

Sleepwalking to cliff edge?



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE US government has taken two exemplary steps in the wake of the brutal killing of Avijit Roy of Mokto Mona fame when he was returning with his spouse from Ekushey

Boi Mela on Thursday last. First, it has flown out of a Dhaka hospital his critically injured wife Bonya Ahmad, taking her under the wings of a US hospital. Secondly, the US authorities are sending an FBI team to investigate Avijit's murder.

The promptness with which the US government is taking care of its surviving citizen and probing the hacking of Avijit to exact a bigoted vendetta underlines a two-fold message: One, they are discharging their responsibilities for their citizens; one may add though that was only to be expected, in keeping with standard norms. Two, here is a principle involved of a dark extremist conspiracy ending in brutal elimination of a freethinker. This is very concerning not only for the USA but the world at large.

The reason why you rehash the episode is to draw a lesson; look how deeply the US is caring for just a couple of its citizens, either alive or dead! You then compare this with our politi-



cal leaders' insensitivity to burning, killing and maiming of their citizens in droves over the last two months.

Thankfully, one notices such devastating incidence of violence tapering off. The propensity to violence, however, remains so long as the bitter discord spews out of the mouth of a fire-eating dragon, if you like.

Of late, Dhaka is seeing a spate in collective, intense and focused diplo-

macy. Travel and movement advisories have been issued to the citizens of representing countries as political equilibrium dips further in Bangladesh. Quite naturally, the diplomats would have concern for the safety of their own citizens. Again, whilst our political leaders put their power struggle ahead of public interest -- people are being punished for no fault of their own -- the representatives of foreign governments

air their grave anxiety over the killing of innocents in our country. It is humanity diminished.

This may sound a little simplistic to squinted-eyed people who are apt to impute motive even in a good gesture. Of course, countries friendly to Bangladesh have a stake in stable and developing Bangladesh as a hub of growth in a geo-politically sensitive region.

In diplomacy, what's kept unsaid is sometimes more important than what is said. The point worthy of note is this: Bangladesh is a 160-million Muslim majority country and unresolved political conflict has a potential to generate Islamophobia, an obsession with the West. Admittedly, we too have been perceptive of an incipient danger of radicalisation and extremism. More on the rather flawed surgical approach of the Western world to the problem, some other day.

Earlier this week, when 12 ambassadors met Khaleda Zia on a persuasion mission seeking her cooperation to stem the havoc of violence, we thought the 'ruthless' mystery man Salahuddin Ahmed would not deliver his favourite notorious punch: a 72-hr hartal call till Wednesday. Particularly disparaging is his prolonging the ghastly serial up to Friday morning with ruthless continuity, albeit at the diktat of the party leader.

A common thread weaves through the initiatives of the 12 ambassadors, 16 diplomats and the EU parliamen-

tary delegation devoted to defusing tension. They implored both sides to reduce the distance between them through confidence-building measures thus paving the way for engagement. But can a dialogue be at all possible, far less entertained, with the blockade and hartal calls continuing? This rolls the ball in BNP's court to stop the shutdowns and then test AL's bona fides about its opening up to any meaningful communication.

As if to signal a melting of ice between the two sides, veteran lawyer Rafiqul Haq, confided to Prothom Alo that in politics and judiciary a soft temper is discernible. Even after eight days of a warrant of arrest against Khaleda Zia and the court upholding it, this has not been executed.

All this is considered a positive sign. American civil war time writer Ambrose Biera had quipped: "To be positive is to be mistaken at the top of one's voice." Doubtless, it was a contextual statement; hopefully, this will not hold good in our situation.

Overall, politics is becoming a figment of imagination multiplied, part of a make-believe domain, as it were.

Here you remember what Dickens wrote in *Hard Times*: "... Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else ... Stick to Facts, sir."

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The love-blind freedom fighters

Here we publish an article written by War Hero Sector Commander Quazi Nuruzzaman. This article was first published in *The Daily Janakantha* on December 16, 1999.



