

# We took up arms for freedom, they took up arms for genocide

**THE THIRD VIEW**



MAHFUZZ ANAM

**E**VERY struggle for freedom and every instance of independence of a country usually comes at a huge cost. We are among those countries of the world who

appeared to have paid a much higher price than many others. As we celebrate our independence day we cannot but mourn the deaths of our freedom fighters and more so the victims of genocide which is now so indelibly linked with any celebration of our Independence.

We know of several instances in history of massacre of civilians by an invading army. We also know of atrocities committed in tribal and ethnic wars. However the genocide that was committed by the Pakistan army on the unarmed civilian population of the then East Pakistan can only be described as something beyond our imagination.

We were aware that West Pakistanis did not know much about us nor did they think much of us. But we had very little idea that they hated us so much as to launch a mass killing just because the election of 1970 did not go the way they had planned and we won resoundingly enough to demand power to govern the whole of Pakistan.

The possible comparison of our genocide would be the holocaust committed against the Jews in Germany by the Nazis and the killing of civilians in Cambodia by the Pol Pot regime. The comparison is relevant both in terms of the huge number of people killed and by the fact that a country's own army was used to kill its own people.

The government that was voted to power in Germany turned around and killed millions of its own citizens. In the case of Cambodia the victors of revolution that people welcomed turned around and started systematically killing ordinary people in the name of eliminating inequality. So also in our case, the army that was fed, clothed, armed and trained by funds generated by our agri-

cultural and industrial products and taxes, was used to kill us.

How could an army that was created to protect us kill us so brutally? They could because the 'intellectual preparation' started much earlier. The point of this article is to assert that though physical elimination of the Bangalis may have started from 25th March 1971, the murder of Bangalis in terms of culture, literature, tradition, intellectual ability and whatever was their collective heritage started much earlier, from the very inception of Pakistan as a country.

Our genocide was not just to 'eliminate' people who wanted independence but an 'ethnic cleansing' comparable to

zens of Pakistan.

The ferocity and brutality of the genocide and its all encompassing nature could not have resulted only from a political decision to 'suppress' a rebellion. It came from a deep-seated sense of 'cultural and racial superiority' bred over decades of nurturing a narrative that 'Bangali Muslims were some sort of an inferior version of Muslims' as most of them were locals and converts as opposed to West Pakistani Muslims having 'Arab' blood.

The Pakistanis identified our cultural heritage to be the most significant obstacle to our being 'genuine Pakistanis'. As most of our ancestors converted to Islam



Painting by Shahabuddin Ahmed

those that occurred in the Balkans and that is occurring now in the occupied territories of Palestine.

Bangalis were killed not only because we took up arms against the state of Pakistan but also because of who we were- Bangalis. In fact that was the crux of the issue-'we were not good Muslims' and hence we would have to be racially 'improved' first by reducing our numbers and then through forced 'relations' of our women with the 'real Muslims' from Pakistan. The indiscriminate rape of Bangali women during the nine months of war was a result of this policy. Thus a whole new 'class' of citizens were to be 'procreated' so that we 'Bangalis' become better Muslims and as such better citi-

and as Bangalis we had significant parts of our cultural heritage that predated the coming of Islam to Bengal, therefore we were 'polluted' with cultural 'impurities' that needed to be 'eliminated' before we could really become good Pakistanis.

The above narrative does not stand to historical scrutiny. The cultural heritage of Bangalis of East Pakistan was far richer, more complex and varied with Islam forming an intrinsic part of it all. But Pakistanis were never interested in the history that showed us in a different light than the one that they created to justify their 'superiority'.

So from the very beginning, the rulers of Pakistan targeted our culture as something that had to be sup-

pressed, if not destroyed, to build a strong Pakistan. Thus within less than two years we had Pakistan's founder arrogantly declaring that "Urdu and Urdu alone will be the national language of Pakistan", a language that he himself could not speak.

