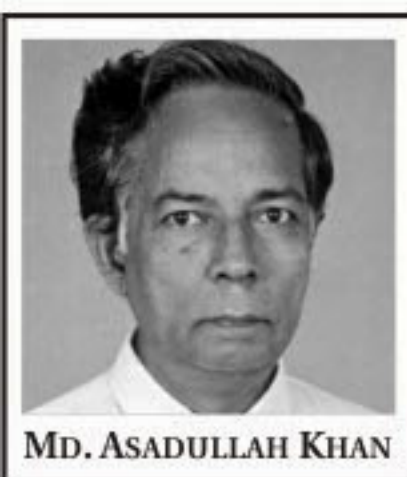


BITTER TRUTH

Forgotten war heroes



WITH the trial of war criminals in the offing, those now in their 30s and above must know the full

background of the liberation war, especially the calculated genocide that was launched by the Pakistani occupation forces from the night of March 25, 1971, which continued for nine months.

Just two days before victory, the most heinous, cruel and sinister crime, aimed at crippling the very backbone of the nation, was committed by the occupation army and their collaborators, the Al Shams, Al Badr and Razakars. The genocide was the "cleansing process" the occupation army carried out as a solution to the political problem. The targets were teachers, students, Awami Leaguers, and intelligentsia.

After being subjected to more than two decades of exploitation and humiliation and with the ultimate brutality inflicted on a sleeping nation on that gory night of March 25, 1971, the people, although unarmed, rose in rebellion against the brute perpetrators. The nation responded to the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman issued in his historic address at Race Course Maidan (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) on March 7, 1971.

The founding premise of Pakistan, protecting Islam and keeping the two parts of Pakistan intact even when the exploitation was at its worst, was shattered. Nothing could stop the 75 million people of the then East Pakistan from going their separate way after that fateful night of March 25, 1971. The genocide plan, "Operation Searchlight," was launched

after General Yahya Khan, the then president of Pakistan left Dhaka after the failed talks between him and Bangabandhu.

Bangabandhu was taken from his Dhanmondi residence that night and flown to West Pakistan the next day. Maj. Gen. Tikka Khan, Governor and Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan, ordered his army commanders to start the cleansing process, wiping out the Bengalee intelligentsia and valiant Bengalees demanding equitable share in business, finance, development and educational opportunities.

It is pertinent to recall what some top brass in the Pakistan army said at that time: "We are determined to cleanse East Pakistan once and for all of the threat of secession, even if it means killing two million people and ruling the province as a colony for 30 years." That was the military regime's "final solution" of the East Pakistan problem.

At about 11-30 that night I got a telephone call from Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, telling me that the army was advancing towards Bangabandhu's house. Until then it was not clear that they would raid the student halls and kill the students and teachers. The stillness of the night was shattered by the sound of gunfire and the night sky was bright with the glare of flames. The carnage in Peelkhana and Dhaka University went on for two days.

Many colleagues were leaving university quarters and fleeing to safer places. I, along with my mother, wife, and children went to my brother-in-law's house. The carnage wrought for two days and

night in the Jagannath Hall was apparent by the roadside.

If blood is the price of independence then the people of Bangladesh paid it fully during the nine-month long war. At the cost of three million lives the nation got its cherished freedom.

My eldest brother Md. Khalilullah

cut off, the remaining task of keeping them under subjugation would be easier. 40 years after the terrible day, we not only mourn the loss of the brilliant minds but also the intellectual and psychological void created by their untimely deaths.

Occasions like Independence Day, Martyred Intellectuals Day and

again. Unhappily, the saga written in blood and enormous sacrifice has not been faithfully recorded and commemorated. Speaking about my own family, my eldest brother was killed by the occupation forces on the first day the crack troops arrived in Satkhira. He left behind his wife and five children, the eldest

Shockingly, that gift of Tk.2,000 was the first and last they ever got from the governments that have ruled the country so far.

To be very specific, history was distorted, lies introduced, and false heroes were invented with every passing year. And this doctoring of history has been going

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STAR

Khan, a Second World War veteran and a businessman in Satkhira, was picked up on May 13. He never returned.

The occupation forces reasoned that intellectuals were a major threat to them. It was here that the seeds of rebellion were sown. It was from here that the voices of protest got the loudest and from here the courage to defy authority stemmed. So if the source of strength could be

Victory Day, despite being recurring annual events, are far from repetitive experiences. And each year they carry an emotional load. Not only did we win freedom, we paid an enormously high price for it and also proved to the world that we were capable of exacting our freedom from an absolutely tyrannical regime.

Forty years after that day, the hour of reckoning has arrived once

one then just 14 years old, and old parents.

The whole family, with my eldest brother as the sole earning member, became pauper overnight. The only recognition my family or my sister-in-law got was a token gift cheque of Tk.2,000 from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after liberation of the country. My nephews and nieces were not even listed as children of a freedom fighter.

on till this day. Official insincerity is flagrantly demonstrated when it comes to recognising or honouring those who were killed, or even those who survived but were permanently consigned to the wheelchair. They symbolise in their persons the price that was paid for our freedom.

