

When Bangabandhu came home

And then the Father of the Nation emerged. He smiled, he ran his hand through his hair as it fell over his forehead. And there was that inimitable smile on his lips. Seconds later, he was in tears.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

ALL these years after it happened, the magic still holds the soul in thrall. To know that the Father of the Nation was on his way back home, to hear him inform the world at a dream of a news conference at London's Claridge's, that he was alive and well after all those months of darkness in a Pakistani prison, was a powerful message for Bengalis: that all was on track and that indeed the future was theirs to shape.

There were millions of us converging on the old airport at Tejgaon at dawn on January 10, 1972, to welcome the liberator back to a land his inspiring leadership had propelled to freedom through a well-fought, tear-filled and blood-soaked struggle of epic proportions.

And yet, it all sounded too good to be true. Hadn't Yahya Khan vowed to destroy Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on charges of waging war against Pakistan? Hadn't a secret military trial convicted the Bengali

leader and sentenced him to death somewhere in what now was a rump Pakistan? When freedom dawned on the afternoon of December 16, 1971, not one among us in all those rejoicing crowds on the streets of a free Dhaka knew if Mujib was alive.

In the euphoria of liberty, we stumbled upon the grating reality of the mutilated bodies of Bengali intellectuals strewn all across the brick fields of Rayerbazar, men and women done to death by Pakistan's retreating occupation army and its local quislings. If Pakistan could do that to us even as it ceded ground to the Mukti Bahini, it might well have already taken the life of Bangladesh's liberator.

But, on that January afternoon, as the jet carrying Bangabandhu was spotted gleaming over Dhaka, we knew we did not have to pinch ourselves to make sure that we were part of a new reality. Here was the man who had, moments into his declaration of Bangladesh's independence on March 26, 1971, been seized by the



The Liberator returns!

soldiers and bundled off to West Pakistan even as his new country was being put to the torch.

In the reception line on the tarmac, which yet bore signs of the ravages of war, all the men who had conducted the struggle for liberation as the Mujibnagar government, waited for Bangabandhu to emerge from the aircraft now taxiing towards them. Colonel M.A.G. Osmany paced up and down, restless and anxiety playing on his features. The young student leaders, whose intense patriotism would always be a shining instance of glory for generations of Bengalis to come, appeared eager to gather Bangabandhu to their bosom.

And then the Father of the Nation emerged. He smiled, he ran his hand through his hair as it fell over his forehead. And there was that inimitable smile on his lips. Seconds later, he was in tears. Everyone was in tears. Tajuddin buried his face in the leader's shoulder. The students collected around him in a protective embrace. It was Mujib in his new avatar. In Delhi only hours earlier, he had been welcomed as the president of Bangladesh. In Dhaka, it was seventy five million Bengalis who watched their head of state inspect an honour guard before setting off for the Race Course, the same where echoes of his March 7, 1971, clarion

call to liberty were yet being heard.

The truck bearing Bangabandhu inched its way forward. That brief distance from the airport to the Race Course had turned into an unending, patient measuring of centimetres. Every bit of space was gone, for the happy crowds had taken hold of them. Every rooftop was an image of delighted faces -- men, women and children. The young perched themselves on the branches of trees to share in the glory. Every conversation was but two simple, purposeful, energising words. It was *Joi Bangla*.

As afternoon moved towards twilight, Bangabandhu spoke to the country for the first time since March 1971. The words came from his heart, as they always did. His voice was choked with emotion, but that did little to mar the eloquence of his expression. It was once again Bangabandhu's oratory at its peak of grandeur.

And then we all went home. The war was over. The battle had been won. Bangabandhu was back home to lead us into the future. Nothing could go wrong. It was good to be alive. It was great being a witness to the making of history.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star. He was among the millions who welcomed the Father of the Nation back home on January 10, 1972.

