

Genesis of Holocaust

Here we publish an excerpt from Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury's extempore speech given at London Headquarters of the Royal Commonwealth Society on 8th June, 1971. During the Liberation War, Justice Chowdhury played a crucial role in mobilising world opinion in favour of Bangladesh's right to self-determination.

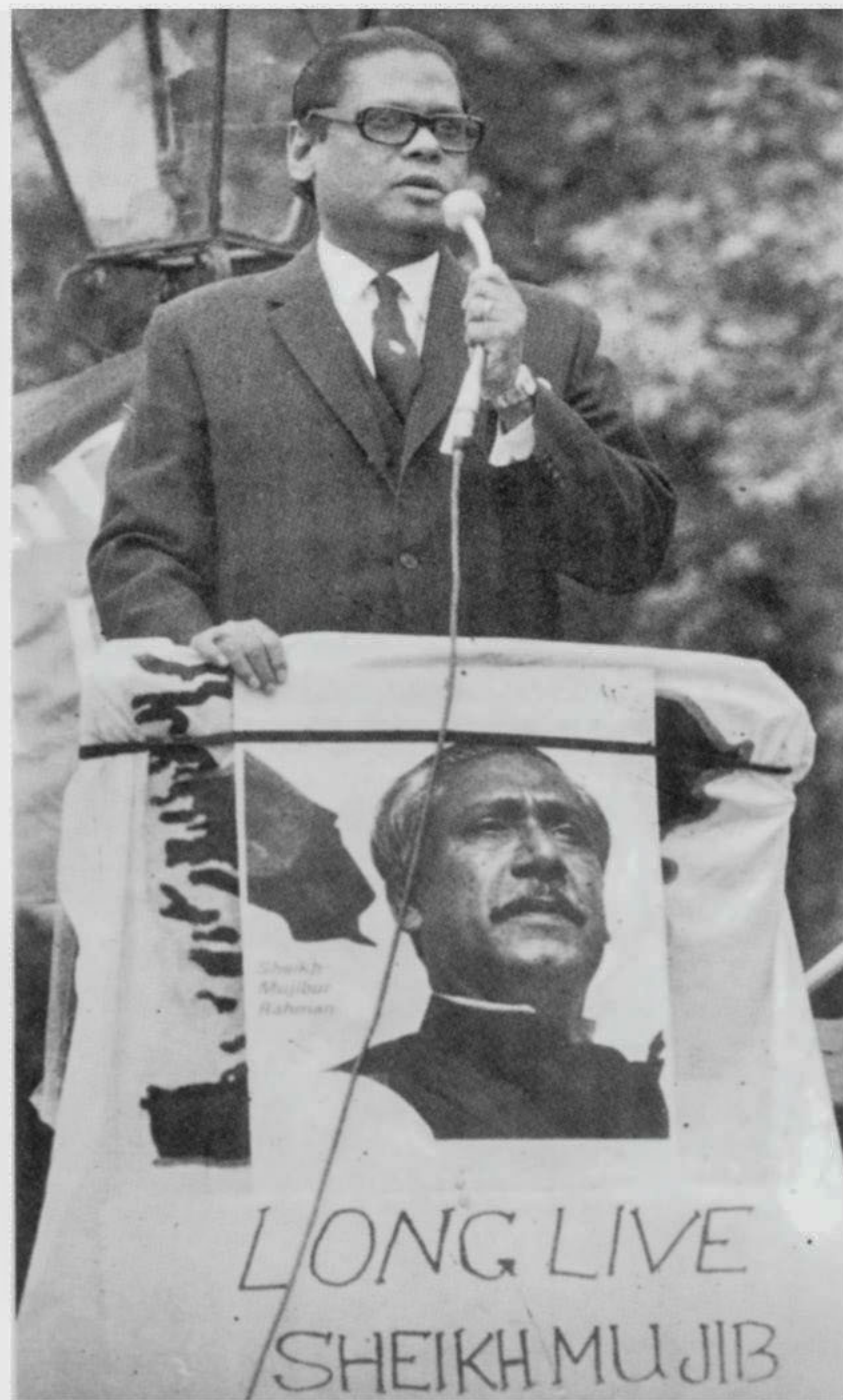


JUSTICE ABU SAYEED CHOWDHURY

As you open newspapers you read that East Pakistanis are fleeing their country, taking shelter in refugee camps and dying in thousands from cholera. But why? What is the genesis of this holocaust? Who is responsible for this human misery?

As you are aware two countries emerged in the Indian sub-continent in August 1947 when the British Government transferred power to the people. While India had a Constitution within a very short time, Pakistan failed to frame one for a long time. When it ultimately did so in 1956, it was on the basis of parity between majority and minority provinces. The major province of East Bengal had to accept an equal number of seats as obtained in West Pakistan.

