

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Dhaka, 1984.

PHOTO:  
IHTISHAM KABIR

## Eyeglasses

After making a long trip to my favourite library the other day, I discovered that I had forgotten my reading glasses. I struggled to read for a few minutes before giving up in frustration.

I recalled an episode of an old TV show – part sci-fi, part suspense – called *Twilight Zone*. The story was about a man who passionately loved to read, but could never find the time because of his job demands. Then came a cataclysmic disaster which destroyed human civilization except our reader and his favourite library which remained intact. The reader was ecstatic as he prepared to spend the rest of his life reading. But, as he gathered favourite books to read, his reading glasses – the last remaining pair on earth – accidentally fell and shattered into a thousand pieces, leaving him with free time and books but without the ability to read them.

Where did the eyeglass, no doubt a great enabler of progress, come from? It was invented in Italy in the thirteenth century. Much earlier, the ever-practical Romans had a simple solution for failing eyesight: they commanded their slaves to read out loud. The Chinese apparently wore glasses on special occasions, but they were intended to shield the eyes from evil forces and not for reading. Real eyeglasses started appearing in European paintings in the fourteenth century.

The first eyeglass lenses were made from quartz because precise glassmaking for optical purposes was unknown. These early specimens were poorly designed from the user's viewpoint. They lacked the two sidepieces and simply sat on the nose, which varies in size, shape and firmness from person to person.

Their centre of gravity was too far forward and they kept falling off. The bad design survived for over three centuries. In order to keep their eyeglasses on, the Spaniards tried ropes of silk attached to the frames which looped around the ears, and the Chinese attached metal or ceramic weights to strings tied to the glasses which hung behind the ears. Finally British opticians invented the familiar sidepieces that fit atop the ears.

The monocle – a single eyeglass that was held in place by the eye muscles – became popular in the 1800s, but today it is usually worn by German generals in war movies. The lorgnette was the eyeglass on a handle that fashionable ladies – who found normal eyeglasses unfashionable – wore in the 19th century. The pince-nez is a throwback to earlier times – the glasses balance on the nose without the sidepieces. The pince-nez is also a favourite of moviemakers because it lends an air of intensity to the wearer.

The great American inventor Benjamin Franklin who travelled widely was irritated by the need for two separate eyeglasses for reading and for viewing distant landscapes from his carriage. So he invented the bifocal lens in the 1780s.

The idea of contact lenses had been around for several centuries, but modern contact lenses were invented by Czech opticians in 1959.

Like many other essentials of modern life, today's eyeglasses serve our needs silently and effectively. But it made a long journey to reach this stage.

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## MARTYRED INTELLECTUALS DAY

## Nation vows to resist plot against war crimes trial

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a vow to resisting any "conspiracy" against the ongoing war crimes trial, the nation yesterday observed Martyred Intellectuals Day commemorating its bright sons, who were assassinated at the fag end of the 1971 Liberation War.

People from all strata of life called for an expeditious trial of the suspected war criminals who committed crimes against humanity during the nine-month long war.

Families of the victims and different socio-political and cultural organisations made the call while paying their tributes to the martyred by placing wreaths at the killing grounds of the capital's Rayer Bazar and Mirpur as well as other parts of the country.

Just two days ahead of the victory on December 16, the Pakistani army in cooperation with their local

collaborators--Al-Badr, Al-Shams and Razakars--killed the intellectuals.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, and the cabinet members paid their tributes at Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Monument early yesterday.

After placing wreaths at the monument of Rayer Bazar mass grave, LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam said a conspiracy is underway to foil the war crimes trial. "But, we wouldn't let it happen. No matter how hard Khaleda Zia tries to save war criminals, she wouldn't be able to do that," he said.

Nine Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP leaders are now facing war crimes trial.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Mujahidul Islam Selim said Jamaat is spending crores of taka at home and abroad to foil the trial and that it has no

legal rights to be a political party. "Jamaat-e-Islami was an auxiliary force of Pakistani army in 1971. It became illegal on December 16, 1971 after the Pakistani army's surrender."

The CPB chief demanded speeding up of the war crimes trial.

Journalist Shaheen Reza Noor, son of martyred journalist Serajuddin Hossain, said they have been waiting for the last 41 years to get justice. "But, when the verdict of war crimes trial is imminent, national and international conspiracies have been hatched to foil the trial."

Dhaka University Vice Chancellor AAMS Arefin Siddique also demanded expediting the trial and exemplary punishment for those involved in massacring the intellectuals.

Projommo '71, an organisation of the children of the 1971 martyred, formed a human chain at Rayer

Bazar to demand resisting the conspiracy against the trial.

As in previous year, Kendriya Khelaghara Asar set up a mock killing ground at Rayer Bazar to inform the new generation of the brutality of the Pakistani army and their local collaborators and to wage a social movement in favour of the war crimes trial.

Awami League, BNP, Bangladesh Workers Party, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, Dhaka Union of Journalists, Dhaka Reporters Unity, Zaker Party, and National People's Party, among other organisations, paid their tribute to the martyred intellectuals.

A large number of intellectuals and professionals, including artists, writers, teachers, doctors, engineers, and lawyers, were killed by the Pakistani occupation forces and their collaborators on December 14 and 15 in 1971.



(Clockwise from top left)  
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina places a wreath at Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Monument in the capital yesterday marking Martyred Intellectuals Day. Leader of the opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia places a wreath there. People from all strata of life arrive at the monument to pay tribute to the nation's bright sons who were assassinated just before the end of the 1971 Liberation War.

PHOTO: STAR



## Ctg physics Olympiad held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Chittagong divisional physics Olympiad took place yesterday in the port city.

Presidency International School organised it as a part of 3rd Bangladesh Physics Olympiad-2013.

"Physics tries to solve the mysteries of the world and make those understandable to ordinary people," said renowned scientist Dr M Ali Asgar, who chaired the concluding programme held in an auditorium of Chittagong Medical College.

"Young students should move forward with an inquisitive mind, the questions that have been lurking in your minds for long will one day open up new doors of science in the future," he added.

A total of 700 students from different schools and colleges of Chittagong division participated in the Olympiad.

The winners will participate in the Bangladesh Physics Olympiad-2013 scheduled to be held next January in Dhaka.



Members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces rehearse for the guard of honour, scheduled for tomorrow marking Victory Day, at the National Mausoleum in Savar yesterday.

## Meter readers demand permanent job

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Contractual meter readers and messengers of Palli Bidyut Samity (rural electrification association) yesterday sought the prime minister's intervention to make their job permanent within this year.

They made the demand at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club in the capital, said a press release.

They threatened tough agitation programmes if their demand is not met.

On a contractual basis, about 30,000 youths have been serving 70 associations of Palli Bidyut in the country for long, the release said.

It added that the work is the same for employees on a contractual basis and permanent workers.

They claimed they have already requested the prime minister, power secretary, chairman and high officials of the samity before to make their jobs permanent, but they did not pay heed to the requests.

## BISHWAJIT KILLING PM, home minister must take responsibility

Says MK Anwar

UNB, Dhaka

Accusing the government of being involved in the killing of Bishwajit Das, BNP Standing Committee Member MK Anwar yesterday said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir must take responsibility for the killing.

"You (the government) killed Bishwajit with your thugs. So, the prime minister and the home minister must take responsibility for the killing of the innocent youth," he told a discussion in the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

Jatiya Nagorik Sangsads, a pro-opposition body, organised the discussion marking Victory Day.

On December 9, some 10 to 12 activists of pro-Awami League student organisation Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) beat and hacked Bishwajit, a 24-year-old tailor, to death near the capital's Victoria Park during a nationwide road blockade enforced by the BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Meanwhile, senior BNP leader Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah termed the prime minister's press secretary's statement on the killing "a big forgery", stating that such statements can not be expected from the office of the head of the government.

"Civilised people and those who believe in democracy and the rule of law can not even imagine such type of words," he told a human chain organised by Jatiyatabadi Diploma Engineers' Association before the press club.

Briefing journalists at the Prime Minister's Office on Thursday, the press secretary, Abul Kalam Azad, claimed that nobody from BCL killed Bishwajit.

## STAR REPORT

India's new External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid started discussions with different political parties and concerned states over the endorsement of the Dhaka enclave exchange accord in their parliament, reports BBC Bangla on Thursday.

He ended discussions with top Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders after two separate meetings with the leftist parties and lawmakers of Assam province.

Without the required majority to pass the accord in the Indian parliament, the Manmohan government is trying to convince the BJP and leftist leaders of the benefits the accord would bring for India.

Although the leftist parties have no pleas over the endorsement, the main opposition BJP still has objections on some points.

The agreement was signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Dhaka visit in September 2011.

## India starts enclave talks with parties