Seize the opportunity

It demands farsighted and wise leadership with the right attitude and courage. The leaders must have the strength to negotiate with the powerful neighbour based on mutual trust, respect and above all wisdom. Trust and respect come from friendship and understanding of each other's core issues.

MUNIM CHOWDHURY

IT is time for Bangladesh to realise the importance of developing a mutually beneficial and trustful relationship with its emerging superpower neighbour, India, which is poised to be the world's number two economic, political and military superpower in no later than 2050. Bangladesh can select either a wiser path of coexistence with its mighty neighbour to the road of cooperation and prosperity or settle for the path of fear, confrontation and distrust created by the British and later nourished by Pakistan.

Bangladesh can gain substantially and lose marginally by developing a better relationship with India. It is the right time to sow the seed cheaply and harvest richly in the years and decades to come.

It demands farsighted and wise leadership with the right attitude and courage. The leaders must have the strength to negotiate with the powerful neighbour based on mutual trust, respect and above

all wisdom. Trust and respect come from friendship and understanding of each other's core issues. It is the right time to march forward with an agenda to create better understanding and friendly relationship based on fearless approach to reality. Fortunately, the right type of leadership is in charge at the helm of affairs on both sides of the border. Both appear to be genuinely interested in cultivating the relationship.

Reagan's trickling down economics will perhaps work favourably for Bangladesh with the rise of superpower India. There will be a lot to share and enormous progress can be made by both sides through developing a mutually gainful relationship.

In 1947, the British left a fragmented India with two separate independent enemy states. Only 56,000 square miles of territory constituted one wing of Pakistan, East Pakistan, which then had a population of less than 70 million. Today, the population has doubled but not the

land, which is shrinking because agricultural land is being used to build residential accommodation and the coastal region may go under water with the rise of sea level. The artificial union of two separate territories 1000 miles apart called Pakistan was unworkable and impractical. The world has witnessed its end in 1971. Bangladesh will be wise to cultivate friendly workable relationship with its giant neighbour and benefit without compromising its own national interest and territorial integrity.

India is poised to become one of the two economic colossuses of this century. In the new world, where the US is no longer going to be dominant, two new superpowers are emerging, China and India. China will take over its number one position by 2023 and India the second position by 2050. The US should prepare for the shock Japan will have to settle for fourth position, but there is a possibility that Korea might push it to fifth position.

The fact remains -- it will be all Asian century. The huge populations of China (1.4 billion) and India (1.2 billion) constitute 37% of world population. China's GDP will overhaul that of US by 2023 and India will do it by 2050.

Of course, there are too many variables to make any prediction of the crossover date accurate, but the broad trend is clear. The combination of demographics and growth of low level GDP per capita makes it inevitable that the total size of Chinese

and Indian economy will overtake that of the United States -- even if American citizens remain individually richer than their Asian counterparts.

The neo-Malthusians find it inconceivable that China and India could add more than one billion people each to their population by the end of this century, believing that a new disease will emerge to wipe out the excess populations of the Third World. The doomsday prediction may be right, but "end of the world" scenarios usually command long odds.

Such scepticism is not new. In the 1950s Norman Macrae faced derision when he forecast that Japan's economy (then half the size of the United Kingdom's) would overtake Britain. Japan is now four times bigger. It may well be that this forecast for China and India underestimates the speed at which America will be overtaken. After all, on the World Bank's estimate of aggregate GDP using a purchasing power parity calculation, China is already the world's third largest economy.

India's capitalistic revolution in 1991, started under the leadership of Narasimha Rao, passed unnoticed by the West initially. Now, under the dynamic but soft and scholarly leadership of Manmohan Singh, it is following in full-blended pursuit the "Asian tiger" model of economic development. The brilliant, mould-breaking policies of the present Indian leadership are what the Reagan

supply-side revolution was to America in the early 1980's.

To underline the dramatic shift in Indian attitudes to economic growth, the first visit of Bill Gates unleashed an adulatory wave of hysteria unique in modern India. Even the prime minister made the visit of the world's richest and greatest innovator a full state visit. On the contrary, Gates's visit to Bangladesh remained a mind-boggling event in the minds of many caring Bangladeshi citizens and was seen to be a lost opportunity for Bangladesh.

