

KALEIDOSCOPE

Is it about protocol and not substance?

Honouring liberation war friends

We felicitate the govt for taking a long overdue step

YESTERDAY we had another tryst with our foreign friends who had stood by us as a tower of strength during our liberation war and helped us breathe freely in a country of our own in the end. The president and prime minister conferred Bangladesh Liberation War Honour and Friends of Liberation War Honour on 61 meticulously chosen recipients on Saturday.

This came as part of the process of recognising some 560 foreign nationals and organisations for their signal contribution to the birth of Bangladesh. On July 25, 2011, the honouring series began by conferring "Bangladesh Freedom Honour" posthumously on former Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi. Then on March 27, 2012 state accolades went to 75 individuals, six organisations, Mitra Bahini (allied forces) and the people of India. Even through Bangladesh missions abroad the awards will be given to those who might not be able to make it to Bangladesh.

The long list of recipients, the research and meticulous homework going into it, the elaborate preparations methodically made, securing physical presence of large number of dignitaries and handing over the awards to them attest to the AL government's stunning success in holding aloft the spirit and values of the liberation war.

Those who gave us moral, spiritual and material support the world over by spreading the message of our dire needs in our darkest moments and helped rally world public opinion against genocide unleashed on us should have been honoured much earlier. It took us 40 years to do it -- a shame on previous governments. Where the preceding governments failed, the AL-led one has succeeded.

By honouring them we have honoured ourselves. What is more to the point, a long unpaid debt of gratitude is being paid in a progressive manner of which a substantial part has been accomplished. A gratified nation feels happier.

This has not only bonded us afresh to our friends in the liberation war and paid homage to those no more but also enhanced goodwill and warmth of those countries from which they came towards Bangladesh.

Let's also add a word of grateful thanks to those who could be physically present amidst us despite pressing preoccupations to receive our tokens of gratitude awash with sincerity and endearment.

The photograph says it all

A case of indiscreet indifference

THE pieced-together photographs on the back page of yesterday's issue of this paper are tell-tale.

One shows a gun-toting pro-ruling party youth with a pointed revolver in hand on Rajshahi University campus. The other illustrates his reappearance in a hospital alongside a Rajshahi police official visiting an injured medical student.

It is not for the first time that deliberate indifference has been shown to a marked-out offender. When photographs and video footages of youths in action were available in the past, the police often made use of those selectively or not at all.

This kind of indifference on the part of the law-enforcers cannot set a good example of law-enforcement.

On previous occasions bigger criminals were found to have appeared with high-ups on public stage basking in the clout of a minister or so remaining elusive to the police.

While armed goons stomp around in public claiming proximity to power, how can campus, or for that matter, any place exude a sense of security?

The prime minister has repeatedly exhorted the police administration to go tough on law-breakers, regardless of their political identity. Obviously, the PM's instructions have fallen on deaf ears. But we believe these should be followed through.

The fallout of this callousness on the law-enforcers' part reflects badly on government's credibility, particularly its commitment to the rule of law as well as its democratic image.

Once again we urge the ruling party to keep its student cadres on a tight leash so that they may not cause further damage to the government's image at the fag end of its



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

THIS is a strange democracy where journalists are being denied direct access to the prime minister's official programmes. Why this new

arrangement? Because what the government thinks is that the private TV channels and a section of the print media have been unfair in giving due coverage to the PM's programmes. Under this new system, journalists will have to collect information about the PM's programmes from the state-run television BTV and official news agency BSS.

Thankfully, the private news agencies UNB and bdnews24.com will also have special opportunity to cover the PM's programmes.

