

## Paying homage to language martyrs

An inspiration for successive generations

Ekushey has and will always be a day of grateful remembrance for us. Not merely is it a day when we pay homage to the sons of the soil who laid down their lives in defence of their mother tongue, but also an occasion on which we reflect on the ways forward.

February 21, 1952 is ingrained in our national psyche because it united us to defend all our core values that made the Bengalees a nation. The sacrifice of Salam, Barkat, Jabbar and many others was testament to our resolve as a people not to bow down to the imposition of a foreign language that was part of a bigger aggression against our culture as a whole.

To truly observe the essence of what 'Ekushey' stands for, we must strive to instil the spirit of our martyrs in the task of upholding and living up to the cultural ethos and democratic values that they had championed so uniquely.

Sixty-two years after 'Amor Ekushey' and forty two years after independence, Bangladesh is still grappling with the onerous task of maturing on a democratic path. The real prosperity and dynamism of a living language is embodied in its literature. Regular exchange with friendly nations on showcasing our language and culture through participation in literary festivals and benefiting from literary works of other countries are steps in the right direction. Expanding our literary works through translating in other world languages and vice versa would only enhance our position in global knowledge based society.

## BNP-led alliance's sway in UZ polls

A clear message to ruling AL

We express satisfaction over peaceful, barring stray instances of violence, completion of the first phase of the upazila polls. The fact that the polls have been held in a fair and congenial atmosphere with a high voter turn out amid much enthusiasm and festivity only points to the seriousness with which the electorate took the electoral event. Women voters coming out in large numbers to exercise their franchise is a positive feature worth noting.

As for the results of the polls, those have not come as surprise. The opinion polls taken prior to the January 5 election to the 10th JS indicated more or less a similar pattern of popularity being enjoyed by the major political parties like AL and BNP. This is a proof, if there is need for any, at all, that the BNP's boycott of the parliamentary election was a strategic mistake. It exaggerated focus on rigging entirely disregarding the fact that the public expectation was for it to take part in the election.

If that was the mistake of the BNP, then the AL's fault was to take a headlong plunge to keep the opposition (BNP) out of the electoral race. The AL should now learn to take the BNP-led alliance more seriously. AL will commit another blunder if it tries to ostracise BNP. In fact, BNP's not being part of the JS has only rendered it (JS) devoid of substance.

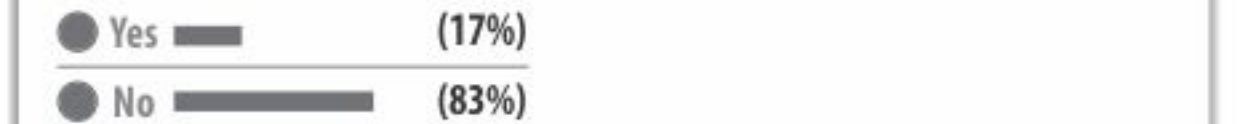
We, therefore, urge the ruling party to take a genuine initiative to engage the BNP in a dialogue and proceed steadfastly towards mapping out the next election in a credible manner.

## What people think

Friday: February 14, 2014  
Do you think it was justified for the US to say that Bangladesh did not make sufficient progress in improving labour standards to justify revival of duty-free trade benefits?



Saturday: February 15, 2014  
Do you think it was justified for Additional Home Secretary Kamal Uddin Ahmed to say that the government has adopted zero tolerance for extrajudicial killing?



Sunday: February 16, 2014  
Do you think Bangladesh would be able to fulfill all the criteria given by the US administration for the revival of GSP facility?



Monday: February 17, 2014  
Do you think it was justified for BGMEA to take stance against inspection standards set by platforms of foreign retailers and brands?



Tuesday: February 18, 2014  
Do you think BNP leader Rizvi Ahmed's allegation that the government is establishing a 'one man rule' in the country instead of the rule of law is justified?



Wednesday: February 19, 2014  
Do you agree with BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that the government is trying to win favour from the US banking on the issue of al-Qaeda threat?



Thursday: February 20, 2014  
Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that the upcoming upazila election will not be fair under the current government?



# Zawahiri's "call" should not be taken lightly

The nation must be one in fighting extremism

### THE THIRD VIEW



MAHFUZ ANAM

whole thing is made up to further harass the opposition.

The tragedy is that people will believe on the basis of their political tilt and not on the basis of facts. Thus the political divide will widen further and we will see one more issue over which there will be mutual mudslinging. And, in the meantime, the truth will get further and further buried under accusations and counter-accusations.

What triggered the al-Qaeda chief to make the 'call' that he did? What had really happened in Bangladesh that necessitated equating us to situations elsewhere where such calls were made? The other relevant question is what use will the extremists in Bangladesh put this message to? What will be the fallout of this call inside our country?

Let us examine how Zawahiri's message is organised. Its narrative is much too familiar to those of us old enough to remember the Pakistani days when everything we did or demanded -- our rights for freedom, language, culture, autonomy and economic well being -- were seen through the single prism of "Islam khatrey mey hai" (Islam is in danger). According to the then rulers of Pakistan everything we did was to weaken the "Muslim Ummah", and nothing else. There was absolutely no merit in anything we demanded or said. We were driven by the single purpose of implementing "India's writ" of weakening the Ummah.

Zawahiri sees our world in the same light as the Pakistanis did in the fifties, sixties and in 1971, and waged a genocide to prevent our dream from coming into reality. His message questions our Liberation War, our right to demand, fight for and finally establish an independent state. Of the 1971 Independence struggle he says: "Their purpose was not independence from Pakistan, stopping aggression against the people of Bangladesh or getting rid of military rule in Pakistan." The real purpose was "to weaken the Muslim Ummah in the subcontinent." Bangladesh, he said, was being turned into "a subjugated surrogate of India."

We have heard all this before. As a freedom fighter I remember hearing Pakistani propaganda over the radio while living in our makeshift camps, calling upon "Muslims of East Pakistan" to resist the Indian "conspiracy" to break up Pakistan and "weaken the Muslim Ummah." There was no recognition of the aspiration of our people for independence. There was never any mention of the atrocities, the burning and looting of our homes and of the random killings of the ordinary people, including women and children. Forty three years later we hear again that our Liberation War was nothing but to "weaken the Muslim Ummah" and whatever is happening in Bangladesh is to make us a "surrogate" of India. The sad part is that there will be some among us who will be willing to swallow this.

Obviously, we are gravely concerned by Zawahiri's call. But what concerns us more is how we, as a state with all our security apparatus and as a people (with all our political rivalries), react to it.

The Daily Star published, last Wednesday, a chronology of postings of Zawahiri's message which was published on several blogs and web sites. On November 30 last year, a Pakistani blog Dawahilallah, run by Balakat Media, first uploaded it, the link of which was sent to Tangail-based youth Rasel, (who is on their email network) who is now in custody for uploading and distributing this message in his own blog, "Islamer Alo." On January 6, 2014 this same

message was uploaded on a US-based web site specialising on jihad related postings called "Jihadology." On February 4 Dawahilallah uploaded the same message again, this time with a title "Bangladesh Genocide behind a Wall of Silence." On February 8, Rasel posted this on his site "Islamer Alo" with an amended title "Silent genocide in Bangladesh." Finally, on February 15 the news broke about this posting on various sites and the media headlined it on the following day.

Why did this message, posted on November 30, 2013 in a Pakistani web site and then reposted on a US site a month and a half later, uploaded on Rasel's site further three weeks later, waken the Bangladeshi authorities up to this dangerous message against our security only on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month, a good three months later.

What were our security agencies doing? We are given to understand that there are specialised bodies whose sole job is to monitor web sites that work against the security and economic interest of our country. Where were they? We know for a fact that many national web sites are regularly monitored. Personal phones of many Bangladeshis are constantly tapped and their conversations recorded, and occasionally leaked to the obliging media to publicise. Three months, even by our standards, is a long time for our security agencies to do their job. We seem to be more apt on spying on our own people then on those who are posing genuine threats to our security. As taxpayers, whose money is being generously spent in the name of security, we have a right to know. We think that the government should hold an inquiry and come clean on how this fiasco occurred, and some heads should role for this grievous lapse. We recall the security lapses in the BDR incident. We do not know if efficiency measures followed from it.

On how we should react as a people, the early signs are extremely disturbing. The political divide is fatally dividing the public response to what we consider to be a matter that should occupy centre-stage of public attention and discourse. But look how our two main political parties are handling it. On February 18 former state minister for law and current food minister, Qamrul Islam, said Tarique Rahman, Khaleda Zia's son, was al-Qaeda's agent in Bangladesh, who he held responsible for the rise of extremism in the country. He also said al-Qaeda's Bangladeshi versions are Jamaat and Shibir.

Not to be left behind, Khaleda Zia, in her press comment on the same day, said that Zawahiri's message was false and is a concoction of the ruling party, and that "the government is carrying on a Goebbel's style propaganda" and the person responsible for it was Sheikh Hasina's son, Joy. So we have the two 'culprits' from the two sides, and it does not need a lot of imagination to think what sort of 'informed public discourse' we are likely to have from them on this vital issue of possible security threat.

Both the above statements clearly show that AL and BNP either do not know what al-Qaeda is or are so obsessed with destroying each other that they do not care if al-Qaeda makes an inroad into our politics as long as it hurts the 'other.' Otherwise, how can they be playing with a terrorist organisation that has absorbed almost the total attention of global powers since the infamous 9/11 in the US. When the whole world is trying its best to keep this terrorist organisation at bay, we are playing into its hands by our immaturity, shortsightedness and the mutual hatred of the two parties.

What we need is a unified response against extremism and not mutual recrimination. We have played enough blame-game with other issues. Against al-Qaeda we must build a national consensus. There cannot be any compromise with extremism, as Pakistanis are learning at a great cost to themselves.

The writer is Editor and Publisher, The Daily Star.

## If al-Zawahiri means business in Bangladesh...

### CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

Bangladesh as al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri enjoyed our full attention. He spoke and we listened.

It was a purported video, at least a month old. Its authenticity was still unconfirmed, but the newspaper splashes screamed as though al-Zawahiri was already breathing down our neck. The ruling party leaders had a field day in the parliament. They pounded BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefajat-e-Islam like the Visigoths ransacked Rome.

The lawmakers did threadbare analysis of every aspect of what the al-Qaeda supremo said. They also speculated on every motive that must have prompted those who shot and uploaded that video. One leader, if I heard him right, even said with a great deal of confidence that it was the BNP chairperson who had asked al-Zawahiri over telephone to do his rendition. The television channels did their best as talk show guests on overdrive also stretched their imagination.

On the whole it was a Don Quixotic exercise fighting the windmills. But if you ask me, the al-Qaeda threat could be real. No, I am not talking about this particular one that was issued last week. I am talking about the future possibilities. I know it in the same way I know that someone neglecting himself is going to get sick.

If you look at the history of al-Qaeda, it was founded as a *takfiri* (a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of apostasy) organisation by Osama bin Laden at some point between 1988 and 1989. Created in Pakistan, its origin goes back to the Soviet War in Afghanistan. Since then this militant outfit expanded operation to Egypt, Iraq, the Maghreb (the region of western North Africa or Northwest Africa, west of Egypt), Nigeria, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Thailand and Yemen. Thus, its trajectory has been a function of two things. It infiltrates where there's Muslim discontent and where national cohesion is

jarred loose by internecine politics.

It requires reference to medical science for better understanding. The autoimmune diseases develop when antibodies and immune cells, by mistake, target the body's own healthy tissues. It's the same science that also drives the al-Qaeda strategy. It targets countries, where the immune system is already weakened by chaos and conflict.

One doesn't have to be an Einstein to guess that Bangladesh is priming up as a fertile ground for disruptive forces. It's a Muslim country, where a section of its population is unhappy because religion doesn't get a greater share in their life and government. This is also a country, where people are fractured along the fault lines of irreconcilable political differences. If al-Qaeda is looking for its next foothold, Bangladesh should loom large on its destination list.

Our month-or-so-old state ministers of home and foreign affairs have assured us that we are fully prepared to fight back al-Qaeda if it ever tried to push its tentacles into Bangladesh. The fact of the matter is that they've said so by putting hope above experience. Mightier nations like the United States, India, Russia and the United Kingdom will vouch that the war against terror is easier said than done. It requires much more than lip service.

The bad news last week wasn't that a quirky al-Qaeda video surfaced to give us a rude awakening. Rather the bad news was how our politicians and intellectuals were fishing in muddy water, using a time of supposedly national distress to score political points. Had they been truly worried, they would have done exactly the opposite of what they did. They would have closed ranks with all political parties to secure the country instead of breaking ranks with them and leave it exposed.

Many of us know the fateful story of the shepherd in Aesop's fable. He amused himself by crying wolf, and when the villagers rushed to protect him and his flock of sheep, they only found the boy had pulled a fast one on them. One day when the wolf really showed up, the villagers didn't come to his rescue.

Those who cried wolf last week amused themselves politically. But if al-Qaeda chooses to show up, are we going to be ready? While we're accusing each other of being deficient in the spirit of the Liberation War, our liberty is spiriting away. One *takfiri* knows the weakness of another *takfiri*. Who should sense it better than al-Zawahiri that a callous nation, with its arms wide open, is courting his footprint?

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A serious threat to Sundarbans

It is true that our power sector requires a lot of development. However, we need to think about the after effects of building the Rampal power plant near the Sundarbans. This project is going to destroy the wildlife of the world's largest mangrove forest as well as the entire ecosystem in which it thrived. Sundarbans has already experienced a steep decline in the population of various species. This project, if implemented, will be a further blow to its flora and fauna. Please don't expose the lives of the animals and plants of this forest to the devastating impacts of the power plant. I would urge the authorities concerned to take the right steps in order to save our beloved Sundarbans and the thousands of animals that live there.

Nasif Ferdaus  
BBIS, Sylhet

### Eliminate all nukes

This refers to the report, "Iran, IAEA agree 'practical steps'" (Feb.10). Why this nuclear apartheid? Nuclear weapons are used as blackmail tactic in international politics. What the IAEA should bother about is whether nuclear weapons are falling in the hands of terrorist groups. Even if Iran has nuclear weapons, she will not use it against any other nation, for the simple reason that such a foolhardy step will be met with massive retaliation. Israel is said to be in possession of more than 100 nuclear missiles, whereas big powers like the US, China, and Russia have thousands of nuclear weapons. Efforts should be made to eliminate nuclear weapons from the planet earth. Nuclear weapons may become outdated, as there are reports that nations like Russia and the USA are developing inter-planet missiles -- a missile that can hit the earth from the Moon, or other planet.

Deendayal M. Lulla  
Mumbai, India

### Brilliant feat by SUST students

Bangladesh's new generation has started walking into a new path of glory. Some students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) have made a remote-controlled aircraft, referred to as drone, which took its inaugural flight on 29th January 2014.

The device will be able to reach any place within a relatively short time and is quite noiseless in its operation.

Young people are working hard for inventing new technologies which can help develop our country. All they need is guideline and cooperation from the government.

Shamima Al Zaman  
Boro Moghbazar  
Dhaka

### What about the burnt schools?

Everybody has forgotten about those schools that were burnt on the day before 10th parliamentary election. Nobody asks anything about the condition of those schools anymore. And we see no news report in the dailies about how they are now carrying out their educational activities. Who knows what kind of future is awaiting the students of those schools.

Soad Yeasin

On e-mail

### Comments on news report, "Kidnappers, reason remain unknown," published on February 18, 2014

#### Aasfisarwar

Interesting! The victim did not say anything about the RAB and RAB has no clue about who did it. So RAB decided to exclude their members from investigation! Maybe tomorrow, we will hear Jamaat-Shibir is the culprit.

#### As-I-Sce-It

Mridul's tears are the tears of the nation. It is very much so when Mridul is from the minority community. If we the majority ignore this barbarism, we cease to be humans and we have no future. When protectors of the law and order turn into killers in a society, that society is doomed.

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### Govt plays down Qaeda existence (February 17, 2014)

#### Truthprevails53

Jamaat, do us a favour; go to Pakistan and Afghanistan, where you belong.

#### Shahin Huq

Using the al Qaeda card to remain in power and to undermine opposition parties may not bring any dividend for Awami League. After experiencing all sorts of oppression by Awami League, Bangladesh people have by now become cleverer than before.