

Time to re-think for BNP and the people!

SIFAT MAHMUD

THE people of Bangladesh have again seen the real attitude of Pakistan towards them and Jamaat-e-Islam in recent events following the execution of a well known collaborator and Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah (commonly known as 'butcher of Mirpur'). The Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan and other political parties, including the ruling party Pakistan Muslim League, condemned the execution. Jamaat-e-Islam of Pakistan has carried out countrywide programmes protesting the execution of Mollah, in their words a leader of their Bangladesh branch who supported Pakistan during 1971, and called him a 'martyr'.

Ministers, MPs and political leaders have also condemned the execution because Mollah has, in their words, been executed for supporting the unity of Pakistan in 1971. The Pakistan Parliament has gone a step further by expressing grief on Mollah's execution. This shameful attitude of Pakistan is nothing new. In 2000, the then Deputy High Commissioner of Pakistan Irfan Raja had the audacity to undermine our Liberation War. However, this time they exceeded the limit.

The people of Bangladesh earned their independence at the cost of blood and sacrifice. It would not have been possible for an invading army to launch such a massacre coming from 1,200 miles away without active cooperation of the then East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islam and other local collaborators. The people of Bangladesh still suffer the pain sustained during the Liberation War.

The government of newly independent Bangladesh initially decided to prosecute 1,100 Pakistani Prisoners of War (POW) for war crimes. Later, 195 POWs were identified to be prosecuted for most serious crimes. The Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order 1972 was also announced to try the local war criminals, and the trial commenced. In 1973, a general clemency was announced for local collaborators except those who were convicted for or charged with or alleged to have committed murder, rape, mischief by fire or explosive substance to destroy houses or vessels. The government

of Bangladesh also amended its legal system in preparation for the trials of both Pakistanis and local collaborators and enacted the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act (ICTA) 1973.

To prevent Bangladesh from trying the POWs, Pakistan government took a series of actions including: preventing the 400,000 trapped Bangladeshis from leaving Pakistan and making them hostages; keeping the Bangali officers in "concentration camps;" imprisoning thousands of Bangladeshis without charges; and announcing thousand rupee reward for capturing any Bangali who tried to escape from Pakistan. However, Pakistan government also expressed their willingness to set up an international tribunal to prosecute those POWs. Pakistani Minister of State for foreign and defence affairs Aziz Ahmed publicly stated this view of his government.

In these circumstances, following a series of meetings and discussions between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, Bangladesh ultimately agreed to release the 195 POWs under a Tripartite Agreement between the three countries. However, the Tripartite Agreement mentioned Bangladesh's position on the 195 POWs in Article 13 of the agreement, which states: "[T]he excesses and manifold crimes committed by these prisoners of war constituted according to the relevant provisions of the UN General Assembly Resolutions and International Law, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and that there was universal consensus that persons charged with such crimes as the 195 Pakistani prisoners of war should be held to account and subjected to the dues process of Law."

Even if for the sake of argument we say that the Tripartite Agreement exempted 195 POWs from their charges, it is void. It is a settled law that international crimes are jus cogens (compelling laws) and should be universally condemned. According to Article 53 of Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969 any agreement or treaty, if seems to be conflicting and derogatory to jus cogens norms is void. Hence Pakistan failed to prosecute Pakistani war criminals as they are yet legally bound to do.

After signing the agreement Bangladesh continued the trial of local collaborators.

However, on December 31, 1975, General Ziaur Rahman repealed the Collaborators Order and released thousand of war criminals who were convicted for and charged with specific allegation of crimes. He pulled off the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami and allowed Ghulam Azam to return to Bangladesh. Since then, we have seen how BNP has protected and patronised Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh till today.

The victims of the Liberation War, their relatives and civil society were always vocal to try local collaborators. Interestingly, the ICTA 1973 and Article 47(3) of the Constitution remained unchanged. This gave hope that local war criminals would be prosecuted. On January 29, 2009, the Bangladesh Parliament took a unanimous decision and passed a resolution to try war criminals. The trial process began on March 25, 2010. Finally, after overcoming of conspiracies and hindrances, at home and abroad, and exhausting all judicial steps Quader Mollah was executed on December 12.

This great achievement of the nation seems to have made BNP unhappy. It kept silent after Mollah's execution. The BNP-Jamaat alliance and their foreign allies like Pakistan tried to hinder and halt the trial till the last minute. BNP has always been trying to protect and promote Jamaat-e-Islami since Zia's regime. It is a shameful fact that two marked war criminal Jamaat leaders were appointed as ministers in Khaleda Zia's last cabinet. Today, when Pakistan is most unfairly and shamelessly undermining our judicial process, BNP, most unfortunately, is silent.

At the same time we are seeing a diplomatic fight between India and US, and how the ruling party and the opposition party in India are working together to uphold the dignity of their country. But in Bangladesh the scenario is completely opposite. BNP's silence after Pakistan's reaction manifestly proves their soft corner for Pakistan and its local collaborators and undermines our national dignity. Pakistan's reactions have revealed the real face of Jamaat and proved its role in 1971 to the new generation. Therefore, it is time for BNP to re-think whether they should respect the public sentiment or continue to patronise Jamaat.

"Let my country awake"

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

their solidarity with their country, pay homage to their martyrs and enjoy a sense of identity. However, these annual rituals cannot be reduced to a pro forma -- they need to be followed up with actions that translate into the wellbeing of the entire nation, including an equitable society and a political system that ensures good governance.

The simple dictionary definition of patriotism is "love for or devotion to one's country." But patriotism is not just "love" for the homeland. For me, patriotism is honouring the ideals that the country was founded on. These are the principles that motivated thousands of Bangladeshis to put their lives, fortunes, and honour on the line and inspired brave men and women to confront the Pakistani machine guns and cannons. Foremost among these ideals are the rights of freedom, democracy and secularism.

Let me be more explicit. Freedom is the bedrock of all modern nations that believe in equal opportunity for its citizens. At a national level it means people have the right to choose their leaders and vote them out if they feel they are not satisfying the needs of the country and improving people's lives. At a personal level freedom might manifest itself in the right to sing the songs one loves, write the poems that expresses one's deep feelings, articulate one's views and follow one's religion and beliefs, as long as these don't impinge on others' rights.

Regrettably, freedom has become a prime victim in the prevailing highly polarised political atmosphere in Bangladesh. The word "freedom" is bandied around loosely, each adversary feeling free to paint the other as "unpatriotic" if her political views are divergent. There is scant appreciation for the fact that dissent and disagreements are hallmarks of well functioning democracies. In fact, the strength of a democracy lies in the ability of the people to contest the status quo, inject opposing views on important issues and propose alternative policies to further national interests. In this

sense, criticism should not only be tolerated but also encouraged. However, in a true democracy political opinions are expressed, debated and acted upon within the structure of the parliamentary system; not on the streets. It is also true that consensus need not always prevail and in that case the majority carries the responsibility and is accountable for decision-making.

In the current milieu of Bangladesh, politics has grown nasty, mean, even malicious to the extent that any proposal from an opposing political party is viewed with extreme mistrust and rejected without adequate consideration. The result is that the two major parties are in a logjam over elections and transfer of power, with political violence ratcheting up every day! Worst of all this has accentuated the polarisation of the nation -- conservatives versus liberals, non-unionised versus unionised, religious versus secular. Each day we learn of dissenters destroying national assets and killing innocent people in the name of restoring democracy. The opposition is propagating such violence under the pretext that it is for a greater national good. But how can destruction of public property and killing of innocent citizens be beneficial to the country? The fact is "street politics" precludes the opportunity of having a rational dialogue in the parliament that could lead to sustainable solutions.

Let me revert to the issue of patriotism -- which is what triggered this column. We may disagree on many things but we must stand united on the core principles based on which Bangladesh was created. And that is the real test of patriotism. We need to uphold the values that define us as Bangladeshis and give us a sense of pride and belonging as citizens of the country. This requires multivocal political forces to vie peacefully to accommodate a governance structure that serves these founding principles.

I wish to end with an emotional anecdote. Two years back on December 16, I was in my car waiting at a red light in a busy Dhaka street. A young girl selling red roses tried to draw my attention. When I told her I was not interested in buying flowers, she paused for a moment, then presented me with a rose and said "Apa, take it for Joy Bangla!" Before I could say anything the light turned green and we moved away. But I treasure the memory because at that moment I felt proud of my country. Through a single humane act of kindness to a fellow citizen the girl had demonstrated her selfless, spontaneous love for her country. For me, she represents the quintessence of patriotism!

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Celebrating our South Asianess

ABHAY K.

FOSTERING regional consciousness needs mammoth efforts. South Asia has had a formal mechanism of cooperation among its member countries through the vibrant organisation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) since 1985. As part of my training I had visited the foreign ministries and the foreign service institutes of the neighbouring South Asian countries between 2004-2005. Those days the idea of deeper interaction among the South Asians always brought back memories of my days spent in Jawaharlal Nehru and Delhi Universities. I cherished the company of students from the South Asian countries who enriched my academic life in many ways.

The visit gave me the opportunity to meet the young Bangladeshi, Nepali and Sri Lankan officer-trainees. During our meetings we felt that it would be a great learning experience for the young officer-trainees of the Saarc member countries if we could spend a week or so together and share our ideas and aspirations with each other.

After my visit to Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, I wrote a paper titled 'South Asian Affairs', proposing a South Asian University in 2005. I was glad to see that establishment of the South Asian University was announced later that year in Dhaka at the 13th Saarc Summit, though it may not have been because of my paper. The South Asian University has been functioning since 2010 at Akbar Bhawan, New Delhi paving the path for a new South Asia.

After the milestone achievement in the history of Saarc with the establishment of the South Asian University, I believe a Saarc Anthem, a song that all South Asians could sing together, can act as a catalyst in fostering deeper South Asian consciousness and fraternity. I am now ready with a Saarc anthem after a very warm and enthusiastic reception of the Earth Anthem internationally, which I wrote and produced recently.

The Earth Anthem was released in June this year by Mr. Kapil Sibal and Dr. Shashi Tharoor, union ministers of India, at ICCR, New Delhi, and later in Kathmandu by Mr. Jhalanath Khanal, former prime minister of Nepal in presence of Mr. Axel Plathe, Unesco's Representative to Nepal. Since then it has been translated into major world languages. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), India has put it on its website for the use of the students studying in schools affiliated with CBSE. I have been informed that Unesco is going to turn the idea of an official Earth Anthem into a global initiative. I hope a Global Earth Anthem Challenge will be launched soon and the best judged entry will be declared as the official anthem of our planet earth.

Regional and International anthems have been in use since quite some time now. Some of the other prominent regional organisations have their own international anthems. For example the European Union uses Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (Ode to Joy part) as its anthem while the African Union has adopted its own anthem titled Let's All Unite and Celebrate Together. The Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) has adopted an official anthem titled Asean Way in 2008. It is written in English. As per Asean, its anthem is an expression of Asean unity and strengthens the sense of Asean identity and belonging among the peoples of the region.

Being aware of the huge popularity of Bollywood films in South Asia, I have written an anthem for Saarc in a mix of nine languages spoken and understood in the South Asian countries:

South Asian Anthem - Multilingual (9 Languages)

Himalaya theke Hinda Sagor, Naga Hills theke Hindukush (Bangla)/Mahaweli inn Ganga, Sindhu inn Brahmaputra (Dhivehi)/Lakshadweep, Andaman, Everest, Adam's Peak (English)/Kabul Lay Thimphu Tsuen, Male Lay Kathmandu (Dzongkha)/Dilli sita Dhaka, Colombin, Islamabad (Sinhala)/Harek paila saath-saath, Harek paila saath-saath (Nepali)/Dzongkha, Hindi, Nepali, Bangla, Pashto, Sinhala (Pashto)/Urdu, English, Dhivehi, Har kadam saath-saath, Har kadam saath-saath/Apni-apni pehchan, apne-apne arman (Urdu)/Shanti ki baat-baat, Har kadam saath-saath (Hindi)/Har kadam Saarc saath, Har kadam saath-Saarc/Har kadam Saarc saath, Har kadam saath-Saarc.

Naga and Chin hills mark the eastern frontiers of Saarc member states. Mahaweli is the longest river of Sri Lanka while Adam's Peak is its most venerated peak. Sri Lanka has two official languages -- Sinhala and Tamil -- like Afghanistan, which also has two official languages -- Pashto and Dari. I have chosen the language of their national anthems. Dhivehi is the official language of Maldives.

This is to inspire the Saarc Secretariat to launch a competition in all Saarc member countries and declare the best judged entry as the official Saarc anthem. Once adopted, the official Saarc anthem could be encouraged at the formal meetings of Saarc as well as Saarc apex and recognised bodies. It could also be played to commemorate special occasions of Saarc, such as the Saarc Charter Day (December 8).

Saarc member countries could be encouraged to translate the official Saarc anthem into local languages as a way to promote the anthem and foster South Asian...consciousness...and...fraternity among their citizens.

SUMON K. CHAKRABARTI

THE 'Butcher of Mirpur' Abdul Quader Mollah has been sent to the gallows. It's the only Islamic-majority country in the world to have tried and then sent to gallows one of the foremost war criminals in the nation -- who killed, raped and maimed many during the country's Liberation War from Pakistan in 1971. Justice after 42 long years. But to quote a recent poster campaign by the Nazi hunters -- Simon Wiesenthal Centre: "Late, but not too late." The Simon Wiesenthal Centre launched this campaign in Berlin, Hamburg and Cologne this year, to try and bring to justice the last Nazi war criminals living with impunity in Germany.

Ukrainian-born Simon Wiesenthal and his family spent time in several concentration camps; 89 members of his and his wife's families died at the hands of the Nazis. If Wiesenthal was the real deal when it came to hunting down escaped Nazi war criminals, then in Bangladesh this credit goes to few. And it starts right at the top with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Don't forget for a second what she and her family were subjected to. Her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was brutally gunned down in a coup along with other family members. Yet she and sister have stood their ground and meted out justice to Bangladeshis, who were the victim of the worst genocide in post-colonial South Asia in the hands of Pakistani troops and their collaborators in the likes of Mollah. And then there are the likes of Shariyar Kabir, whose Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee (Committee for Resisting Killers and Collaborators of Bangladesh Liberation War) fought a relentless battle against all odds and terror tactics to identify and collate proof against the war criminals of 1971.

But then came the Shahbagh Movement. A movement which has often been wrongly identified as the Bangla Spring. Shahbagh was nothing like the Arab Spring. Shahbagh was unique, not just in its very essence, but its character. In a Muslim-majority country, Shahbagh defied all odds and stood against Islamic radicalism; Shahbagh made us remember all over again that we are Bengalis first; Shahbagh brought the chants of Joy Bangla back on the streets and hearts of Bangladeshis. Shahbagh did not want to overthrow a government, but

it made this generation of Bangladeshis stand up for justice -- justice for the inhuman crimes committed against their parents and grandparents.

But there is a global outcry over the fairness of his and other trials held for alleged war crimes. How can Bangladeshis be 'blood-thirsty,' many have asked. An eye for an eye will turn the entire country blind, argued many. They have conveniently forgotten how millions of women were raped and mutilated, how minor boys and girls as young as two-years-old were thrashed to death in 1971.

And have they also forgotten Adolf -Eichmann? After two decades, Eichmann, one of the top leaders of the Nazi party in Germany, was found hiding in Argentina. He was smuggled out the South American nation in

1960 by agent-s of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service. He was tried and sentenced in 196 and hanged in 1962.

Long live Bangladesh. Because it's not just the name of a country but a concept. A concept of people who speak the same language, a concept which led them to revolt against Pakistani domination 42 years ago

Pakistani domination 42 years ago, a concept where language comes before religion. And inside Bangladesh, the word 'Jamaat' needs to be treated with as much contempt as 'Nazis' are across the world. A recent example is of the 20-year old Greek soccer player Giorgos Katidis, who celebrated a game-winning goal on Saturday by giving a Nazi salute to fans in Athens and has been banned for life from representing his country in international tournaments.

Over the years 'Razakar' has replaced 'Jamaat' in practice while identifying those who carried out the genocide during the formation of the Bengali-speaking nation. It has been a continuous but subtle effort to delineate the essence; in reality though, 'Jamaatis' and 'Razakars' are both sides of the same coin. And they should be treated with the utmost contempt like the 'Neo-Nazis.' Nothing more, nothing less. Otherwise humanity risks insulting millions who laid down their lives and/or were violated in the barbaric genocide of 1971, all over again.

By THOMAS JOSEPH

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and answers.

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

On 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.

11-15 CRYPTOQUOTE

VNSFQ SR FY AOHXOXO UQNF DYK LY CYF ROO: FQO POUNPL YV FQSR VNSFQ SR FY ROO UQNF DYK AOHXOXO. - RNSCF NKJKRFSCO

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THERE ARE ONLY TWO MISTAKES ONE CAN MAKE ALONG THE ROAD TO TRUTH: NOT GOING ALL THE WAY, AND NOT STARTING. - BUDDHA

BEETLE BAILEY

Comic strip panels showing Beetle Bailey and his wife.

HENRY

Comic strip panels showing Henry and his wife.

by Mort Walker

Comic strip panels showing Mort Walker's characters.

by Don Trachte

Comic strip panels showing Don Trachte's characters.

QUOTABLE Quote "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." Arthur Schopenhauer