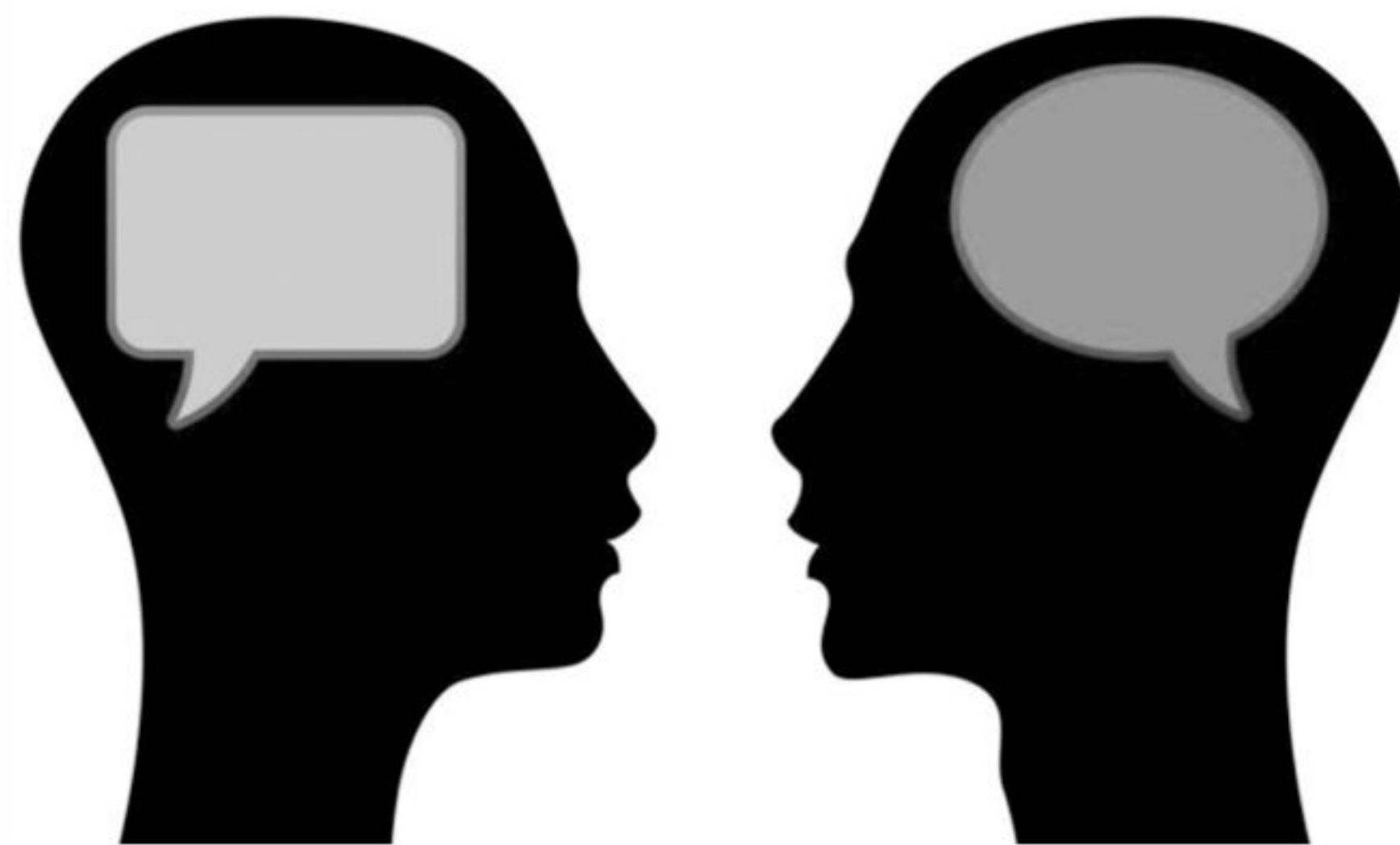
Interestingly, the announcement came hours after the prime minister had expressed her displeasure at a cabinet meeting that morning over, what she indicated, insufficient and less important treatment of her news in the private satellite channels and some newspapers.

And the government functionaries wasted no time to see that this particular expression of the PM's feelings take the shape of an official position against the privately-run electronic and some of the print media.

What do we usually find when it comes to PM's other wishes and instructions that have to do with public good? Are they not then all fingers and thumbs?

And journalists did not have to wait long to see the PM's expression of annoyance take the shape of concrete action! Have the journalists now the cheek to critique the government officials saying that they are tardy or neglectful?

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What baffles us is what message the government is trying to convey by restricting the news; people's right to information by barring them from covering PM's cabinet briefings or various official meetings. Is it trying to punish them for their perceived "misconduct" or what they may even like to interpret as "audacity?"

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With due respect to the PM and her wisdom, can we clarify again how a journalist judges the worth of a piece of information? He decides it by putting himself in the place of the public who would read that particular news in a newspaper or view it on TV or listen to it on the radio. And how does the layman look at a news item? To know that, watch which news they are talking about more and from which sources among the print and electronic media.

The PMO's office, for example, has advised journalists to collect their information from BTV. Assuming that the government functionaries in the PMO are not aware of it already; would they please conduct a survey, if they have not done one before, to find

out the percentage of viewers who tune in to the BTV?

And it speaks volumes for the value the public attaches to the news telecasted by this state-owned TV channel. We believe the PMO's functionaries certainly want that the common people read and listen to what the PM says at important official meetings. And they certainly want that the public get informed not only about who said what in keeping with the official protocol, but also about the substance of their speeches and comments. And surely, the PM had not missed to point out that in the cabinet meeting.

The government, by restricting journalists' access to PM's official meetings, is not so much teaching the press a lesson as they are in effect teaching the news a lesson, instead, and being instrumental in depriving the public of quality information

contained in the PM's speeches or briefings.

Information Minister Hasanul Haque Inu has told owners of private TV channels on October 16 to broadcast news of the PM and the opposition leader according to their state protocol. It cannot be said that an erstwhile firebrand left-wing political leader who once fought on the streets alongside his comrades against autocracy does not recall with delight how the media served their cause when they were in the opposition.

