

# Women in forefront

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offensive pages and produced derogatory propaganda to abuse her.

Lucky, however, maintains that nothing can keep her from Shahbagh. "They cannot scare me with their petty tactics."

On the nonstop movement that began on February 5 demanding capital punishment to all the war criminals, she says: "It is really inspiring to see the spontaneous participation of women at Shahbagh. Even the women who used to run in the opposite direction when they saw rallies are now chanting slogans and staying day and night at Shahbagh."

"Young girls from remote areas are rising up, giving slogans and leading the movement in their own villages."

Hundreds of women like Lucky have been the life-force of the movement and have been shaping it, giving it strength and sustenance.

Monti Bosnab, a cultural activist, has made Shahbagh intersection

her home for the last two weeks, singing rebellious songs on the stage and motivating the protesters. Fellow organisers say she cannot be dragged out of Shahbagh even for a few minutes' rest.

Aninda Saha, another cultural activist, has fainted twice during the protest, but refused to go home. She is among those who have been leading the slogans.

"So why not take some rest?"

Monti smiles at the question, and says: "We will rest when our demand for justice is met."

"The mass awakening is not confined to Shahbagh alone. We are seeing that large numbers of women are taking a lead and speaking out. They are challenging oppression. We hope they will be able to raise their voices to demand and establish their own rights as well," says Monti.

According to Joinab Binte Hossain, a blogger from Bloggers and Online Activists Network, mass

awakening is not possible without the active participation of women. "Women like Pritilata, Begum Rokeya and Sufia Kamal have led the way for women's emancipation. We are only following in their footsteps."

In a country where the public sphere is dominated by the male, women and girls at Shahbagh have found a safe space for themselves. Many have been staying all night on the streets, without having to face any problems.

"Except for a few stray incidents, we have not faced any threats or felt insecure," says Sheuli Shaha, a student activist. "Our parents too, even the ones who are otherwise conservative, have supported our decisions to be here."

According to Lucky, it is an admirable feat that women are staying at Shahbagh till two or three in the morning.

"Their safety and security has not been threatened, and they have felt

like they are an active part of this movement. This can go a long way towards ensuring women's emancipation," she says.

Ridma Jahan, a protester, said, "I really want to thank the men who have been supportive and respectful towards women at Shahbagh. But at the same time, I want to address the handful of men who insult the spirit of Shahbagh by poking and staring at women and I tell them to learn to respect women."

Girls and young women in school and college uniforms have flocked to Shahbagh in their hundreds. "People used to say that the youth are apathetic, that we don't care about anything. The youths at Shahbagh have proved them wrong," says Sima, a student of Viharunnisa Noon School and College.

"I hope that the movement for a better Bangladesh doesn't stop at Shahbagh. I hope it continues till we build the country we all dream of," she adds.

# Protectors won't be spared: PM

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League before the last parliamentary elections.

Nine people, including six from Jamaat, have so far been brought under trial in connection with war crimes. Of the nine, two have already been convicted by a war crimes tribunal.

"Inshallah, we will get verdicts of the trial [of the remaining war crimes cases] and be able to execute those," she said, addressing a discussion at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital.

The Awami League organised it to mark the International Mother Language Day today with its Presidium Member Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury in the chair.

The young generations woke up to the spirit of the Liberation War, AL President Hasina said, adding now no one would be able to obstruct the trial process through conspiracies.

Youths learnt the true history of the war through the information and communication technology; an outcome of the government's efforts to make a digital Bangladesh, the PM said.

Hasina expressed deep gratitude towards the young people who voted her party to power in 2008 elections, leading to the government amending the constitution and beginning the war crimes trial.

AL Presidium Member

Matia Chowdhury said the anti-liberation forces were involved in the recent killing of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haidar. They killed Rajib the way they killed many intellectuals ahead of the country's independence on December 16, 1971.

"They are not human beings. They are beasts. They have hacked Rajib's blog and posted offensive comments to hurt religious sentiment of the people," Matia said, urging people not to be misled by such propaganda.

Agriculture Minister Matia also blasted national and international human rights organisations for their request to Bangladesh government to ensure human

rights of the war criminals.

"Where were these human rights organisations when the anti-liberation forces killed freedom fighters and raped women?"

The war crimes trial is being held, maintaining international standards, Matia said.

Hinting at the Jamaat-e-Islami, the key ally of the BNP in the 18-party opposition alliance, she said those who do not follow rules and regulation of Bangladesh would not be allowed to do politics here.

AL leaders Syed Ashraf Islam, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Abdul Latif Siddique, Nooh-ul-Alam Lenin, Shahara Khatun and Mahbulul Alam Hanif also spoke.

## The 3D printing pen

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plastic wire that hardens almost instantly on being cooled by a fan built in to the pen's tip.

It is hoped it will go on sale later this year, and the firm has already given prototypes to artists to create everything from 3D animals to reconstructions of the

Eiffel tower.

"Everyone knows how to use a pen, so we designed a 3D printing pen," the firm said.

"If you can scribble, trace or wave a finger in the air you can use a 3Doodler. As you draw, plastic comes out of the pen, is cooled by an

integrated fan, and solidifies right in front of you.

"You can draw on any surface and lift it up into the air to create your own 3D objects," the firm added.

The device has been created by a company called WobbleWorks, which is currently seeking \$30,000 funding through

Kickstarter.

The creators say it can also be used to repair items through using it as a plastic welding tool.

It has also given artists prototypes of the pen, many of whom are using it to create 3D doodles they then sell online via Etsy.com

# Media cautioned

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The young organisers of the movement have already categorically rejected the allegations of campaigning against Islam, saying that the anti-liberation forces have chosen a path of inciting hatred against the movement by demeaning Islam and shift the blame on the protesters.

The minister said publishing, republishing or airing such stories is clearly against journalism ethics and related law.

He warned that the government will take measures to control and block any community blog or social media, if found hurting the sentiments of the people.

Earlier, the government had blocked YouTube and some other sites for their contents against Prophet Muhammad (SM) and Islam.

Mentioning Jamaat-e-Islami as the "master-

mind" of the propaganda campaign, Inu said some quarters have put in their evil efforts to portray the ongoing movement for war crimes trial as a campaign against Islam.

"The trial for war crimes or demanding trail of war criminals is in no way an anti-Islamic activity; rather it's a bold step to establish justice," he noted.

The accused, said the minister, were exposed to justice for committing crimes against humanity like mass killings, rapes, arson and tortures, which are crimes that do not deserve mercy in the eyes of Islam also.

"The war crimes accused are professional politicians, not Islamic scholars or clerics, religious teachers or preachers," he mentioned.

Accusing Jamaat of war crimes and militancy, Inu said the government is

examining the related laws to ban the party.

He urged all not to mix up Jamaat with any other Islamist political party or organisation as Jamaat itself confessed to involvement in war crimes.

The government, he said, is not against any other Islamist political party or organisation.

Thousands of youths started a non-stop demonstration at the Shahbagh intersection in the capital on February 5, hours after the International Crimes Tribunal-2 awarded life sentence to Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Abdul Quader Mollah for committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

The protesters demanded capital punishment to all war criminals.

# The war Bangladesh can never forget

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protests which followed, and are still continuing, are led by intelligent and liberal people; they are, however, calling with great urgency for the death penalty to be passed on Mollah and other convicted war criminals.

The genocide is still too little known about in the West. It is, moreover, the subject of shocking degrees of denial among partisan polemicists and manipulative historians. Before 1971, Bangladesh was East Pakistan, detached from the main body of the country. The founders had believed that the unity of religion would bind it together. Over time, however, the incompatibility of secular cultures had grown overwhelming. Parts of the Pakistani rulers regarded the Bengalis with open racist contempt.

In his 1967 memoirs, General Ayub Khan wrote that "East Bengal... have all the inhibitions of downtrodden races... their popular complexes, exclusiveness and... defensive aggressiveness... emerge from this historical background." This common hostility towards an immensely rich secular culture reached a tipping point when the leader of the nationalist Awami League, Sheikh Mujib, won a national election. He was imprisoned, and the Pakistani forces began a genocide which lasted from March to December 1971.

Pakistan has never accepted responsibility for what happened. Moreover, historians and journalists have come perilously close to genocide denial, or have seemed motivated by a desire to minimise the numbers involved. The official Pakistani estimates were originally only 26,000 dead and 2 million refugees. A recent Oxford historian whose methodology was savagely criticised declared that there were no more than 50,000 to 100,000 dead from all sides in the war.

If this were true, the Pakistani forces would have fallen short of their ambitions. At a meeting on 22 February 1971, the Pakistani President General Yahya Khan is recorded as saying in fury: "Kill three million of them, and the rest will eat out of our hands." Ten million fled to India; 30 million left the

cities and went to the villages.

In the first phase of the war, young men and Hindus, Awami League members, intellectuals, students and academics were targeted for murder. In the second phase of the war, women were singled out. It is thought that at least 200,000 women were raped by the Pakistani forces and their collaborators - 25,000 victims found themselves pregnant, so that is not implausible. There are eyewitness accounts of "rape camps" set up by the Pakistani forces. The numbers, and the names of rape victims, remain disputed. Sheikh Mujib, the first leader of Bangladesh, ordered the destruction of lists so that the shame would not follow the victims all their lives.

In the last week of the war, when Pakistani defeat was inevitable and a new nation was clearly about to be born, a concerted effort was made to kill as many intellectual leaders as possible, many between 12 and 14 December. The names of potential leaders of the future nation to be murdered were found in the diary of at least one Pakistani officer.

Bengali collaborators in the form of armed vigilante groups, Al-Shams and Al Badr, took the lead in these murders, only two days before the war came to an inevitable end.

It is impossible to know the real death toll. The historian RJ Rummel, who has looked as deeply into it as anyone, concludes that the "final estimate of Pakistan's democide to be 300,000 to 3,000,000, or a prudent 1,500,000." The numbers became politically important in the decades following. As the scholar Bina D'Costa points out, for the Bangladesh government, an upper figure gave the new country greater legitimacy; for the Pakistanis, to scoff and diminish allowed them to demonstrate an ongoing distrust. Whatever the final figure, tens of thousands of those killed died as cruel and appalling deaths as anyone has ever devised. Out of thousands of episodes, one should read the evidence to this trial given by an extraordinarily brave woman, the single survivor of her family. She told how she saw her parents, her two sisters and two-year-

old brother killed in front of her before she was raped by 12 soldiers. She was 13 years old.

That was 40 years ago. The Pakistani perpetrators of the war crimes have never been brought to trial - after independence, Pakistan said that if a single one of its soldiers were tried in the new country, no Bengali then living in the Western half would be given permission to leave. Nor, until very recently, have the Bengalis who collaborated with the genocidaires. The current trials have operated under constant threats of violence from a still active Jamaat-e-Islami. Some war criminals fled abroad. As long ago as 1995, the British authorities had their attention brought to alleged war criminals living in London by a Channel 4 documentary directed by the Dhaka journalist David Bergman. One, Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin, who has been working as an NHS administrator, is only now beginning to be brought to justice.

The shabby series of amnesties and diplomatic effrontery that has left some of the cruellest mass murderers of the century enjoying a peaceful retirement was often challenged by activists, without success. An attempt by the author and national heroine Jahanara Imam to promote war crimes trials in 1992 did not succeed. The International Crimes Tribunal was finally established only in 2008. Its work is slow, and everyone feels that it is achieving what it can before the government changes at the next election. There is no faith at all that Khaleda Zia, the leader of the opposition and, it is often asserted, an ally of the Jamaat-e-Islami, would allow the Tribunal's work to continue for a day, or let its sentences stand.

The rage of the crowds at the life sentence given Mollah is that they know, as so often before, that Sheikh Hasina's government has not achieved what it could, and a change of government will almost certainly lead to a pardon of imprisoned war criminals. It has done so often in the past. Hence the call for the death penalty, as the one punishment that no politician can

reverse.

The calls for the death penalty are the counsel of despair. These are people who believe passionately in the rule of law, and justice. They have seen too many times that justice is only done at the bidding of politicians, and may be undone. But the chaos of the Mollah trial has stirred great concern from observers, and from thoughtful Bengalis. The pressure of the Shahbagh protests has encouraged Sheikh Hasina's government to intervene, proposing the possibility of prosecution appeals, in the interests of securing the death penalty. More intervention in justice by politicians; more judicial murder; more martyrs. It is important, above all, that democratic states reveal themselves to be better than the brutes who murdered and raped, and did their utmost to extinguish a people. And yet the probability that some of the worst war criminals in history will never face justice, and the worst of their collaborators will only have to face a year or two in prison, drives the protesters to despair.

What is the solution? Serious doubts have been raised about aspects of the trials, and the death penalty cannot be the right solution. But life imprisonment in Bangladesh for the mass murderers commands no respect.

There is one further possibility: the Liberian war criminal Charles Taylor was not imprisoned in Liberia, but under the provisions of the ICC in The Hague. The intervention of international law-makers ought to be desirable, and to take murderers out of the control of national politicians. That might permit, too, the trial of the main war criminals, and not just their Bangladeshi collaborators.

The Bangladesh atrocities are too important to go on being manipulated when a government changes. It seems as if this convulsive national exorcism, if it is to achieve justice, must take place in the eyes of the world, and with the world's input. For the rest of us, we have averted our eyes for too long. We have a duty to learn about this forgotten genocide, and face our own responsibilities squarely - not to

shelter murderers, not to ignore, not to forget.

**'BUTCHER OF MIRPUR'**

Abdul Quader Mollah, the assistant secretary-general of Bangladesh's Jamaat-e-Islami party, sparked protests when he emerged from Bangladesh's Supreme Court on 4 February having been handed a life sentence for his role in the atrocities committed during the 1971 war for independence. He was clearly happy with the ruling - giving a victory sign to supporters outside the court. But critics of the so-called "Butcher of Mirpur" - who was convicted of beheading a poet, raping an 11-year-old girl and shooting 344 people - have been left fuming over the sentence, and are calling for him to face the death sentence, like fellow accused Abul Kalam Azad.

## War tribunal

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that his ministry approved her appointment and that she will enjoy the status and facilities of an additional attorney general.

With Tureen, the number of the prosecutors of the tribunals now stands at 22.

Two international crimes tribunals have been dealing with the cases filed on charges of committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

Tureen Afroz extensively studied relevant laws and the trial of the cases, State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam told reporters at his office in the Secretariat.

Therefore, she can benefit the prosecution team at the tribunals with her talent and knowledge, he added.

Replying to a question, he said the government will take an appropriate decision on banning the politics of Jamaat-e-Islami since this has become a popular demand.

Qamrul hopes that an appeal will be filed with the Supreme Court next week against the verdict on Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Mollah, seeking his death sentence in the case.

The verdict of International Crimes Tribunal-2 on February 5 sentenced Quader Mollah to life in prison for committing war crimes.

# Ekushey -- and the struggle

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When these Bangalees died 61 years ago today, they sent out the clear message to the living that their heritage would live on, that the state which was putting the life out of them was shooting itself in the foot.

Today, as we observe the martyrdom of those defenders of the Bangla language, we recall too that Ekushey 1952 was that defining moment in our collective life when we sounded the warning that geography structured into political absurdity by misleading communal politics could certainly not override the cultural legacy of its Bangla-speaking people. That culture was greater than fanaticism, that heritage existed on a much higher plane than the politics of the effete and the snobbish, was the truth we sent out on this day in 1952. That truth was to expand, widen, fill itself with increasing doses of political and aesthetic richness and lead us on to paths of greater glory.

Ekushey led in time to a resurgence of Rabindranath's songs, in 1961. It impelled our students, in 1962, into a rejection of the education

report of the Ayub Khan junta.

Because of Ekushey, we put up barricades of resistance to those who would instigate communal riots in East Bengal in 1964. Because of the sacrifices of 1952, our leadership told the entrenched communal-civil-military establishment based in Rawalpindi, in 1966, that the state called for a major rehaul to survive or, failing that, to be ejected from our land altogether. We sent Pakistan's first dictator packing in 1969.

Nearly three years later, we humiliated the second dictator and his murderous army, along with their local henchmen in East Bengal, into a surrender that would shame them forever. It was Ekushey that was our strength, the belief which informed us that ours being a cultural, language-based nationalism, we simply had no wish to inhabit a ghetto constructed of religious hate and anti-historical falsehood.

This morning, Ekushey warns us to be on our guard against those who murdered in 1971 and whose fanatical, blood-thirsty descendants might murder in the old fashion. On Ekushey, we link up with our brave

men -- our students, our founding fathers, our Mukti Bahini soldiers, indeed the souls of our three million murdered compatriots -- to remind ourselves that those who have killed and raped must walk to their richly deserved punishment.

And those who, in near-madness, go about defending these war criminals, through commandeering Islam and thereby sully its reputation, through attempting to question the religiosity of the Bangalee nation as it converges at Projonmo Chottor must be swatted down in the interest of our survival. These dark forces of hate will not defeat us. But it must also be our endeavour from now on to put to a decisive end their nefarious attempts to nibble away at our national ethos.

Ekushey 1952 was a call to every Bangalee to put the denizens of mediaeval darkness to flight. Let Ekushey 2013 ensure that never again will these sinister men, the ageing war criminals and their equally sinister philistine followers, arise to impede our march to a future of light and laughter and happiness.