## THE CALL FOR FREEDOM

NURUL ISLAM ANU

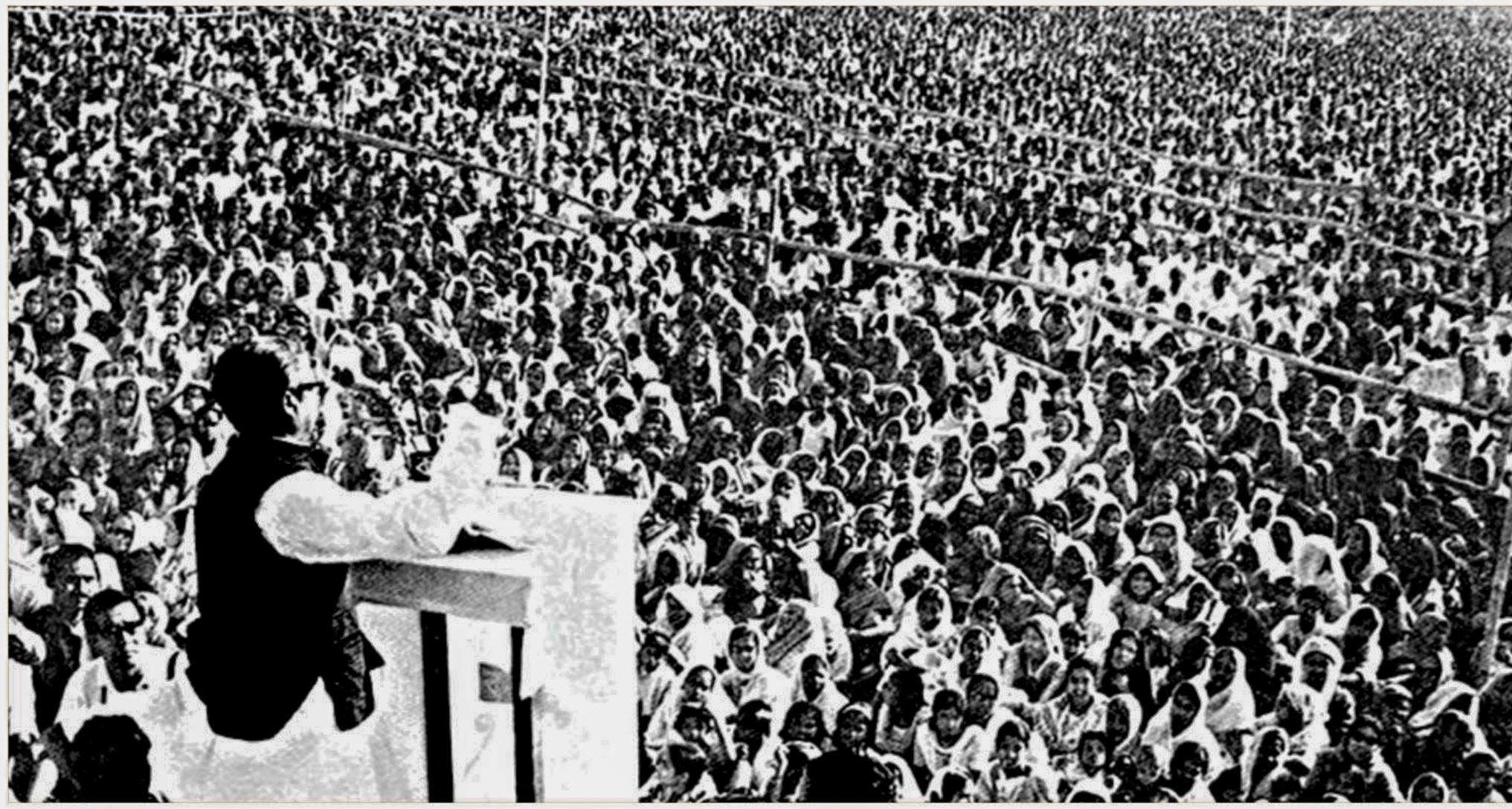
ILESTONES in history are sometimes created without design; they are hardly the product of any deliberate engineering. And yet these incidents have expressed momentous truth, inspired the human mind to achieve the miracle with their awesome and irresistible appeals; they have broken barriers of prejudice and repression built over ages with a bang and set a road map of redesigned future for a nation; it creates cyclones of human emotion capable of sweeping the evils of oppression, injustice and discrimination into the dustbin of history. That is why these days have been called historic.

7th of March 1971 is just yet another day in the daily calendar but stands immortalised in the history of Bengali nationalism -- made so by a rare and magnificent feat of political eloquence. The quality of the speech, delivered by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, its inspiring and mesmerising character have hardly been paralleled in the contemporary political history of the world, the closest comparable being the speech delivered by American Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC, where he brought home the message of a dream of a non-discriminatory multiracial America.

The speech of 7th of March, galvanised the deepest-held political aspirations and frustrations of a majority fighting for decades for their legitimate rights, denied by the manipulative design of an insensitive minority. The struggle followed its classical

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course of designing of political programmes, demand for its implementation inside the socalled parliament, street protest, facing the ruthless use of the instruments of oppression against the people and their political leaders yet the march of the movement for political



rights continued on its designed course -- the Six-Point programme Agartola conspiracy case, the mass movement of 1969 -- to name a few. Constitutional movements conducted within the context of a repressive and manipulative political culture inevitably tend to lead to armed struggle; it has happened in the Palestine of Yasser Arafat, in South Africa of charismatic Nelson Mandela, in Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam -- all inevitable products of this dynamics of history. Bangladesh was no exception.

Events leading to the 7th of March witnessed the last act in the political drama in the collapse of Pakistan following the cancellation of the session of National Assembly; the country-wide street agitation the virtual collapse of the Pakistani Administration and the emergence of Bangabandhu as the virtual administrator of former East Pakistan. The public enthusiasm for a movement reached a militant height ready to be ignited with the smallest spark. The stage was just set for the ultimate act.

7th of March was a call for an armed struggle because of the futility of a constitutional redress to the pangs of the Bengali nation which was starkly demonstrated before the political leadership. Ebarer Sangram Muktir Sangram --Ghare Ghare Durgo Gore Tolo -- Tomader Ja Ase Ta Niye Shatrur Mokabela Koro - what would be clearer than this inspiring call to take arms and signal a message of the abandonment of constitutional struggle to the Pakistani junta and and the world?

Ebarer Sangram Muktir Sangram, Ebarer Sangram Shadhinatar Sangram was a clear call for an Independent Bangladesh. This message for an armed struggle to establish an independent Bangladesh was delivered with majesty of eloquence and political drama, toughening the inner soul of every Bengali inspiring him to achieve the impossible. The outline of the speech was not previously designed by a crafted speech writer -- nor was it rehearsed. It was the spontaneous and

thunderous expression of a political mind consumed by a relentless passion for the love of the common man and the establishment of his right; it was the expression of an uncompromising, bold and courageous mind prepared to gamble with life for the fulfilment of the ideals the speaker -- the Bangabandhu -- believed in. A consumed passion spoke out in the Race Course Maidan, combined the mystic virtue of courage, love for his country and its people. Bangladesh was born with an unsung majesty.

Unquestionably 7th of March is and must remain a treasured part of Bangladesh history. It will tell an inspiring, colourfull and glorious tale of the fight of an unarmed nation for its sovereign existence to all future generations. Nations get glorified by preserving treasures; they appear small at indifference, smaller when it is administered indifference. 7th of March is not a partisan day -- it was the majestic expression of a nation's voice, its right to declare its existence, its determined endeavour voiced by someone with deep

commitment to a cause and his uncompromising willingness to suffer and die for that cause -- fearless, daring, uncompromising and yet armed with a serene confidence in the content of his message. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib declared what destiny asked him to do.

Since the day is admittedly a part of our political heritage, its dignity must be preserved and be a shared responsibility. The story of 7th March needs to be told and retold to all successive generations, its audio and video preservations played and replayed as a tribute to those who attended that historic meeting and the countless others who also got inspired to die for the founding of their motherland.

Dereliction from this responsibility will amount to a disrespect for the day, irresponsible and immoral.

The article was first published in The Daily Star on March 7, The writer is a former civil servant.

# Tolerance in Bangladesh

ROBERT WATKINS

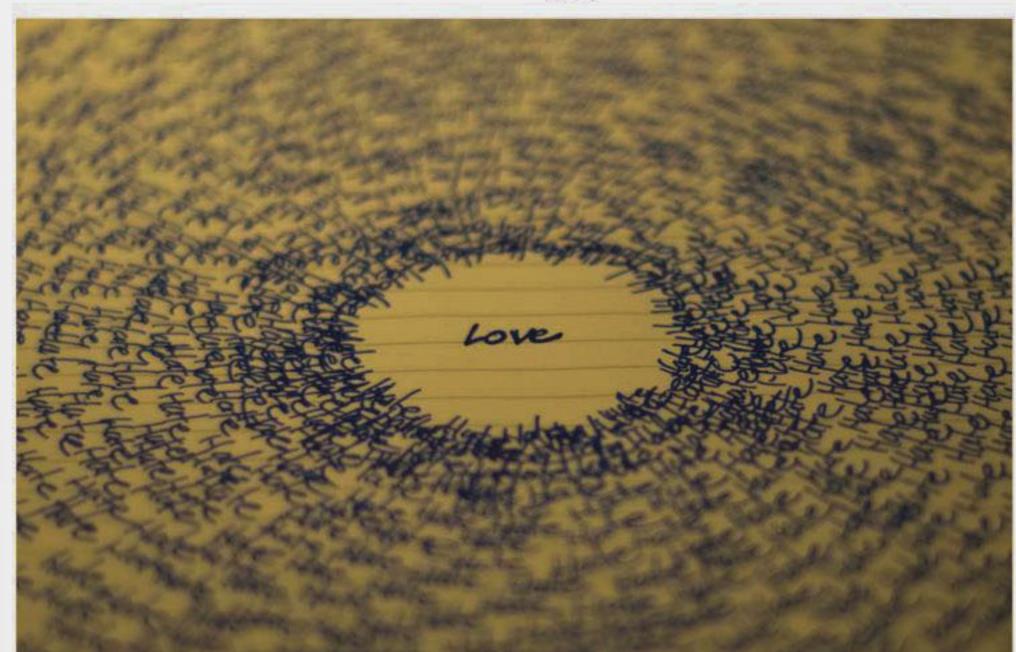
HERE is a common perception in Bangladesh that religious communities generally live together in peaceful coexistence and have done so since the beginning of time. This is exemplified by the way in which a number of religious celebrations and festivities, such as Eid, Durga Puja, Buddha Purnima and Christmas, are observed and celebrated in the country by the whole population. In a country with a religious majority where 90 percent of the population is Muslim, while other faiths such as Hindu, Buddhist and Christian faiths comprise the remainder, this is a significant achievement. In similar circumstances, in many other parts of the world, the respect for religious diversity is not as manifest as it is in Bangladesh. While the people of Bangladesh in general can and should be praised for this achievement, constitutional guarantees providing equal status of all religions serve as a bulwark against intolerance.

