

Bangabandhu's clarion call

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A civil disobedience movement with a call for total non-cooperation with the military junta was organised by Bangabandhu with a ten-point action program. This was in defiance of the military junta led by President Yahya Khan. In a statement Bangabandhu said that the non-violent and non-co-operation movement would continue till the objectives -- the immediate termination of martial law and transfer of power to the elected representatives -- were achieved.

The tough program of non-co-operation included the 10 points mentioned below:

- No-tax campaign to continue.
 - The secretariat, government and semi-government offices, High Court and other courts throughout the country should observe *hartal*. Appropriate exemption to be announced from time to time.
 - Railway and ports may operate, but railway and port workers shall not co-operate if they are used for mobilisation of forces for the purpose of carrying out repression against the people.
 - Radio, television and newspapers shall give complete versions of the statements of the people's representatives and shall not suppress news about people's movement, otherwise Bangalees working in those establishments shall not co-operate.
 - Only local and inter-district trunk telephone communication shall function.
 - All educational institutions shall remain closed.
 - Banks should not effect remittances to the western wing either through the State Bank or otherwise.
 - Black flags shall be hoisted on all buildings every day.
 - Complete and partial *hartal* may be declared at any moment, depending on the situation.
 - A sangram parishad (council of action) shall be organised in each union, *mahalla*, *thana*, sub-division and district under the leadership of the local Awami league units.
- The non-cooperation movement eventually evolved into the creation of a kind of Awami league government. The *junta* flew troop rein-

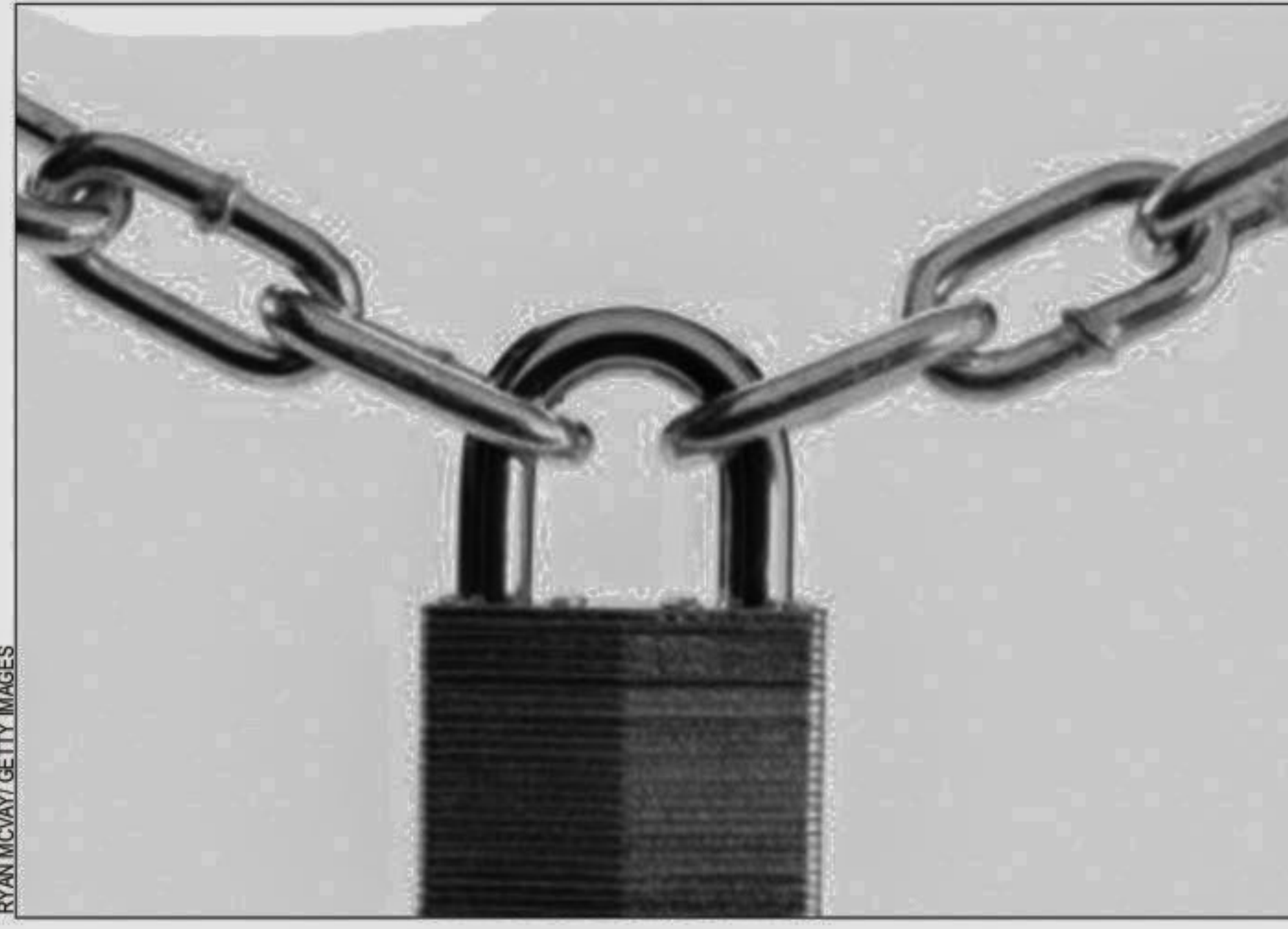
forcements into East Pakistan at night. From March 10 onwards leaders of minority party groups visited East Pakistan to meet Sheikh Mujib. They exchanged views with him, slating Bhutto's provocative attitude.

