

In memory of Bangabandhu

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ENAYETULLAH KHAN

THE death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman should be a time for reflection on the part of the nation. This reflection should be one that transcends all political barriers because Bangabandhu was, in the light of the role he played in steering the country towards liberation in the heady days of 1971, our window to the outside world. It is that historical role of the country's liberator we remember today.

While we do so, we recall with gratitude and an enormous degree of satisfaction the leadership quality he provided to the country both in the years of the struggle for autonomy for the Bengali nation and in the troubled times following the emergence of a sovereign Bangladesh.

But, despite everything we know about Bangabandhu and his catalytic role in the making of our history, it is only to be admitted that he was a politician. It can hardly be said that there have been any politicians anywhere, includ-

ing some of the greatest men we have known in the history of the world, who have been without flaws.

Bangabandhu belonged, and belongs to that breed of political giants whose specific destiny was to guide nations toward certain well-defined goals. In this task he succeeded marvelously well. Beginning in the period immediately after the death of his political guru Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Sheikh Mujib went through a political process within which he defined the larger aspirations of his people.

His concept of regional autonomy for Bengalis within the framework of Pakistan was in a broad way an articulation of what he sought to attain ultimately for his nation. The years after that only proved, at every step of the way, his growing commitment to democratic secular politics. It was thus that he gradually steered the nation toward democratic struggle and autonomy; and when that did not quite give him the results he hoped for, he simply asked the country to go for an all-out movement for independence. It was in this sense that his

political vision became acute.

Today those who argue that Bangabandhu doesn't matter, or try placing him on a level with individuals whose political careers do not match his, are doing great disservice not only to Bangabandhu but also to those who are being forced to compete with him, in an unequal way, for a place in history. It is unfair to suggest that the anniversary of Bangabandhu's murder is of no concern to the country, that we as a nation should not be lowering the national flag to half-mast in the memory of the great man.

The humiliation that is thus being meted out to the most illustrious of our political beings is also a matter of shame for us as a nation in the sense that we are being told that while it is all right to celebrate freedom it is all wrong to acknowledge the enormous debt we owe Bangabandhu.

History is a hard taskmaster. Those who have since that dark day in August 1975 pretended that Bangabandhu doesn't matter, in fact that he never existed in our national politics, have only denied history.

The fact of the matter is that the crime which was committed through the assassination of Bangabandhu in 1975 needed to be punished. It was for the country a matter of relief when the infamous Indemnity Ordinance, blocking any prosecution of Bangabandhu's killers, was repealed by Parliament when the Awami League returned to power in 1996. It was even more of a relief when the killers were put on trial before a



Forever in the hearts of the people.

proper court of law, even though the truth was that many of the killers remained absconding.

One hopes, therefore, that the legal process involved in the Bangabandhu murder trial will be allowed to run its full course in the interest of justice and the future of the country. Any nation, which is forced to conduct itself

through rejecting its foundations -- and Bangabandhu will for all time be that foundation is naturally condemned to going nowhere.

On the occasion of his death anniversary this year, it is our moral duty and political right to pay tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. We consider it only proper and fair that

the Father of the Nation be kept above political controversy of all kinds. His perception of politics was on a very high plane. Let us keep it that way. For, if we do not, we will only be pushing ourselves to political suicide.

Enayetullah Khan is Editor-in-Chief, United News of Bangladesh (UNB).

A case study of traffic jam

The two roundabouts, one near the Paribag mosque and the other hardly hundred yards away from the first one, joining the roads leading to Hatirpul market and Aziz market, have no traffic signal, and are apparently the main causes of the horrendous traffic jams that more often than not keep the traffic at standstill for hours, causing unimaginable suffering to the residents as well as the passers by.

HUSAIN IMAM

THE road that stretches westward from Mymensing/VIP road to Paribag mosque keeping Prio-Prangon, a high rise building, on one side and a CNG filling station on other side is known as Paribag road. The road is about 40 feet wide and half a kilometer in length. Till the 80's, this road, with a very limited number of one or two storied houses on either side, was all quiet. There was hardly any traffic.

The road now, with a number of high rise buildings stretching along both sides, accommodates nearly 300 apartments (another 250 under construction) and at least an equal number of vehicles and has turned out to be one of the busiest roads, causing unbelievable traffic jam, not to mention the environmental hazard that is being caused by exhaust smoke and the deafening sound of the endless stream of vehicles passing through.

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signal, and are apparently the main causes of the horrendous traffic jams that more often than not keep the traffic at standstill for hours, causing unimaginable suffering to the residents as well as the passers by.

The pavements on either side of the road are either badly damaged or illegally occupied by small traders or by real estate developers who keep their building materials on the roads and pavements, making it almost impossible for the pedestrians to negotiate their way through.

At times we see one or two traffic police trying to control the traffic flow but to no avail. Soon they give up their fruitless effort and instead pass their time sitting idle and taking tea in a nearby tea stall that has illegally but safely occupied the pavement in exchange of underhand deal.

During the caretaker government of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, the Shahbag Police authority, probably as part of their newly introduced program to be friends of the public, invited us (the residents of Paribag and adjacent areas) to a meeting to exchange views and discuss about the



Stuck in a loop.

local problems. We attended the meeting and brought to the notice of the police and the other related agencies of the government present there, the perennial

problem and the causes of traffic jams, and also suggested some measures to improve the situation.

