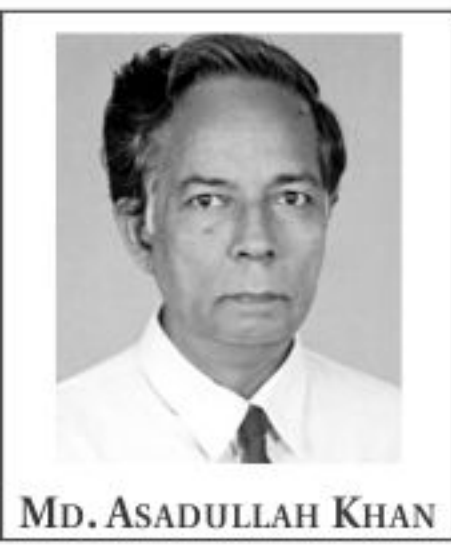


BITTER TRUTH

Projonmo chottor shows the way



Md. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE call from the Shahbagh *Projonmo Chatter* reverberates throughout the length and breadth of the country, demanding capital punishment for the collaborators during the Liberation War. After 42 years the resurgent youth have rekindled the spirit and ethos of the Liberation War. Now, after a long and turbulent journey, light begins to show at the end of the tunnel.

After remaining in hibernation for five years since the liberation of the country, the demons who opposed the Liberation War and actively associated with the occupation forces in the brutalities raised their ugly heads and vitiated the social and political scene through their nefarious designs with the patronage of some self-seeking political masters. Two presidents who came from the barrack mutilated the constitution to suit their personal ends and in consequence the country suffered enormously for long 37 years.

People have not failed to notice that a storm had been brewing in the country not only on party lines but also on other fronts. Religion-based politics has no place in the present day world and it is contrary to the spirit of the Liberation War. Many people also think that the past governments had flip-flopped on major policy decisions while the divisive forces to gain ground. History teaches us that discarding reason and critical thinking in favour of fanaticism and extremist lines leads only to misery. Most of the activists who are now involved in Jamaat-e-Islami politics or outfits like Huji, etc., were not even born in 1971 and have no knowledge about the vile game these collaborators played in those genocidal days.

After 42 years, the youth have launched a peaceful protest movement demanding capital punishment for those perpetrators of crimes against humanity. These collaborators, calling themselves al Badr and al Shams and guided by Jamaat-e-Islami party, made a list of the intellectuals they wanted to eliminate from the soil of Bangladesh and gave it to the then High Command of the occupation forces in Dhaka. They reasoned that intellectuals were a major threat to the existence of Islam and Pakistan.

In carrying out their nefarious design of keeping the



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two wings together, they resorted to every possible means of violence like torture, rape, destruction and savagery of all sorts. Forty two years after those gory days, the hour of reckoning has arrived. Unhappily, the saga written in blood and enormous sacrifice has not been faithfully recorded. Sadly true, politics has since not gone beyond petty self-interest and narrow extremist party lines even at district and *thana* levels.

Even after the restoration of democracy in 1990, parties in power took little notice of the dangers of letting the extremist and radical religion-based political groups take control of things and ride roughshod over the principle of sacrifice and the spirit of the Liberation War. The AL vs BNP cum Jamaat feud and petty politicking stood in the way of establishing the rule of law and stopped all nation building activities based on the participation of all classes of people.

Even if the politicians, who remained mostly busy in fulfilling their narrow self-interest, failed to ignore the thunderheads piling high on the horizon, the youth could. They stood up like a rock to rid the country of

the stigma and undo the damage wrought through long 42 years by allowing the collaborators and enemies of Bangladesh Liberation War to hold state power, fly national flag on their cars and amass vast wealth from home and abroad.

The portents were grim and the end result could have been more apocalyptic had not the youth forces come ahead and raised their voices through peaceful and non-violent means against the injustice and damage done to the nation through unholy compromise with the destructive forces. People witnessed that, at a time when the whole nation got united on the demand for death penalty for the war criminals, a group of Jamaat-Shibir activists unleashed a reign of terror in the streets of Dhaka and in different parts of the country by exploding cocktails, damaging vehicles, firing at police and injuring innocent people.

The Quranic principle and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (SM) enjoin upon the Muslims to practice tolerance even in the face of severest provocation, but now suddenly that perception of tolerance seems to

have been shattered. People are wondering if those now campaigning for restoration of Islamic values want people to rediscover the virtues that were once needed in the days of the Prophet Muhammad (SM) when Islam faced the greatest assaults and stubborn resistance by the infidels.

Shockingly, the Prophet Muhammad's (SM) precepts as a code of earthly behaviour that galvanised Muslim societies with hope for renewal and growth are being lost sight of by the religious zealots. The whole world has reasons to be perfectly happy about the way medieval Europe crouched when Islam reached its apogee of power. Islamic culture and civilisation had worked wondrously, radiating brilliance and electrifying influence for over five centuries in the world. How can we forget the messages of Quran revealed in Medina that are so much tolerant of minority views and other faiths?

Today, in many places of our country, tolerant view and liberal attitude towards religion have given way to oppressive, illiberal and harsh measures, hitherto unknown in the earlier days of Islam. The campuses of some universities have become hostages to a section of activists belonging to radical group who have earned a bad name for Islam. Devout Muslims are shocked to hear that the name of their faith, which means "submission to Allah," can summon up such images of violence.

Apart from the concern for lives and freedom that might be in jeopardy, moderates fear that this wave of terror unleashed by ultra-religious groups, with an innate passion to fulfill a lust for power, might destabilise the country. People in our country tend to forget that this region's mixed races with different faiths have to live together if they want to sustain a formidable growth rate.

The cause for which the youth of the country, apolitical in character and imbued with the spirit of Liberation War, have stood up is a national cause, a singular effort to rid the nation of an inglorious past and a dynamic endeavour to complete the unfinished task of the Liberation War. The mass awakening after 42 years initiated by a unique band of bloggers and net activists and immediately participated by the whole populace aims at fulfilling the dream of '71 through building a secular, non-communal, healthy and vibrant democratic society.

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Searching for answers for a way forward

CURTIS S. CHIN

MORE than a dozen years have passed since I made my first visit to Bangladesh. As a U.S. business executive and advisor then working on a natural gas project, I traveled from my firm's regional headquarters in Hong Kong on to Dhaka and Sylhet. The culture, the spirit, the people and the potential of the nation soon captured me as I met with leaders from business, government and civil society.

How could I not return? And, indeed I have, in my role a few years back as U.S. Ambassador to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) -- a Manila-based international financial institution that is focused on poverty reduction and remains one of Bangladesh's largest multilateral development partners, having provided more than \$13 billion in assistance since 1973.

I now serve as a senior fellow and executive-in-residence at a regional institution in Thailand focused in part on educating and building the capacity of future leaders in business, government and civil society from across Asia, including Bangladesh.

As a member of the Board of international humanitarian organisation Community and Family Services International (CFSI), I also was pleased when that organisation launched last year an initiative with Bangladesh-based Brac to help bring quality basic education to pre-school and school-aged children in the conflict-affected Philippines provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur.

Informed by Brac's own learning and service delivery models for education, the three-year cooperative effort with CFSI is an example of how ideas and approaches out of Bangladesh can continue to influence and transform others around the world.

Yet, as with many Americans with some attachment to Bangladesh, I follow the news now coming from Dhaka always with a mix of hope and apprehension.

During my time in post, I had the opportunity to travel across Bangladesh, from Cox's Bazaar to the Sunderbans, gaining a better understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of ADB-financed agricultural, transport and energy projects. I saw firsthand how lives were improved with increased access to sanitation, water supply and power.

But I also saw failed projects in the tourism sector. Ambitious projects were undercut by poor maintenance, or stopped outright. Just as the Jamuna Bridge serves as an example of how vital ADB-supported internal infrastructure links have spurred growth, the allegations of corruption swirling around the now suspended Padma Bridge project underscores the need for continued and greater oversight.

Indeed, while success rates have increased significantly over the decades, only some 61% of ADB projects in Bangladesh that have been evaluated as of December 31, 2011, have been rated "successful," according to the 2012 ADB country fact sheet on Bangladesh. This includes a 25% success rate for agricultural projects as well as an 80% success rate for those in the energy sector.

Clearly, it will be up to the people of Bangladesh to shape their own future. There are, however, a few simple questions that I would encourage the nation's development partners as well as Bangladesh's own leaders to take to heart, regardless of political party.

Is Bangladesh's government bureaucracy hindering or fostering

economic growth?

The track record of government's performance is mixed everywhere. Whether in Dhaka or Washington, D.C., a real fight against bureaucracy must be less about new organisation charts, and more about assessing what works and what does not. And then, getting rid of the latter. It's the service quality, and not just the size, of the bureaucracy that matters. Government jobs should be viewed as neither as spoils for victorious parties or a source of lifetime benefits for those who hold those positions.

How are regulations impacting job creation?

With large numbers of unemployed or underemployed, this remains one of the most critical questions. Some level of regulation is essential. Yet, whether in the garment industry or the energy sector, rules need to be consistent and enforced fairly, transparently and equally if everyday citizens and outside investors are to have the confidence to create the jobs essential for Bangladesh's future.

When is government intervention appropriate?

Governments in Asia have rightly been criticised for seeking to pick winners and losers, often distorting markets and hurting competition. China and India provide numerous examples of intervention gone awry. Too often, however, government interventions and inefficiency can go hand in hand. Policymakers need to ensure such interventions, if any, are limited and a last resort.

What more can be done to root out corruption?

Throughout the world, corruption and cronyism also go hand-in-hand. The United States is not immune, ranking only 19th "least corrupt" on Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perception Index, which looks at perceived levels of public sector corruption, with the lower the number, the better the ranking. Bangladesh ranks a striking 144th out of more than 175 rated countries and territories. That is

worse than 139th ranked Pakistan. China ranks 80th, and India 94th. Allegations of favouritism or leniency must be investigated, institutions strengthened, and individuals held accountable if people are to have any confidence in the public sector.

At the heart of these four simple questions is my view that policymakers must commit to tear down new "bric" walls being built of bureaucracy, regulation, interventionism and corruption. The prescription for economic growth in the world's developed and developing nations is straightforward -- improve the bureaucracy, regulate fairly, intervene rarely and stamp out corruption. Investment, capital and business confidence and growth would follow. This also applies to Bangladesh.

While there always is much talk of the threat of competition posed by the large emerging BRIC economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China, this lower-case "bric" may well pose the biggest challenge for Bangladesh.

What the nation needs now is to overcome division and discord, and to focus on innovation, infrastructure improvements and a policy environment that will foster the job growth necessary to drive the economy forward. Without question, all the people of Bangladesh deserve no less than this.

The writer served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Asian Development Bank (2007-2010). He is now a Senior Fellow and Executive-in-Residence with the Asian Institute of Technology, and a Managing director with RiverPeak Group.

People's protests fuelled from Shahbagh

PETER CUSTERS

THE Bengali spring has arrived, the gloom of winter has finally been removed. On February 5, a new generation of activists started a movement from the Shahbagh intersection in Dhaka, criticising the weak verdict pronounced by the International Crimes Tribunal in the case against Abdul Quader Mollah.

Like an avalanche, this movement has spread to the nooks and corners of the country and has outstripped and outsmarted the street terror exercised by cadres of the Jamaat-e-Islami. There cannot be the slightest doubt about the verdict pronounced by the people of Bangladesh: the highest punishment must be meted out to those leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami and to other reactionary politicians who helped the Pakistani army implement its policy of genocide in 1971.

The vibrant and spontaneous people's movement started by the youth has appropriately erupted in the month of February, just before the start of Falgun, and this has more than symbolic significance. It clearly fits in a long and powerful tradition of active political engagement by Bangladesh's students and youngsters. Indeed the movement is a very worthy successor to the world famous language movement for recognition of Bengali language staged in February 1952, a movement in which students of Dhaka University played a leading role.

Sure, the present movement must also be understood against the background of the Arab uprising for democracy. Sure, this is a different era, and the initiative of the Blogger and

Network (BOAN) towards the suffar. Still, the primarily a tribute farsightedness of younger genera- Unfortunately, Europe, we are far field of struggle. other members of Diaspora, we wish heartfelt support

demand programme that BOAN has submitted to Bangladesh's Parliament.

We entirely agree with the protestors that this movement's target cannot be limited to the issue of adjudication of war criminals alone. For the scope for democracy and human emancipation can only be broadened durably if the party of war criminals, the Jamaat-e-Islami, and other fundamentalist parties are banned, and if the party's direct and indirect financial resources are confiscated. Let those resources be deposited in a state fund towards promotion of secularism and religious tolerance in Bangladesh and the world at large.

We are acutely aware of the fact that Bangladesh anno 2013 is still compelled to deal with the legacy of 15 years of military dictatorship. Still, some lessons have been learnt. For instance, the Brussels-based European Parliament has repeatedly expressed its agreement with the demand for the adjudication of war criminals. In 2007 it demanded the release of teachers and students who were unjustly detained and tortured by the semi-military government. And it has more than once expressed its respect for Bangladesh's tradition of secularism and tolerance.

We are confident that the voice of the youth and the verdict expressed through countrywide protests will be heard. And we pledge to promote their agenda internationally until the six demands have been met.

The writer is International Correspondent of *The Daily Star*. On behalf of the International Committee for Democracy in Bangladesh (ICDB). Dr. Peter Custers, President, M.M.R. Monowar, General Secretary, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Board Member (ICDB), Khorshed Ahmed, Board Member.

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