

Honouring Indira Gandhi

Recognition was long overdue

PRESIDENT of the Indian National Congress, Sonia Gandhi's first ever visit to Bangladesh to attend an international conference on autism and to receive the Bangladesh Freedom Honour for her late mother-in-law, Indira Gandhi, holds enormous significance. This has been enhanced by the fact that the visit precedes that of Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, in the first week of September which "is expected to infuse fresh dynamism into the multi-faceted, multi-dimensional relationship between the two countries", as announced by the government earlier this month.

Sonia Gandhi, also Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance, with her forthcoming and genial nature accompanied by a humanitarian touch, is a highly popular and respected figure in Bangladesh. This has become even more pronounced in the warm welcome provided to her not only by the state but by the people of Bangladesh. Her unostentatious nature, despite her being one of the most influential women in the world, has endeared her to us and to people the world over.

The political impact of her visit, if any, we will address separately. For now, the prime focus is the role of India, and especially Indira Gandhi, in assisting and expediting the end to Bangladesh's Liberation War, undaunted by the odds. Not only did she take some 1 crore Bangladeshi refugees under her wing in 1971, but she also mobilised global support -- firmly withstanding US, Chinese and Arab pressure at the time -- which was crucial for our country's struggle for freedom.

Thus the award of Swadhinata Sammanona or Bangladesh Freedom Honour -- the highest Bangladesh honour for any foreign national -- presented to Indira Gandhi posthumously, comes as a long overdue recognition and indeed a debt repaid on our part. Our long-nurtured sense of gratitude has finally found expression. Although belated, we hail the move by the state to recognise and honour Indira Gandhi's contribution to our independence movement. We also heartily welcome the visit of Sonia Gandhi in itself and hope that both events will set the stage positively for the Indian PM's visit and lead to a renewed, strengthened, reciprocal and mutually beneficial friendship between the two nations.

Rare accusation,

rare admission

Cure the disease

IN what must be a rarity, a minister has accused the police of indulging in extortion or, as is known in the vernacular parlance, Chandabaaazi. The accusation is in fact an admission of the problem that is behind the systemic dysfunction of traffic system on the highways among other things.

The minister for shipping, perhaps in his capacity as the chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation has ventilated its members' grievance that they have to cough up between 300 and 400 taka on a trip at various points on the national highway. What the minister has said is something that is directly suffered by many and indirectly by most of us. No one can deny that extortion as a whole has tremendous negative impact on the people. The amount passing hands in this manner runs into several thousand crore.

We are certain that the Minister for Home or the IGP may not agree with the shipping minister's assertion, but they, as much as the general public, know what the truth is. However, it is not the police alone that are indulging in extortion; according to the minister, the local mastaans and goons linked to the local MPs, are participating in what is a very lucrative pastime, with gay abundance.

Now that we know who is doing what and how, should we not expect something done about it quickly? Admittedly, it is by no means an easy task. The problem of chandabaaazi in the transport sector is fairly representative of the phenomenon pervading other sectors of public and private life. However, the matter is confounded by the gamekeeper turning poacher. And that is where the cleaning up must begin from.

The government should act fast, particularly in view of

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 26

657

First Fitna: the Battle of Siffin see the troops led by Ali ibn Abi Talib and those led by Muawiyah I clashing.

811

Battle of Pliska: Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I is killed and his heir Stauracius is seriously wounded.

920

Rout of an alliance of Christian troops from Navarre and Léon against the Muslims at Pamplona.

1822

First day of the three-day Battle of Dervenakia, between the Ottoman Empire force led by Mahmud Dramali Pasha and the Greek Revolutionary force led by Theodoros Kolokotronis.

1944

The first German V-2 rocket hits Great Britain.

1952

King Farouk of Egypt abdicates in favor of his son Fuad.

1956

Following the World Bank's refusal to fund building the Aswan High Dam, Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal sparking international condemnation.

1968

Vietnam War: South Vietnamese opposition leader Tr  ng Ð  nh D  u is sentenced to five years hard labor for advocating the formation of a coalition government as a way to move toward an end to the war.

TRIBUTE

Indira Gandhi ... in our collective memory



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

OUR acknowl- edgeme- nt of Indira Gandhi's con- tribution to Bangladesh's War of Liberation has always been there. And now that the govern- ment of Bangladesh has officially taken note of that acknowledgement, through honouring the late Indian prime minister posthumously, we reassert the crucial and decisive role Mrs. Gandhi played in that long ago war for Bengali freedom. The role, if you go back to a recapitulation of history, was for us, indeed for South Asia as a whole, defined the nature of what would come to shape and char- acterise geopolitics in the region.

We in Bangladesh recall the spon- taneity with which Indira Gandhi and her government came forth to provide shelter and sustenance to the Bengali refugees, ten million in all, forced to flee their own land in the face of Pakistani military persecution. The Indians would have been perfectly within their rights had they chosen to adopt a stance of indifference to the plight of the Bengalis. The argu- ment could have been made that the genocide in Bangladesh was an inter- nal matter for Pakistan; that all those years after Partition, India would have little to do with a state created on the basis of communal politics in 1947.

Indira Gandhi did not choose that path. It was the purely humanitarian that came into her approach. For nine months, even as the rest of the world demanded a political solution to the crisis, it was the Indian government which bore the burden of keeping the refugees alive and safe. And then came the bigger move of providing sanctuary to the Bangladesh govern- ment-in-exile. When Tajuddin Ahmed met Indira Gandhi in early April, one of the first questions she put to him related to the whereabouts of



Forty years after our tryst with destiny, we do not forget that Indira Gandhi was the larger than life stateswoman who helped bring that destiny closer to our doorstep. We have remembered. And we say, to her soul: 'Thank you!' For now, for all time.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was the Father of the Nation's safety that was to be one of her preoccupations over the next nine months. And with that came her no- holds barred support, moral as well as material, to the struggle of seventy five million Bengalis for freedom. Mrs. Gandhi's government created the proper ambience for provision of guerrilla training to the Mukti Bahini and ensuring an adequate supply of arms and ammunition to the young men going back to their country to wage war against Pakistan.

Indira Gandhi toured the refugee camps, kept in touch with the Mujibnagar government, ensured a smooth functioning of the clandestine radio that would famously come to be

known as Shwadhan Bangla Betar Kendra. And then she went touring the significant capitals of the world, the better to keep her counterparts posted on the ground realities in occu- pied Bangladesh. Her calm demean- our and her grace enhanced the qual- ity of her global presence. Her insis- tence that the Yahya Khan military regime negotiate a political settle- ment to the crisis with the elected leaders of Bangladesh was her way of informing the world that her country did not harbour any designs on Pakistan. And yet, in shrewdness born of a long career in politics, she left no one in any doubt that should Pakistan go for the misadventure of pouncing on India, she would not stay silent. When truculent western journalists

asked her why India was providing shelter to the Bengali refugees, she bris- tled in urbane anger, before shooting her own question at them: why had the western powers come to the aid of Europe's Jews and other oppressed peo- ple when the Nazis ran riot all over the continent between 1939 and 1945?

In 1971, Indira Gandhi forged a crucial link between politics and diplomacy to help the Bengali cause. She made it unambiguously clear to the Nixon administration that it was making a huge mistake by tilting towards Pakistan. And with the Soviet Union, she went for a definitive new alignment through concluding a treaty of cooperation in August 1971. In December, as the Indian army and the Mukti Bahini forced Pakistan's soldiers into retreat on the battlefield, the Soviet Union helped keep all resolutions for a ceasefire at bay at the United Nations Security Council until the Pakistan army surrendered in Dhaka, until Bangladesh emerged as a free repub- lic on the ashes of East Pakistan. Indira Gandhi heeded Bangabandhu's call for a withdrawal of Indian soldiers from Bangladesh without reservation. The soldiers went home in March 1972. That was Mrs. Gandhi's gift to Bangladesh, on Bangabandhu's fifty second birthday.

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Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star. E-mail: babsantareq@yahoo.co.uk

ENIGMATTERS

Grudge of a Christian fundamentalist



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

THE macabre killing of 93 people by a right-wing fanatic in Norway is the worst attack carried out in that country since the

second Great War. Traumatized Norwegians mourn the death of the unsuspecting souls who did not have the slightest clue of the doomsday.

After this, things will never be the same for the Norwegians. The horrify- ing scenes of blood and wail have left a deep scar on the national psyche of the peaceful nation.

The 32 year old Anders Behring Breivik, who is now under police cus- tody, surprised many by justifying his acts. In his first comments, after giv- ing himself up to the police, made public through his lawyers, he said although the killing was 'atrocious' it was 'necessary'. We'll learn more from his deposition in the court.

Investigators are planning to bur- row deep into his beliefs and come out with a concrete outline of his actual profile, other than the one posted on the facebook. It is impor- tant to know what exactly he wanted to achieve.

Till now, it is an act of a single man. There has been no evidence of multi- ple involvements as yet. Only time will tell the remainder of the story. Although outside links are not downplayed by political experts.

He may have acted alone in this operation, but most likely inspired by 'extreme rightists' scattered across Europe. We have to wait till his depo- sitions and intensive police findings that have got underway.



If Breivik is calling himself a nationalist it is like vindicating the aphorism that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel. The macabre massacre he unleashed is the most degenerated form of exerting rancour on his own co-religionist compatriots. He appears to be a modern re-incarnation of Adolf Hitler.

crowd without showing any sign of thrill.

What were his political beliefs? From boyhood he grew with a deep hatred towards multi-culturism of the lefts and of the Muslims. He hated "cultural Marxists" and wanted a "crusade" against the spread of Islam. He called himself a 'nationalist' and harbored a deep resentment against the immigrants, who he thought enjoyed benefits of his state without deserving them. A staunch believer in right politics he planned to create a far right nationalist party, mainly to set up a counter force to deal with the

"violent Marxist organizations that he believed terrorized the politically conservative".

Breivik was a member of the Progress Party, albeit for a brief period, between 1999 and 2004. But he left the party blaming it for embracing 'multiculturalism'. It was after walk- ing out of the party, that his 'inde- pendent extreme views' took shape. All these years he worked alone. But he kept contacts with far right group members in several countries of Europe. He discussed political ideolo- gies and strategies with them. We

might have more information on them in future.

What spurred him to commit such a cold blooded massacre? Is it only his dogmatic political thinking that led him to this blood letting? Why did he have to kill those innocent young people attending a youth camp of their party?

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Breiviks gruesome acts only sub- stantiate the conventional wisdom of Europe that far right circles in that continent are getting intolerant and more confrontational. This is a dan- gerous phenomenon that powers in Europe and the world could ill-afford to ignore. Home-grown terrorists are hardly visible before they commit the most dangerous acts in their own yards.

However, people taking recourse to terrorism must be told that 'act of terrorism has little to do with politics or beliefs; it is a senseless and criminal act, not justifiable by any reasoning.

It is important that the First World democracies address the problems posed by the 'far right extremists' and 'Christian fundamentalists' in their countries. They harbour intense hatred and grudge against the immi- grants and minorities and their reli- gious belief. They also target those who believe in democracy and protect the rights of the immigrants and minorities.

This is no secret. They have made it known through the media, through public rallies and through attacks and killings.....