Despite this incongruity, the Constitution at least guaranteed fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary, and many other things we hold so dear. However, before a general election could take place, the Constitution was abrogated and Field-Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan seized power. That election was not allowed to



Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury giving his speech at a public meeting in London during the Liberation War.

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be held, but Ayub Khan soon realised the force of public opinion and appointed a Constitution Commission which was headed by Mr. Justice Shahabuddin, a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who was at that time Chief Justice of Pakistan, and who had originally come from Madras and settled in Pakistan. I was a member of that Commission. Although we were chosen by the Field-Marshal our consciences were clear and we knew our duties.

We recommended a Constitution with adult franchise, fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary, and a very large measure of autonomy in the provinces, despite the fact that a government delegation forcefully advocated -- this is on record -- a unitary form of government. Even in 1961 they did not want a provincial legislature at all. Then the President wrote to Chief Justice Shahabuddin that he wanted to meet the members of the Commission. At that meeting, Ayub Khan emphasised that there must be a unitary form of government. To this day I recall him saying: "To do otherwise would be committing harakiri."

After we came away from the President's House in Karachi, I asked the Chairman: "What are you going to do? A unitary form of government as distinguished from a federal form of government will never be acceptable to people of East Bengal." The Chairman was very firm in his opinion about a federal form of government. Ultimately, we recom-

mended a representative form of government, but that was not accepted. We recommended it should be a real federal form of government.

It was not possible to have a representative form of government without agitation. The recommendation of a Commission constituted by the President himself had not been accepted by him because there was never any intention to transfer power to people. The country was being ruled by a ruthless military regime but yet the President had to bring about some sort of constitution although disregarding our recommendation. In the Constitution of 1962, he gave provincial legislatures limited powers, an electoral college, a 'basic democracy' which was unheard of anywhere else. This, however, did not satisfy anybody.

Ayub Khan steps down
In 1969 there was such an upsurge of feeling that Ayub Khan had to step down. His Commander-in-Chief, Yahya Khan succeeded him. He soon realised, because of the upsurge of feeling, that a promise had to be made about a representative form of government and he announced that an election would be held in December. So far, so good.

However, the people of East Bengal had been suffering for a long time from the frustrations of their hopes and aspirations, and from political domination and economic exploitation. ... Under the influence of feelings about economic and political exploitation, the people of East

Bengal went to the polls in December 1971. They voted Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's party, the Awami League, into power....

General Yahya Khan's advisers could not tolerate Sheikh Mujib getting all the seats from East Bengal except two. (His party got 167 seats out of 169.) The military dictatorship felt that time had come when they would be required to transfer power to the elected representatives. This upset them, and they in turn set up Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who got eighty odd seats in West Pakistan.

The President did not call a meeting of the Constituent Assembly to frame a Constitution. But there was a clamour for it, and he ultimately convened it on 3rd March 1971. But Zulfikar Ali Bhutto demanded that Sheikh Mujib should compromise on his six points; he should give a guarantee that the members of the Parliament should pass a Constitution agreed to by him. ... Then, under the pressure of the Army junta, General Yahya Khan cancelled the meeting. Sheikh Mujib tried to keep the Pakistanis together; he only expressed his resentment by a very well-known expression of disapproval, a method adopted by Mahatma Gandhi when he wanted independence -- civil disobedience. In this case, the difference was this -- the entire population of East Bengal joined in the movement. Nobody worked anywhere. The courts did not function, the Secretariat was empty.

The people of East Pakistan accepted

Sheikh Mujib as the legal ruler of East Bengal. At this stage General Yahya Khan offered to negotiate. The Sheikh agreed to it. While keeping him engaged in negotiation, General Yahya Khan brought shiploads of arms and the army from West Pakistan, and then the most tragic event of human history, referred to by me at the outset, took place.

It began at midnight on Thursday, 25th March. When my students were sleeping in their halls of residence at the University and the professors were in their apartments with their families and the city of Dhaka was asleep, the army moved in, went to my university, shelled the halls of residence and killed the students and teachers. You have read the horrifying reports in the newspapers. You know how the foreign journalists were bundled out of Dhaka and were not allowed to take any photographs or notes out with them. Why? Because, the Army had to hide their sins, their crimes.

The nation in East Pakistan rose and a cry went up for independence. A new country emerged which today is Bangladesh. Whether any country has given it recognition or not is a technicality. The reality is that General Yahya's army has destroyed the city; they went to the villages and burnt the huts of the poverty-stricken people who had to carry out agriculture without modern improvements. The whole nation has rejected this army. It is not possible for any authority, anybody, to keep Bangladesh under the control of the invading army. It cannot rule the 75 million people. The sooner this grim reality is recognised the better.

People's rejection
This is clearly government by murder. It has been rejected by the people of Bangladesh. It is not correct to say that the West Pakistani army and government have full control over East Pakistan. Under gunpoint, some senior officers of the Dhaka Secretariat go to the Secretariat and return home under military escort. They have practically no subordinate staff to work. ... It is conquest by army. Since it is now sought to reduce us to the status of a colony we must get back our territory and throw out the invading army.

We are a betrayed nation. We are different in habits, in culture, in language. We constitute a separate people. Under the Charter of the United Nations, we have been guaranteed the right of self-determination, and it is now an article of faith with us that we must exercise this right of self-determination. While we must not lose sight of the colossal human misery, we must treat the disease itself and not the symptom. That can only be done by recognising a reality, and that is the will of the people of Bangladesh. Without recognition of that reality, if we stick to mere technicality, we shall not be able to trace the genesis of the suffering and we shall not be able to bring permanent peace in the sub-continent.

Today, the troubles could lead to a continental war. There is a potential threat to peace; the people of East Bengal refuse to be politically dominated and the economically exploited by West Pakistan any longer.

Foreign aid taken in our name is spent in developing the industries of West Pakistan; foreign earnings by the sale of our jute and our tea are spent in West Pakistan. Therefore, we must be independent, and must have control of our own foreign earnings. With this and with the foreign aid we shall be receiving, we will be able to develop our agriculture and our industries. We shall build up a prosperous sovereign republic of Bangladesh. We shall have a policy of non-alignment.

Tribulations of Transparency

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

ONE of the buzzwords of the 21st century attached to other buzzwords like 'democracy,' 'progressive thinking' and 'participatory' is 'transparency.' Being transparent is not only sexy - and we are not talking of one's attire by the way -- it is also the only way the public will trust you, if you are in any position of authority,

that is. This is why Transparency International provides us with information on all the non-transparent activities of public officials and the institutions they are part of; little things like women in rural areas paying bribes to police and court officials between Tk. 300 to Tk. 40,000 at different stages of the cases they file for acts of violence on them; or giving pay offs to officials to receive maternity benefits and stipends.

Of course such endeavours have made organisations like TI -- the enemy governments 'love to hate' because these precious nuggets of information invariably put them in embarrassing positions -- a bit like suddenly realising, in a *milad mehfil*, that your Punjabi is way too see-through for decent company.

Following this principle of letting the world see you for what you are -- warts and all -- many organisations have adopted this strategy of having open, airy offices with glass all around for everyone to see. This includes office rooms that are surrounded by crystal clear glass -- hence they are *completely* transparent. While having one's own office room is clearly a privilege, when it is a glass box, one may feel, at least at the beginning, like a member of a mutant species -- like those half-human, half-porcine creatures in the local zoo, reported by tabloids of negligible credibility, that the public are dying to come and see.

One of the biggest adjustments to being in a transparent cell, sorry, room, is that you must always sit straight, not slouch around like you did in your erstwhile hidden corner where you could collect all kinds of debris around you and even snatch a snooze or two. You can't, moreover, lean back into your flexi chair and check on Facebook updates. No, you have to look busy *all the time*. More importantly you must adopt a kind of ascetic -- I don't give a hoot whether anyone is looking at me -- attitude. This means making no eye contact whatsoever with people who may or may not be looking at you as they walk past by. It means no scratching your head in front of a blank screen, no retouching lipstick or powdering that impossibly shiny nose. It also requires that you do not spill half the contents of the water bottle on your person when you are trying to elegantly get a sip.

Yes it does make you self conscious, these glass walls. So much so that you are very careful when you throw that piece of tissue into the bin; if you miss, it is sheer mortification because surely there must be a pair of eyes or worse, pairs of eyes, watching your pathetic non-athletic moves, no doubt silently giggling their heads off.

Being in a transparent room also means that you can be seen from all angles. Which is why you must do a reconnaissance of the various views of your room from different strategic points. Take the boss's room or the routes that he normally takes around the floor. What would he see? A calm, composed, presentable looking employee working serenely on her computer -- or, a disheveled mad woman who has entered the 'Owner of the Untidiest Desk Award' contest? Are the mugs, clay mungoes, bottles of water, post ids, head phones, tissue box, calendar, newspapers, files placed in a semi-aesthetic arrangement? Or is that little jute monkey looking a little out of place with the ceramic mug that mockingly says: Keep Calm and Carry On?