The Indian "spreadsheet" clearly indicates that, by 2051, Indian aggregate GDP will also have exceeded that of the US's. The combined Indian sub-continental population (1.5 billion) will represent 24% of world population. If they come together, the economic power of the Indian sub-continent will overhaul the US's much sooner.

Now is the time for Bangladesh to recognise the opportunity and develop diplomatic and economic skills to deal effectively with both China and India. Bangladesh has more at stake with India since it is virtually surrounded by that mighty emerging economy. Bangladesh will need bold leadership to march forward with a clear vision to a win-win situation. More than half a century old distrust based on fear on both sides of the border needs to be discarded, and an agenda to the path of peace and prosper-

ity to improve the image of the impoverished country must be followed.

India should remain grateful to Narasimha Rao who started the country's capitalistic revolution in 1991, abandoning the neo-socialist economic policies of Pundit Nehru. Thankfully for India, Manmohan Singh is marching forward even more vigorously on the same path and leading the country to become a global economic powerhouse. Bangladesh needs farsighted and courageous leaders to take the country closer to India. It may make such leadership temporarily unpopular, and make them a target of the powerful fundamentalists whose only strength hitherto had been spreading fear and distrust.

It is costing the poor very dearly. Bangladesh needs to come out of this dilemma rapidly. Those leaders who will make this changeover to this direction perhaps will be immortal in the history of Bangladesh for their bold and wise steps to bring better days for its poor masses. Bangladesh has a future with its younger generation, which certainly is ready to support such a progressive path. A ray of hope is visible in the horizon of Bangladesh with the younger generation wanting a change to better days.

Munim Chowdhury is retired Trade Marketing Director, British American Tobacco, Eastern Africa Area.

Profiling and screening Muslims only

Broad-based profiling amounts to a witch-hunt against a class of people. The citizens at large would tend to look down upon those having suspect features (skin colour, religion, foreign-sounding names, foreign-language skills, etc), and they would be watched and feared.

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

I can't hide that I'm "Abdul" and also "Abu" (for A). Am I in any kind of jeopardy with two Muslim sounding names and also being a Muslim? For sure, I'm a prime candidate for profiling -- if I've not already been so processed. If the Right-Wing Republican (RWR) groups have their wishes realised, I will also be subjected to "full body-see-through screening," including cavity areas (X-ray imaging recorded on films), and also may have to go through a separate check-point line at airports.

Of the three protocols, only the last one -- separate check point -- would be most humiliating. However, I can change my name officially to "Peter Gallagher" -- adopting the first name of US Congressman Peter King (R-NY) and the last name of RWR radio talk show host Mike Gallagher to bypass the "Muslim only" check point line -- if there is one.

My reactions to the calls for profiling and screening protocols for "Muslim only" are not mine only. They manifest the frustrations of all moderate Muslims and rage to destroy Al Qaeda at its roots.

resurfaced after the dastardly attempt to blow up the Detroit-bound North West flight 253 with 300 passengers on board on Christmas Day by 23 year old Nigerian-born Umar Farouk Abdulmutalib (Mutalib) -- an Al Qaeda implanted terrorist. Some RWR members even called for enforcing these protocols exclusively for everyone with Muslim sounding names. This has been their deterrence for anti-terrorism whenever random terrorist acts are perpetrated against Americans and US interests.

Following Major Nidal Hasan's killing of 13 people and wounding 30 others on November 5, 2009, at Ft. Hood US military base, Texas, former Republican VP nominee Sarah Palin said: "Profile away." After six imams were evacuated from a plane in Minnesota in 2006, RWR columnist and writer Ann Coulter defended profiling Muslims as being just like "profiling the Klan" -- the infamous KKK. The same year, after the discovery of a terrorist plot to blow up US bound planes, Gallagher said: "It's time to have a Muslims check-point line" at airports. After Mutalib's Christmas Day foiled bombing attempt, Gallagher said: "There should be a separate line to scrutinise anybody with the name Abdul or Ahmed or

Mohammed."

