

Ramna Batamul blast case

Resolve this and all such cases quickly

WHILE the nation celebrated with fervour and festivity Pahela Baishak on the 14th of April, perhaps the largest festival of the Bangalees, one could not but be reminded of the carnage perpetrated at Ramna Batamul nine years ago that day. There have been bomb attacks on public functions before, and there have been many since then, but this one was quite different from the rest. This was an attack against the very identity of the nation; it was a blow against the very belief on which the War of Liberation was fought; it was a stab at the very ethos in which we take immense pride, both collectively and as individuals.

The poignancy to the celebrations, and indeed to the very day itself, was lent by the very fact that the process of trial has stumbled on matters of procedure. That, after all these years during which one saw deliberate attempts made not only to distort the substance of the case but also derail the very process by dubious means, is very disheartening indeed. Not only should the tangles be removed with all speed and exemplary punishments meted out to the accused, there is also need to find out the brain behind this incident. The longer they remain out of the grasp of the law the more they will have time to regroup to perpetrate similar carnage in future.

The Ramna blast also brings into focus several other incidents of bomb attacks in the country, since 2001 in particular. The attack on the AL leadership in 2004, the attack on Mr. Kibria, and on the then British High Commissioner in Sylhet, and the Mymensingh cinema hall blasts, are but a few very high profile cases that have not been resolved as yet. And in respect of these cases too one saw a very cynical attempts to shift the blame on some one else. What was most reprehensible was the attempt by the then government to exploit these incidents in a politically partisan manner. While we fail to rationalise the actions taken with regard to these cases, certainly the long delay in resolving them have gone in favour of the perpetrators and the brain behind these attacks.

While one can notice a pattern in these incidents there may not be a link between the motivations and the actors. That is why there is all the more urgency to identify the criminals and their agents and operators. The long delay in resolving these cases reflects our failure on several counts, but the grave implications of leaving these cases unresolved should not be lost on the agencies concerned.

Women's role in Bangladesh's liberation

Rather late, but a welcome move nevertheless

THE formation of a parliamentary sub-committee to collect information about the role of women in Bangladesh's liberation war has come rather late in the day. Even so, now that it has dawned on the powers that be that Bengali women have indeed made significant contributions to the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign state, we welcome the move. With every bit of detail about the war quite loaded with the narratives of male participation in the struggle, it is now important that the history of the liberation war be made more substantive through recording the contributions of the women of this country.

We cannot easily ignore the fact that a prime target of the Pakistan occupation army and its local collaborators was Bangladesh's women. Everywhere these genocidal forces went, they left a trail of devastation in their wake through murder, pillage and rape. The brutal fact remains that tens of thousands of women were raped by the soldiers and their auxiliary forces. Many were made pregnant and there are distinct reports of the many war babies born toward the end of the war and immediately after it. These women have regularly been eulogized for their extremity of suffering. Most of them go on with life reliving that old nightmare of pain and shame. That said, there are the women who made it to Mujibnagar, in droves, in order to serve the country. Doctors, teachers, artistes, government officials, spouses of influential men, et cetera, all were unequivocal in their belief that they needed to lend a hand in the historic task of the attainment of national liberty. Some women even worked on the battlefield; others inspired the nation through keeping up our spirits on Shwadhini Bangla Betar. Taramon Bibi and Dr. Sitara Begum are names we have not forgotten.

The task of recording the contributions of women to the cause will not be easy, seeing that nearly four decades have elapsed since the end of the war. But despite the difficulties involved, the parliamentary sub-committee must shape a strategy through which names, events and records can be collected across the country. Our surviving sector commanders, their junior officers and officials who worked in other areas may be contacted for the details. Additionally, there are the aging freedom fighters in every nook and corner of Bangladesh. They should be knowing of the women who took part in the war, directly or otherwise, from their localities. Let them be contacted.

It is time a substantive record of those who went to the war and so reinforced the intensity of the struggle was placed before the country.

The year 1417



RASHID SHUKON

In the year 1417, your average Bangladeshi will be told that he or she never had it so good. He never ate better or enjoyed more modern conveniences or more opportunities to better himself and his family.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

SOMETIMES I wonder what a time-traveller from the past would make of our brave new country in the Bengali year 1417. What would such an observer note about the denizens of our fair nation and how the average Bangladeshi lives and loves.

Surely, the first thing that any visitor from any other realm or time would be struck by is the sheer mass of humanity that pulsates within our 55,000 square miles.

It always amuses me to think that back before independence, when the population was some 75 million, we thought then that the country was grievously overpopulated.

Lord help us now that we have doubled to 150 million while the land area has actually diminished somewhat due to riverbank erosion, rising coastal waters, and other inexorable forces of nature.

Dhaka, for most of its history a sleepy and tranquil backwater, today teems with upwards of 12 million citizens crammed in cheek by jowl, living, for the most part, in

suffocating concrete boxes, unpainted and charmless, piled one on top of the other.

Every day brings thousands more migrants, hungry to try their luck in what is now one of the most populous and most crowded metropolises on the planet.

The percentage of the population living below the poverty line has halved since independence, but, as the population has doubled, the number of these unfortunate souls, 60 million, remains the same.

A time-traveller from the 19th or pre-independence 20th century, when famine and pestilence routinely stalked this benighted corner of the globe, would, however, surely be impressed with some of our post-independence achievements.

Bangladeshis are today taller, better nourished, better educated, longer-lived, more prosperous, and healthier than at any time in the past two centuries.

We look different now. In the year 1417, lungis and ganjis are being replaced by shirts and trousers. Footwear is common, not a luxury. Sunglasses, hair-gel, and ear-

rings are the fashion accessories of choice for the young and stylish.

For their part, young women are trading in their saris for salwar kameezes, the more daring for fatuas and tight jeans. Make-up and beauty products are no longer solely the province of the westernised upper-classes.

Some things never change. On our Bengali new year's day, armies of young women flock to the streets with flowers entwined in their hair and in midriff-baring red and white saris that would make Britney Spears blush.

Where once women were confined to the home, today, at dusk, the streets of the capital are filled with the 3 million garment workers wending their way home after a hard day's work.

In the year 1417, television is everywhere. Even the slums have access to illegal cable, and the exploited garment worker can come home to enjoy her choice of the dozens of television stations on the air.

The typical choice of a Bangladeshi viewer today is one of the Indian stations showing Indian Idol or IPL cricket or one of the interminable and trashy daily soap operas. As a result, we all now secretly understand, if not speak, Hindi perfectly well.

The concrete pill-boxes that clutter the Dhaka sky-line and the honking and pulsing congestion at street level are new. In one sense, these are signs of prosperity and development, but then again, no one but

an economist would argue that this represents any kind of improvement.

In the year 1417, we have 50 million mobile phones. The middle classes possess material comforts such as air conditioners and gas cookers and refrigerators that their parents' and grandparents' generation could scarcely have imagined.

But not all is well. Demand for power so outstrips the supply that there is daily loadshedding for hours at a time. Mind-bogglingly, in this land of water, there is a shortage of water fit to drink, cook with, and bathe in.

We have fast-food chains on every corner. Multi-national corporations recruit BBAs from the dozens of private universities, tempting them with offers of plush air-conditioned offices, company cars, and fat expense accounts.

In the year 1417, your average Bangladeshi will be told that he or she never had it so good. He never ate better or enjoyed more modern conveniences or more opportunities to better himself and his family.

Nevertheless, he will spend his entire time plotting his exit. Lines for visas form at embassies from before dawn. The best and the brightest dream only of moving abroad to study and settle, and the poor and the miserable remain eager to sell themselves into virtual slavery to escape these shores.

It is the year 1417.

Zafar Sobhan is Editor, Editorial & Op-Ed, The Daily Star.

Killing to make a killing

Many centuries ago, Cicero had said that endless money formed the sinews of war. The killing on Friday is proof that he couldn't be more right. It was reflection of this society in a puddle of blood. We're risking more to gain more, ready to kill so long as killing makes a killing.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

LAST February, a ward commissioner in old Dhaka was gunned down on his way home from the Friday prayer. The assailants fled the crime scene, only to resurface in police custody few weeks later. Every crime leaves behind evidence. Here the evidence comes in a trail of hidden hands. This is a land of all possibles, although it may not be a land of all possibilities.

The hired hands, which pulled the trigger, came at the end of a long and effective chain of command. It turns out that these hands worked for a man, who lives in another country and runs his contract killing business by remote control. Behind that remote man was a businessman who is in jail for packaging the deal. Then we hear about a man behind whose wish was his command.

If nothing else, the efficacy of this chain

of command itself should be the envy of any institution. The whole thing was well coordinated, without delay, without dithering and, above all, it was carried out with utmost precision. The right target was hit at the right moment and the killers got away smoothly as planned.

The credit may go to the captain of the team, depending on whom we choose between the man sitting in a foreign land whose men carried out the killing, and the man on whose behalf the killing may have been commissioned. But the man of the match is certainly the businessman, who acted as a go-between. This man is quite a story. He has tons of money, many acres of land, and at least three wives. Here is a kind of man, who is man enough to cut many of us men to half their size.

This man with his 4th-grade education, learned to make money before many of us learned to count. He intimidated people, and then got rich at a dizzying speed. In

arithmetic progression of mischief, he amassed his fortune by geometric progression. Then this man also has spent his money with the same brisk hands.

He has invested in housing projects, hospitals, garments industry, supermarkets, etc. Then he couldn't help letting some of his creative juice flow. He got into the movie business, the last refuge of any scoundrel, who believes money can buy him the power of imagination. The sheer titles of the movies he produced could send anybody gasping for breath.

Yes, he is the man of this match because his performance exemplifies the game. A car thief recently boasted that he was afraid of law since he had always bought his way through courts and prisons. He is worth ten crores today, and vows to stop stealing cars only after he will make two hundred crores!

Notoriety in this country is now an open secret, and prison does nothing but certification to criminals so that they can practice crime as professionals. Sooner or later our businessman will get out of jail. He will throw his money, and others who have stakes in him will also throw their money. In this country, money works like tsunami.

That's more murderous than murder. When people get stinky rich it happens in two phases. In the first phase, the man makes money. In the second phase, money

makes the man. The car thief and the ring-leader of the contract killers are still in the first category. They are committing crimes because they are making money.

The businessman comes under the second category. He is the living example of a man who has been made a monster by his money.

That should be a matter of real concern. If we look around, we are flooded with the prototypes of this businessman. Our homes, offices and streets are packed with creatures behaving like slot machines. They don't spit out service or favor before a coin is inserted.

Some doctors don't treat patients. Some lawyers don't defend clients. Some journalists don't write facts. Each of us has cut out a turf for himself, a sphere of extortion where we force others to pay. Our businessman is a concentrated expression of that money-based madness. He outshines others in his enthusiasm to risk more in order to gain more.

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Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a columnist for The Daily Star. E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com.