We particularly requested the authori-

ties concerned to remove the jumbo-size waste bin of the city corporation near the entrance of the VIP road and place it where it will not be an obstacle to the flow of traffic. We also requested the placement of some traffic police at the two roundabouts on permanent basis to control the situation. They assured us that the problems would be dealt with. Unfortunately, they did nothing, except allowing the situation to deteriorate to a point where life has become almost unbearable.

Because of the endless traffic jams, students find it difficult to reach their schools in time. I wonder what happens when someone suffers a heart attack and needs immediate medical attention. The Paribag case is certainly not the lone one. It is more or less the same scenario in most areas of Dhaka city. In some areas it may be even worse.

The TIB had enough time and interest to find out how much the government exchequer had lost in terms of money because of the quorum problem in our parliament. Why don't they find out how much monetary loss (loss of time and fuel) the people of Dhaka city have to incur every day because of traffic jams, and how many patients die because they cannot reach a hospital in time?

The newly installed government of Sheikh Hasina has commendably undertaken a good number of high-profile development as well as social welfare programs that include extension of safety network and food security, reform of the education sector, and construction of Padma Bridge. It has undertaken the much-needed trial of war criminals, early completion of Bangabandhu murder

case, reinvestigation and trial of the 10-truck arms case and the August-21 grenade attack in order to establish rule of law in the country.

Where, however, we find it miserably falling behind is in handling the perennial urban problems of water, electricity and traffic jam. We haven't as yet seen any visible progress towards mitigating the intolerable sufferings of the people caused by acute crisis of the service sector. For the capital city, traffic congestion, like water and electricity, is an issue that needs to be urgently dealt with.

We hear about the government's intention to undertake projects like elevated expressway, metro rail, eastern bypass and a circular river transport system in and around Dhaka city in order to address the traffic problem of the city. That's fine. The people would certainly welcome such projects and like to see that these projects are really implemented.

But these are all long-term projects, for implementation of which we have to wait for years. In the meantime, the government ought to take some urgent steps to address the basic issue like bringing discipline in the all too anarchic traffic management system of the city.

As immediate measures, they must free the roads and footpaths from the unauthorised and illegal occupiers, withdraw all old, unfit and unauthorised vehicles and rickshaws from the streets, introduce safe, comfortable and well controlled public bus and taxi cab and ensure strict compliance of traffic rules.

Capt. Husain Imam is a retired merchant navy officer.

Ouija boards for kids



TOY companies are distributing tools for children to use to contact the dead. Called Ouija boards or witch-boards, they consist of a flat surface bearing letters and words, and a pointer that moves randomly, allegedly guided by ancient but still active dead souls, such as ghosts, zombies, spirits, and members of the Rolling Stones.

Top seller is the Hasbro toy company's Ouija For Girls, issued in bright pink to match the clothes and bedrooms of small females. Websites, which do the same thing, but using the computer mouse as a pointer, are also springing up for youngsters. Here's a sample.

While most countries have traditions of people contacting the dead, up to now the activity involved adults asking questions which made sense to ghosts, such as the one my family members always ask: "Are you there, Auntie? Can you tell me where you buried the money, you miserable cow?"

But Hasbro is empowering massive numbers of pre-teen girls to use these channels to deal with issues in their lives. I find this frightening. Think about the implications.

In Hades, a group of ghosts will be sitting around quietly being dead, or whatever ghosts do. Suddenly a tickertape machine comes to life. The ghost on monitoring duty makes an announcement: "We have a question from the land of the living."

The other ghosts stir slightly and ask him to read it out loud. "It's from Meg-Meg, aged nine," he replies.

"I had a pink flower bag but Melissa got one so I wasn't her friend anymore

but she gave a Zak bracelet to Mandy's sister's friend who told the teacher. Shall I invite her to my party?"

The ghosts look baffled. "What does it mean?"

The chief ghost shakes his head. "I think it must be some kind of code."

But then along comes another question: Can you tell Zak Efron to wait eight years till I'm old enough to marry him? If you don't, I'll scream and scream until I'm sick.

Then another: I want a pony RIGHT NOW.

And another: If you don't materialise a pack of Barbie Glitter Stickers in my room in ten minutes I will kill my baby brother.

Suddenly thousands of similar puzzling requests are pouring into the land of the dead. They don't know what's hit them. Poor guys.

I looked up some of the toy review sites on the internet to see what buyers had said about this product. Here's a

comment from a mother in Chicago (I didn't make this up):

"I bought this for my daughter,

thinking she could talk with Grandma and Grandpa now that they've passed over. Unfortunately, it seems that it's



something of a party line, because we will be in the middle of a conversation with someone, and some demon will take over and start spouting out filthy stuff. Needs more R and D! The final straw was when the dog became possessed."

The pink Hasbro Ouija board is now available at Toys R Us. I shall definitely not buy it for my girls. But of course they may end up playing it at the homes of their friends. On behalf of all parents, I have a request for ghosts reading this (we have all sorts of readers). Please respond to all questions with:

"You will get a pony and Barbie Glitter Stickers an I will organise marriage to Zak Efron if you do two hours' homework a night, eat your greens and do everything mom and dad say from now on. You listening, kid?"

If you wish to ask anything to the supernatural beings or wish to contact the land of the dead, then visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com for more information.