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At a crucial stage of the non-cooperation movement the Dhaka talk between Bangabandhu and Yahya took place on March 19. When all efforts for a political solution failed, Yahya imposed military solution. On the fateful night of March 25 the Pakistan army went on a rampage, killing unarmed civilians in Dhaka with unprecedented brutality.

The call for non-cooperation was the clarion call of Bangabandhu. The situation that was created compelled him to go for complete non-cooperation. There were lots of provocative measures to deal with through mass resistance following the proclamation of the postponement of Dhaka session of the National assembly on March 3, 1971. In his historic March 7 speech Bangabandhu spelled out the guidelines of non-cooperation. Below is an excerpt from his speech:

"Let me make it clear without ambiguity that all courts, magistracies, government offices and educational institutions will remain closed for an indefinite period. In order that people do not suffer and my people do not get through pain all other activities will continue within the ambit of general strike. Rickshaws, horse carriages, trains and river vessels will ply. The Supreme Court, High Court, judge courts, semi-government offices, Wapda-- nothing will work. Employees will collect their salaries on the twenty-eighth. The owners of industries will make certain that the wages of workers who have taken part in the strike for the past week are duly paid to them. I shall tell employees of the government, my word must be heard, and my instructions followed. Until freedom comes to my land, all taxes will be held back from payment. Remember, employees at radio and television, if radio does not get our message across, no Bengali will go to the radio station. If television does put forth our point of view, no Bengali will go to television. Bank will remain



The call for non-cooperation was the first move.

open for two hours to enable people to engage in transactions. But there will be no transfer of even a single penny from East Bengal to West Pakistan. Telephone and telegram services will continue in East Bengal and news can be dispatched overseas."

All of us perhaps know the history of civil disobedience or non-cooperation movement launched by the protagonists of quit-India movement in undivided India. Non-cooperation is a non-violent movement observed in a peaceful manner. But the non-violent nature of the movement could not be upheld because of incidence of sporadic violence provoked by the British Raj. The Khilafat and non-cooperation movement during the British period stirred the whole society to its depth. The impacts were far fetching. Aimed at extermination of British colonialism, the movement led to the development of Indian nationalism.

Since then, the movement for self-determination had been gaining momentum. The lesson from this type of non-cooperation movement was that true nationalists did not want any alien rulers to continue to rule. Inspired by Bengali nationalism, the non-cooperation movement launched by Bangabandhu was aimed at dislodging the semi-colonialism that plundered our wealth and resources through exploitation. It was also non-violent. But incidences of skirmishes and firing by the army accounted much for violence. The logic of the movement was upheld when Yahya dilly-dallied in ensuring peaceful

transfer of power to the elected representatives, and let loose state terrorism upon the unarmed Bengali civilians.

Bangabandhu tried his best to keep the wheel of the economy moving despite disturbance. Banking, procurement and agricultural activities, and all their programs, functioned normally. Relief and rehabilitation functioned, and wage labourers involved in development projects continued to receive payments due to them.

The historic and fiery March 7 speech of Bangabandhu was full of programs for non-cooperation and preparation for the war of liberation. True, Bangabandhu set up a parallel government in defiance of the central command by issuing directions amid a non-cooperation movement. The people from all walks of life paid heed to his instructions, as if Bangabandhu were the de facto head of the government of East Pakistan.

Even the electronic media followed the directives of Bangabandhu while conducting its normal functions. The western wing of Pakistan was economically disconnected from East Bengal. In fact, a virtual declaration of independence was implicit in Bangabandhu's scheme of non-cooperation, which was later termed as "an act of treason" by Yahya Khan in his broadcast over radio on March 26, 1971.

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I am the miracle man

MY friend Sheila came into the noodle shop with mud on her shirt, a tear in her tights and a heel missing from her shoe.

"I'm having one of those days," she lamented. The guy next to me nodded. "Sweetheart," he said. "I have one of those days every day."

One of those days is an English idiom describing a period when everything that can go wrong does.

The miserably guy next to me expanded his theory. "Not only do I have one of those days every day, but I am having one of those lives."

The fourth diner in the shop was a mathematically-minded youngster. She said: "Surely the law of averages requires that you should have an equal amount of days when everything goes right? A day when you are a sort of miracle man who can't do anything wrong?"

This statement was greeted by baffled silence.



Netanyahu snubs Obama

When preparations were being finalised, US Vice-President Joe Biden went to Israel on March 8 to give the talks US blessings. It was at that time that Netanyahu thumbed his nose at Obama. On March 9, the Israeli interior ministry announced that 1,600 new Jewish homes would be built in East Jerusalem.



MAHMOOD HASAN

THE arrogant Israeli right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has snubbed the Obama Administration. During the past couple of weeks the news on the Middle-East peace talks has been making headlines all over.

Palestinian-Israeli talks have been stalled since the legendary Yasser Arafat died under mysterious circumstances in November 2004. When Barack Hussein Obama went to Cairo in June 2009 and spoke at Cairo University, categorically supporting the two-state formula, the Muslim world seemed hopeful that the dithering over the establishment of a Palestinian state would be over. Palestinians hoped that the Obama administration would help restart the negotiations with Israel.

Barack Obama appointed George Mitchell as his special Middle East Envoy to get the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations going. In February 2009, Israel went for parliamentary

(Knesset) elections. Though the right-wing Likud led by Benjamin Netanyahu did not get a majority, it succeeded in forming the government with the help of ultra-rightist parties. Likud had always had a hawkish policy towards the Palestinian state and strongly supports Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

For the past one year George Mitchell has been trying to get the two adversaries on to the negotiating table for direct talks. When those efforts failed due to Netanyahu's intransigence he proposed indirect talks. The Arab League foreign ministers met in Cairo on March 2 and gave the go-ahead to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

The Arabs, though divided, felt that some talk was better than none. The League declared that the talks should be completed within four months and produce tangible results. Mitchell was to be the "go-between" in the talks.

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US Vice-President Joe Biden went to Israel on March 8 to give the talks US blessings. It was at that time that Netanyahu thumbed his nose at Obama. On March 9, the Israeli interior ministry announced that 1,600 new Jewish homes would be built in East Jerusalem.

For Biden, who had praised Israel on arrival at Tel Aviv and declared that US was fully committed to Israel's security, it was a bolt from the blue. He quickly condemned the Israeli decision, and to show his displeasure arrived 90 minutes late to Netanyahu's dinner. Netanyahu pleaded ignorance and blamed the slow bureaucracy for the announcement, which unfortunately coincided with Biden's visit. But by then the damage was done. US officials interpreted the announcement as Israeli strategy to foil the talks. Dismayed Biden went back to Washington on March 11, after having talks with Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah and King Abdullah of Jordan.

On March 12, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Netanyahu and in unusually strong words told him that Washington strongly objected to the settlement announcement as it was a "deeply negative signal." Clinton said that the announcement ran "counter to the spirit of the vice-president's trip." She described the Israeli move as "insulting."

Clearly, Washington was terribly angry with Netanyahu. When diplomatic relations between Israel and US dipped to a new low, the two sides scrambled to repair the damage. While White House staff huffed in anger, Netanyahu urged for "calm." The Jewish lobby in Washington went on overdrive to restrain the Obama administration from punishing Netanyahu.

