

The intellectual organisation of political hatreds

Displacement of indigenous families

The gov't. should address their concerns

OVER 80 indigenous people of some 21 families are still homeless more than nine months after they were evicted from their ancestral lands for the establishment of BCB 51 Battalion headquarters in Babuchhara of Dighinala.

On June 10, despite protests from the indigenous community, they were driven from their homestead and were forced to take shelter in two crammed classrooms. They are now living in a decrepit agriculture office. It is concerning that the government remains oblivious of the protracted plight and repeated pleas of the aggrieved community, who are yet to receive an adequate rehabilitation package.

It is even more reprehensible that the government, instead of assuaging the victims, seems to be clamping down on dissenting voices. Eleven days ago, at least six indigenous people were injured when a peaceful procession brought out by indigenous groups in protest of the establishment of BCB battalion offices was reportedly barricaded by security forces, and at least six indigenous people were injured when a clash erupted. Even though witnesses said it was the law enforcers who initiated the confrontation, fourteen indigenous people were arrested and a case filed in this regard.

We must not forget that the right to assemble and protest are constitutional rights that the government is obligated to uphold. We urge the government to withdraw the case against indigenous leaders and take immediate steps to provide a sustainable solution to the lingering predicament of the indigenous community. It must address the underlying grievance of the activists that the land was acquired without consultation or consent of the Hill District Council, in violation of the Peace Accord.

Another minor raped and murdered

How can we protect our girls?

THE rape and murder of 13-year-old Ayesha Siddiqua Sumaiya, living in Rangpur is another reminder of the lack of protection young girls and women against sexual predators. Sumaiya, a student of Class VII was alone in her home — her parents were at a religious function — when a gang swooped on the minor, raping and then strangling her to death.

Rape is seldom reported in our country in fear of social stigmatization and intimidation by the rapists who are invariably individuals who can use influence and money to go scot free. But even the number of reported cases demonstrates the high incidence of rape especially of minor and teenage girls. In 2014, according to an Ain O Shalish Kendra study, there were 387 rape cases and 208 gang-rape cases with around 68 cases of the victims being murdered after the rape. Around 181 of the rape victims were minors.

We do not know how many women and girls have been raped from January until now but going by the chilling statistics of the 2014 report it would not be presumptuous to assume that the number of such incidents will be appallingly high.

When we have extremely stringent laws against rape and murder after rape, especially in the case of minors, why should the number of heinous crimes be so high? Law enforcers must be made to investigate these despicable crimes and catch the rapists. We must all help to protect our girl children.

Justice for AVIJIT

RAFIDA AHMED BONYA

March 26th marks one month from the date my husband, Avijit Roy, and I were brutally attacked on the Dhaka University campus. Avijit wrote about science and humanity, critiqued religious fundamentalism, and created the first online Bangla platform for freethinking. For these reasons, religious extremists hacked Avijit to death with machetes. The attack occurred in a crowded place with dozens of eyewitnesses, surveillance cameras and police checkpoints. An Islamist terrorist group 'Ansar Bangla-7' has even claimed the responsibility on social media for the attack. Despite all these leads, the only progress that has been made after one month of investigation is a seemingly tangential arrest.

While the international community has offered help with the investigation, the Bangladeshi government has failed to mention a word about Avijit's gruesome murder since the day it occurred. This is alarming on many levels. Where are the leaders of Ansar Bangla-7? Why haven't they been arrested or questioned? Similar attacks on secular writers have happened before. This turning of a blind eye feeds both the public's sense of cynicism and the terrorists' sense of invincibility. We demand that the Bangladeshi government address religious terrorism at its root and stop a legal culture of impunity, where writers can be killed without the killers being brought to trial.

March 26th is also Bangladesh's Independence Day -- a day that commemorates the founding of a country that was based on secular laws with freedom for all. Instead, it saddens us that we have to spend today begging for justice against the atrocious deeds of religious fanatics. As Avijit's wife, fellow writer, and a freethinker, I reiterate my condemnation of this attack and urge the Bangladeshi government to speak up and pursue a thorough investigation.

The writer is a blogger and wife of slain activist Avijit Roy

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE brain is connected to the body in a crisscross fashion. The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body and the right side controls the left. For example, what the left eye sees is sent to the right side of the brain for interpretation; the images captured by the right eye are sent to the left. God knows that should have been an ideal relationship between intellectuals and politicians.

If we compare national politics to the human body, that's how intellectuals should have been connected to it. They should have sat like the opposition inside their own party, ready to flay the party leadership for its failures, mistakes and mischief. They also should have been able to see the looming complexities and convince their parties to address them ahead of time. That's how intellectuals could help political parties in advance before conflicts escalated to crises.

That, however, hasn't been the case for us. Our partisan intellectuals behave like courtesans. They are too eager to please their party bosses instead of following their own conscience. In their exuberance or flattery they even abandon their professional standard.

Instead of being guided by intellect, they are guided by experience and emotion.

French philosopher Julien Benda describes this phenomenon in the beginning of his book *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. He writes: "Our age indeed is the age of intellectual organisation of political hatreds." Written in 1927, almost hundred years later those words prove uncannily prophetic as our intellectuals are negotiating provocations when they should be provoking negotiations.

Thus the intellectuals have degraded themselves, their role as the brainpower of the nation reduced to blind and impulsive subservience. Many of them act like talking machines using their talents for articulate thinking and eloquent speaking to obediently and punctually dispense volleys of partisan shibboleths. Intellectuals on either side of our political divide are to politicians what amplifier is to transistor.

These intellectuals in their submissive role have subverted their own reputation. People don't have much confidence in them, because their minds are predictable even before they open their mouths. Sherlock Holmes tells his assistant John Watson in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone*: "I am a brain Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix." That statement is conversely true when it comes to linking intellectuals to politicians in this country. Brains bound to political slavery, our intellectuals have become a mere appendix.

It has given rise to the class of mercenary intellectuals, who are motivated by their desire for private gain

to take part in political hostilities. They are the hired hands of politicians, who are employed to play the same role in the realm of ideas that musclemen play in physical showdowns. These thought terrorists use half-baked truths and distorted facts as weapons of mass delusion.

The real intellectuals would have done otherwise. They would have simplified things, extricating fat from meat so that politicians couldn't bluff the people. Quite the contrary, the intellectuals are making things complicated in this country, creating smokescreens for politicians to hide their intentions. They pretend to defend the people but portend harm for them.

In many countries of the world intellectuals have been persecuted. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia killed academics or anybody wearing glasses because it suggested literacy. During the Spanish Civil War General Francisco Franco targeted writers, artists, teachers and professors because they were seen as probable enemies fostering the cultural and economic changes. China's Mao Zedong hated intellectuals and his Red Guards were particularly brutal in attacking their teachers and professors, causing most schools and universities to be shut down once the Cultural Revolution began.

There are scores of examples also from the ancient world when intellectuals suffered for their disagreement with the politicians. When Nero became tyrannical, Seneca disagreed and the emperor thought the philosopher was plotting to kill him. Before Nero's soldiers reached his home to kill him, Seneca had

already taken his own life.

It's not just their intellect that makes intellectuals who they are. It's their commitment to live by that intellect and not to negotiate its precepts for material benefits that are the crowning glories of their avocation. It's for the same reason valour is extolled as the highest order for heroes, and piety for holy men.

Intellectuals shouldn't be politically biased as yardsticks shouldn't be

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crooked. They should be watchdogs of politics not its lapdogs, because it goes against their grain when living in the highest organ of the body they stoop so low. The brain submits to the body when it should be the other way around.

The writer is Editor, First News and an opinion writer for The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

DHIRENDRANATH DUTTA

Champion of the downtrodden

ESHA AURORA

ON Independence Day newspapers and television channels run all kinds of stories and biographies on people who galvanised the cause for our independence from Pakistan, but I stopped looking for the slightest mention of my great grandfather a long time ago. It seems that if you are Hindu then your story counts a lot less, even if that person was the first person to ever bring up the subject of Bangla being the lingua franca of then East Pakistan; even if that person rejected a position offered by India to be chief minister of West Bengal in 1947 because he believed in Bangladesh. He believed his place was with the people of this land, even though he knew he would be killed for believing in what he did and saying what he did. He still fought till the very last day for a bright beautiful independent Bangladesh.

The first time I really realised who Dhirendranath Dutta was when we had to read about him in our grade school Bangla book. I was 9 or 10 years old. The teacher kept telling the whole class how he was my great grandfather and I remember feeling so embarrassed from all the attention I got. I had nothing to add about a man exactly a hundred years my senior; someone whose actions have shaped my life but I had little or no connection with.