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Migrants and IOM

M.SHAFIULLAH

INSTITUTIONS and organisations come up to meet new challenges of time. The International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), founded in 1863, is an organisation that brings succor to the wounded, and provides protection and assistance to victims of armed conflicts and strife. Its visionary founder Henry Dunant and the Red Cross were the joint recipients of the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, the year it was introduced.

Any conflict or natural disaster leaves a trail of human distress, displacement and dislocation and consequent migration inward or outward. Migration is neither a recent phenomenon nor confined to poorer countries. In fact, large scale migration originated in Europe during the First World War.

Human dislocation took the worst form during, and in the aftermath of, the Second World War in Europe and also in the Soviet Union. To escape from persecution in Europe and in the USSR a huge number of Jewish people in particular swamped the Palestinian territory, then under British Mandate. For the resettlement of the displaced persons of Europe, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) was created in 1951.

By the mid-fifty's ICEM arranged migration of 4,06,000 refugees, displaced persons and economic migrants from Europe to overseas countries. ICEM gradually extended resettlement assistance to Latin America, Africa and Asia. During the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 ICEM assisted UNHCR in the resettlement of 1,30,000 refugees from Bangladesh to Pakistan.

Through its European experi-

ence the Committee found that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. The ICEM was transformed into International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 1989 in recognition of its expertise and increasing global reach. While not a part of

Gulf crisis developed when Saddam Hosen invaded Kuwait in 1990. The turmoil resulted in one of the worst human dislocations in history, forcing a few thousand people to cross into the Saudi desert and Iraqi-Turkish border. In confusion, uncertainty and anxiety

waves towards Jordan. The number of Bangladeshi refugees swelled to 14,000 in Amman in the first week of September. A large number was kept waiting in the no-man's land under inhuman conditions, and would be allowed to cross into Jordan once backlog was flown out.

have been far had there been no intervention by IOM.

Amman became the hub of the international media covering the Gulf War. The plight of migrant workers came under focus of the world media. Humanitarian assistance began to flow in. IOM made an appeal for donations for charter flights. We also requested NORAD, Swedish Middle East Church and the EEC (now EU), who obliged us with chartered flights.

The IOM's experience in the European migration came into full play. The international community promised contributions or flight commitments to IOM. The Organisation became the coordinator and lead agency to charter as well as to allocate flights to move out migrants to their destinations.

We, maintained close liaison with IOM in Amman. Bangladesh received the highest number of flights in the shortest possible time. An estimated \$22 million was spent by IOM in surface transportation as well as flying out approximately 65,000 Bangladesh migrants from September to November 1990.

After the successful repatriation of the displaced migrants from the Gulf crisis IOM became a high-profile inter-governmental organisation that provides rapid humanitarian response to sudden influx of migrants and aid to the displaced.

In the midst of repatriation I proposed that Bangladesh should be a member of IOM, to which the foreign ministry readily agreed, and authorised me to contact James N. Purcell, Director-General, IOM in Geneva. He instructed an IOM team in Amman to visit Bangladesh in October 1990. Following the visit, Bangladesh became member in November 27, 1990.

The Amman repatriation brought the realisation that South

Asia needed capacity building and infrastructure for orderly migration. IOM, therefore, established a regional office in Dhaka in August 1998 focusing on (i) strengthening labour migration process, (ii) combating trafficking in women and children, (iii) assisting in resettlement, repatriation, transportation and post emergency assistance, (iv) technical cooperation and capacity building, (v) migration information analysis and dissemination, in particular public information campaigns, and (vi) research related to migration management and other services.

The trend in population decline and ageing in developed countries called for reversal of near prohibitive and anti-immigration policy in the West. A pragmatic immigration policy will discourage pervasive, clandestine migration and trafficking in human cargo from the South to the North.

Another trend in human dislocation is in the offing due to global warming and climate refugees. IOM, therefore, needs to launch a global campaign to create awareness for orderly mobilisation of affected people beyond their borders.

Funding is a constraint for IOM. To tide over the current repatriation from Libya IOM has appealed for \$160 million. It has repatriated about 25,000 out of 30,000 Bangladeshi migrants. It is devoted to containing social unrest and civil strife through orderly migration of distressed and displaced refugees, and providing human security. The Organisation needs high visibility and prestige in order to raise funds to serve humanity in distress, which can only come from winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

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TANVIR AHMED/DRINKNEWS

the UN system, IOM maintains close working relations with its bodies and agencies. IOM has as partners many international and non-governmental organisations. Soon after IOM was created the

for security, thousands of expatriates in Kuwait and Iraq headed towards the no-man's land between Kuwait-Iraq-Jordan.

The migrant workers of Bangladesh joined the human

PIA and Air India were flying out their nationals. Bangladesh, which had two Boeing 707 aircraft then, was unable to cope with urgent commercial commitments. Doomsday for them would not