



# Can a self respecting nation treat its brave sons like this?

Here we publish a speech given by Major General M. A. Manzoor, Bir Uttam, at a seminar organised by Bangla Academy. It was published in Sangbad on March 26, 1977. Major General Manzoor was the Sector Commander of Sector 8 during the Liberation War.

M. A. MANZOOR, BIR UTTAM

**T**HIS is my first opportunity to speak to an audience after our Independence. I convey my sincere thanks to Bangla Academy for affording me this opportunity. First my deep respects to those brothers and sisters whose blood has created the opportunity for this discussion. Many learned persons have commented on the Liberation War—I don't have the ability to make such erudite comments. I will, as a soldier, present my own views on the Liberation War as I have understood it.

The background of our freedom struggle was written long in the past when our predecessors realised that there was a need to live in this land as a separate national entity. For ages the people of this land had been enslaved. The Bengalis had never been free in the real sense or had never participated in the task of determining their own destiny. But we had always dreamt to break free from this environment and shape our own society, culture and economy in a free atmosphere. At times our nationalist urge had caused severe tremors. The Fakir-Sanyasi revolt, the peasant revolt, the Wahhabi and Faraizi movements and the revolt against indigo farming were manifestations of our nationalist feelings. But we succumbed every time due to lack of unity, and in the face of rapacious rulers our dreams failed to materialise. But somewhere during a phase in that struggle, when the colonisers were evicted from the subcontinent, our hearts were filled with delight. We dreamed of a glorious free nation. But we awoke to a rude shock. A hard truth dawned that the newly found independence was only a phase in the quest for real independence; then started another struggle. A new start was launched with the Language Movement of 1952. Thus,

every time in celebrating February 21 we celebrate the first step of our revolutionary nationalist awakening. 1971 was the armed phase of the glorious struggle when the people of this country took up arms. An amazing unity not seen before, a determination to struggle unto death and a mood of nationalism was created. There is not another example in the subcontinent of a collective resolve to sacrifice everything for independence. Except for a handful of selfish and misguided people the entire mass of the people had lent their support for independence. And only this unity and people's support made independence possible. Everywhere in this land, in the towns and villages, we received spontaneous and unstinted help of the people. Without this support it would have been difficult for us to survive, much less gain independence. It is true that we have gained independence but our struggle is not over yet. If we had retained the same unity and sense of dedication of the days of 1971 then we would not have faced difficulty in enjoying the fruits of independence; we would have progressed much in the task of nation building.

Many people have said and written many things about the Liberation War of 1971. Many have made profits out of publishing colourful books with attractive covers. But how many of them have written about the brave son, printed the face of the young boy aged 16 of a small village who bade farewell to his mother vowing to liberate the country and in keeping that vow never returned to the embrace of his mother. Where is the account of the brave deeds of the brave soldiers of the Bengal Regiment or the East Pakistan Rifles? Of those who were decorated with Bir Shrestho for their bravery? Were their sacrifices any less significant than the death of a few intellectuals and politicians? Our real history is in the tale of the valour



Major General M. A. Manzoor (1940-1981)

and sacrifices of thousands of youths, thousands of common men. We have to write that history which will be an inspiration for the future generation.

It is not possible for me to lay out the details of the events of the War of Liberation. But I would like to narrate a few incidents that are examples of incredible patriotism of the common man. We were stuck on the banks of the Madhumati since December 8. On the other side was enemy's strong defence. It was necessary to gain information about the strength and deployment of the enemy; came forward two young men. In the course of their effort to gather intelligence they were caught. One was killed and the other returned with severe wounds on his throat. That incredibly brave young man also died but not before giving us the details of the enemy by writing and drawing sketches.

On another occasion in another battlefield in Satkhira one of our companies was encircled by the enemy. It was not being possible to provide them ammunitions and logistics. Even experi-

enced soldiers were not willing to risk their lives to reach them. At that time 5 or 6 young boys came forward -- they were between 12 and 16. In the cover of the night risking their lives they continued to supply the company with replenishment. But one of them was killed by the enemy during their third foray. When his comrades returned with the tidings of his death his mother broke down in a heartrending cry. I went up to console her but returned in silence. An old woman had sheltered a group of freedom fighters one night and cooked meal for them; even gave them some molasses and puffed rice for the road. But next day the occupation forces burned down her hut, the only possession she had, for this offense. She did not repent her action nor did she demand compensation for her loss from the government. These small deeds of bravery are actually the real stories of our independence. But we witnessed a very dangerous picture after the country was liberated, a wicked attempt to fulfill personal lust. And in this lust were lost the expectations and the spirit of the Liberation War. Attempts were made to distort history. Thus we lost a grand opportunity to take our country forward towards development and progress. Had we utilised that opportunity we would not have to face the situation that we are facing now. In the post-liberation phase the collective strength of the freedom fighters could have been employed for the development of the country. By making the most of the enthusiasm and the aim for which they had participated in the war we could have started a new chapter. But that very strength was misused for political gains. As a result, most of the freedom fighters went astray. Instead of the gratefulness and good wishes of the nation they were given an insignificant certificate.