Yes transparency is a seductive yet tricky concept. It makes you regret not having brushed your hair in the morning or for inadvertently screaming out an expletive when the mouse closes down your document before you have saved your Pulitzer Prize winning piece. It makes you hold your sneeze till you are safe in the comfort of the restroom and compels you to resist the urge to do Jim Carrey/ Khan Jaiul/Peter Sellers (whatever is relatable to your generation) impersonations just to make sure your facial muscles are alive. Basically it stops you from doing silly things, especially those you wouldn't want the public to know about. It obliges you to at least try to show yourself at your best. No wonder governments get all antsy when they are asked to be a little more transparent.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Op-Ed and Editorial, *The Daily Star*.

BEETLE BAILEY



QUOTABLE Quote

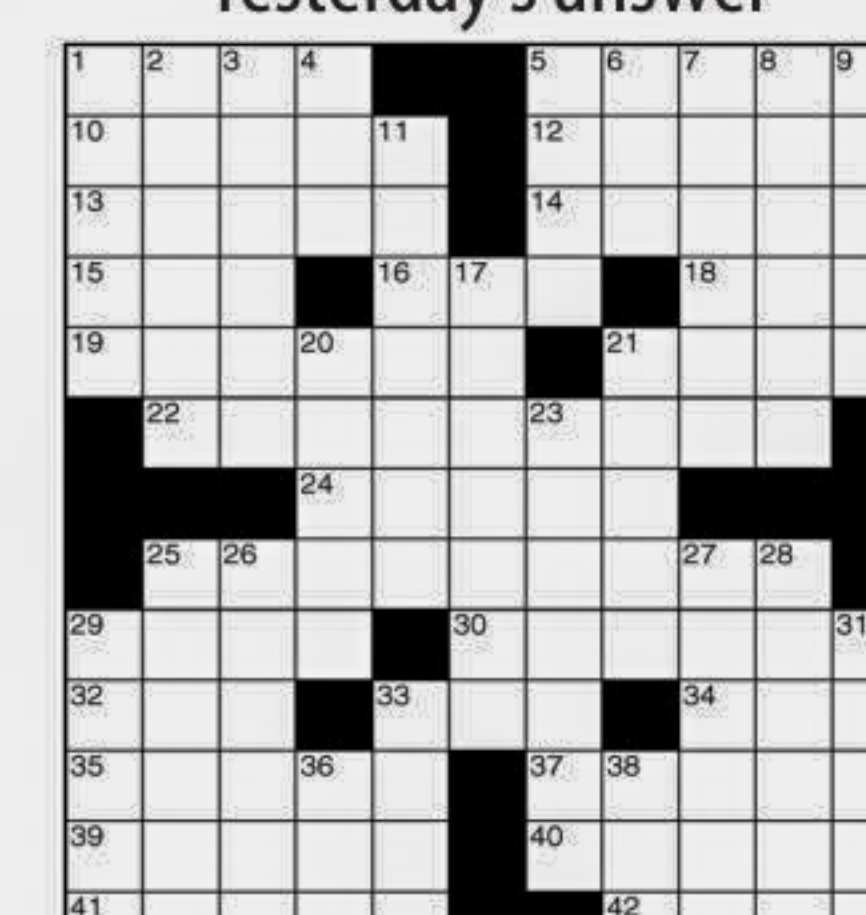
If you don't know where you're going, any road'll take you there.

George Harrison

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Lancaster of film
 - Barrel piece
 - Outdo
 - Make broader
 - Gluttonous spree
 - Set off
 - Hagen of acting
 - Flock father
 - "Aw, shucks!"
 - Mind a Manx, say
 - Stadium section
 - Yellow flower
 - Hawkeye
 - Yellow flower
 - Telescope part
 - Color-changing stuff
 - Drama division
 - Imitating
 - Old hand
 - Principled
 - Subarctic forest
 - Tickle
 - Throat ailment
 - Looks for
 - Clutter
- Down**
- Rise to the surface
 - In agreement
 - Singer Scotto
 - Gentle pull
 - Did laps, maybe
 - Service reward
 - Slow tempo
 - Ben of "Pippin"
 - Door sign
 - Green gem
 - Dined in style
 - Irritated states
 - Color lightly
 - Rodeo ropes
 - Turn into
 - Fabricated
 - Strike caller
 - Political oysters
 - Eastern monks
 - Bath bars
 - Pub pints
 - Invite
 - It's pressed for cash

Yesterday's answer



RAJAH RECAP
ADORE EVITA
SHRED CARTS
PED GLANCES
ERA EEL USE
DENS BLAST
APE SIP
PLANS DEAF
RAM TIS AMI
EROTICA NUN
MADDLE LOUSE
PESTS MESSY

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