

Pakistan's statement on hanging of war criminals

Uncalled for and unacceptable

We are outraged by Pakistan foreign ministry's statement expressing 'deep concern and anguish' over the execution of two war criminals who collaborated with the Pakistani forces to perpetrate the most heinous crimes against the Bengalis in 1971. The active participation of these war criminals in these crimes against humanity has been proven in the International Crimes Tribunal following standard proceedings with enough scope for the accused to prove the allegations wrong. In such circumstances we find Pakistan's official stand not only a dishonour to the martyrs of the Liberation War but also unacceptable interference in a country's internal affairs.

This is not the first time that Pakistan has officially condemned the carrying out of sentences handed down to other war criminals. As a nation we feel insulted that the official line of Pakistan should be one of commiseration with those convicted of crimes that should be condemned by any civilised nation. Instead of issuing a formal apology to the people of Bangladesh for the war crimes committed by their own army, Pakistan's government has chosen to side with those collaborators who are part of this shameful history.

It seems that the bigotry and racism that prompted the Pakistani occupying forces to unleash a wave of terror on ordinary people have been carried over by some Pakistani officials since 1971. We had hoped that, after 45 years, Pakistan would have shed this mindset and moved on. Regrettably that has not happened. This has only served to jeopardise any possibility of reconciliation. If the spirit and substance of the tripartite agreement is to be honoured then Pakistan should try the 195 war criminals whose acts it had 'condemned and regretted' in the said agreement.

Despicable MRP saga Over one million expatriate Bangladeshis' future at stake

THE International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) deadline on Machine Readable Passport (MRP) passes today, and 1.1 million expatriate Bangladeshis have not yet received their travel document. The situation is acute in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia where migrant workers face loss of job and possible deportation without MRP. The level of negligence from the part of IRIS, the company outsourced to produce and distribute MRP in these two countries, is indeed telling. In some cases people who have paid the renewal fees six months ago have not received their passport.

Many a time in this newspaper we have expressed our doubt as to whether IRIS will be able to meet the ICAO deadline. Allegations of mismanagement and incompetence have also been rife against the company. Now that our worst fear has come to pass, we demand to know why mid-course corrective measures had not been taken against the company despite a number of reports highlighting its failings. Why has the government failed to launch any probe into the alleged irregularities surrounding the IRIS and MRP?

The IRIS must be held to account, and its contract reviewed. We also need to seek more time from the ICAO to deliver MRP to all Bangladeshis living abroad. Revenues sent by the migrant workers are one of the largest earners of foreign remittance for the country. We have to make sure that this flow always remains clean and uninterrupted.

COMMENTS

"27 killed as gunmen siege Mali hotel"
(November 21, 2015)

Rubira haque

Another brutal attack by these bigots. We need an all-out effort by the governments of the world to root out these evil elements.

"Turning a swamp into fish farm"
(November 21, 2015)

Anonymous

It is indeed a great initiative.

Hasina Rahman

There's a lot to be learnt from this: how to turn a swamp or a piece of barren land into something valuable.

"Fresh attack on Bangladesh?"
(November 21, 2015)

Julia

The government should be aware of this threat.

Abedin

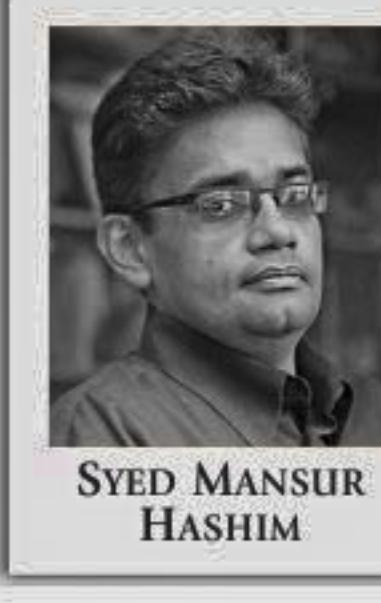
The people of Bangladesh are mostly peace-loving. Our clear message to these bigots is this: there is no place for extremism in our land.

"Bangladesh among safest countries"
(November 19, 2015)

Razia Afrose

It's nice to read that, but we also need to feel it.

Stay out of our affairs



SYED MANSUR
HASHIM

BACK in December 2013, the Pakistani foreign ministry and indeed, the Pakistan National Assembly and Punjab Provincial Assembly adopted a number of resolutions over the execution of war criminal Quader Mollah. Today, after the recent execution of two individuals who have been tried and found guilty by the international (war) crimes tribunal,

Pakistan's foreign ministry has issued this highly objectionable statement stating "we have noted with deep concern and anguish the unfortunate executions...Pakistan is deeply disturbed at this development". This is a violation of diplomatic protocol.

Uttering such statements is an affront to Bangladesh which fought a bitter and violent war of liberation in 1971. Bangladesh ceased to be part of Pakistan on December 16, 1971 and hence Islamabad has no business making public statements on a subject which is, essentially, none of its business. What perplexes us is why it is going to all this trouble in the first place. As history will testify, members of Pakistani forces committed acts of atrocity during 1971. What is interesting to note is that the 195 Pakistanis were not freed without charges. As per an article printed in The Forum titled 'The Curious Case of the 195 War Criminals' in May 2010, by Syeed Ahamed, "Bangladesh, however, made it clear that India would not release 195 of the initially accused Pakistani POWs and Bangladesh would try them, along with its local collaborators, for war crimes." That plan fell through thanks to arm twisting by the Pakistani government which used the issue of stranded Bangladeshi officers and families.

Going by a statement issued by the Pakistani government at the latter part of April, 1973, "Pakistani government rejects the right of the authorities in Dacca to try any among the prisoners of war on criminal charges, because the alleged criminal acts were committed in a part of Pakistan by citizens of Pakistan. But Pakistan expresses its readiness to constitute a judicial tribunal of such character and composition as will

inspire international confidence to try the persons charged with offences." To the best of our knowledge, there was no tribunal formed and the matter, in all probability, never came to light. What did come to light, however, was the fact that Pakistan decided to take hostage some 16,000 Bangladeshi civil servants after dismissing them from government jobs and many of them, including army officers, ended up in "concen-

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tration camps". This is corroborated by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) which reported that many Bangladeshi people were arrested on Pakistan soil for their "alleged intent to leave Pakistan".

The issuance of the highly objectionable statement by the Pakistani foreign ministry is provocative to say the least. Precisely what will be achieved by making

derogatory remarks on the judicial process, that has allowed for Bangladesh to bring to a close the demand of a nation and its people who have sought for the better part of four decades redress for crimes committed against an unarmed people, is still unclear. If the intention is to draw international ire of human rights organisations, vis-à-vis nations that are categorically opposed to capital punishment, then it has succeeded. What has been lost in the process of course is whatever goodwill that existed between these two member states of SAARC.

As for: "There is need for reconciliation in Bangladesh in accordance with the spirit of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh Agreement of 9th April, 1974. The Agreement calls for a forward looking approach in matters relating to 1971. This would foster goodwill and harmony", we beg to differ that the agreement did not absolve Pakistan of its promise to conduct a probe into allegations made by Bangladesh on the criminal activities of the 195 war criminals. There is no doubt that attempts have been made and are being made currently to portray the war crimes trial process as being "politically motivated" and "not living up to international standards". The reality is that had the process not been a fair one, the process would not have taken this long. Had we been witnesses to "kangaroo" courts, most, if not all, the accused would have been done away with, within a short period.

Going by what has been reported in Pakistani electronic media Geo TV (and printed in this paper), Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan has hinted that a "group" in Bangladesh is against restoration of friendly relations between the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Precisely how does the Pakistani government expect to restore friendly relations between the two countries? By making a mockery of our judicial system? By distorting history in the vain attempt that no one will take note of it? The atrocities committed by the Pakistani military and its cohorts against the people of Bangladesh have not disappeared from collective memory of Bangladeshis. The trials will continue regardless of what Pakistan thinks of them.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

GHOSTS OF WAR CRIMES PAST

MOYUKH MAHTAB

FOUR decades is much too long a wait for justice. The ICT was not about revenge, as many would and do simplistically reduce it to — it is about coming to terms with history. Before any further question, let us get past the facts that we know of the two war criminals hanged on November 22, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahed. SQ Chowdhury, with his brash remarks, claimed he was not in Bangladesh during 71 — an alibi plea that did not hold up in court. As Barrister Shah Ali Farhad pointed out with clarity in his article, this alone does not prove him guilty — evidence from news reports, witnesses to his torture, and a statement and report from a doctor written during the time all point towards his guilt. As for Mojahed, he was the man who claimed that there are no war criminals in Bangladesh, the man responsible for the murder of the intellectuals at the ending days of the war, the man guilty of killing Shahid Rumi, son of Jahanara Imam and musician Altaf Mahmud.

Are we then absolved now? Far from it, especially at a time when the ICT is questioned by our very own. The death sentences resonated with most of the population. But there were still those questioning, with what motive is open to speculation. A quick look at the responses critical of the hanging and the questions posed by these people are as follows: a) Isn't the ICT all 'political', designed by the government to rid itself of opposition? b) Were the trials fair? c) Why make such a big deal about the past?

The first question, always posed rhetorically at its most civil, is by far the easiest to answer. Yes, it is political — the matter is a political one. 1971 was as much about the politics of this country as it was about the social aspects. Is it a way for the ruling government to garner votes — maybe. But that is what a democracy is about: political parties put forward policies to appeal to the voters. In this case, when the Awami League came to power in 2008 with the promise of holding the war crimes trials, the people of this country responded. The same way they had responded in the 90's to Jahanara Imam's Gono Adalat and its symbolic justice for these war criminals.



PHOTO: STAR

The people who raise issues about the fairness of the trial seem to be doing so out of some external motive. The questions are never about whether those condemned were guilty. In a country which authorises the death sentence for murder in criminal cases, it seems almost absurd that questions of the punishment being too harsh on war criminals who actively aided in genocide are raised. Was the ICT less than perfect — yes. The issues should have been about the protection of the witnesses,

about the verity of the facts being presented, about strengthening the judiciary. Oddly, these questions were raised by activists fighting for the punishment of these war criminals. The Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee has raised all these issues about strengthening the ICT since its inception. But instead some people will question everything about the ICT itself in an attempt towards indicating that the accused may not have been guilty. Forty years of pain for the families, testimonies by the sons and daugh-

ters of those killed, countless books and reports documenting their crimes, a decade of trying to get justice, even if symbolically... do none of these matter anymore that instead of healthy criticism of the rule of law, we wish to exonerate the perpetrators?

As for the third group, those claiming there are more pressing matters in the present to worry about than what happened in '71, the best response is William Faulkner's famous lines — "The past is never dead. It's not even past." What Faulkner wrote is not a metaphor; what hopes do we have of understanding the politics of a country this young without understanding its past? It is not for no reason that the Nuremberg trials happened; where would Germany as a country stand today if it joined the ranks of denial, calling the past dead? Unresolved issues in history have this unsettling way of popping up every now and then. These people will point towards unresolved issues of French violence against the Algerians when it comes to the recent Paris attacks, remind us of the role of western powers in the creation and support of incipient terrorism, and clap at those who point out the duplicity of the colonials — all true, all necessary. Why does this search for historical context stop short of condemning those who killed innocent lives without mercy in this very land?

The trial of the war crimes committed during 71 is a good start, but it is a part of a larger process of acknowledging what the liberation war was about. To forget the ideals this country was built on and to let communalism and suppression of ideas rile us up into further hatred is to disrespect all the fighters and intellectuals who laid down their lives. We have politicised and diluted history for far too long — the average student today learns of the war through what simplistic version is taught in the text books. What hope have we to understand and participate in the building of a nation, if we do not know the recent past? For in the end, for all the rage I feel at those questioning the guilt of these war criminals, I cannot believe that if they knew that history of the war, if only they cared to find out the narratives, they would not in good conscience be able to loudly proclaim what they do today.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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New economic corridor with huge potential

Central Asia represents a unique centre of vast natural resources. A new economic corridor is under construction connecting Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent via Afghanistan-Iran-India route. The corridor will pass through roadway networks from Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran to the Chabahar Port (Iran) and then connect via a maritime route to western ports of India. This will be connected to the Eastern corridor of India that also links Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Currently highway construction is in progress linking north-eastern India to Thailand via Myanmar and

Bangladesh connecting SAARC and ASEAN economic zones. If Central Asia could be linked to this eastern corridor, it could easily facilitate vast flow of trade and commerce from Central Asia to Southeast Asia. If the proposed corridor materialises, then in the long-run this zone could be used for trade with EU through Turkey. Hence, there is huge socio-economic potential for Asia and Bangladesh to capitalise on. This economic corridor and the freight passing through Bangladesh could prove to be a big economic boost for the regional economy that could transform the quality of life for millions of Bangladeshis.

Saikat Kumar Basu

Lethbridge, Canada

Why not implicate Bacchu?

The Basic Bank money scam is one of the biggest examples of corruption in the country. Under Mr. Abdul Hye Bacchu's chairmanship, about Tk 4,500 crore was swindled from the bank in the last six years. We do not understand why he was not implicated in the probe.

A.H. Dewan
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