

## Their supreme sacrifice remembered

*They remain a beacon of inspiration*

ON this very painful day, we remember and grieve the lives of our brightest intellectuals, mercilessly killed by the Pakistani occupation army and its local collaborators on the eve of victory in 1971. It was a systematic, if desperate, attempt to deal one last blow to the emerging nation: to deny it its intellectual wealth and cripple its progress. And so, between December 12 and 14, they picked up and put to death the luminaries of intellectual world -- our academics, doctors, civil servants, cultural activists and journalists.

Although 43 years later, we stand strong as an independent nation, we observe the sad truth that the void their cruel and untimely deaths left behind is yet to be filled. On this day, it is not enough to simply mourn their deaths, if we don't also remember their lives -- their dreams of and sacrifices for a democratic and just Bangladesh. We, individually and collectively, must emulate their unparalleled devotion to the motherland and its people, and draw renewed strength from them to sustain us on our journey toward the creation of a just, egalitarian and secular Bangladesh.

Today, as we pay homage to the martyred intellectuals, we are grateful that the long awaited process of justice has begun to bring some semblance of closure to the grieving families as well as to the nation at large. There is, however, a long way to go before we can honour the memory of our martyrs through ensuring that their killers answer for the heinous crimes committed in 1971.

## IT services taking root nationwide

*Overcoming hurdles a major challenge*

WITH the establishment of digital service centres in more than 4,500 village unions and some 460 urban digital centres at ward level under 11 city corporations, millions of people are getting the benefit of government services which had earlier been a challenge in terms of time spent, and bribery and hassle entailed. With United Nations Development Fund's technical assistance, the establishment of such digital centres in unions fully equipped with computers, audio and visual equipment and high speed internet has changed the lives of some 4 million people. They use the services that include everything from taking digital photographs, filling out online forms to video conferencing with loved ones who mostly work abroad as expatriate workers. These centres have become a source of employment, too.

From what has been published in a leading Bangla daily, we understand that in little over four years since the first digital centre opened, the project has earned Tk. 140 crore. Yet there are problems that need to be addressed. Frequent power outages, equipment in disrepair, slow internet speeds are some of the bottlenecks that are hampering work at the centres. Despite these challenges, the contribution of digital technology in bridging the gap between the rural and urban centres cannot be understated. It opens up all sorts of possibilities. However, more needs to be done to publicise the working of these centres as a great number of people in the unions have no idea that such services are available at affordable cost that is free from hassle and available at their doorstep.

## 'Jihad' against corruption

ABDUL MATIN

THE Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) organised a human chain programme in Dhaka on December 9 marking the International Anti-Corruption Day 2014. The ACC declared a 'jihad' against corruption. According to the UN, corruption attacks the foundation of democratic institutions. The ACC was formed through an act promulgated in 2004. According to the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International, our rank was 145 in 2004. Ten years later, we occupy the same rank with some ups and downs in between. We are thus back to square one in spite of the jihad declared by the ACC.

Occasional increases of the salaries of the government servants had no impact on corruption in the past. It is an open secret that no file moves in government offices without the payment of what is known as 'speed money.' It is reported that a substantial portion (approx. 30%) of all development funds is spent as bribes to government officials and influential people. There are serious allegations that in most offices a candidate spends Tk. 3 lac to Tk. 5 lac to get a job. One cannot recover this investment without resorting to corruption. Corruption is rampant in many banks, both public and private. In spite of our achievements in many sectors, the pervasive corruption in the country is a major hindrance to higher economic growth.

It is most unlikely that a messiah will come and free us from corruption overnight. We must do it ourselves but it will take time and concerted efforts by all. First, it must be ensured that the salary structure is adequate for all categories of officials and employees so that they can live honestly with a reasonable standard of living. Second, the drive against corruption must start from the top. All senior officials must be made personally responsible for any corruption at lower levels. Third, only dismissal from job is no punishment for corruption. There must be exemplary punishment including both imprisonment and confiscation of all ill-gotten assets. Fourth, there must be a social movement against corruption and corrupt people. If we can motivate the people to look down on corruption, the corrupt people, who are usually identified by their style of living, will soon be isolated as social outcasts. Fifth, paperwork must be reduced in all offices as far as possible and replaced by computerisation. Personal contacts between government officials and the public must also be reduced as such contacts often breed corruption. Sixth, the ACC must be manned by honest and dedicated people and be accountable to a parliamentary body consisting of members from both the ruling and opposition parties.

Will any political party include the suggested steps in its manifesto?

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

# America's shame and strength: The CIA torture report

SUNDAY POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

EVERY conflict in history has been fought on at least two grounds: first in the battlefield and then in the minds of the people, using propaganda. The 'good guys' and the 'bad guys' are both guilty of manipulating the facts of their case with distortions, subjectivity, inaccuracy and even fabrications. This is done to get support and a sense of legitimacy for their cause.

This is exactly what America did when it embarked on fighting its war against terrorism. The country knew that in a democracy what is required is the 'manufacture of consent.' This is a euphemism for thought control. America knew that its government could not control the people by force, but could do better by controlling what they thought. America therefore began a massive propaganda war to make the world believe that it was the 'good guy' when it came to finding out who were the perpetrators of terrorism after the World Trade Centre in New York was destroyed by the associates of Osama bin Laden in 2001.

The Bush administration set up secret Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sites around the world to forcibly extract information from individuals belonging to many nationalities about future terrorist plans. Between 2001 and 2006, America used various forms of torture, called 'enhanced interrogation techniques,' on the detainees there. The horrendous methods used were sleep deprivation for up to 180 hours at times with their hands chained above their heads, simulated drowning or 'water boarding,' sexual abuse including 'rectal feeding' and 'rectal rehydration,' among others. All these were done without any documented medical need. America did what it itself criticised when other countries resorted to torture to extract information from suspects. The CIA believed that information from detainees in these facilities subjected to such enhanced techniques of interrogation helped the US to track down al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden. He was killed in the 2011 US raid in Pakistan. But America kept all the torture it did under wraps and the world was kept in the dark. The cause was good and nothing else mattered.

But how far is all this true? It goes to the credit of America that its Senate formed a bipartisan select committee on intelligence to find out about the extent of abuse in the CIA facilities. It reflected the strength of US democracy when the people's elected representatives went out to uncover what their government had perpetrated. The 6,000 page report took 5 years to complete at a cost of \$40 million. After 8 months of deliberation in the Senate it voted to release a portion of the report. Thus, a 525 page extract highlighting the key findings and an executive summary of the full report was published. The remaining portion of the full report is still classified.

This 525 page CIA report, which in fact is America's

shame, has seven sections and 20 key findings. It concludes that CIA's use of torture was not an effective means to obtain real time intelligence. Thus there was no justification behind use of such enhanced techniques. There were many inaccurate claims of their effectiveness. The torture techniques were not only brutal, they were much worse than those depicted to policymakers in the Bush administration. Even the US Department of Justice could not do a proper legal analysis of the CIA torture programme. Oversight of the programme by Congress and the White House was also impeded. The CIA in the meantime coordinated the release of classified information to the media, including inaccurate information on their effectiveness. Two contract psychologists who devised the CIA torture programme were paid \$81 million for their efforts. By 2005, the CIA outsourced the programme. The Senate Committee came to the conclusion that the CIA torture techniques damned the US standing in the world and resulted in other significant monetary and non-monetary costs.

What was more shameful was that at least 26 of the 119 prisoners held by CIA were later found to have been improperly incarcerated. It must be remembered that President Bush had ordered that "only persons who pose continuing serious threat of violence or death to US citizens or interests or planning terrorist activities were to be detained by the CIA." Since the CIA kept incomplete records, it is not clear whether 119 was the total number of detainees in their custody.

A huge hue and cry was raised in the US after the report was released. Various human rights organisations have called for the prosecutions of senior Bush officials who authorised the torture. Many think that unless prosecutions take place, torture in the US will remain a policy option. Another perception is that the practice of torture in the US has led many countries to justify their own abuses in their territories. The media in many countries around the world have already dubbed the CIA torture programme as 'wicked acts.'

