

Rajib's sacrifice will not go in vain

We condemn this heinous murder

THE murder of architect and Projonmo activist-cum-blogger Ahmed Rajib Haidar is thoroughly reprehensible and condemnable. It shows how desperate anti-liberation elements are in their efforts to foil the rejuvenated spirit of 1971 among the young and indeed among the entire population of the country. The moment is, therefore, here and now, for firm action on the part of the government. The first thing that must be done is for the law enforcers to go swiftly into action against Rajib's killers, nab them and haul them before the law.

The murder of the blogger has raised the question of the security of those behind the mass upheaval at Projonmo Chottor in Shahbagh. We are worried that with such massive crowds gathering at the place, it becomes rather easy for fanatical elements to strike at random and thereby cause casualties. It is again for the authorities to step up security arrangements in Shahbagh and everywhere else in the country where such mass protests against the war criminals are going on.

At the same time, the organizers and leaders themselves will have to mount vigil and take adequate precautions to protect themselves while in movement.

We expect quick and credible action from the government against the vengeful perpetrators. They must, after this tragedy of Rajib's killing, ensure that no anti-liberation elements or agent provocateurs can infiltrate the crowds at Projonmo Chottor.

We pay tribute to Ahmed Rajib Haidar and pray for his soul. Our heartfelt condolences to the members of his bereaved family. He was a brave warrior in defence of history and national heritage. Let us take new inspiration from him and vow that his sacrifice will not go in vain.

Ongoing Shahbagh movement

Show deference to day-to-day public concerns

WE felt happy about the change in the programme at Projanma Chottar movement by limiting the rally hours between 3 pm and 10 pm. But in the face of heinous murder of blogger Ahmad Rajib Haidar, leaders and organisers of Projonmo Chottar have reverted back to their round-the-clock timing of the programme.

We can understand their anger at the grisly murder and the youth genuinely feel the wrath that it has evoked. We share their sentiments fully. In our first editorial above, we have expressed our severe shock and strong condemnation over the incident.

However, we need also to point to the importance of a transformative approach to the programme while retaining its full vigour.

Hopefully, reversion to the old timing would be short-lived. Uninterrupted continuation of their programme spanning all day and night is somewhat unrealistic, which they will be able to realise sooner or later.

For one thing, the judicial process must run its course, since an amendment has been brought about for the appeal. For the other, given that the traffic of Dhaka is already heavily congested, holding of day-and-night-long rally needs to be rethought.

Two very important public hospitals are situated in the Shahbagh area. Needless to say, public's easy access to them should be ensured.

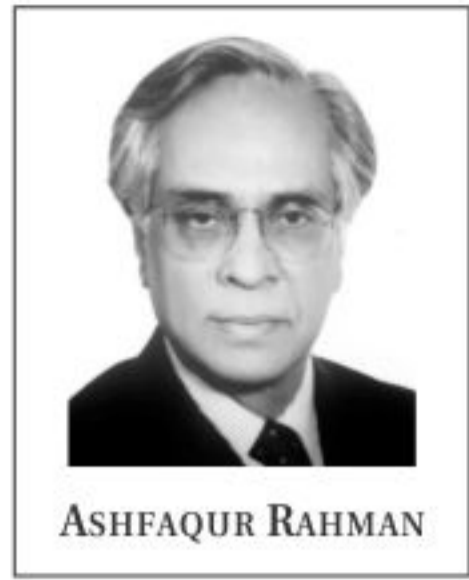
We like to underscore that the correctness of the Projonmo Chottar movement has endeared it to the people. The three minutes' observance of countrywide silence on Tuesday and holding of candlelit vigil on Thursday in memory of those martyred at the hands of the war criminals in 1971 were moments that renewed the nation's awareness about the War of Liberation.

Having reached that point now is the time to take the movement to the next stage, the rationale of which will bring them closer to the people.