QUAZI NURUZZAMAN

WHEN December and March come, I get calls from newspapers asking me to write about our Liberation War. When I ask them what I should write about, they say that being a sector commander, I should write about the memories of different operations of our Liberation War and the ways that the guerrilla groups worked. People want to know about active freedom fighters and the armed battles of the war. At times I get the feeling that they think that only some armed fighters participated in our war of freedom, the most glorious event of our national life. The fact that immense sacrifices were made by crores of people in that war often gets buried under the narratives of armed fights. In the last twenty eight years in our literature, theatre, cinema and other art forms, the same old cliché about our Liberation War has been portrayed. The vast background of people's war and the participation of mass people in that war are yet to be revealed.

We were not at all prepared to fight an armed battle or to fight for freedom until the brutal attack of the Pakistani forces on the fateful night of March 25, 1971. Even though the call was made for turning every home into a fort to resist the attacks, the politicians were looking for a formula to compromise as well. Although our politicians were confused that day, the Pakistani military junta was not. They had no confusion. They decided to keep the then East Pakistan under their control for at least five years, and for that purpose openly reinforced their army while at the same time they pretended that they wanted to discuss. In 1971, from January till March, they brought arms and ammunition by ships and planes and increased their military power. At that time none of our learned politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, or intellectuals questioned or even doubted their move as to why they were increasing arms and ammunition, let alone give us any hint about the imminent tragedy and the war that would befall the nation. If they could do so, maybe the loss of lives and properties would have been much less.

When we were attacked on the night of



Quazi Nuruzzaman (1925-2011)

March 25, and the barbaric genocide started -- when police, EPR, soldiers, and intellectuals were killed -- the political situation took a different turn. In no time the movement for autonomy turned into a War of Liberation. People took up arms in their hands. Armed struggles started along with social, political, and psychological resistance against the treason and killing by the occupation forces. We won victory in that noble war.

I was in Agortola from the last part of June till the first week of July in 1971. At that time I was not given the responsibility of a sector commander. A few days before, General Osmani had handed over responsibilities to Shafiqullah, Ziaur Rahman and Khaled Mosharrar to work in the eastern battlefield of Bangladesh. General Osmani told me, as I was senior to all and "staff qualified," that I would have to go to "Tura" of Assam. I wanted to know everything in details, but he didn't tell me anything more for the sake of keeping confidentiality. Then he went to Kolkata.

At that time I was regularly meeting the freedom fighters and refugees at Agortola. The Bangladeshi officers used to go to the BSF headquarters. Sometimes Shafiqullah and Ziaur Rahman would go there and we would discuss different aspects of leading the war operations. Shafiqullah and Ziaur Rahman were not satisfied with the whole system. Although they were given the responsibility to lead the war, in all affairs such as recruiting, training, arms, providing medical treatment, etc., the Indian authorities' decisions

were final and we had to go to them over and over again for that. It was difficult to inform our own headquarters at Kolkata about the various problems the sectors were facing. Besides, General Osmani was mainly administratively skilled. It was impossible and time-consuming for him to come to the Eastern front frequently. We all reached a consensus through discussions that if there were two headquarters in eastern and western battlefields and if we could decentralise General Osmani's responsibilities, the battlefields would be more active. I was given the responsibility to discuss this with Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed. So I talked to Tajuddin. He

One by one all the blind freedom fighters fumbled their way to that bed. I was overwhelmed with emotion. They didn't make any complaints to me, they didn't cry. They all had the same question: "Sir, have you come from home? Tell us how do you feel? How does free Bangladesh look like?"

listened carefully and asked for some time to think it over and decide. I had a feeling that he might have considered the proposal ambitious on part of the military officers. I assured him by saying that I was submitting my resignation letter to him right now without putting any date, he could put the date if need be. By doing so, I wanted to make him understand that we had come of our own free will to fight at the call of our motherland. We

made the proposal for proper and successful operation of the war, nothing more. Time passed in war -- until we achieved victory in December 16.

Right after the war ended, there were new responsibilities on our shoulders -- to bring all the members of the sectors and Mukti Bahini together and send them to various places. A week had passed. Then I went to Kolkata to keep my promise. Otherwise, I had no reason to go to Kolkata. Now I think if I had not gone to Kolkata, an important aspect of the war of freedom would have remained beyond my comprehension.

The office of Bangladesh government at Kolkata was almost empty by then. I met an Indian colonel there, in his hand was a list. He was looking for the MPs and MNAs of Bangladesh. A plane at Dum Dum airport couldn't take off for shortage of passengers. The colonel looked perplexed, and so, to make the situation lighter, I told him that they all came to India on foot, maybe they all went back to Bangladesh the same way. I asked him where the prime minister was and he pointed in the direction.

As far as I can remember, I was the only person present there with Tajuddin that day. But after a few years I came to know from Dr. Faruk Aziz Khan, Tajuddin Ahmed's private secretary, that he was also present there. However, I don't have any words to express the memory of that meeting with the prime minister. The condition of his room was miserable. He welcomed me with open arms, with a peaceful mind. We discussed more about the future of the newly liberated country than we reminisced about our past days. The prime minister asked me: "Why didn't you go home yet?" I answered: "I came to you from Bangladesh to put the date on my resignation letter and take leave." He said in a calm voice: "Won't you give me some more time?" When I came out of his office, I met the Indian colonel again. This time he made a serious allegation. He said angrily: "Why are you people so selfish? Everyone is going home; don't you have any responsibility for the wounded freedom fighters?" He said many freedom fighters were undergoing treatment in various hospitals of India. They heard the news of victory and were anxiously waiting to know more, but couldn't find

anyone to talk about it. The saddest incident took place in Alipur Hospital of Kolkata. Eight freedom fighters were admitted there who lost their eyesight in the war. The doctors were trying to save their eyesight, but it would take a long time. These freedom fighters sent some hospital staff to Theatre Road only to get the news of the country, but nobody came to see them in the hospital. So they became worried. Observing the situation, the hospital authorities sent news to the military.

I was appalled to know this and so immediately went to the hospital. The blind freedom fighters were lying flat on their beds. They looked frustrated and helpless. They looked sad... (khovo o ovimane bimorsho) As I went there, one of them shouted in joy: "Hey, listen everybody, a sector commander has come, come here, all of you." One by one all the blind freedom fighters fumbled their way to that bed. I was overwhelmed with emotion. They didn't make any complaints to me, they didn't cry. They all had the same question: "Sir, have you come from home? Tell us how do you feel? How does free Bangladesh look like? The horrifying situation has surely changed into a happy one? How much has changed? Please tell us."

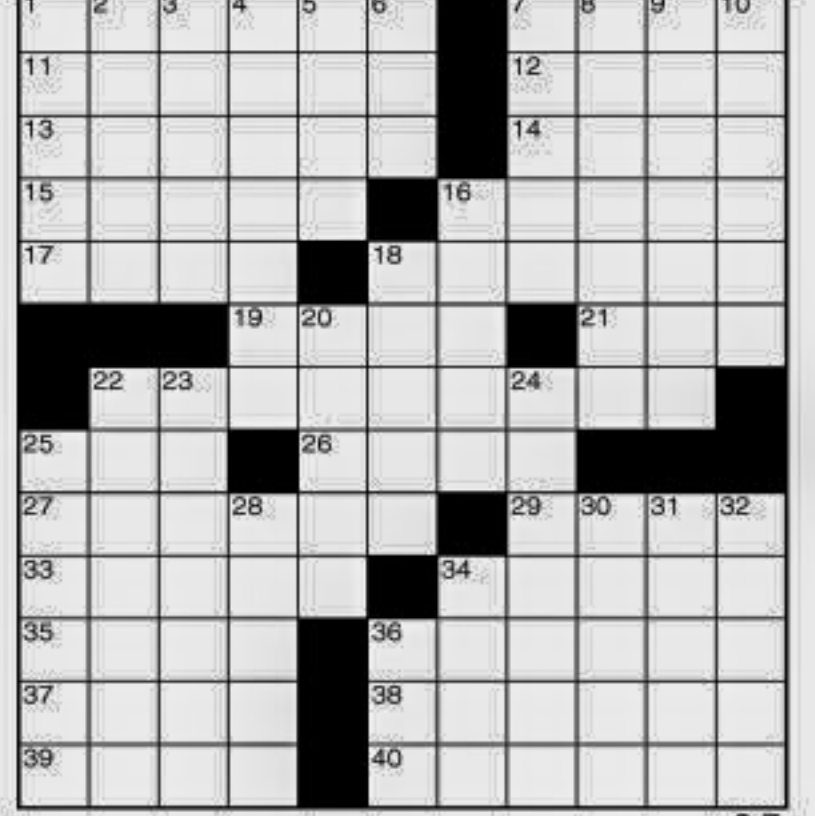
One of the blinded freedom fighters took my hands in his hands, felt them on his eyes, and said: "Sir, maybe we will never be able to see again. We give you the inner sight of our heart. Hope you will see the free country in our eyes on our behalf." One after another, everyone took my hands into theirs and put them on their faces and eyes. It was heart-wrenching. I had the feeling that in my whole life I felt nothing more sacred than their touch. They requested me to go and see the new face of the liberated Bangladesh and come back to them to describe it. But I could not go back to them again. I couldn't bring myself to face them. For, the country we got was not the one they so desired, the society we got was not the one they yearned for. It was not a country that reflected the dreams and spirit of our war of freedom. Still I am waiting for a country that was the dream of those blinded freedom fighters. Maybe we will have to wait for another upsurge like that of March 25 of 1971 for such a country.

The article was translated by Naznin Tithi of *The Daily Star*.

Our life always expresses the result of our dominant thoughts.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- 1 Key Largo co-star
 - 7 Reduced amount
 - 11 Egypt neighbour
 - 12 Olympics weapon
 - 13 Physical
 - 14 Muses count
 - 15 Sister of Anne and Charlotte
 - 16 Parish head
 - 17 Take it easy
 - 18 Tiny
 - 19 Lunch hour
 - 21 Piston connector
 - 22 Wood-stock singer
 - 25 Easy mark
 - 26 Grove growth
 - 27 Components
 - 29 Cockpit guesses
 - 33 Charged
 - 34 Squash, for one
 - 35 Pub orders
 - 36 Less leisurely
 - 37 Covet
 - 38 Chuck-Walla's cousin
 - 39 Toppers
- DOWN**
- 40 Pinball bonus
 - 1 Tower site
 - 2 Kitchen come-on
 - 3 Spanish port
 - 4 Chisholm Trail terminus
 - 5 Symbol purity
 - 6 Put down
 - 7 Bolshevik leader
 - 8 Food lover
 - 9 Capitol worker
 - 10 Be furious
 - 16 Singer Gill
 - 18 Ties down
 - 20 Quarter doubled
 - 22 Fronton activity
 - 23 Like some flexible mortgages
 - 24 Stays informed
 - 25 Spread out
 - 28 Play groups
 - 30 Utter
 - 31 Concert venue
 - 32 Wander off
 - 34 Cook's mint
 - 36 Pine's kin



Yesterday's answer

COSTS ASHES
 ARTIE CHUMP
 BERET HENCE
 AGO TEE GEE
 NON LAD RED
 ANGLES WYSS
 AUSTRIA
 DISC MANSES
 ETA SAW ALL
 FAB END BAA
 ELUDE ADEPT
 RILED TEASE
 SALES ACRES

CRYPTOQUOTE

HXCHP SQ WDCTR TGSHPGX ST HPG HPGSQ TDX HPG KTHSHPGQSQ, UCH ST KT GEGXFDH GTH QTHPGQSQ LPSIP XGIDTISMGO HPG HLD. - FGDXF PGFGM

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE:
 THE UNIVERSE IS LIKE A SAFE TO WHICH THERE IS A COMBINATION. BUT THE COMBINATION IS LOCKED UP IN THE SAFE.
 - PETER DE VALES

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte

