

## KALEIDOSCOPE

# Is February only a memory?



SYED FATAHUL ALAM

**F**EBRUARY is traditionally the month of the Language Martyrs. It is also the month when, historically, the fire of

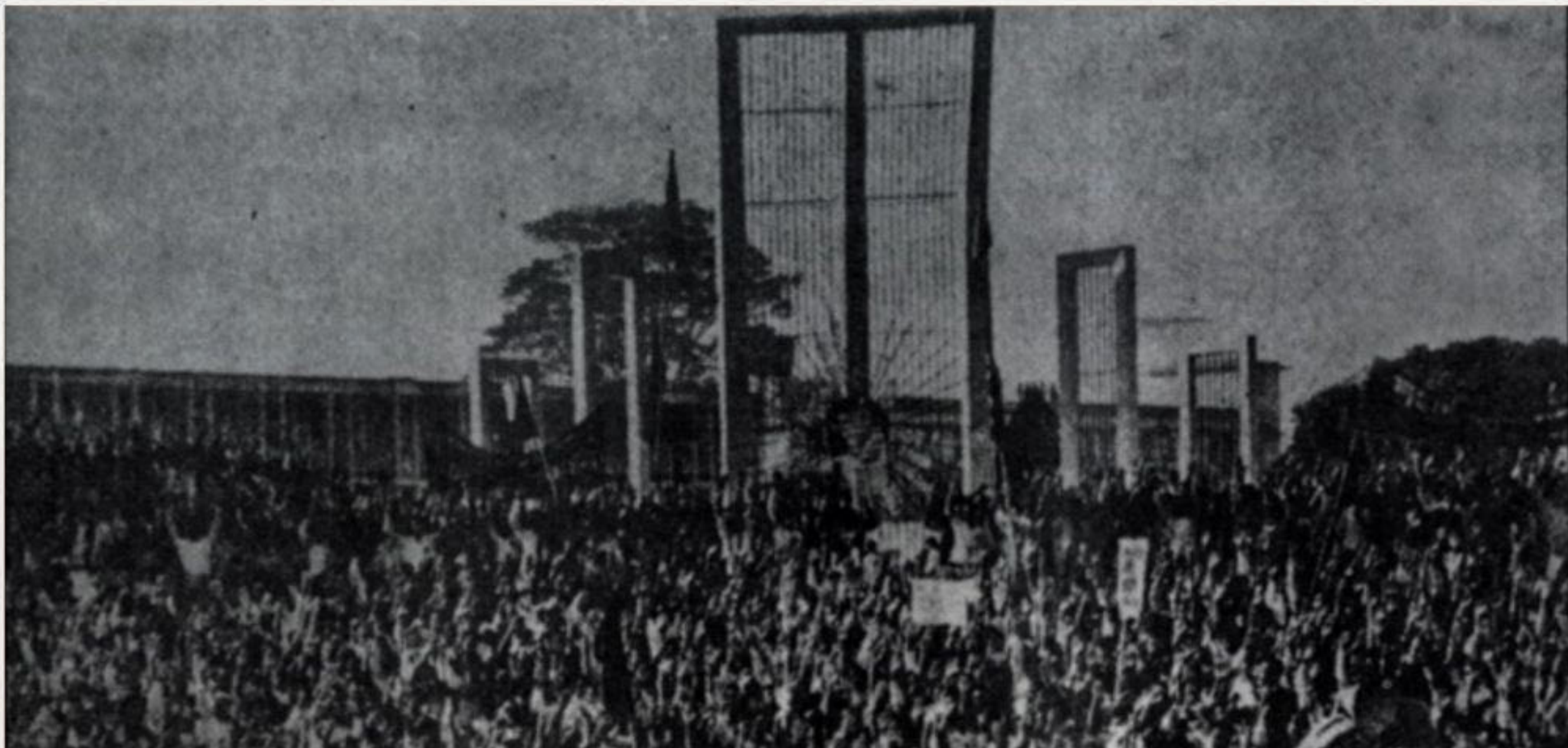
protests and dissent sweeps through the country.

The February of 2013 has added a new dimension to the memory of the Language Martyrs. The youths at Shahabag have not only rekindled the spirit of Liberation War, they have also proved once again that they are not a lost generation. From now on, history will remember February also as the month when an unprecedented upheaval of the people was spearheaded by the youths. The killing of blogger Rajib, an organiser of the upheaval, has added another name to the list of February martyrs.

As in the case of the present movement at Shahabag, every movement of the past that changed the course of history in this part of the world was launched by the youths. And in every case, the major political parties of the day, either took a reactionary position or chose to sit on the fence, while the youths pushed through their movements. The Language Movement of 1952, the 1969's mass uprising, the 1971's Liberation War and the popular upsurge to overthrow the military dictator HM Ershad in 1990 were no exceptions.

True, the youth force has been the movers of our history. But in spite of their inexhaustible fountainhead of energy, they lack the experience in politics, in the art of the statecraft.

To fill the gap between youth power and politics, the onus rests with the democratic and progressive political parties of the country to come forward and take charge to materialise the dream the youths fought and shed their blood for. Unfortunately, political parties have so far been failing,



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and miserably at that, either by their short-sightedness or for their capitulationism. Small wonder, the cause of none of the great movements of the past could fulfil the dream of the youths and the mass people in general in the long run. Examples of such failures, or retreats or betrayals at the last moment abound.

The successful movement of the youths against military dictatorship over the 1980s culminated in the overthrow of military dictatorship in 1990. After achieving their goal, the youths returned home. It was then the turn of the major political parties to restore and institutionalise democracy for which the youths and students fought and laid down their lives for. What have the political parties done over the following two decades to that end? Can we claim that democracy has been established in the country? On the contrary, in place of people's democracy what we have got is the right of those who have political power or have links to power.

The youths that once were ready to sacrifice everything for their lofty

ideals, have been relegated to being lackeys of the political parties. They are embroiled in gangland-style wars at the universities and colleges and kill each other over power rivalries or for booty from tender or admission business. Which face of the youth then is true--the one that we see during the critical junctures of history, or one that we see always at beck and call of the political parties in power?

The great mass upsurge of 1969 against the Pakistani military dictatorship was at once for democracy, complete autonomy as well as political and socio-economic emancipation of the people of the then-eastern wing of Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Finally military dictator Ayub Khan of Pakistan had to step down handing over power to Yahya Khan, who promised to hold election to allow people to decide their lot through elections. It was again a classic example of political capitulation on a grand scale.

Political historians are yet to write the actual history of that struggle and its failure, the reflection of which we can discover in the Liberation War of

1971 and the latter-day fallouts after independence.

This year we will be observing the Language Martyrs' Day on 21st February for the 61st year. Have we ever asked ourselves what we are really observing every year with ritualistic monotony on this day? Publishers launching some new books, intellectuals giving lip-service to Bengali through their writings and lectures--all either eulogising the language martyrs or shedding crocodile tears for Bengali language. After that, the emotions and tears for the Day are put in mothballs until the next year. Meanwhile, anarchy in the usage of the language in the soap operas, language of the anchors of various programmes and talk shows and the electronic and print media continues. Bengali as a language of science, research and commercial transactions remain largely ignored. And the Language Martyrs turn in their grave all the time.

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## Jamaat's call for hartals

### Deplorable acts

JAMAAT'S hartals are becoming repetitive and tedious. And it is futile to ask them whether they realise that using a perfectly legitimate political tool indiscriminately is fetching them any dividend at all. We find their call for hartal today an irresponsible and politically disastrous step.

Yesterday in Sylhet, and the two days starting from Saturday in Cox's Bazaar, Jamaat had called for hartals ostensibly to protest police action on their political programmes. These have caused unnecessary sufferings to the people of these two areas. And if the party wants to carry its message to the public, putting them under duress is not the way to convey one's point. If anything, Jamaat has alienated the public all the more by putting the people through trouble by calling hartals.

We feel constrained to repeat what we have said many times before. Jamaat is fighting for the wrong cause. Calling for release of their leaders, now under trial on charges of crimes against humanity, has no taker, because the country is totally one, barring only a few hardcore Jamaat supporters, when it comes to the issue of trials of war criminals and the severest punishment of those under trial in the Tribunals. And the sooner they realise that the outcome of their violence and their activities that go against the grain of popular feelings and their comments that are abrasive to the sensitivity of the people are counterproductive, the less harm will they do to themselves.

We have watched with a great degree of trepidation Jamaat-Shibir deliberately indulging in violence, particularly on the eve of hartal called by the party, with the sole purpose of creating panic among the public. And they have targeted the police in particular. This is a deliberate tactic to precipitate a horrific situation.

In this context we hear of calls to counter the hartal. This may raise an apprehension of confrontation but any act that does not have the people's support, but on the contrary causes them difficulty, is repugnant to public sensibility. However, resisting hartal should come as part of a civic movement participated by all.

## MCCI makes its case

### A spurt in term lending called for

THE Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) has called for a boost in investment for the industry sector. In particular, it laid emphasis on stepping up term lending in a significant way.

The organisation's just-published report based on an evaluation of the investment situation pertaining to October-December, 2012-13 fiscal, spells out an important suggestion for a marked increase in disbursement of term credits in the remainder of the current financial year.

It needs to be noted that in the second quarter of the fiscal, the industry sector grew by 9.47 percent like in the first quarter -- thanks to an improvement in power supply, according to MCCI. But to realise the potential for further growth the entrepreneurs need adequate term loan distribution within a policy frame of a greater credit flow to the private sector as well as rolling back reduced import of capital machinery.

As a matter of fact, unless energy deficit is worked off and inadequacies of infrastructure in general are addressed along with anomalies in the regulatory mechanisms, we won't be able to make the desired headway in the industry sector. A tall order maybe, given the current political scenario and the level of accountability of the government agencies, but it surely needs to be delivered on if we want to further increase the share of industry sector in the GDP.

What gives us hope is the fact that among the South Asian economies, Bangladesh's achievement in spite of a world economy meltdown has been remarkable. A UN study has found that in competitive terms, Bangladesh's economy has fared very well.

Thirty-five percent reduction in imports, however, may not have been an unmixed blessing. And, the appreciation in Taka value vis-a-vis dollar poses a problem of export prices being less competitive. Policy planners need to watch out. The coming months are going to be crucial for Bangladesh in so many ways.

## TRIBUNE

# Shahabag Square - why we Pakistanis don't know and don't care

PERVEZ HOODBHOY

**S**HAHBAG Square - where's that? Abdul Kader Mullah - who's he?

A bunch of university students in Islamabad, with whom I was informally conversing yesterday, hadn't heard of either. Of course, they knew of Tahrir Square and Afzal Guru's recent execution. But they showed little interest upon learning that Shahabag Square was in Dhaka and that, as we spoke, the city was seething with protest. Between 100,000 to 500,000 Bengalis had converged to Shahabag to sing patriotic songs, recite poems and read out episodes from Bangladesh's history of the Liberation War. At the centre of the protesters' demands was Abdul Kader Mullah's fate.

On February 5, the Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) found Mullah guilty in five out of the six charges against him. Known as Mirpurur Koshai (Butcher of Mirpur) because of his atrocities against citizens in the Mirpur area of Dhaka, he was charged with beheading a poet, raping an 11-year-old girl and murdering 344 people. The ICT sentenced Mullah, presently assistant secretary general of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, to life in prison. For the protesters in Shahabag Square, this isn't enough they want Mullah hanged. On the other side, the Jamaat-e-Islami protested violently and also took out demonstrations. But its efforts to influence global opinion foundered in spite of a well-funded effort.

Curiously enough, Mullah's case has been taken up by the government of Turkey. President Abdullah Gül sent a letter last month to the president of Bangladesh requesting clemency for all those accused of mass murder. Fortunately, Turkey's president appears to be an exception and much of the world has shown little regard

for genocidal killers.

Pakistan has shown zero interest in Mullah's fate. The media is silent and the Foreign Office has not issued any statement. This is quite ironical because, like the forgotten Biharis of East Pakistan, Mullah has been abandoned although he subscribed to the Two-Nation Theory and had fought alongside the Pakistan Army for a united Pakistan. In 1971, local political and religious militia groups like Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams assisted Pakistani soldiers in the mass killings of Bengalis, often singling out Hindus. Many militia members were also members of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

The disinterest in Shahabag Square epitomises the enormous gulf that separates Bangladesh from Pakistan. The period of our national history

textbook (English) is still briefer and simply states that, "Some leaders of former East Pakistan with the active help of India managed to break away from Pakistan and established Bangladesh." The class nine-10 (Urdu) book by far the most detailed devotes nearly three pages to explaining the disintegration. The listed subtitles include: a) Incompetent government of Yahya Khan; b) Hindu domination of trade; c) Nefarious role of Hindu teachers; d) Language problems; e) Indian interference; f) The elections of 1970.

Having seen only grotesque caricatures of history, it is impossible for Pakistan's youth to understand 1971. But how can I blame them? Those of us who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s knew in our hearts that East

have lost half of our country present-day Bangladesh after disgraceful defeat."

But would this have really worked? Even with a bomb, the Pakistan Army would be surrounded by a hostile population and peppered by the Mukti Bahini's guerilla attacks.

Though armed with tanks and aircraft, the weakness of West Pakistan's position was irreversible. With a hostile India in between, the logistics of supplying 90,000 troops from a thousand miles away were simply horrendous. India had, of course, refused permission for over-flights, leaving only the sea route. A long war would have left Pakistan bankrupt. More importantly, all occupying forces including the Indian Army in Kashmir and the Americans in Afghanistan typically exact disproportionate retribution when attacked. The atrocities of occupiers heighten local resentment and add hugely to the insurgency.

I am still trying to understand our good doctor's suggestion. Could the bomb have been used on the raging pro-independence mobs in Dhaka? Or used to incinerate Calcutta and Delhi, and have the favour duly returned to Lahore and Karachi? Threatening India with a nuclear attack may have kept it out of the war, but then East Pakistanis would have been massacred wholesale.

History cannot be undone but it's time to move on. Bangladesh is right in demanding an apology from Pakistan one which we have so far refused to give. Let us do so now and start a new chapter in the relationship between our two states. If we have the honesty and courage to take this step, as a bonus, the problem of Balochistan might become a tad easier to understand and perhaps, solve.

The writer retired as professor of physics from Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 18

**1873**  
Bulgarian revolutionary leader Vasil Levski is executed by hanging in Sofia by the Ottoman authorities.

**1946**  
Sailors of the Royal Indian Navy mutinied in Mumbai harbour, from where it would spread throughout British India and involve 78 ships, 20 shore establishments and 20,000 sailors.

**1991**  
The IRA explodes bombs in the early morning at Paddington station and Victoria station in London.

**2007**  
Terrorist bombs explode on the Samjhauta Express in Panipat, Haryana, India, killing 68 people.