The whole country has been stirred up by the Projonmo Chottar. But the youth, including students,

14

SUNDAY POUCH



AS the clock ticks and as the season changes from winter to spring, the big question in everybody's mind is, where is Projonmo Chottor (New Generation Roundabout) in Shahbagh leading us. Every day thousands of new faces are joining those present there and packing the area to its full capacity. The main slogan there is the call for death sentence for the Jammal leader Quader Mollah and all others accused of being Rajakars who had collaborated with the Pakistan occupation army in 1971. Shahbagh has now turned into a national symbol of resistance against evil forces of the past.

To those of us who are curious spectators, four things seem to impress us all. The first is that it is the young, most of whom were not even born in 1971, who are thronging Shahbagh. These young men and women know about the crimes committed by the then Pakistan army and their local collaborators from books, novels, plays, films, blogs and from newspaper reports. They know about the mass killing fields, the rapes and arson as well as the looting that took place. They also know now how the young men and women in those days bravely faced the torture and the persecutions and what sacrifices they had to make in order make the future of this generation and the following ones safe. Morally they think they have a heavy debt to pay. Therefore they are not willing to compromise in any way with the punishment that the perpetrators of the crimes deserve. They have zero tolerance for any flip-flop on justice to be meted out. They are all seeking a moral closure.

The second thing is the astonishingly large number of women in the gatherings there. From the girl child to expectant mothers, from college graduates to professionals, no one seems to be missing out. Sporting colourful dresses and adorned in various accoutrements they have occupied the public space which is rightfully theirs. Shouting slogans, listening to speeches, singing and dramatising history of that time they have kept the focus of the world on Shahbagh.

The next thing is that one cannot discern any formal leadership structure that is guiding the movement. There is no central body that dictates daily

schedules and programmes or gives out policy directions. No one can be sure which way the wind will blow from Shahbagh each day. People in small groups gather every day to express their feelings and their emotions about the War of Liberation. They informally discuss what requires to be done to bring the message to the people at large. They coordinate their thoughts and ideas among themselves and before the end of the day reach consensus about what should follow tomorrow.

So innovative programmes are crafted every day. So one afternoon a 3-minute silence is declared to remember the 3 million dead, which brought the whole country to a halt.



In the days ahead, if the government can get the amendment to the International War Crimes Tribunal passed in Parliament as proposed by the Shahbagh activists, then it must try to appeal to the highest court of the land to see whether the High Court sentence of life imprisonment can be overturned and a death sentence can be awarded.

On another evening a candle light vigil was started which illuminated cities and villages around the country. Surprisingly, the food and water served to this huge crowd are donations given voluntarily by individuals and organisations. Just like how the ordinary folk hosted their fellow men in 1971.

The most significant aspect about Shahbagh is that the protesters use the Internet extensively to relay messages and confirm decisions. They load images on their Facebook and converse by Twitter. This is not only lightning fast but also cost effective. Thus, the on line activists and bloggers have become the new pyramid builders of this day and age.

They also closely monitor the Internet. They have formed into

groups of bloggers who are constantly patrolling the cyber space and pounce on mischief mongers who may try to sabotage the Shahbagh movement. All this is mumbo jumbo to the traditional politicians of this country. They belong to the earlier generation and have remained technologically challenged. So they are at a loss on how to react to Shahbagh. Politicians of all colours and hues have been left on the sidelines and are out of this loop. Shahbagh has also specifically requested the politicians not to bring their agenda there.

The spark that ignited the Shahbagh protests was the malicious victory sign that Quader Mollah

fore, who are not only well connected but also enlightened about the ways of the world. They are no fools to suffer Quader Mollahs in this time and age.

In the days ahead, if the government can get the amendment to the International War Crimes Tribunal passed in Parliament as proposed by the Shahbagh activists, then it must try to appeal to the highest court of the land to see whether the High Court sentence of life imprisonment can be overturned and a death sentence can be awarded. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court will have to take into account all the substantive and procedural matters before it can give its final ruling. But the state prosecution must be able to produce all the material witnesses and the best legal counsel. Shahbagh and the country will be watching closely.

The rest of the pending war crimes cases must also be handled by the government prosecutors with deftness and professionalism. No stone should be left unturned to obtain the maximum penalty deserving in each case. Only then a catharsis can begin.

For that to take place, our politicians, professionals, civil society and our youth must revisit the spirit that propelled our Independence. Our freedom fighters had dreamt of a free nation which would be able to establish a poverty free society, where inequality in wealth or incomes would not lead to the breakup of social cohesion. They dreamt that everyone in Bangladesh would be able to pursue his own religious belief without let and hindrance. For all this to take place a democratic system of government will always have to be in place, with strong democratic institutions playing their assigned roles. Shahbagh's relevance therefore is more permanent in nature.

For posterity, it is necessary to be able to recall the resurgence of the spirit of independence by our youth in 1971. It would be fitting tribute if a huge laser light monument is set up permanently in Shahbagh that would reflect all the colours of the rainbow encapsulating all the diverse views that this new generation hold but yet remain united behind the spirit of independence. This monument would remind future generations how the young did surprise everyone and took charge of the moral and ethical values that were forgotten for decades and gave voice to the silent majority in this country.

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The writer is a former Ambassador and a regular commentator on contemporary affairs.
E-mail: ashfaq303@gmail.com

RUSSIAN ARMS DEAL

Was it necessary?

with such a high rate of interest?

Such deals are justified with the political slogan of modernising and strengthening the army. But why do we need such a strong army? And who are we going to fight?

Our country is almost surrounded by India and slightly by Myanmar. The mere thought of matching Indian armoury is ridiculous. We simply do not have that much money.

Even if we ever get into conflict with India or Myanmar, the best solution will be to use diplomacy. The quality of our diplomacy has already been proven through resolving the maritime problem with Myanmar; and we are also very close to solving a similar dispute with India.

Regional problems like Ulfa and Shanti Bahini have been resolved through diplomacy. The Rohingya problem with Myanmar has to be resolved again through diplomacy. The quality of our diplomacy could be improved further to tackle any future territorial problem.

The other logic being advocated is

that the army needs modern arms for its peacekeeping role. First, the peacekeepers bring in a limited amount to Bangladesh. According to one estimate it was \$1.2 billion in the last three years.

This foreign exchange is earned through the peacekeepers on the condition that they continue to get their salary from our revenue account. There is no such provision for any other professionals who take lien from government service.

When public university teachers go for research with lien they don't get their salary at home. Why should we spend so much on arms to earn very expensive foreign exchange for the country?

Compare this with the earnings of our skilled and semi-skilled labourers who bring in \$14 billion a year. This helps us to maintain balance of payment. What does the government do for these foreign currency earners? How much does the state spend on their welfare? No government has done anything significant for their welfare. These foreign

currency earners are the most neglected. They are harassed and cheated at every step in their life.

We have a priority case here glaring at us -- the Padma Bridge project. This one bridge would have generated 1.2 percentage point of GDP growth and more than 7 lakh jobs.

So why do we not secure loans for the bridge instead of arms? Definitely, the Padma Bridge is more important than buying arms.

There is more news -- the government is going to buy a submarine for our Navy. We will be the 41st "proud" nation to have a submarine.

Countries like Singapore could not yet buy a submarine. Going for such spending spree on arms would continuously balloon our defence budget because of the sheer need of maintenance.

Ironically, Transparency International has published a report that says Bangladesh is at risk of corruption in defence purchase. The recent arms deal with Russia has not been discussed in public. No-one knows the details of the deal. How can a country like Bangladesh, with all her development needs, go for such an arms purchase spree?

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The writer is a former student leader and businessman.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 17

1370

Northern Crusades: Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Teutonic Knights meet in the Battle of Rudau.

1411

Following successful campaigns during the Ottoman Interregnum, Musa Çelebi, one of the sons of Bayezid I, becomes Sultan with the support of Mircea I of Wallachia.

1854

The United Kingdom recognizes the independence of the Orange Free State.

1979

The Sino-Vietnamese War begins.

1992

Nagorno-Karabakh War: Azerbaijani troops massacre 7090 Armenian civilians in the village of Qaradağlı.

2008

Kosovo declares independence.

2011

Libyan protests begin. In Bahrain, security forces launched a deadly Pre-dawn raid on protesters in Pearl Roundabout in Manama, the day is locally known as Bloody Thursday.