it, arguing that it would curb India's political autonomy, that it would do little to alleviate India's chronic energy woes and that it would leave the country vulnerable to American economic

clout. The agreement also faced specious attacks from the right-of-center Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which claimed that it would hamstring India's ongoing nuclear weapons program.

The government sought to allay the misgivings of its communist allies in parliament and attempted to publicly refute the BJP's dubious charges. However, it adopted too conciliatory a posture toward the communists and failed to bluntly refute the BJP's questionable claims. As a consequence it faced growing public skepticism about the deal, and it became increasingly mired in the vortex of India's rough-and-tumble politics. Sensing that the agreement was running into increasing opposition, whether ideological or opportunistic, the United States started to openly lean on Singh and the Congress Party to ensure that the process did not entirely stall. Sadly, that effort only

helped generate a counterpush from the communists, who now found a new target to attack. They promptly asserted that the assiduous American quest to consummate the deal cloaked a more insidious agenda -- obviously the United States had far more to gain from the agreement than India.


Confronted with this new line of attack, and looking toward a national election next year, some members of the Congress Party have started to fret about the wisdom of trying to wrap up the deal.

Under these delicate circumstances, any further public declarations on the part of the Bush administration and its small band of congressional allies are only likely to further undermine the deal's fragile prospects of passage. Instead the administration should declare a victory of sorts: it successfully negotiated the terms of the deal with India, helped pass appropriate

domestic legislation and was prepared to take the final step with the requisite international bodies to enable India to participate in global nuclear commerce. Only the intransigence and cupidity at the two ends of India's political spectrum have placed the deal in serious jeopardy. The only way out of this impasse is to adopt a posture of disinterest in its eventual outcome. As the card shark in "The Gambler" concludes, the United States is now "plain out of aces." To save its weak hand it needs to know that the time has come to walk away from the deal and let the chips fall as they may.

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ONLY IN ASIA
by Nury Vittachi

Insanity is all relative, especially in my clan

YOU think the Middle East Conflict is a tough problem to resolve? You should try the Vittachi family reunion. Admittedly, slightly fewer rocket-powered grenades are involved. But in terms of the complexity of issues, the two events are pretty much on a par.

This past weekend marked the first ever Family Day in Singapore. Like many families in East Asia, the Vittachi clan is split around the globe. Some family members are in Asia, some are in Europe, some are in the United States, and some, we desperately wish, were on Neptune, the third moon of Neptune. But sadly they are not; they are right here on Earth.

Now when I say "sadly," I don't mean to imply that I am not fond of them. Indeed, I am so fond of them that I can only cope with the excitement in small doses, such as getting one visit from them per century, for example.

And when I say "right here on Earth," I should make it clear am talking in literal terms only. Speaking in figurative terms, there are certain members of my family who are definitely not on planet Earth at all.

Take my late Uncle Ernie, for example. He believed that aliens were using mind control rays to invisibly guide millions of individuals into making bizarre, irrational decisions. We all used to laugh at this outlandish theory. Until George W. Bush won the 2004 US Presidential Election and Uncle Ernie's version of events suddenly became the only logical explanation.

Like other geographically spread families, we have numerous difficulties in communication. Consider a simple concept such as the 15-minute break in the middle of the school morning. My American brother calls it "Recess." My

English sister calls it "Playtime." My Australian cousin calls it "Break." My Sri Lankan cousin calls it "Cease fire."

Having a split family comes with significant dangers. For example, when my siblings and I were brats, my father became increasingly fond of lengthy business trips, until the inevitable happened: he went on a business trip and never came back.

But he kept in touch by sending us news dispatches from time to time. One of these informed us that he had got married and was going to be a father, it apparently having slipped his mind that he was already married and a father.

But we didn't blame him. When you're miles from home, you forget things. As the saying goes, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder of absence." Anyway, everything calmed down eventually. My father got into the habit of visiting his former family every few months, and we would never fail to greet him affectionately with warm, loving cries of: "Die, scum."

No, actually, we all got on very well. You see, by that stage we realised that extreme quantities of patience and tolerance were vital to maintain harmony in spread-out families, or, indeed, any other type of family.

Anyway, I'm just about to start organising the next major gathering of the Vittachi clan. But lately I must admit I've been tempted to give the job to someone else and concentrate on doing something simpler.

Such as solving the Middle East Conflict, perhaps. I wonder if someone at the United Nations would like to swap jobs with me?

UN officials wanting to send our columnist to a war zone can contact him via www.vittachi.com.