Which is why we get so upset when the journalists are to hear from him how they should give the coverage to a particular news item keeping in mind the official order of precedence of the person being quoted.

Every professional journalist knows the golden rule of news treatment and does it religiously. And the newsmen, of course, follow the policy of the respective media house. That does not mean that the owners of the news channels dictate day to day business of the journalists at their desks.

Inu was undoubtedly aware of it when he advised the media house owners about maintaining protocol in broadcasting news. The media owners, if they want to continue in the trade, wouldn't interfere in making of the news. This is how the media runs and that is the stuff of press freedom.

The high-ups in the government must know that by restricting journalists' access to the PM's official meetings they are just killing that press freedom.

Since the press's function as the fourth estate was defined as the "guardian of the public interest and as a watchdog on the activities of government," it has been delivering its service under democracies as such. Governments, as long as they are democracies, have to recognise this basic tenet of the press that it will serve public interest and keep a watch over the government. As soon a government fails to accept this basic fact it will become a bad day for democracy and not just the press.

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GROUND REALITIES

OBITUARY

OLI AHAD (1928-2012)

For him, nationalism was all



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE passing of Oli Ahad at the age of eighty four is one more sign of a nationalistic Bengali past moving into the ages.

Ahad's nationalism first came to the fore in the early years of Pakistan when, as a young student, he plunged into the battle for an assertion of the right of the Bengali language in the new country's constitutional scheme of things. In the manner of many of his contemporaries, among whom were Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Shamsul Haque and Khaleque Nawaz Khan, he was initially enthused by the creation of Pakistan. Again, like those contemporaries, he was soon disillusioned by the politics of the ruling classes of the new state and so made the deft move toward what would become a defining stage for Bengali nationalism.

In March 1948, Oli Ahad was among the youthful student leaders arrested by the Pakistan authorities over his involvement in a growing crisis over the language issue. That was clearly the point where he decided that commenting on history as it shaped up before him could come by more substance through his active participation in it. As a leading figure in the

East Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League, he did not let go of the idea that within the communal confinement of Pakistan, Bengalis certainly needed to re-establish their secular credentials through their language and everything that came with it.

In the increasingly disturbing late 1940s, Ahad found himself among four young students rusticated at Dhaka University. By the mid-1950s, he would turn himself into an active publicity and organising secretary of the East Pakistan Awami League. As the decade wore on, though, the impression grew that Ahad's soul was not in the party. Even as men like Mujib steadily established themselves as powerful figures in the party, Oli Ahad appeared to be seeking fresh new territory for himself. It was also a time when the seeds of his growing rivalry with Mujib would be sown. An idea of how Ahad felt about his place in politics clearly manifested itself when, through the Kagmari conference called by Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani in 1957, he hitched his wagon to the National Awami Party star.

Oli Ahad's politics would, however, get to be overshadowed down the years through his incisive reflections on the 1952 language movement. His account of the movement remains by far one of the truer and more persuasive recordings of a seminal phase in Bangladesh's history. And yet Ahad,

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the political being that he was, would not give up his search for a strong footing in politics. In post-1971 Bangladesh, his criticism of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's policies would intensify, to a point where the difference between academic disapproval and personal acrimony would often get blurred. After the horror of the tragedy of 15 August 1975, Oli Ahad would link up with Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed through the Democratic League, an outfit which unabashedly described the day of the murder of the nation's founding father and his family mem-

bers as najat dibosh -- or day of deliverance.

Perhaps a huge irony about Oli Ahad's political career is that it effectively drew to an end by the late 1970s. Now that his life has drawn to a close, the memories of him that promise to live on are those associated with his involvement in the struggle for the Bengali language and with his secular politics through the 1950s and 1960s.

Oli Ahad lived as an ardent Bengali nationalist. And he died as one. And therefore is he deserving of the nation's respect.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 22

- 794** Emperor Kanmu relocates the Japanese capital to Heiankyo (now Kyoto).
- 1859** Spain declares war on Morocco.
- 1944** World War II: Battle of Aachen: The city of Aachen falls to American forces after three weeks of fighting, making it the first German city to fall to the Allies.
- 1957** Vietnam War: First United States casualties in Vietnam.
- 1962** Cuban Missile Crisis: US President John F. Kennedy, after internal counsel from Dwight D. Eisenhower, announces that American reconnaissance planes have discovered Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba, ordering a naval "quarantine" of the Communist nation.
- 2007** Raid on Anuradhapura Air Force Base is carried out by 21 Tamil Tiger commandos. All except one died in this attack. Eight Sri Lankan Air Force planes are destroyed and 10 damaged.
- 2008** India launches its first unmanned lunar mission Chandrayaan-1.