There is no doubt that the CIA torture report has raised serious question about the ethics of torture. Some think that when the overall outcome of lives saved due to torture is positive, there is a strong case to justify it. The ends justify the means when analysts consider the 'ticking time bomb scenario.' But then experienced intelligence officials say that torture does not work, it usually results in false information since people subjected to torture will say anything to make the torture stop. Then there is the possibility that torture can impair a person's ability to tell the truth.

All this debate about the ethics of torture leaves us with a nagging question: have we learned nothing from 9/11? Perhaps we have: violence in any form or style only incubates new forms of violence, and all religions teach us to refrain from it. Now the world has indeed to relearn it and start practicing it.

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## The Janata Parivar 2.0 Initiative

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

AN interesting political development in India is the regroupment of the former Janata Party's fragments into a party which recreates the once-powerful Socialist current. Part of the Left, this was second in importance only to the Communists.

The initiative, taken a month ago, has resulted in an organisation informally called the Samajwadi Janata Party. Its main leaders include Samajwadi Party President Mulayam Singh Yadav, Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United), H.D. Deve Gowda of the JD (Secular), and Laloo Prasad of the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Although issues like the party's symbol and organisational structure remain unresolved, it's significant that these groups are merging 26 years after the original Janata Dal was formed.

The new bloc plans to confront the Modi government on the Land Acquisition Act (whose consent clause it wants to dilute to favour Business), raising the foreign-investment ceiling in defence and insurance, and diluting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

If the bloc acts imaginatively, it could create a novel political platform. It currently commands 40 MPs, including 15 in the Lok Sabha. This strength isn't negligible.

Three factors have catalysed the Janata Parivar's regroupment. Two negative ones are the severe setbacks recently delivered to these parties by the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana; and second, the exhaustion of their caste-identity-based "social justice" politics over the past decade.

A positive factor is that they stand to gain handsomely from coordinating their electoral efforts. If the JD(U) and RJD were to join forces in Bihar, their combined vote would be 47%, well above the 39% polled by the BJP-led alliance in the Lok Sabha. This would win them 28 of Bihar's 40 seats.

The situation is less favourable in UP, where the Bahujan Samaj Party is loath to join forces with SP. (If the two allied, they would match the BJP in votes.) Nevertheless, the new bloc could facilitate fruitful social coalitions.

This raises the hope that the Socialist current, which ceased to have an organisational expression in the 1970s, might be recreated. Given the disarray of the mainstream Communists, this should be good news for the Left, and stimulate a sorely-needed debate on radical politics.

The Socialists originated in 1934 as a pressure-group in the Congress. The Congress Socialist Party also included many Communists. But the Socialists and Communists were allied to different international movements and couldn't recombine their differences, especially over caste and class.

Their hostility tragically divided the Left. In Bihar,

both the Communist Party and the Samyukta Socialist Party had strong bases, but acted as rivals despite their complementarity.

Worse, the Socialists repeatedly split, primarily on the policy to be adopted towards the Congress. Rammanohar Lohia's SSP advocated anti-Congressism, and formed non-Congress governments in the Hindi belt post-1967.

Anti-Congressism partly laid the basis for the merger of all Socialists into the Janata Party in 1977 in opposition to Indira Gandhi's antidemocratic Emergency. The Janata Party restored democracy, but was a divided house.

Jaya Prakash Narayan brought the Jana Sangh into the Janata Party and gave respectability to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Janata government became a hostage to manipulation by the Jana Sangh faction, which tried to topple the party's state governments, and refused to forswear its primary loyalty to the RSS.

The Janata Party split in 1979. The Socialists too split into rival factions: Janata Dal, under V.P. Singh in 1988, Chandrashekhar's Samajwadi Janata Party in 1990, Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party in 1992, George Fernandes-Nitish Kumar's Samata Party in 1994, and Laloo Prasad's RJD in 1997.

More damagingly, some factions, including the Samata Party and RLD, and later Ram Bilas Paswan's Lok Janashakti Party, opportunistically joined BJP-led coalitions, destroying their own "social justice" claims. Only Laloo and Mulayam refused to ally with the BJP.

The Janata Parivar 2.0 project might seem a good non-Congress-non-BJP alternative, and a powerful counter to the Sangh Parivar. But it's marred by three flaws. First, Nitish Kumar faces a challenge in Bihar from his Dalit successor—Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi.