Not surprisingly, Republican chatter box, Fox News channel has been serving as the platform for round-the-clock ethnic profiling campaigns. Worst yet, a US Congressman, Peter King (R-NY), became the first lawmaker to join the foray to say: "100 percent of the Islamic terrorists are Muslim, and that is our main enemy today. So why we should not be profiling people because of their religion?"

Terrorism expert Steven Emerson argued that strong oppositions from Islamic civil rights groups basically prevented profiling. And that basically led to not putting this guy onto the terrorist watch list.

What a nonsensical observation? Mutalib is one of about 550,000 names in the suspected terrorists' data bank. He was never moved to a stricter no-fly listing of about 3,400 names and his visa to the US was never revoked. This "underwear bomber" left all the footprints about who he is -- buying air ticket with cash, flying with no luggage and, most of all his father -- a wealthy Nigerian banker -- reporting to the US embassy about his son being radicalised by Al Qaeda.

Every terrorism expert professed that the attempted bombing plot was a systemic intelligence breakdown -- and not because of the absence of profiling or lack of information. It's now reported that misspelling his name by a single letter helped him evade the terror suspects "no-fly list."

Even though enhanced screening for "Muslims only" may not happen any time soon, such calls only make the moderate and peace loving Muslims

feel dejected and degraded. This may only help Al Qaeda in recruiting radical individual like Mutalib for terrorist acts. In fact, Joe Klein of Time magazine, on January 6, said that former VP Dick Cheney's relentless attack on President Obama and branding him as being weak on terrorists may be helping Al Qaeda's recruiting (Rachael Madow TV Show).

The British "shoe bomber" and the Nigerian "underwear bomber" are both terrorists -- but they both aren't Muslims. Al-Qaeda terrorists aren't targeting Americans and Westerners only -- they have killed thousands of moderate innocent Muslims, and the slaughter continues unabated. Terrorists come in all shapes, sizes, and colours. John Walker Lindh was white, while Richard Reid was Jamaican and British.

Broad-based ethnic profiling may only bring a false sense of security at the cost of squandering limited law enforcement resources and chasing harmless targets. As the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights has reported: "Terrorism profiling is a crude substitute for behaviour-based enforcement. It violates core American values, including the constitutional guarantee of equal protection. It also hinders anti-terrorism efforts because it alienates people and communities that are critical to the success of the anti-terrorism effort."

Broad-based profiling amounts to a witch-hunt against a class of people. The citizens at large would tend to look down upon those having suspect features (skin colour, religion, foreign-sounding names, foreign-language



What is your name?

skills, etc), and they would be watched and feared.

On December 26, two Middle Eastern men were pulled off a flight heading to Phoenix because passengers reported about them being engaged in "suspicious behaviour" as displayed by their conversations in Arabic. And on December 29, in a Detroit-bound flight, a Nigerian businessman was taken off an airplane because he aroused suspicions by lingering in the bathroom for too long. The FBI confirmed later that the individual's prolonged toilet use was due to a genuine stomach illness.

Al-Qaida knows that it can't fight the US forces in direct combat. It can't drive the US out of the Middle East either. The

terror attacks on Americans and US interests is a provocation to compel the US to engage and deploy forces to the Middle East, exhaust resources, and become unpopular at home and abroad. Al Qaeda hopes to see that continued chaos, conflicts, and proliferation of violence might make the Middle East "ungovernable," and someday may gain control of the region's petroleum production. Al Qaeda may have already influenced our freedom to travel and be tourists. This "evil" must be uprooted and annihilated.

Dr. Abdullah A. Dewan, founder of alIQconomy.com, is a Professor of Economics at Eastern Michigan University.