Then, on March 17, Clinton came out saying that relations between the two allies were not in danger. Democrat author Philip Bobbitt's remark, "Netanyahu has more votes on the (Capitol) Hill than Obama does," seems to be more than true.

There is no doubt that Netanyahu made this gaffe purposefully. He knew that he could get away with it, as the risk of US abandoning Israel is nil -- particularly with Iran's shadow looming large over the region. He may have also calculated that Obama would be a one-term president, and his fortune would shine once the Republicans were back in the White House.

The flip side is that if Obama feels that Israel is not a friend of America but a great friend of the Republicans only, the entire gamut of US-Israeli relationship may change drastically. However, defiant Netanyahu seems least worried.

The victim of these dramatics has been the much awaited proximity talks between the Palestinians and Israelis. Mahmoud Abbas and the Arab League Secretary General Amr Mousa declared that talks could not be held under such conditions.

Mahmoud Abbas is in a precarious situation. He is damned if he talks to the Israelis and damned if he does not. He has come to be seen as an ineffective leader and a pawn in the hands of US and Israel. He believes in negotiations with Israel, while the Gaza based Hamas believes in militant resistance. Over the past five years Abbas has not been able to extract any concession from the Israelis. He, however, has a consolation now -- Israel has made a fool of Joe Biden.

Building on occupied areas is illegal according to international law. Since the occupation in 1967 Israel has built more than 100 settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where more than half a million Jews are living. Israel says that these settlements have been built for its security. Palestinians view these settlements as further annexation of their land, which will prevent the establishment of the State of Palestine.

The international community does not accept Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, as it will be the capital of Palestine. Israel occupied 78 percent of Palestine land during the 1967 war. Negotiations to establish the Palestinian state on the remaining 2 percent has to resolve four contentious issues -- the Jewish settlements in occupied areas, the borders of Palestine, the status of East Jerusalem, and the question of return of Palestinian refugees.

The ME Quartet ((UN, US, EU and Russia) formed by Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar in 2002 met in Moscow on March 18 and asked Israel to halt all settlements in the occupied land. The Quartet strongly supports the establishment of the state of Palestine.

If a negotiated settlement cannot be arrived at, the inevitable will follow -- the third Intifada, which Israel fears. If that happens, Israel will no doubt launch a war against the Palestinians, which may turn into a major conflagration, drawing in anti-Israeli forces such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas from Gaza.

Netanyahu should realise that by constructing settlements in the occupied land he can neither alter the demography of Palestine nor stop the birth of the state of Palestine. He should shun the policy of annexation and immediately start direct negotiations with the oppressed Palestinians.

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Everyone has days when everything goes wrong. How come no one ever has days when everything goes right?

After a brief discussion, I found a solution, which allowed us to set this puzzle aside and get on with the really important business of the meeting, which was to sit around and do nothing. My answer was to categorize the puzzle as "an inexplicable mystery of life" and order some beers.

Okay, so it's not intellectually satisfying, but I find nothing shameful in being pathetically easy to please.

The above conversation took place more than two years ago, and I had completely forgotten about it -- until last Wednesday, when something extraordinary happened.

I had the fabled day when everything went right.

I was triple-booked -- but taxis appeared every time I stepped out of the door, so I actually managed to be in three places at once.

Later, I was hosting a party in a massively overcrowded bar when one of guests lost his passport. Within five minutes, one of the other guests recovered it.

Ten minutes later, a hotel key and passport in the name of Ray Hsu were found -- but there was no one of that name in the vicinity.

I got on the phone and miraculously managed to track him down.

Even more amazingly, the woman standing next to me was staying at the same hotel and offered to hand-carry the items to him.

At 11.27 that night, a third disaster tried to strike. Ouyang Yu, a Chinese-Australian poet, grabbed my elbow. "I'm a bit drunk," he said. "And I've lost my iPhone. It must have fallen out of my pocket."

He was distraught, knowing that the chances of recovering it were zero at best.

I told him not to worry. "Today I am Miracle Man," I said. "I'll find it." Two minutes later I found it and handed it back to him.

A young man who had been watching me work wonders asked: "How did you do that?"

I replied: "I see you don't recognize me without my cape." He didn't get the joke, so I explained that fate was making up for decades of bad luck by giving me one day when I could fail at nothing. There was only one bit of bad news that day. None of the bars sold lottery tickets.

To learn more about this miracle man and his flying cape, visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com.