Second, the project lacks ideological coherence and an alternative socio-economic programme. An alternative must oppose neoliberalism and corporate capitalism, as well as Hindutva.

The Modi regime represents a diabolical combination of communalism, perverse development, authoritarian governance, social conservatism, anti-people, anti-environment policies, and militarist national chauvinism. It cannot be fought effectively on a partial terrain.

Unfortunately, many Janata Parivar parties succumbed to neoliberalism in the past and followed compromised policies on relations with India's neighbours, human rights and the environment. This must change if they are to offer a credible alternative.

Third, the Janata Parivar will gain nothing by refusing a policy dialogue with the Communist Left. The more cerebral Communists since the mid-1990s have been the mainstay of initiatives to form Third Front alternatives to the BJP and/or the Congress, and provided policy and programme thrust to them.

That apart, this is a momentous opportunity for the regrouped Socialists to restart the long-interrupted dialogue with the Communists, who will be more receptive to it given their own crisis today. The opportunity must not be squandered.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Uneasy wait for 2015

We are on the doorstep of a new year but instead of being optimistic we are feeling very uneasy because we can easily picture what is waiting for us in the year 2015. The past two years were turbulent; people had been demonstrating for a neutral government to hold the general election in the year 2013, and 2014 started with the formation of a government that did not have people's mandate. And this government is determined to hold on to power at any cost. May the Almighty Allah save us from further sufferings and let us live in peace and happiness.

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

### Is racism on rise in America?

America being a super power often puts pressure on other countries to establish the rule of law or democracy. They are vocal about violation of human rights all over the world. But paradoxically, they themselves do not care for those things. The killing of Eric Garner (by using chokehold) is nothing but a racial killing, as the protesters have termed it, because the grand jury did not indict the police officer involved in his death. American police is continuously killing and harassing black people there. Michael Brown is another victim of police brutality. There are many more examples of police killing. It seems racism in America is rising or can we say that it has been there all along?

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### Land of stifled, not dead, ideas

Zia Haider Rahman sounded like latter day Nirad Chaudhuri with his disparaging remarks on Bangladesh. His iconic predecessor the author of "The Continent of Circe" was brutally dismissive of India. He termed India as a land of swine, not the cradle of civilization. Haider's premise is scarcely different. He termed ours as a land of dead ideas (Ref. The Daily Star dt. December 4, 2014). Is this valid? Absolutely not. We have capable intellectuals and international award winning novelists, jurists, film makers and scientists. Our microcredit idea burst on global focus, borrowed and emulated by all. Yet it's not the whole story. General situation is not that cozy.

Fertile lands don't alone yield bumper crop. Without nurturing fertile brains too fail to sprout ideas. For the mind to be creative ambience for freedom of thought and democracy has no alternative. In a society that is hostile to differing and diverse views, condition for creativity is not only not feasible but risky too. Who can experiment with new ideas to be politically profiled and perished? The essence of life is in the ability to think. Man is a thinking reed. In thinking does he exist and enjoys superior status to other animals. 'Cogito ergo sum' I think that's why I exist. If we fail in this vital area we are nonexistent. Idea denies us. Physical survival and intellectual existence are not the same. In a condition of disenfranchisement anyone is enslaved to the will of a tyrant. Is he allowed to experiment with new idea that does not conform to the pattern prescribed by the press and publication acts in a non functional democracy? Are we any different?

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### Comments on news report, "Oil spill getting larger," published on December 10, 2014

Afreen

Our navy and army should be fast to minimize the damage done by the leaking oil tanker. There are emergency measures against oil spillage which are practiced worldwide. The government should urge them to put to good use. Sad that no action has been taken as yet.

Faisal Khair Chowdhury

So much for declaring the Sundarbans a World Heritage Site.... my question is why are oil tankers and commercial vehicles allowed to travel through the forest area?

I shudder to think the long lasting effects this will have, and surprisingly, this is not even a headline news on TV? What country are we living in?

Saint

Devastating accident for the Sundarbans; it will wreak havoc not only on the largest mangrove forest but also on our total environment. The government should take initiative to remove the oil from the river urgently.