

RUBY AMATULLA

HISTORY is a testament to the fact that societies or regions that learn to work from moral high ground of forgiveness and reconciliation after a difficult past of bloodshed and turmoil heal fast and generate a momentum of progress. America after the Civil War in 1860s, South Africa after the Apartheid ended in 1994, Germany and Japan after the World War II under the Marshall Plan are all examples of raising a momentum of socio-political and economic developments by reclaiming and integrating previous adversaries or extreme or oppressive forces within.

Except for the top few that are the masterminds behind the oppression and crimes against humanity who deserve exemplary punishments the rest can be reconciled and integrated in the society by an effective approach of leniency and constructive engagement. Otherwise polarisation and volatility could haunt such a society for a long time.

In South Africa after apartheid, for example, punishments were given for some top offenders, but most defendants were eventually forgiven through the process of confession to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]. It was not easy for Nelson Mandela to undertake such a reconciliation process, as it faced enormous opposition from his community -- even from his own party, the African National Congress to let go of those who oppressed and exploited the Blacks for a long time. However, under Mandela's visionary leadership the country quickly healed, which led to more integration, democratisation, and economic growth of the society. In doing so, South Africa saved itself from the fate of neighbouring Zimbabwe that failed to embark on such a process of integration.

American President Abraham Lincoln gave general amnesty to the defeated Southern states after the four-year long civil war ended in 1865. This visionary act of amnesty and the inclusive political process helped the nation heal after the bloody civil war that claimed over 750,000 lives.

Kosovo, in recent times, after the long and bloody 'ethnic cleansing,' has stabilised and integrated under the leadership of Marti Ahtisaari of the UN who helped the society avoid another round of bloodshed and disintegration by protecting the Serb minority by enforcing

impartial rule of law laid down in the constitution.

Some of the most shining examples of integration took place 14 centuries ago in Arabia under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad [pbuh]. Among many of his deeds, two major courses of action helped the Muslim community to grow stronger through greater social integration.

Today, it is most unfortunate and mindboggling that the Muslim world has failed to remember this original vision of integration. Sectarian fighting, regional conflicts, and civil wars are ripping many Muslim majority societies apart. These conflicts could be avoided through initiatives that promote integration and peaceful coexistence. It is also unfortunate that many governments in the Muslim world subdue radicalism only via military means, often under the influence of Western powers. Social scientists repeatedly state that this method of force without the creative agenda of constructive engagement and integration does not actually prevent radicalism, and can actually exacerbate the problem instead.

Force or military power must sometimes be used initially in order to compel the parties come to the negotiating table. However, military 'hard' power can achieve only very limited short-term goals. There is absolutely no substitute for diplomacy, amnesty, reconciliation and constructive engagement to help sustain long term stability and progress.

Failure of integration can be extremely costly for a nation. Iraq is a glaring example of that failure in our time. By deliberately isolating and marginalising the Sunni community after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraq ultimately caused much lasting trauma to a nation of 28 million people.

Saddam's Baath party consisted of Sunnis -- about 18% of Iraq -- who ran the country since the days of the Ottoman empire. There is no doubt that the extensive and exhaustive de-Baathification process after the American invasion in 2003 is one of the main reasons Iraq has been in a dysfunctional state since.

Under tremendous pressures from the global



community in general and the Muslim world in particular America deviated from the path of the Marshall Plan and was reluctant to do what was required to do to lay down a firm post-invasion plan of recovery and nation building. America, right after the invasion, was too eager to hand over responsibility to the UN, became indecisive, arranged too early an election without fulfilling some preconditions. As a result, the majority Shia groups -- 60% of Iraq -- seized the opportunity to frame a constitution that marginalised and alienated the Sunni community -- and Sunnis subsequently went on the offensive. In no time, violence erupted. And it never ended.

Considering three most unequal ethnic groups -- Shia 60%, Kurds 21%, Sunni 18% -- and their long history of rivalry and separate alliances with the regional powers, the simple majority rule would never have worked in Iraq and it did not.

If an international group of experts under the auspices of the UN drafted the constitution -- validated by a referendum -- that would make these three unequal and conflict-prone ethnic groups indispensable and interdependent in the governance of Iraq, the nation really would force itself to integrate. Perhaps this could be achieved via a bi-cameral legislature as well as a delicate balance between the national and provincial powers. By now, Iraq could have been an integrated and highly developed country in the

Middle East with huge oil reserves. The price Iraq paid for failing to integrate is incalculable.

Different circumstances require different set of approaches to help integrate a society after a conflict-ridden past, however there are some general rules: (1) amnesty and reconciliation for most of the people who may have contributed to past offenses, (2) a democratic system that offers political participation and power sharing for such groups, (3) an impartial rule of law that upholds justice, rights, and equality for all irrespective of religious, ethnic, or other differences, (4) a conducive environment for social stability, economic development, and social consensus for peaceful coexistence, and (5) exemplary punishments, through fair trials, for some individuals who are masterminds behind oppression, killings, or crimes against humanity, as this punishment serves as healing and reconciliation for such a community and establishes precedence.

Integration does not necessarily resolve all conflicts and reconcile all differences. Rather, integration brings about a consensus as to the fundamental principles of rights, freedom, and equality of all people irrespective of differences, therefore enabling them to coexist and to jointly contribute to the collective welfare of a society. If any group in a society remains marginalised and pushed away from power, it will find itself cornered and thus forced to take a more extreme and desperate stand. This is dangerous and detrimental for a society. If, on the other hand, such a group is constantly kept within the loop of dialogue and constructive engagement, there is a much better chance for a positive change. History is filled with examples of radicals becoming moderates when allowed to participate in the socio-political processes of a country. Integration always empowers the moderates and weakens the extreme forces in a society.

I believe that the case of Jamaat and the other Islamist groups in Bangladesh should be handled in a different manner than is currently being handled. An approach of constructive engagement should be taken towards these groups, instead of the policy of constant harassment, incrimination, incarceration, and alienation. A

vigorous programme of reconciliation should be launched in order to help bring about transformation and integration. This would require a change of mindset and modus operandi from both sides of the equation: the dominant mainstream and the Islamist groups. The government and the 'liberal' majority should take that initiative in order to get the balls rolling.

The vast majority of individuals are new generations of Jamaat, most of them were not even born at the time of the war of independence. They should be given a fresh chance to become integrated and a peaceful part of the society. A continuous and intense dialogue should be created to engage them, and they should be allowed to participate in the political process. This is the only way they can be snatched away from the spell of extremism, alienation and hatred.

It would be an extremely counterproductive and dangerous move if we choose to dismantle them by force. They will go underground, take different identities, form different organisations, and they will come back again and again with new faces to haunt the nation as they are driven into a corner. It remains an infinitely better approach to undertake a game-changing process of reconciliation and integration.

If the drug-fueled rebels who traumatised Columbia for a long time now could be brought under the process of redemption and integration through leniency, negotiation, and ambitious social agenda, then it is possible to bring about a change among the Islamists anywhere and everywhere. Education, political participation and social integration can help bring about that change in our time.

Global powers and international business leaders are repeatedly expressing their optimism regarding Bangladesh as a country that can take a leap forward in economic progress. Moreover, considering the geopolitics of this region of the world, Bangladesh is increasingly becoming an important country strategically for major powers. Rapid economic development will help to expedite this strategic importance among world powers. However, volatility often leads to the death of economic progress. In order to ensure stability and continuity Bangladesh must integrate itself -- it must develop a sociopolitical consensus that will strengthen a fair rule of law for all people.

The writer is Executive Director, US-based Muslims for Peace, Justice and Progress. E-mail: rubyamatulla@yahoo.com

## Killing children to “ensure people's voting rights”

QUAMRUL HAIDER

THE American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream that his “four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.” He paid a steep price for the dream -- his life. Bangladeshis also dream that they would be able to raise their children in an “oasis of freedom and justice” as worthy citizens of the world. But because of the “infectious greed” of the political mafia for money and power, their dream has turned into a nightmare. Just like King, they too are paying the price for dreaming, albeit not with their life, but with their children's life.

Never in the history of mankind had a promised land looked as unpromising as Bangladesh today. A nation that witnessed its bloody birth at a cost of millions of lives, a nation that was supposed to be proudly democratic with great economic potential, Bangladesh is now an almost moribund country brutalised by 38 years of military dictatorship and political “dynastocracy.” Since 1975, it has become a country whose rulers, in their eagerness to retain power, legitimately or illegitimately, has become morally bankrupt.

Today, politics in Bangladesh is on a free fall into a bottomless chasm. Children are being killed, burned, blinded and maimed in the name of political rights. Rather than being an exception, killing children to “ensure people's voting rights” has become the rule, as shamelessly justified by Mirza Fakhrul Islam of the BNP. His chilling euphemism not only smacks of arrogance, it shows his apathy toward human life and the decadence of a politician's moral values. Nothing could be more repugnant than sacrificing a child for voting a political party into power.

When will the politicians realise that the grotesque procedure of killing children to score political points is unacceptable in a civilised society? When will they learn that political violence without moral restraint is a “disease that corrupts all who use it regardless of the cause?” When will they understand that

their activities are resulting in the most egregious violations of human rights?

The Bangladeshi politicians' behaviour reveals how impoverished the nation's political discourse has become. They and their depraved cohorts, both in position and opposition, who spit venom are doing politics without principles. These are the people when in opposition caustically criticise the government as a fascist regime without apparent remorse for their own fascist-like demeanour.

The government and the opposition alike have displayed a particular affinity for the armed cadres that sympathise with their political ideology. The goons of the opposition party together with the “carabineros” of the government are engaged in political and criminal activities, armed actions against opponents, including killing innocent civilians. They are operating largely unchallenged and with broad impunity.

The cadres and their godfathers are playing the parts of terrorists, really as imaginative, ruthless, brutal and fanatical as their political adversaries. In the years since independence, not a single one of them has been brought to trial or even reprimanded for murder. Thanks to them, human life has now become the cheapest commodity in Bangladesh. By now, people have become immune to the sight of a dead

child, or a child writhing in pain with burns all over the body, or a child with amputated limbs, or a child blinded by the explosion of a bomb. Parents no longer worry about the bullet that bears the name of their child. It's the one that says “To whom it may concern” that worries them the most.

The lust for violence is a clear sign of neurotic insecurity; their display of authority and power is an irrefutable demonstration of narcissistic personality disorder. These traits are indeed sad but true portrayals of the political leadership of Bangladesh. Such people do not possess the moral compass to lead a nation.

The writer is a Professor of Physics at Fordham University, New York.

## November 7: Let the truth be known

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

OF the many controversies that impinge on some of our historical events, November 7, 1975 remains one. In a society of radical politicisation of events, dates and uprisings it's often challenging to follow the truth from a neutral stance. What the BNP observes as a national Revolution and Solidarity Day is labeled as the Freedom Fighters Killing Day by the Awami League. Moreover, the day with diverse perceptions creates confusion among the minds of many.

BNP's rationale is quite simple: the 4 day long military-civilian revolt not only saved Late General Zia's life, but also paved the path for introducing military dictatorship in Bangladesh. The uprising, beginning on November 3, established Zia's larger-than-life image by sending Colonel Taher to the gallows; nullifying Khondokar Moshtaq's cabinet; heinously snatching away the lives of Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf along with Captain A.T.M. Haider while technically leaving the People's Republic of Bangladesh without a government for 4 days (November 3-7).

Firstly, it's, difficult to perceive how one could brand such an event as a national revolution and solidarity day? Since the outcome of the uprising appeared negative and undemocratic. Secondly, that the AL regime brands it as freedom fighters killing day is no more than exaggeration and exploitation of the event with political motives. True, some notable freedom fighters were murdered during the uprising, but simultaneously their killings were orchestrated by freedom fighters too.

Though a military dictator, the late Zia -- the key beneficiary of the uprising -- was a notable freedom fighter too. We neither vilify nor celebrate the day. We want to address a set of queries that have long been unanswered.

The day actually stands second as a counter-coup in the series of coups during the post-August 15 period after killing of Bangladesh's founding president Sheikh Mujib. Unlike other coups during November 1975, the November 7 one is probably the most misrepresented coup too.

It was the first time during an uprising when the nation was communicated with the theory of “India card.” The propaganda machine conveyed a message that two military leaders (Khaled and Haider) were about to hand over the control of the country to India.

Rationally asking: is it really that easy to hand over the authority of an independent and sovereign state through a military takeover? However, the public could not be fooled, and Bangladesh remained as it appeared after 1971.

It's been well over 35 years, but the nation still doesn't know the murderers of two valiant freedom fighters: Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf and Captain A.T.M. Haider. In what circumstances were they killed? Moreover, why are these two sector commanders' deaths not mourned? Why were the print media, during the first week, unable to report about the jail killing and the ongoing power struggle within the army? More surprisingly, why were all editorials on Bangladesh made subject to pre-censorship in India during the first half of November that year?

Up till now the answers to our raised questions along with many more remain hidden.

Historical evidences suggest that the late Colonel Taher was responsible for the killing of Brigadier Khaled along with other officers as per his statement, but then again it's not proven and declared through a verdict by the legal authorities. However, in March 2011 a full-fledged verdict was published regarding Late Colonel Taher's murder, where the late Zia has been mentioned as the main culprit for hanging him.

Unfortunately, most of the books, articles and media reports on the event of November 7 uprising have come up with biased often inconclusive reactions and statements regarding the roles of the top military brass. Even the book titled *Bangladesh: the unfinished revolution* by Lawrence Lifschultz did not appear to be unprejudiced. But one characteristic among the officers during the coup is evident.

The officers: Zia, Taher, Khaled, Haider, along with the known and unknown officers at the time, had played questionable roles for assuming and influencing state power -- directly or indirectly. Their actions during the coup are disputed, and yet all of them were spirited freedom fighters.

The mystery-shrouded November 7 needs a re-write as far as the truth is concerned. There is no shame in revealing the facts of a past event that for long seemed misapprehended and politically exploited.

Let's finish it with a first-hand experience about the importance of knowing true history gathered in Germany last month. The writer had the opportunity to visit the infamous Nazi concentration camp Dachau near Munich. Over half the visitors were groups of children from different public schools. When asked about the reason to one of the teachers she astutely replied: “We believe it's important to reveal the facts of the much sinister Nazi past from which the students can take sad but true lessons for the future. We don't want a repetition of that past.” Her reply was not only bold but impressive.

Let the facts and events of November 7 be known, and without distortions and political prejudices.

The writer is current affairs analyst, *The Daily Star*.

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 40 Squelched

1 Ward (off) 41 Fills completely

5 Mixes up 42 Patch up

10 Cheering 42 Patch up

12 Piano part 42 Patch up

13 "Death Be Not Proud" poet

14 Merge 4 Football's

15 Greek vowel 20 Loses

16 End-of-proof letters 21 An arm and a leg

18 Ballroom maneuver 23 Egyptian pharaoh

19 Chinese restaurant choice 25 Afternoon break

21 Boost 26 Bothers

22 Woody 27 Will topic

24 Mosque faith 28 Logic

25 Woody 29 Consecrate

29 Prejudice 31 Forgo frugality

30 Slob's creations 33 Pro

32 Rent out 36 History

33 Cart puller 38 Zodiac animal

34 Phone bug

35 School paper

37 Make blank

39 Play place



Yesterday's answer

1 Like old

2 Hot

3 Generic

4 Football's

5 Tater

6 High

7 Confession

8 Confirm

9 Out

11 Petition

17 Badges

20 Loses

21 An arm and a leg

23 Egyptian pharaoh

25 Afternoon break

26 Bothers

27 Will topic

28 Logic

29 Consecrate

31 Forgo frugality

33 Pro

36 History

38 Zodiac animal

### QUOTABLE

#### Quote

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

-Winston Churchill

AXYDLBAAXR

is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

10-8

CRYPTOQUOTE

Q J J T

I O T Q A U V C

H J A U R L X J A U S F U X P U V H U

G V T U S F U X P U V H U H J A U R

L X J A M G T I O T Q A U V C

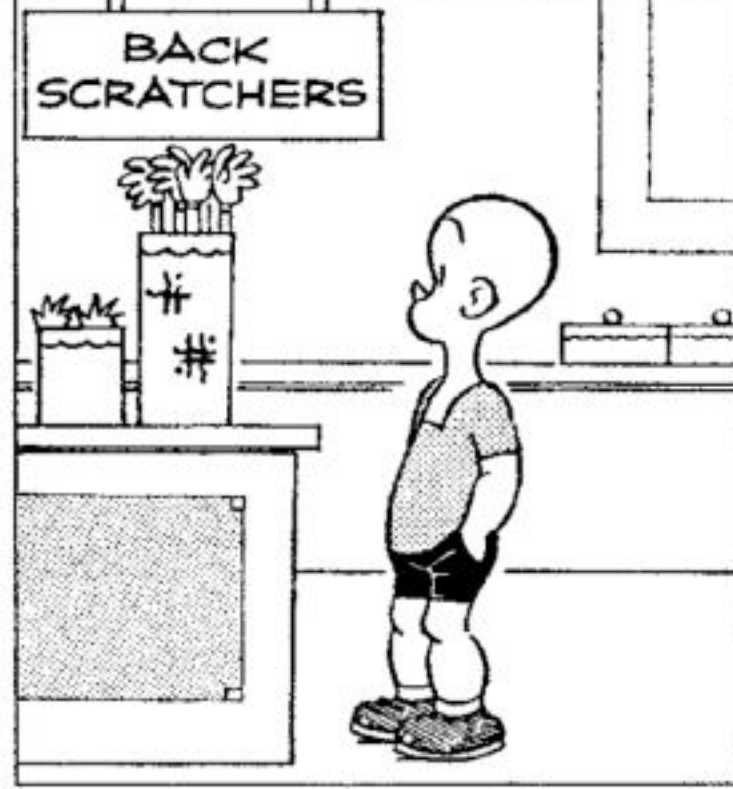
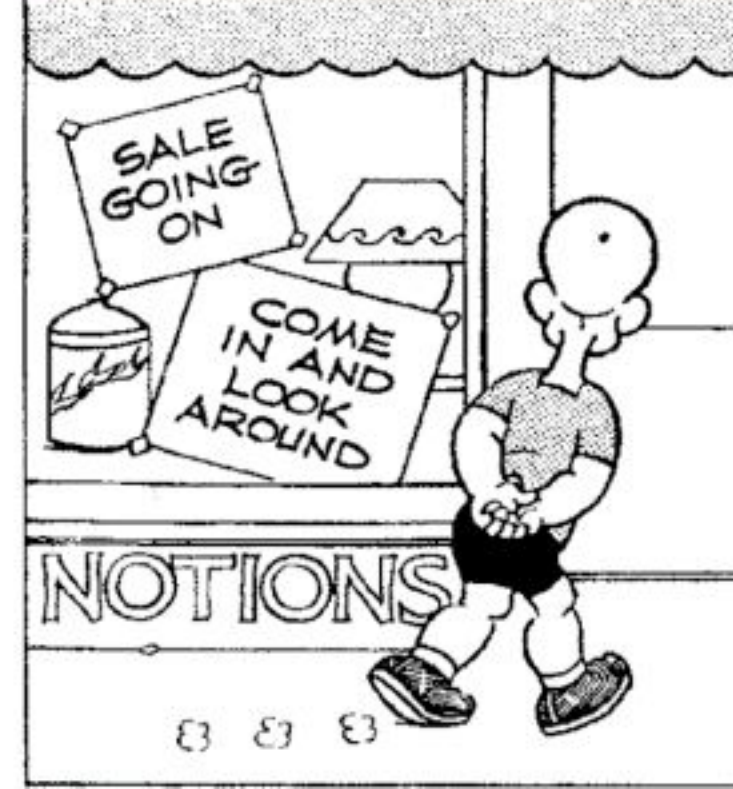
— L X U T M X J J Z R

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT'S SAD WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNOW BECOMES SOMEONE YOU KNEW. — HENRY ROLLINS

BEETLE BAILEY



HENRY



by Mort Walker

by Don Trachte