In my house you couldn't escape the ghost of him even if you tried. I would always wonder what the big deal was; they would tell me how he was the first person in parliament to demand Bangla as the state language. As a child I would think it was normal for adults to do the right thing. As an adult now I realise how hard it is to rise to the occasion and do the right thing.

The older I get, the more I realise my great grandfather's contribution to a free independent Bangladesh. I write this not to praise some familial connection

to greatness but to remind the country of the many different people who sacrificed themselves for our freedom. People who did not think twice to stand up in Pakistan's parliament and demand that the lingua franca be Bangla and that an oppressive regime needs to end.

March 26 is a particularly difficult time for us all, especially those of us who

state language of East Pakistan. I shudder every time I think how much courage that took to say that.

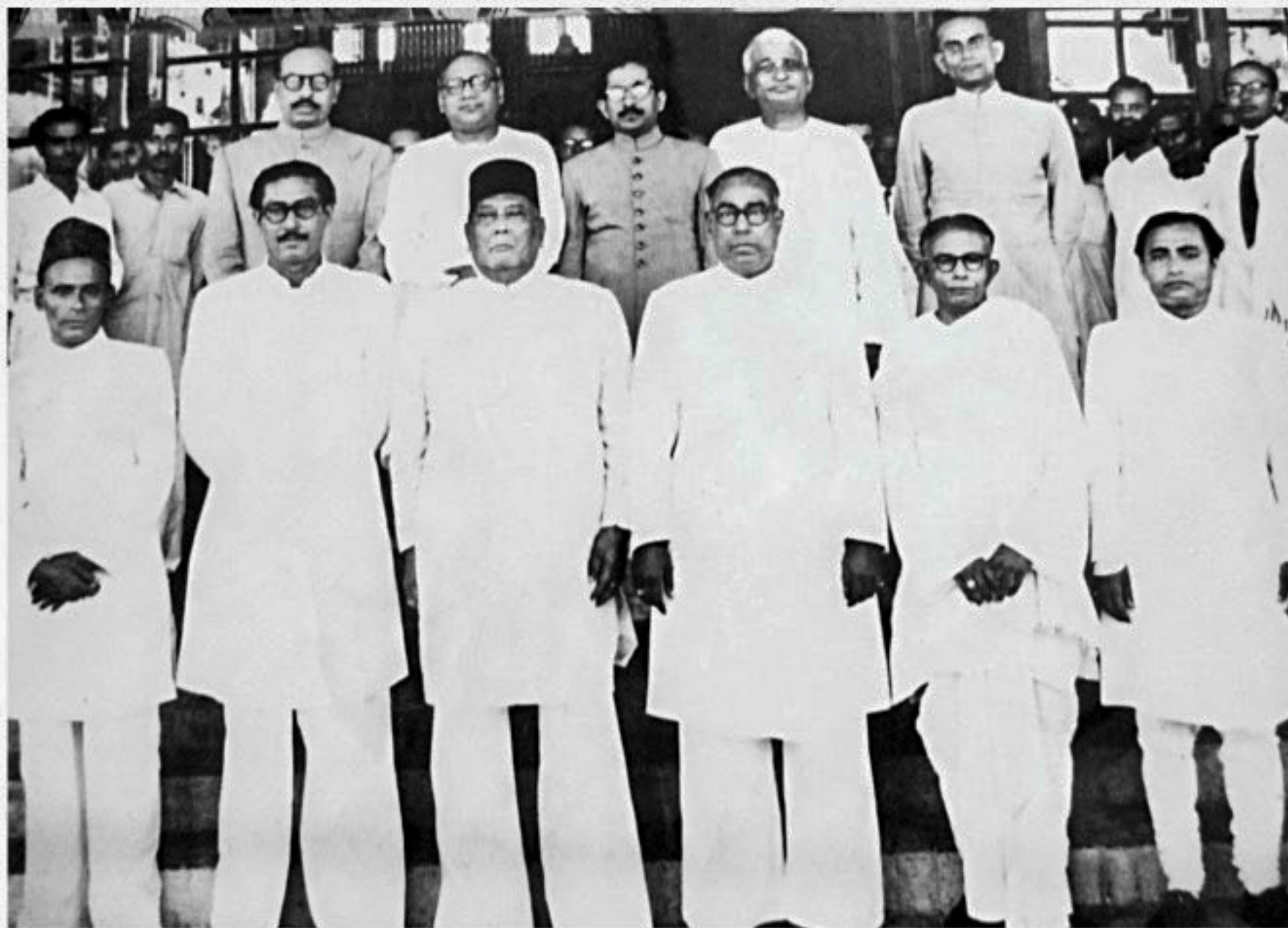
Rewind a little further and you come to realise why he was the way he was. Champion of the downtrodden, forever believing David would win against Goliath. He was born in 1886 in Brahmanbaria and began his career as a head master of a school in 1910. Pretty soon though he went

disperse. Up! Up! The national flag! Down! Down! The Union Jack!" They then beat him up and sent him to prison. For the next twenty years he spent most of his time in jail for defying the British rule. (Who can blame him?!) He later served in the first cabinet as the Health Minister of East Pakistan in 1956 through 1958, after which martial law was declared.

My family was destroyed when he was killed. Everyone was displaced, and returned only after the war to find everything was looted and gone. My entire family became refugees in India and beyond but my mother, my grandfather and grandmother decided that this was our land, this was what he fought for and this is where we should stay. So we did, and my mother went from nothing to building a career in development to continue to help those who needed help the most. She married my father who, by the virtue of being Muslim, had always been slightly controversial in the family. But she did not care, Dhirendranath's spirit of rebellion made her see things differently. I being a woman have been brought up not to see colour, race or religion, but the contents of one's character. My great grandfather's teachings go far beyond his time. He's travelled with me in how I judge and see the world, through a prism of humanity.

I have realised that the narrative of Bangladesh is changing, it is rapidly becoming a country where one is valued for their money and power, where we are forgetting the core values, the central thesis, of our fight; we are complacent in other's cruelty and violence is no longer something that shocks us. I hope that, one day, my generation wakes up and sees that we must return to a more humane society and the philosophy of men like my great grandfather Dhirendranath Dutta who believed in a just world, even if that meant the greatest sacrifice of all.

The writer is the great-granddaughter of Dhirendranath Dutta.



Dhirendranath Dutta (second right in the upper row) with Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others.

lived through that night. On the March 29 in 1971 he was picked up by the Pakistani army along with my grand uncle, and we never heard from them since. What little we know is that they gouged his eyes out, broke his joints and then let him be in that state for a day before they shot him. The reason for this cruelty was that he stood up to speak the truth when nobody else would. Rewind to 1948; and in the first constitutional assembly in Karachi my great grandfather proclaimed that Bangla should be the

to law school and graduated in 1911 and got involved in the quit India movement. Soon thereafter he joined the Congress Party in 1917 and became a freedom fighter. The big one happened in 1930 for leading a massive quit India rally where thousands of men and woman took to the streets to protest. The police came and surrounded them and tried to arrest him when he said: "I refuse to recognise you, you have no power to declare this assembly an unlawful assembly and to ask us to disperse. You are a foreigner. I shall not

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net



PHOTO: AFP

Did we forget Rana Plaza victims?

It has been about two years since Rana Plaza collapse took place that claimed nearly 1200 lives. Many of the victims are yet to receive any compensation from the government. Could Bangladesh ever ensure justice for the victims and their family? I still can't forget the cries and pains of the wounded victims and the family members of those who died inside that building. Poor people's lives are so cheap in Bangladesh!

Matiur Rahman
On e-mail

COMMENTS

"The independence movement of Bangladesh" (March 23, 2015)

Nazia Rahman

It is unfortunate that the younger generation does not know the actual contributions and struggles of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani.

"Precious yet we pollute" (March 22, 2015)

Akhtar Shah

With so many examples around the developed world of what not to

do (polluting the rivers in the 18/19/20th and prior centuries specially in Western Europe and the devastating consequences thereon) vis-a-vis abuse of a precious resource like water, BD people of authority, influence and money are completely blind and deaf to the continuing and long lasting consequential disaster that awaits future generations. One does not need a special day, an expert or stats to realise this catastrophic dooms day scenario.

"Loggers feast on forests" (March 21, 2015)

Snr Citizen

Though fully aware, the administration always turns a blind eye and a deaf ear towards these looting.