Everything about our culture was anathema to them. People of West Pakistan were taught that Bangali culture was nothing but an extension of Hindu religion and our love for and attachment to Bangali culture and literature prevented us from appreciating what great opportunities Pakistan as a country provided for us to regain the glory of Islam and Muslim Empires.

Ingrained deep within the Pakistani mindset was a deep-seated hatred for what we stood for as Bangalis. This needed to be 'changed' before we could be accepted.

The history of our 24 years with Pakistan bears ample proof of it.

The genocide of 1971 was the most brutal and cruel manifestation of a thinking that Pakistanis nurtured and something that was hammered into their thought process, especially in the mind of its army. Otherwise the army of one's own country-which it was till the 25th night- could not have killed innocent unarmed men, women and children as the Pakistani army did starting from that fateful March night.

The racism behind the genocide of 1971 has not been sufficiently focused on and not enough research has been done on the mindset of the Pakistani leadership, especially that of the armed forces, to expose the nature and extent of the cruelty of a country's 'own' army killing its majority population.

As we celebrate our independence today we must introspect why we needed to separate ourselves from Pakistan in 1971 and what would have happened to us as a people, as a culture and as a historic entity had we not gained our independence. It is not only that we are far better off with our "Independence" but that we would have been obliterated as a culturally distinctive people if we did not become so.

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## Bangladesh at 45

*Let's live up to our hard-earned independence*

**T**HE nation enters its 45th year of independence. It is as much a cause of celebration as that of an expression of profound respect for the sacrifices of valiant freedom fighters, martyrs and all classes of people who waged a do or die struggle against the forces of occupation and genocide.

Over the last 44 years, Bangladesh has had many attainments that we can be justly proud of. The economy and agriculture have performed outstandingly amid all sorts of weakness and instabilities in the political and governance fronts, by virtue of the never-say-die spirit of the peasants, garments workers, migrant workers and entrepreneurs of the country. The country once denigrated as 'bottomless basket' has now become an emerging and vibrant economy. Bangladesh's successes in various socio-economic indicators, especially in the areas of women's empowerment, reducing maternal and child mortalities, higher enrollment in education, have earned the country laurels as a role model among developing countries. The country with its huge young population has a potential demographic dividend waiting to be harnessed.

Two of the main goals of our Liberation War were to achieve pluralistic democracy and economic emancipation based on equitable distribution of wealth. But, 24 years after the of restoration of democracy, political and state institutions have not flourished in the way that we would have liked them to, for which much of the blame must lie with fractious politics. And although poverty has been significantly reduced, inequality has not commensurately come down.

Let us make a fresh pledge on the 45th Independence Day: shun self-destructive politics and work collectively for a 'golden Bengal' that we had unitedly aspired for during the Liberation War.

## Journalist victimised

*We want justice done to him*

**T**HE highhandedness of the police in dealing with Prothom Alo's Baufal correspondent ABM Mizanur Rahman leaves us dumbstruck. The High Court (HC) has issued a rule asking why the inhuman physical and mental torture perpetrated on Mizanur Rahman in police custody would not be declared illegal. The police authorities have been asked to show cause in two weeks "as to why the law enforcers responsible for torturing" the correspondent should not be punished. We think a safeguard is implied for the victim against further torture in the two-week period.

We are aghast to witness the mentality of certain law enforcers in that they believe they are well within their rights to frame a member of the press who had dared to argue with them. In this particular case, a small tiff which appeared to have been resolved ended up being an attempted reprisal by the police.

Mizanur Rahman was remanded for 14 days by a Patuakhali court although he could hardly stand up and displayed signs of physical torture. It is heartening to hear that a medical board has been ordered to be formed under the guidance of the civil surgeon to look into Mizanur Rahman's physical condition. The board is to present its findings by March 31. This is not the first time a member of the press has been tortured by law enforcers. Journalists, particularly in the outlying areas, have been often found vulnerable to maltreatment and high-handed behaviour of the police in honest and diligent pursuit of their professional responsibilities.

## Economic impact of political unrest unfolding

ABUL BASHER

**A**WAMI League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) are the two biggest political parties in Bangladesh. But instead of cooperating with each other, they have been carrying out a feud. We, the 'governed,' suffer as a result of their duel. Yet, they say they do it to serve us better and for our betterment.

Surprisingly, they do not suffer much. Rather, the economic life of common people suffers the most. It suffered heavily in the second half of 2013, and now it has been suffering heavily again since the beginning of 2015, with no foreseeable sign of ending. Given that the service sector accounts for the lion's share of Bangladesh's economy, conflicting politics significantly affect the economy as this sector is more prone to blockades and strikes. In plain words, the severity of the economic sufferings from strikes and blockades has increased more than ever before.

The economic impact of any kind of political or non-political incident can be traced with the help of the lead and lagged economic variables. Lead variables are those that forecast the likely impacts whereas the lagged variables reveal the impacts only after they have been felt. However, there is another kind of economic variable in many developed countries, which is called 'coincidental variable.' Coincidental variables reveal the real-time impact of any kind of shock in the economy. It is difficult to identify any coincidental economic variable in developing countries like Bangladesh.

One of the most renowned lead economic variables across the globe is the

stock price index. It is assumed that the buyers and sellers participating in the stock markets are forward looking and use all information available to them at a given time to make a decision about buying and selling of stocks. Therefore, any event that can potentially affect the business and economy in future will affect the price of the stock today. Any incident that can potentially negatively affect the economy in future will reduce the stock price today, and vice versa. When all available information is exhaustively used in decision making, the outcome is said to be an 'efficient' one. The stock market is assumed to be one of the efficient markets where the participants (buyers and sellers) leave no information unutilised in making their economic decision.

This efficient market hypothesis explains, for example, why a tsunami in Japan affects stock prices all over the world. Tsunami in Japan is likely to affect the Japanese economy, which is one of the three largest economies of the world. In this era of globalisation, where most countries are interrelated through trade and capital flow, any downturn in Japanese economy is likely to negatively affect the economies of other countries. This possibility, when taken into account by the stock market participants all over the world, immediately slashes the price of stocks.

However, Dhaka stock market, by far Bangladesh's largest stock market, is not very big and connected with the rest of the world. It can easily be maneuvered by a few large buyers and sellers. This may cast doubts about the efficiency of this market and its ability to provide leading information about the economy. Notwithstanding such limitation, the stock price index of Dhaka Stock

Exchange (DSEX) is correctly unfolding the formidable economic challenges ahead created by the ongoing political crisis.

On January 1, 2015, the DSEX index was 4941.52. The current wave of vandalism accompanied by strike and blockade started from January 6, 2015. The DSEX index started declining as result. On February 1, 2015, the index plummeted to 4618.47. This fall reflects not only the current but also the looming threat of further economic damage by the ongoing vandalism. As this fear intensified, the DSEX index continues declining. On March 12, 2015, it stood at 4556.94, registering a decline by about 8.5% since January 1, 2015.

Inflation is one of the most renowned macroeconomic variables, which captures the economic impacts of past events. The inflation figures for the months of January and February 2015 have been released by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). These figures mark the impacts of ongoing blockade and strike on commodity prices, which ultimately affect the quality of life.

Inflation was high in the first half of the last fiscal year, which experienced political vandalism and serious disruption in the supply chain. In particular, food inflation was very high in the urban areas. Since the beginning of 2014 -- the second half of the last fiscal year -- political vandalism lessened and supply chain was restored. Because of this favourable change, inflation started declining.

