

The true taste of victory

Fulfill the dreams of the martyrs

ON this momentous day, we pay tribute to the martyrs, freedom fighters and Birangonas who have made supreme sacrifices for our freedom. We pay homage to Bangabandhu and the four national leaders who, under the inspiration of Bangabandhu, led the nation to victory. There is much to celebrate on our 44th Victory Day and our conquest over injustice and persecution by brutish oppressors. But on this day, we must also take stock of how much we have been able to fulfill the dreams of our martyrs.

True, we are no longer in the clutches of foreign occupiers, their racist policies and cultural hegemony. We have made remarkable progress in many fields – in getting our girls into school, making sure fewer of our children die at birth, that more mothers have safe deliveries and that all our children get basic immunisation. Our economy, despite natural calamities and a dysfunctional political environment, is fairly stable, maintaining a decent growth rate, being replenished by foreign remittance, a booming garments industry and other thriving ventures. Socially we have managed to bring up a young generation that is vibrant, energetic, innovative and full of hope.

Despite such progress, we have enormous challenges before us. We have a huge population and crippling economic inequality. We must create more jobs, opportunities to get better skills, a good education and accessible healthcare for all. We need to develop a healthy, truly democratic political culture, governance that is transparent and accountable, a parliament that is really representative of the public, elections that are unequivocally free and fair. We need equal access to justice and law enforcing agencies that are free from political influence and greed. If it is true victory we want to taste, these are some of the challenges we must overcome to bring us closer to the vision that is the basis of this nation's birth.

Illegal brick kilns in Bandarban

Adding to pollution and deforestation

AS per a report published in this paper on December 15, dozens of illegal brick kilns are using firewood from the forests in Bandarban Sadar upazila to make bricks. This is in direct violation of 'The Brick Making and Kiln Establishment (Control) Act – 2013' that came into effect in 2014. While kiln owners make hay flouting the law, the burning of firewood poses health risks for humans as air pollution increases and it speeds up deforestation in the locality. We fail to understand precisely why the relevant authorities are not stepping in to stop the 50 or so kilns that are said to be operating in the area. There are no jurisdictional problems between different agencies that we know of which is sometimes used as an excuse for lack of action. Yet, as we know, the Act that came into effect from November 2014 specifically to prevent the use of agricultural and hill lands to make bricks, and there is really no reason for the relevant department not to take necessary steps to stop the pollution.

Given that it takes an average of 7.4 tons of raw wood to fire up each kiln, we are looking at an average of 373 tons of felled trees per day. This is a recipe for disaster in the hills. It is obvious that what is going on in Bandarban Sadar would not have been possible without the connivance of unscrupulous officials. But then, this is hardly news. The question is precisely what the district administration is going to do about it, should allegations of illegal kilns prove to be true.

COMMENTS

"Key words missing in statements"
(December 14, 2015)

Rabeya Rahman

I find nothing wrong in the statements. Finding faults for not using incendiary rhetoric is in bad form.

Sajjad Mojumder Saju

They did it intentionally.

"Bangladesh needs to tackle security issues"
(December 12, 2015)

Tarek Mollah

First of all, democracy should be restored in Bangladesh because that is the foundation of curbing corruption and strengthening good governance. Corruption fuels every evil act.

Akash Khan

Now no one (except the powerful) is safe in Bangladesh.

"Worries remain over rights"
(December 10, 2015)

Ayesha Akhter

Human rights has become nothing but a farce in Bangladesh.

Demanding apology from a myopic establishment



STRAIGHT LINE

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE government and the people of Bangladesh have quite justifiably expressed their shock and indignation at the reaction of Pakistani parliament following the execution of two notorious collaborators who committed despicable crimes against humanity on their own people in 1971. There is a demand for apology from Pakistan

government for the crimes of its army during our War of Liberation. While we must not relent in our demand for an apology, we cannot be oblivious of the perverse thought process of the Pakistani establishment.

To recollect, in December 2013, Pakistan's National Assembly's resolution expressing concern over the capital punishment of Bangladeshi Jamaat leader Abdul Kader Mollah, though outrageous, did not come as a surprise to those who are aware of the military-feudal mindset of the country's ruling class. Manifestly galling was the impertinence and ignorance of Pakistan's Interior Minister who commented that Mollah was hanged "through a judicial murder for supporting a united Pakistan in 1971."

Pakistan's National Assembly may be within its rights to express grief and sorrow for the execution of traitors and quislings of 1971, but when it demands that Bangladesh avoid reviving the wounds of 1971, it clearly betrays an arrogantly diseased mind that has not as yet come to grips with reality.

The fact of the matter is that in 1971, Bangalees, despite clinching an electoral majority were not only denied their due, they also became the unfortunate victims of a regime-sponsored genocide whose gory details and dimensions are yet to be ferreted out.

The recently published book Blood Telegrams, that tells of a forgotten genocide and the Spivac Communications before and after Bangladesh's cruel birth, brings tragically to the fore the monstrous deeds committed by the Pakistan army and its Jamaat collaborators against hapless Bangalees in 1971. Leaving aside this credible evidence, one could talk to

scores of living men and women of Bangladesh who are first-hand witnesses to the horrendous criminality of the Jamaat hirelings against their own countrymen in 1971.

It is, in fact, only a small fraction of the above perpetrators that have been accounted for and are now being charged for crimes against humanity. Let us be very clear on one point; after March 25, 1971, no self-respecting Bangalee could support the Pakistan establishment's action in then East Pakistan. The Pakistan army was in fact quite unabashedly carrying out what in later days was termed as ethnic cleansing. The racist rage of the 'Brown Sahibs' against the dark skinned Bangalees, despite following the same religion, was manifest. Unspeakable and dastardly crimes were committed in the name of the so-called 'Islamisation drive.'

Let us do some fact checking. The fact that Muslim League, which spearheaded the Pakistan movement, was founded in Dhaka in 1906, the fact that the historic Lahore Resolution of 1940 demanding independent homeland for Muslims in the Indian subcontinent was initiated by a Bengali braveheart, and also the reality that in 1946 Bangalee Muslims voted overwhelmingly in favour of Pakistan, could not be grounds for Bangalees to remain within the Pakistan state. The reason was painfully clear. In 1971, their rights, honour, culture and existence were at stake. The Pakistan state was the enemy.

The Bangalees of East Pakistan experienced the insensitiveness of the Pakistan establishment quite early in 1948 when their mother tongue was denied the recognition of state language. It had to be earned after much struggle and loss in terms of human lives in 1952. A duly elected government was arbitrarily toppled by executive arrogance. Economically and politically, East Pakistan was reduced to the ignominy of a colony. It was thus no wonder that Bengali nationalism received unprecedented support in the general election of 1970. That support was most brutally countered by the Pakistani military junta. For Bangalees, in 1971, there was no love left for Pakistan.

Historically speaking, and insofar as Jamaat-e-Islami is concerned, Pakistan failed first in 1953 when two

groups of Muslims fought bloody battles on the streets of Lahore, known once as the pearl of the East, in the name of Islam. Hundreds died and a sect of believers was declared heretic and has been persecuted and persecuted since then. And, at the core of the conflict was a simple question; who was a Muslim?

When a Pakistani minister terms the hanging of a quisling as judicial murder for supporting a united Pakistan in 1971, one can see the visible signposts of a self-destructing nation whose people and leaders remain blinded by unfounded myths and unreasonable denials. We can see a State riddled with mass insecurity and unrelenting rejection of its natural identity.

While we would not comment on the physical and mental harassment of the Chief Justice of Pakistan in the not-too-distant past, we have to emphatically assert that violence and destruction alone does not justify our existence. We do not want to create a sub-culture of hostility and brutality in which thousands would perish. Quite clearly, we cannot countenance a polity where violence against other fellow beings is justified as a religious cause.

The tracking of Nazi war criminals has been an unrelenting process. Armenians have not forgotten the extermination campaign against their existence in the early 20th century. Koreans still resent the brutalities committed by the Imperial Japanese Army during WWII. Bangladeshis, despite being subjected to a horrendous genocide, have been more than magnanimous towards their tormentors. So, let the Pakistan establishment atone for its crimes in 1971, as has been done by the Germans.

If indeed Bangladeshis are the "brotherly" people as has often been claimed by the Pakistani authorities, then let them respond accordingly and give their "brother" the due respect. Let them not defile our sentiments and distort history. We owe at least this much to the countless souls who sacrificed for our sovereignty. Let Pakistanis honour themselves by paying tributes to our war heroes of 1971, especially those brave soldiers of East Bengal Regiment who in large measure gallantly defended Lahore in the 1965 War.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Pakistani war criminals of 1971 still free

BRIG R P SINGH, VSM (RETIRED)

ON December 16, 2012, a brave heart 'Nirbhaya' was raped and mutilated by four men in a moving bus in Delhi. This incident shook the conscience of the citizens. On the same date in 1971, Bangladesh was liberated from the Pakistan army's occupation after a struggle of nine months, in which 30 lakh innocent Bangalees were killed, 4 lakh women were raped and one crore refugees took shelter in India. More than 70 thousand war babies were born. Unfortunately, unlike Nirbhaya's case, the 1971 rape victims did not receive much global sympathy or compassion. Instead, they were seen by the society as a symbol of 'social pollution' and shame. Most of the families of rape victims refused to accept them and only a few were able to return to their families or old homes. Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave the rape survivors the title of birangona (heroine). But this titled served as a reminder that these women were now deemed socially unacceptable as they were 'dishonoured.' The term birangona became associated with barangona (prostitute). The official strategy of marrying the women off and encouraging them to be seen as war heroines failed, as few men came forward to accept them as brides. And those who volunteered to marry them expected the government to provide them large sums of money as a kind of dowry. Those women who did marry were usually mistreated, and majority of men, abandoned them after taking their money.

On February 18, 1972, the government formed the Bangladesh Women's Rehabilitation Board to help the rape victims. Many of them were pregnant. Many women felt a sense of relief for the abortion programme, as they did not have to bear a child conceived from rape. However, others had to go the full term. Many of them, understandably, felt a surge of animosity towards the child they were forced to carry. Several international agencies, such as Mother Teresa's 'Sisters of Charity' helped the victims through an adoption programme. However, not all women wanted their child taken away.

In such cases, babies were forcibly removed and sent for adoption. Such was the emotional trauma of the rape victims. Most of them are looked down upon even till this date by others in Bangladesh. After 44 years of the liberation of Bangladesh, they still carry the stigma and reel under emotional agony.

In April 1971, I was detailed to assist the civilian authorities in administering the refugee camps set for Bangladeshis in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura where I met a large number of such victims. I also met many victims of the 1971 genocide during this time. The

of fear of being shot, they walked through the mine field. One of them blew her leg and the other injured her backbone in an anti-personnel mine blast. They were writhing in pain and crying as they narrated their tale.

There is very little information available about the children born out of rape; we have little knowledge about those who were adopted by people from other countries. In recent years, the humanitarian community has shown interest in integrating children born out of sexual violence during conflict through post-conflict humanitarian efforts, migration policies and refugee-

of me when I needed it most. I don't have any roots and that makes me cry. So that is why I am trying to learn more about where I was born."

After the liberation of Bangladesh, a list of war criminals was prepared and 200 of them were identified for trial as per the UN General Assembly resolutions on war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. But following the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan, then president of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, visited Dhaka and appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past in order to promote reconciliation. In turn, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared that he wanted his people to forget the past and make a fresh start and agreed for repatriation of 200 war criminals who were in Indian POW camps.

It was one of the biggest travesties of justice. The agonies and atrocities suffered by millions of innocent people, particularly rape victims and war babies who continue to suffer, were compromised to bring in peace and tranquillity in the sub-continent. Ironically, neither the peace nor tranquillity has prevailed nor has reconciliation taken place. Pakistan continues with its old policies with a new strategy of terrorism. It is an irony that in the modern world such heinous crimes have gone unpunished. While the Nazis were punished for WWII crimes, till as late as 2010, the Pakistani war criminals were allowed to enjoy their retired life in luxury, financed from their loot from Bangladesh in 1971. The Chinese and Korean sex slaves kept by the Japanese during World War II have been adequately compensated but Pakistan has not even fulfilled this basic humanitarian obligation. Even after 44 years of the Liberation War, I feel repulsed. I appeal to the world to start the process of bringing the perpetrators of carnage, arson and rapes of 1971 to justice under international laws, and put pressure on the Pakistani administration to recognise and provide adequate compensation to rehabilitate rape victims who are in their 60s and 70s.

The writer is a retired Brigadier General of the Indian Army. He participated in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.



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stories of their trauma haunt me to this day. During the war, on December 7, 1971 I visited a hospital in Thakurgaon after we liberated it from the occupying forces. I met two girls who were apparently kept as sex slaves in a bunker by a Pakistani Major. When he saw the Indian Army preparing for assault on his sub-unit, he forced these girls to walk through the mine field laid in front of his defended locality. They begged for mercy but he threatened to shoot them if they didn't act as per his orders. Out

settlement programmes. A well-known human rights activist, Bina D'Costa, sent an appeal to several adoption agencies, Bangla websites and newspapers to talk about the war babies. The following e-mail was sent by one website owner: 'I had a lousy dad, who just insulted me ... I tried to commit suicide four years ago ... I often wonder why I am here in Canada, adopted by parents who divorced three months after I was adopted ... I hated being a kid, and I am angry at Bangladesh for not taking care

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Thoughts on Victory Day

I recall the courage of the freedom fighters who risked their lives to free the country from the clutches of the marauding Pakistani army. Many of the freedom fighters were quite young but they cared little about their lives. They were driven by patriotism. We also recall those nameless people who embraced martyrdom so that we can breathe freely in an independent nation. We had to wade through a sea of blood to achieve freedom. 30 lakh people laid down their lives in the nine month's struggle for freedom.

We shall never forget the martyrs of our Liberation War and we salute the freedom fighters who are still alive.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

We must remember their sacrifice

"Ek shagor roker binimoye/ Banglar swadhinata anley jara/ amra tomader bhulbona..." This emotional patriotic song often comes to my mind; I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the contributions of our freedom fighters, and at the same time, I feel ashamed that we could not value their sacrifices. The freedom fighters and the martyrs gave us a free country to live in peacefully, but what have

we done? Peace has vanished and violence has taken over. Spilling of blood is a common occurrence; no one feels safe anywhere anymore. We do not know what is in store for us in the future.

We do not want to live in a suffocating atmosphere where we cannot speak our minds. We pray that all the miseries go away and that we can live in peace in the country which the martyrs gave us in exchange of their blood.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong