

Capitulating on Liberation War, Bangabandhu

Govt. must put a brake on it

MORE than 100 organisations have mushroomed all over the country over the last five years, most of them unregistered, that are shamelessly exploiting the name of the Liberation War, Bangabandhu and his family members.

One is struck by the moral depravity of the people involved in this despicable business who will stop short of nothing for their personal gains. What is particularly shocking, however, is the alleged involvement of some AL leaders in the process; they are the ones who, once side-lined from the party, fund these duplicitous organisations in return of a readymade platform to make headlines, controversial or otherwise.

It is nothing less than gross impropriety on the part of the AL leaders to provide various benefits to the founders of these organisations, including ensuring jobs, transfers, and tenders from different public institutions, as well as to turn a blind eye towards their extortion activities.

It surprises us that although our Liberation War Affairs minister seems to think that these organisations are "fake and were launched with ill-motives," no initiatives have yet been taken to stop the activities of these mostly unregistered organisations, especially those that are using the name of the Liberation War without permission from the Jatiya Muktiyoddha Council as per the law.

We urge the government to take this matter seriously as such business trivialises the Liberation War while also portraying the ruling party in a bad light. Meanwhile, the opportunists should ponder about how far they are stooping for their personal gains.

Tapping maritime resources

Seize the opportunity at the earliest

BANGLADESH appears to be moving at a snail's pace in exploring the bonanza laid open by the two consecutive maritime verdicts. Projects undertaken to estimate fishery and other resources in the deep sea, expansion of international trade route and its preparations for exploring oil and gas have been noticeably slow and to some extent disorganised.

So far as oil and gas are concerned, Myanmar has already begun exploring its own blocks by conducting a number of seismic surveys and discovered three large gas fields on its side. In fact, the relatively most potential blocks within our maritime boundaries are adjacent to each other. According to geologists, underground resources do not follow any geographical boundaries. That being so, Bangladesh needs to expedite the process of exploring its own oil and gas blocks. The government is believed to have begun a holistic preparation to avail itself of the resources from the bay, but it appears to fall short of a steady and systematic approach.

We urge the government to fast-track the process of exploration, because we are in a race with time.

In the case of procuring a small vessel for estimating fish resources, the authority concerned better train up personnel to operate it when it arrives by March-April next year, so that it does not sit idle.

Nur Hussain: Why this denigration?

SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

WITH the slogan "Down with autocracy, let democracy be freed" inscribed on his back, Nur Hossain became an epitome of the pro-democracy popular movement against the military dictator Ershad in 1987. But the military dictatorship of that time could not tolerate even his novel, non-violent way of expressing his love for democracy and hatred against autocracy. So, he became the target of the terror brigades unleashed by the despot and went down in history as one of the martyrs of anti-autocracy movement as a bullet pierced his body during a pro-democracy, anti-Ershad protest march on November 10, 1987.

Nur Hossain is undoubtedly one of the great martyrs of this nation who laid down his life to emancipate its people from the clutch of a political tyrant. His measure should be the sacrifice he made for the noble cause he fought for and not the modest social background he came from. But are we really giving this martyr his due?

One cannot but raise such a question seeing that his sculpture has been removed in haste, and in a slapdash manner at that, from its original location in front of the Shamsunnahar Hall. The uprooted sculpture of Nur Hossain is now kept at a temporary location with the help of a support on a road island within the Dhaka University area. One wonders where it is finally destined.

Why is this strange arrangement for Nur's statue? Because it had to give way to the newly inaugurated, 'Road Accident Memorial' built in memory of noted filmmaker Tareque Masud and media personality Mishuk Munir. It may be recalled that both of them died in a road mishap on August 13, 2011. Their premature deaths in a road tragedy were undoubtedly an irredeemable loss to our cultural and media arenas. Erecting a memorial in their honour has without question been a commendable decision. But why a national martyr's statue has to be dismantled and displaced to install their image at the same place? Is this the way to show respect to those who died for a cause? Would Tareque or Mishuk have approved such an arrangement had they been alive? From whose fertile brain has come this strange idea of knocking down Nur Hossain's figure to make room for the statues of Tareque Masud and Mishuk Munir? What message are those behind such decision trying to convey to the rest of us? Aren't they, by their action, discriminating one national hero against another? Can there be a comparison between our national martyrs?

Actually, they are setting a very dangerous precedent. We hope, good sense will prevail and Nur Hossain's statue will be relocated to the original site.

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Revamped Silk Road



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

CHINA is pushing ahead with its dual network of maritime and road links that will, if they materialise, effectively connect East Asia with Europe. As reported by Bloomberg, China intends to create a "\$16.3 billion fund to finance construction of infrastructure linking its markets to three continents as President Xi Jinping pushes forward with his plans to revive the centuries-old Silk Road trading route." Such plans have already found favour in many countries including Russia, Tajikistan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The list of "hubs" along the route includes port facilities in Bangladesh.

That China's financial institutions, which include the recently constituted Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), are willing to back major infrastructure projects is already materialising. For instance, Sri Lanka has been promised US\$1.4 billion to develop port infrastructure capabilities. In the central Asian region, deals have been



struck to develop both infrastructure and energy deals to the tune of \$50 billion, and Afghanistan is the recipient of more than \$300 million in economic aid, some of which will lead to construction of essential infrastructure like highways, power generation and roads.

The thought process behind such ambitious projects is not difficult to understand. With its huge economic might, China is willing to bankroll multi-billion dollar infrastructure all along the routes that will facilitate trade over land and water. It will certainly involve Chinese companies that have garnered considerable expertise in building mega projects, not just in China but all over Africa and more recently Latin America. One must not forget that China envisages itself to be a "great power" in the coming decades and extend its political and economic influence over the entire region. What better way to reach that goal than extend credit facilities to cash-starved countries that lack the economic resources to get their infrastructure upgraded? The new "look outward" policy marks a shift in Chinese policy, which had hitherto been focused on attracting foreign direct investment to the country. According to Zhang Yunling, Director of the Institute of Asia Pacific Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the plan is "a shift in China's strategic thought" that foresees the outflow of Chinese "development" to countries in its vicinity.

It is little wonder that countries such as Tajikistan, the

Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and even India have expressed interest in the plan. As described by Xinhua News Agency, the land road will stretch from the ancient capital city of Xi'an, travelling through Lanzhou and Urumqi going onwards across Central Asia, the Middle East to Europe. "The sea-based Maritime Silk Road goes through Guangdong and the southernmost Chinese province of Hainan, an island, en route to the Malacca Strait and the Indian Ocean. It traverses the Horn of Africa before entering the Red Sea and Mediterranean. The two roads are supposed to meet in Venice." That China means business is reflected in its inking of deals all across Central Asia over the last one year. 22 infrastructure deals worth \$30 billion in Kazakhstan, 31 deals in Uzbekistan worth \$15.5 billion and some 36 co-operation agreements worth \$1.5 billion, and a plethora of agreements in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan for new pipelines. We are looking at roads, pipelines and high-speed rail along what is set to become a reincarnation of a 4,000 mile long ancient trading route that was the Silk Road.

The opening up of markets along such a wide spectrum that could eventually involve 50 nations with a combined population of about 3.8 billion brings with it the promise

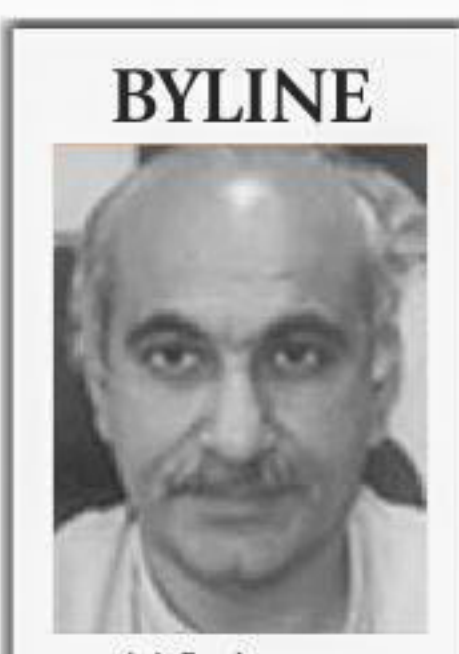
of a multi-trillion dollar business potential. The fostering of transportation links in the region can only lead to tapping the massive business potential that exists and Chinese companies will certainly benefit from it. And it is not only trade in finished goods that drives policymakers in Beijing towards the revamped silk roads. Many analysts believe it is in China's best interests to tap into and secure global energy supplies that are needed to feed its mammoth economy.

For Bangladesh, being part of the new silk road certainly brings forth the opportunity of a deep sea port. Such a facility would not

only cater to the regional business opportunities that will evolve with maritime road but facilitate greater import and export potential for the country. The need for a deep sea port has been highlighted for some years now. Although Chittagong port handles about 80% of the country's imports and exports, the narrow approach of Karnaphuli River means that large container ships more than 617 ft. in length cannot pass through. It also suffers from draft problem (allowable maximum draft, i.e. depth of 8.87m) which hinders ocean-going vessels to anchor at port (currently mother vessels anchor at outer anchorage a few kilometres away from the jetty and small lighter ships tranship bulk cargo). Again, smaller container ships shuttle between Singapore to Chittagong. This single problem compels the country to rely on smaller ships to carry cargo to the port, pushing up cost and time for major import and export trading. With global consultancy firm McKinsey & Company's study, "Bangladesh's ready-made garments landscape: The challenge of growth," which predicted that Bangladesh can double its garments exports in the next decade, the arguments for a deep-sea port become more compelling. It is only in its best interests that Bangladesh should join the Silk Road initiative that could potentially pave the way for much-needed investments in crucial infrastructure.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

Bukhari has no rights over Jama Masjid



M.J. AKBAR

WHEN ignorance marries bluster you get a functioning blunderbuss. Every scattershot gun should come with a safety catch, but human behaviour so often becomes vulnerable to the ego of a weak mind.

Muslims claim, with justified pride, that the age of jahilya, or ignorance, ended when the message of Islam came to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the desert city of Mecca. Regrettably, jihalat still lingers in parts of the Muslim world. It has found a temporary sanctuary in Delhi's Jama Masjid, the iconic symbol of Indian Islam.

If the bluster of its Imam, Syed Ahmad Bukhari, were nothing more than self-inflicted wounds, it would not matter so much. But Bukhari gets media space, thanks to his position, and thereby affects the wider perception of Indian Muslims. When he claims that he will not invite India's prime minister to his 19-year-old son Shaban Bukhari's so-called investiture ceremony, but would like Pakistan's leader to be present, Ahmad Bukhari is guilty of many varieties of stupidity. Indian Muslims relate to their country's leaders, not to those of a foreign nation. But this is an appropriate moment to ask another question.

Since when has a mosque become, in Islamic doctrine, private property? Who has given the Bukhari family genetic rights over India's most glorious mosque? Who has allowed him to pocket all the revenue from that institution, and use it for a lifestyle that is anything but pious? The mosque is wakf property, and therefore owned by the Delhi Wakf Board. Bukhari claims a hereditary right to the Imam's position because an ancestor, sixteen times removed, was made Imam by the emperor who built the mosque, Shah Jehan. That is an illegitimate argument because of both religious practice and a democratic environment. If that principle were applicable, Shah Jehan's woebegone heirs should send an application for the ruler's job in Delhi.

A mosque is always owned by the Muslim community, for which it was constructed. The first mosque was built by no less a person than the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his adopted city, Medina. This glorious mosque is still a magnet for the faithful, wherever they may reside across the world. Did the Prophet (pbuh) bequeath that mosque to his son-in-law Hazrat Ali and his daughter Bibi Fatima? No. Why have Indian Muslims abandoned the precept established by the Prophet (pbuh) himself?

The two holy mosques are at Mecca, where Muslims go on Haj, and at Medina. For 14 centuries a succession of Caliphs and Sultans has protected these mosques from external threat and internal turmoil.

the Mamelukes, he went to the grand mosque of Aleppo for Friday prayers. The nervous Imam described Selim as an overlord during the sermon. Selim corrected the cleric immediately. He was only a servant, said the Caliph.

The Imams of Mecca and Medina do not possess hereditary rights. They are appointed by an order of the Saudi court, and can be changed in their lifetimes. The selection criterion is familiar: knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah, combined with piety in character. But in Delhi's Jama Masjid, we have permitted a dynasty to prevail. This is anathema to Islamic practice.

Why? No one really knows. The true answer is the community's inertia.

There are countless mosques in India's cities, towns and villages. In each one of them an Imam is chosen by the will of the community, through the mosque community. This principle should be applied to Delhi's Jama Masjid as well, for, to reiterate, the place of worship belongs to the congregation, not to the person who leads the prayers. It is up to the Muslims of Old Delhi to establish the democratic process through which they elect the mosque committee, and then empower the elected body to choose the Imam

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for regular terms.

Perhaps it is also time media and politicians stopped catering to the arbitrary whims and fancies of an interloper like Ahmad Bukhari by according him importance. Who, after all, does he represent except himself? Would he ever dare contest an election in his local constituency? We might then find out precisely how much support he has in his own area. We could even test the trust he commands in an even smaller constituency, his congregation. I have little doubt that he would lose.

Institutions must be protected through institutional mechanisms. Bukhari has set himself up as some sort of petty Nawab of Jama Masjid, rather than as an Imam who serves the people. People have been afraid to intervene largely because they do not know how to go about it. The Bukharis have, in effect, acquired squatters' rights.

It is time that honest Indian Muslims decided who is a good Imam, instead of a devious Imam deciding who is a good Muslim.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR
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Congrats to Shakib Al Hasan

During Shakib's suspension for six months, Bangladesh cricket lost its rhythm, which returned with Shakib's return. We rejoice at his becoming a part of history, as he became the third player after Ian Botham and Imran Khan to score a century and claim ten wickets in a Test match which contributed to a comprehensive victory against Zimbabwe.



PHOTO: FROZ AHMED

Bangladeshis, especially those of us who live abroad cheered up watching him play. We are truly blessed to have this cricket genius born in our country. Congrats to Shakib Al Hasan and Bangladesh cricket team.

Rubab Abdullah
Columbus, Ohio, USA

Misconceptions about Bt brinjal

The letter of Samshad Nowreen published in your column on November 1 needs correction on several points. Firstly, it is not true that most of the Bt brinjal plants grown by farmers in Bangladesh in the recent season wilted and died. Many farmers had an excellent crop, and 100 farmers are due to receive seeds in the next distribution -- many more are reportedly eager to do so. Nor is it remotely true that Bt brinjal is an "invasive plant" which somehow mysteriously changes the "chemical composition of the soil." Bt brinjal is just like any other brinjal, with the single exception that it requires little to no toxic pesticides to grow. Those who grow and eat Bt brinjal are therefore subjected to less exposure to pesticide toxins than those who grow the conventional alternative, which is why the government of Bangladesh is distributing this important crop. Bt or Bacillus thuringiensis, naturally originates from a soil bacterium which is present everywhere around the world for thousands of years. Bt brinjal is toxic only for fruit and shoot borer caterpillar which is the main pest. Humans and indeed all other animals are not affected by the Bt protein involved, which is known to scientists as Cry1Ac. Cry proteins have been extensively tested by scientists for two decades, and used in large amounts of food and crops in North and South America, Europe and Asia that are consumed by people. Bt brinjal will actually reduce farmers' and consumers' exposure to pesticides by reducing the use of insecticides, many of which are genuinely toxic and cause grave health hazard.

Md. Arif Hossain
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Reporting that's in bad taste

Last week and in the week before it, the print and electronic media of Bangladesh overzealously reported on the marriage of our railway minister as if it was a matter of great fun, though it was not. The way they reported tirelessly on the marriage, it has in fact encroached upon the personal life of the minister and his wife. When will we stop poking our nose in personal matters of other people? The op-ed, "The railway minister and his trophy wife," published in your daily (Nov. 7) is not tenable. Saying another person's wife a trophy is highly objectionable; no matter whether the person is a minister or a man from the street.

Faruque Hasan
Alaol Avenue
Uttara, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "United, they now choose to fight," published on November 8, 2014

New Generation

This speaks of administration's failure to uphold people's rights.

Muzzy703

Can't wait to see what the authorities have to say about this.

"BNP must come clean on Jamaat" (Nov. 6, 2014)

Pacha Beruli

There is no need of Jamaat. We want to get rid of such party.

Rohimkader

BNP will gain landslide victory if a free and fair election is held under a caretaker government.

S. M. Iftekhkar Ahmed

While AL is no saint, BNP is also mistaken if they think that a coalition with Jamaat will benefit them. People are more informed these days and can differentiate the right from the wrong.