In the first month of the current fiscal year, July 2015, the overall inflation was 7.04%, with food inflation of 7.94% and non-food inflation of 5.71%. These measures of inflation

continued declining since then. In December 2014, the last month of the first half of the current fiscal year, overall inflation declined to 6.11%, with food inflation of 5.86% and non-food inflation of 6.48%. But as a result of the newly started political unrest and disruption in supply chain, food inflation started increasing, which eventually drove the overall inflation up as well. In February 2015, food inflation increased to 6.11%, putting a brake on the declining trend of overall inflation.

Interestingly, food inflation in urban areas in February 2015 was 7.02%, while the same in the rural areas in the same month was 5.72%. Since agricultural products flow from rural to urban, the difference between urban and rural food inflation to some extent reflects the effects of disruption in supply chain. The observed dynamics of overall as well as different components of inflation imply that the ongoing unrest is taking a toll on the economy.

No matter who says what, both lead and lagged economic variables are showing deep scars in the economy created by the ongoing unrest. If this situation continues, these scars will become unmanageable. Bangladesh was nicely poised to become a middle income country. Over the last decades, the country made recommendable developments and was termed as a 'development surprise' by many economists and economic commentators at home and abroad. But if the current conflicting politics continues, soon the country will be identified as a land of lost potentials.

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## COMMENTS

**"Family plumbing depths of anxiety"**  
(March 22, 2015)

A.H. Dewan

Let us hope and pray that the cries of Salahuddin's family members come to an end with his recovery. Who else but the government bears the onus?

**"Khaleda 'positive on city polls'"**  
(March 21, 2015)

Zman7

If she is now positive on city polls, why didn't she become positive on the last national polls which were portended by many analysts (particularly after the Gazipur City polls) that her party would be coming to power. So she had lost an opportunity. And now she has no other way to come into power except by participating in the next general election. And for that she must wait until at least 2018.

**"Panicked expats fly home for passports"**  
(March 20, 2015)

Kazi Hasan

Sad story. May be expatriates like us read this and express our sufferings by a sigh, but it does not matter to our administration. This administration is for whom? Who is paying for their salary? All these are at the cost of ordinary people's hard-earning money but they are the most neglected ones in Bangladesh.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Goodbye, Lee



On March 23, 2015, Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew died at the age of 91. He had served 31 years as prime minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990. When Lee left Singapore, per capita GDP was \$14,000, his reputation was gilt-edged and an entire tier of second-generation leaders lined up to take over when he stepped down in 1990. Overcoming many controversies, he rebuilt the economy of Singapore after the sudden pull-out of British forces. He was a great statesman. We bid goodbye to Lee Kuan Yew.

Mobarak Ali  
Gopibagh, Dhaka

### Unacceptable tweet of Shoaib Akhtar

It is not only sad but also disgusting that a renowned cricketer like Shoaib Akhtar tweeted in the social media, "Come on East Pakistan!! You can do this!" during the Bangladesh-India match on March 19, 2015. How ridiculous! Is this man kidding us? Who the hell is 'East Pakistan' anyway? We are Bangladesh and we earned it! How did a renowned figure like him come up with such an unacceptable statement? He should apologise to Bangladesh for this comment.

Mahbuba Sharmeen Preema  
BRAC University

### Strive for five

Objective viewers will agree that three of the four 2015 cricket World Cup quarterfinals were won decisively without any controversy. Remove those three controversial decisions and the India quarterfinal would have been a much closer contest. Logically speaking, therefore, the Tigers are presently performing at about the number five level in the world rankings. WI seems to be declining. The future of SL seems uncertain after losing their two elder heroes. England will likely bounce back, but are presently down. Three veterans from Pakistan have retired from ODIs, but Pakistan and their pace bowling attack is due to arrive in April. Tigers, it will be important for you to put behind you all of the grief over the pathetic umpiring which skewed the quarterfinal heavily in India's favour. It will be important to maintain the momentum of your World Cup performance and show the cricket world that was no fluke. It will be an opportunity to make a statement that you are a continuing force to be reckoned with in cricket. Strive to be number five and settle for nothing less. Make it your motto!

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