Having deposited their weapons after the war they then went around seeking jobs and favours displaying that certificate. The freedom fighters were insulted and the spirit of the War of Liberation was denigrated. Acts of some of the misguided youth gave immense pleasure to those evil forces that had opposed the war. Can a self respecting nation treat its brave sons like this?

There is constant effort to attack our independence and sovereignty. Some individuals and groups, in order to hide their misdeeds and at the behest of external forces, are putting impediments to our freedom. At a time when it is essential to forge unity there is constant attempt to create a divide. These misguided people should be identified and made to shun the wrong path. This is our collective responsibility. If need be, and for the greater interest and for the sake of further strengthening our unity, they should be destroyed from the root. Just as we are facing direct assault on our freedom, there is an indirect attempt to distort our nationalism by misinterpreting religion on one hand and on the pretext of cultural liberalism on the other. Our religious, cultural and social practices are well established and self sufficient -- there is no need for fanaticism, no need to import distorted culture from outside. What is needed now is full utilisation and development of whatever we have. The people mostly live in rural areas. And it is their economic development that should be our first priority. And all our efforts should be to develop the rural economy.

Source: Bangladesh: MuktiJuddher Bhugal o Itihas, Edited by Sukumar Biswas, Agami Prokashoni, May 1996.

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# The choice of the (unaware) elakabashi



CHINTITO SINCE 1995

NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

**I** had a dream, which is not unusual given the time that we get to sleep during the traffic jam, which is the hallmark of the ongoing hartal imposed by the opposition out of parliament. We did not think this was possible, not my dream, the jam in a hartal.

As I sashayed in my trance the prime minister appeared under a halo, and waved aside all the other aspirants one by one; there was one from each mahalla, and nominated me for the throne of Dhaka city.

This did not dissuade the other aspirants in the least, and they surrounded us with billboards that had their portraits with what seemed like sharpened Dracula-teeth, and blood streaming down their lips. Obviously, I had no love lost on them. Imagine their audacity of defying our leader.

I could swear I saw lipstick on the billboards, not of the glamorous ad that the drab political hopefuls had covered. It was the artwork of the photo-shop-wala, who produced pink candidates. The piracy on high street saw mobile operators and merchandising corporations vanish behind large-hearted promises.

As I slipped further into the abyss, there appeared from behind the mist the towering figure of a military-dictator, pseudo-constitutionalist, and debonair-president, whose reverberant voice declared that democracy had expired in 1991. Ouch! He blessed

me as his personal choice because I saw him first, and every one on his party's national committee cheered me as their mayoral candidate. This was a sweet nightmare if that definition was possible.

I now found myself on the floor hugging my grandmother's kol-balish. The leader of the real opposition appeared angry in my delusion. She was opposed to my candidacy because that is her sworn duty, but she hardly gets to do that, and here she was avenging her real-life incompetence in another man's musings.

She asked me in a flat monotonous dialect, "Why do you want to be Mayor?" My reply was, "If I did not, my dear Leader of the Opposition, then your husband may put up someone else."

"That does not mean you will degrade yourself by lying on the floor. As Mayor you will get many opportunities to lie," she muttered under her breath.

I was back on the bed pronto, and now dreaming hard. In my restlessness, I promised the city people clean water even for car washing and rose gardening. I switched from right to left and this time I pledged the citizens a jam-free capital within two weeks of being elected. I sat up in a shock. Did I just say that? I was now lying on my stomach. Dishonest politicians lie in any imaginable position. I vowed there would be no power cuts, and I was not talking about the opposition.

"Did someone mention my name?" Madam appeared from nowhere. Seeing me all alone she was assured that hartal was in force. Her smile was visible despite her silhouette. She too assured me of her undivided support, stating eerily, echo after echo, as I tried to break away from my deep hallucination, that in the forthcoming city elections

she would go with the national consensus. Huh! Now I was sure I was dreaming.

I doubled my philanthropic wish list. I guaranteed every person a house, every non-matriculate a job, a second job to those who have one, every rickshaw driver a license, every vendor a footpath, every student a golden star, every garbage bag the assurance of being picked up within the first hour. We would have a dream city. You bet!

A michil appeared with people holding handwritten placards (the announcement was so sudden, you know) and hailing the all-party accord, and led by a smiling horse pulling a cart. The cacophony was tearing apart my eardrums. Everybody was very happy that I was the choice of the people of my area. The people they looked from rooftops and from behind curtained windows, even from below me, already.

My zealous workers had smeared with alkatra freshly painted boundary walls belonging to the elakabashi. Without their knowledge, but in their name, they wrote that my character was as holy as a flower. They have obviously not met Golapi of the neighbouring mahalla, or Fulbanu further down the street. But, my purpose was being served. Selfish, you say. Have you seen any other kind?

There was a soft knock on the left wall of my dream. Come in, I stuttered. The local police commissioner was almost apologetic as he explained that his force would not be able to deliver at my beck and call. Irritated, I waved him away, confident that I will manage without him. They all do.

I was now hearing taps from various sides of a transparent geodesic dome in which I was a floating citizen, helpless. We all are in this city of broken footpaths on which ply

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motorcycles, unless someone has built on it. "Come in," said I. The Wasa boss was delivered before me via an under-construction pipeline. Dripping with what this city of 15 million produces, all he could manage were slurping sounds, which I took to mean his inability to serve this mayor hopeful. This was getting scary.

No sooner had I dried up the place with a mop the size of Rajuk Bhaban, its chairman arrived with the full Nagar Unnayan Committee. They were dream hopping and only stopped by to say "Hi!", and that they have no manpower, no resources and no time to come to the aid of the city father. That will be the case with most children these days. They can manage only the time for their

parents' funeral; otherwise what will people say. Yup! I had drifted away from one phantasm to another.

When I returned to my original reverie, I caught the PDB chairperson just leaving; they come and go as fast as the electricity they manage. So were we getting uninterrupted power supply for all my tax-paying city folks? I promised. He lowered his head. Seeing my ashen face, he uttered, "For VVIP programme, of course, sir!" My face lit up despite the blackout that commenced just then, because I took the letter 'I' to mean innocent.

How ghastly! The mayor will have no support from the law-enforcers, meaning there will be no let-up in the worst traffic system in the world. Crime would be unabated. Water supply and sewerage management will continue to be inadequate. Greedy people (and there are so many of us) will build at will anywhere, and up to any height. Electricity will maintain its erratic and eccentric culture, EEE. What about gas? All I heard was a fissy...fissy. If this were my sworn enemy vying for the post of mayor, I would be his (or her) cheerleader. But, hey, this was about me, my dream, my false promises... Suddenly, I was awake, sweating as in a sewer, the EEE fan was not moving, the garbage was waiting to be collected, the gas burner was running low, brownish particles were floating in tap water, every building was the prize outcome of violation...

I wonder what amount of courage drives the tiger in the real mayoral and councillor candidates to spell out their vision, dream if you will.

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**QUOTABLE Quote**  
*We know what we are, but know not what we may be.*  
William Shakespeare

## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Prepare potatoes
  - Diplomatic skill
  - Words to live by
  - Oscar or Tony
  - Victorious
  - Ohio city
  - Hot dish support
  - Purr producer
  - Golf target
  - Wane
  - Neptune's realm
  - Adversaries
  - Make broader
  - Hard worker
  - Bar bill
  - 2013 Disney hit
  - Facts and figures
  - Motor need
  - Camera support
  - Steer clear of
  - Deck coating
  - Delroy of "Get Shorty"
  - Yard surrounder
  - Wildly eager
  - Perimeter
- DOWN**
- Fifth president
  - Hun leader
  - Burner setting
  - Aspiration
  - Price add-on
  - Wonder
  - Annul
  - Musical chords
  - Fluttery insects
  - Postmark part
  - Prop for Poseidon
  - At any time
  - Soup buy
  - Annoy
  - Expert, in slang
  - Quiz show fodder
  - Tea type
  - Studio event
  - Immediately
  - Police ID
  - Young horse
  - Cut into cubes
  - Abundant
  - Wedding words
  - Beagle or boxer

**CRYPTOQUOTE**  
MBDYI KR MERKGLK DOE DYC PDKGE, POBCGEYGI DYC POBCBOZG DEG OY ZDLK MBDYI KR MERKGLK XDY.  
-IKGPDEK TCDBB

**YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE:**  
THE SECRET OF MY INFLUENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT IT REMAINED SECRET.  
-SALVADOR DALI

## Yesterday's answer

B	U	R	T	S	T	A	V	E
O	N	E	U	P	W	I	D	E
B	I	N	G	E	A	P	A	R
U	T	A	R	A	M	G	E	E
P	E	T	S	I	T	T	I	E
D	A	N	D	E	L	I	O	N
I	O	W	A	N				
B	U	T	T	E	R	C	U	P
L	E	N	S	L	I	T	M	U
A	C	T	A	L	A	P	R	O
M	O	R	A	L	T	A	I	G
A	M	U	S	E	S	T	R	E
S	E	E	K	S	M	E	S	S

**A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW**  
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

## BEETLE BAILEY

**BEETLE, COULD I HAVE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME?**  
GREG+MORT WALKER

## by Mort Walker

**SURE, BUT IT WILL COST YOU FIVE BUCKS**  
**MY "FREE TIME" DOESN'T COME CHEAP**

## HENRY

**HENRY**

## by Don Trachte

**HENRY**