



PHOTO: POLASH KHAN

Martyred Intellectuals' Day

There are but a few days in our history more painful and engaging of the collective psyche of a nation than 14 December. On this day, we remember and we grieve. We remember with a heavy heart the loss of the brightest stars of our intellectual firmament and we grieve for the fact that we will hardly be able to produce the likes of those that we lost. We feel their absence deeply and will continue to feel so for as long as we survive as a nation.

The killings were a well planned strategy to divest a nation that has just emerged as an independent country of its thinkers, professionals and teachers to cripple its progress.

This year, as in the past, we have put together a collage of pictures and articles, mostly reminiscences and personal, insightful thoughts about some of the luminaries by some of those who had been intimately associated with them.

This year's Martyred Intellectuals' Day Supplement, like in the past, is both a reminder and resolve. It is a reminder of the trauma that the nation had to undergo, and a resolve not to let the perpetrators of the heinous crime go unpunished.

--Editor

Intellectuals: The Martyred and the Living

SERAJUL ISLAM CHOUDHURY

THE martyred intellectuals of 1971 did not belong to the same profession, nor were they of equal eminence, but all of them had one thing in common, they were patriotic nationalists. The Pakistani hordes that killed them too declared themselves to be patriotic and nationalistic; but were poles apart from the Bengali intellectuals in their idea of patriotism and nationalism. Buoyed up by their patriotism of plunder, the armed Pakistanis subjected the Bengalis to one of the worst genocides in history.

Our martyred intellectuals belong to the people of East Bengal, who had discarded the two-nation theory of nationalism. The rejection was not merely theoretical; its practical significance was disastrous for the Pakistani ruling class whose intention was to turn East Bengal into their colony. To say not to Pakistani nationalism and turn to Bengali nationalism, which is what the martyred intellectuals had done, meant removing the very *raison d'être* of the Pakistani state, asking the people to rise in rebellion against national oppression. And that is precisely what the Bengalis eventually did in 1971.

The process started with language discontent and movement which began right at the inception of Pakistan as a state. Initially it was an intellectual movement, but soon it took on a political character. The intellectuals had protested against the state's presumptuous move to impose Urdu as the state language on the Bengalis; and the entire population of East Bengal lent their support to that protest. The toiling masses had their own disappointments, and they found in the new movement an outlet for their grievances. Step by step the movement grew and was strengthened by popular discontent. The design of the rulers to keep East Bengal as a rich field of exploitation became clearer

with the passage of time and the demand for autonomy continued to gain momentum. The majority of the Pakistani population lived in East Bengal, and to deprive them of their rightful share of state power a curious, and totally undemocratic, system of parity was devised. The intellectuals and political leaders demanded universal adult suffrage, which the rulers had to concede, finally clearing, without their knowing it, the way for the breaking-up of the unnatural state that Pakistan was.

The contradiction between the state and the intellectuals was beyond resolution. Needless to say, all our intellectuals did not promote Bengali nationalism; there were some who clung to

The martyred intellectuals have played their role; they have influenced the movement of history and become a part of it. But the important question is what the living intellectuals have been doing since independence. To be precise, the intellectuals have not explained what went wrong with the state and society in Bangladesh, not to speak of taking that explanation to the public. In fact most of them have affiliated themselves in varying degrees to the ruling class, a class that comprises contending parties, but is in reality a conglomerate of selfish interests. The leadership of the major political parties makes use of the public but remain far removed from them.

To put it in unmistakable terms,

The intellectual, we know, is a person who interprets the world and engages himself/herself in the dissemination of the interpretation to the people.

the establishment and acted in a manner which was reactionary. The intellectuals come from the middle class, which class is well-known for its wavering on ideological issues. But those who saw the national question from the historical and objective point of view were on the side of Bengali nationalism and felt the irresistible urge to take up a position which the state found intolerable. The intellectual, we know, is a person who interprets the world and engages himself/herself in the dissemination of the interpretation to the people. This is what the intellectuals who had rejected Pakistani nationalism had done, earning undisguised state hostility.

what ails Bangladesh -- economically as well as ideologically -- is capitalism. Capitalism had had its virtues, most of which it has lost in the process of its development. Capitalism in Bangladesh today is without enterprise and entrepreneurship; it relies on the gaining of riches through plunder and clings to the world capitalist system, even if marginally. It is certainly not without significance that the capitalist world was prepared to support our agenda of autonomy but not that of independence, fearing that the independence, movement would be led by extremists. By extremists they meant the leftists. India herself was interested in a quick ending of the Bengalis' war

against the Pakistanis not only because of the heavy pressure of refugees but also in the apprehension that a protracted war might result in a leftist take-over of leadership. And the way the capitalist world which opposed the liberation war has established its control over Bangladesh is a proof, if any be needed, of the surrender of our rulers to capitalism.

The emancipation that has been the dream of the people depended on a social revolution; but the class that took over state power did not believe in that kind of a revolution. For them the gaining of power was nothing short of a revolution and, in the interest of their security and continuity, they had pledged to themselves to keep the state and society as it was before.

The original constitution of Bangladesh had socialism as one of the regulating state principles. That, however, was more of a compromise than a pledge. The Awami League was not known for its faith in socialism; it was only in the 1970 Election Manifesto that the party promised to establish socialism, in view of the popular expectation.

Not to speak of a particular party, Bengali nationalism itself has been perceived by the bourgeois leadership in control of the nationalist movement as compounded of two elements -- one explicit, the other implicit. Explicitly its leadership believed in linguistic nationalism, but implicitly it had nurtured its trust in capitalism. This became clear when the leadership took over state power. The rulers displayed their acceptance, in some form or other, of the idea of nationalism, but remained believers in capitalism. In other words, despite their rejection of the two-nation theory, they continued to be capitalist in ideology and outlook.

SEE PAGE 2