Nonetheless, although Bangladesh has stood out in many ways as a tolerant society, increasingly there are indications that this peaceful coexistence is coming under growing pressure. For example, there have been instances of land grabbing, where religious minority communities see ownership of their land under threat. And the Ramu incidents with destruction of Buddhist places of worship in 2012 are still fresh in peoples'

minds. Furthermore, the number of Hindu population has halved during the last 30 years. For real or perceived reasons, there is a sense that Bangladesh is losing some of its tolerance of minority communities.

In spite of these setbacks, religious intolerance and extremism are still not common in Bangladeshi society. Sadly, this cannot be said for other parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East, where over the last few years we have witnessed an expansion of extremist ideologies, even in countries which hitherto were models of tolerance, not unlike Bangladesh today. With this in mind, it cannot be denied that Bangladesh has recently experienced a number of incidents that distinguish it from its traditional spirit of tolerance. A number of recent violent attacks against persons from religious minority groups and their places of worship have resulted in the loss of lives and destruction of property. These incidents include bomb attacks against Hindu temples in Dinajpur and the killing of a Hindu priest near Panchagarh, violent armed attacks against Christian priests in Pabna and Dinajpur, and a number of other priests receiving death threats, armed attacks against a Shia procession in Dhaka and a Shia Mosque in Shibganj resulting in the death of the muezzin. And we are all aware of the numerous violent attacks against on-line

activists over the last couple of years. Incidents like these can be manifestations



of a changing society and the emergence of an environment in which fear, violence and intolerance exist. This trend is of utmost concern and needs to be taken seriously by all actors in the political arena as well as among the leaders of all religious faiths. Situations in which individuals have lost their lives and places of worship have been destroyed need to be clearly condemned, and perpetrators brought to justice. If not, the risk of further

incidents is high and a culture of impunity

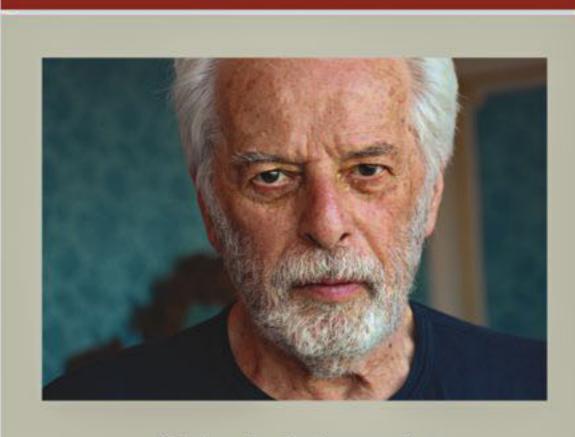
can prevail. In April 2015 at the High-Level Thematic Debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism, the UN Secretary General remarked that the UN "will emphasise the core values of peace, justice and human dignity as true alternatives to the extremists' hatred and fear. It will focus

on prevention through equitable institutions, inclusive governance, and respect for human rights and the rule of law...we must also enable women to assume their rightful, equal leadership role in this movement".

With this in mind, the United Nations in Bangladesh seeks to underline the importance of promoting a culture which respects the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The protection of human rights, at the centre of any such policy, needs to be accompanied by corresponding legislation, policies and practical measures. In this case, the necessary institutional frameworks for the executive, legislature and judiciary, in line with principles of transparency, rule of law and popular participation, need to be both elaborated and firmly anchored.

On 9 March 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief who visited Bangladesh in September 2015 will present his report to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. This report, and the recommendations made therein, will hopefully be seen as an opportunity for Bangladesh to establish a platform for further discussion and action to strengthen the enjoyment of the freedom of religion or belief as well as an opportunity to enhance the conditions of religious minorities in the county.

The writer is the United Nations Resident Coordinator in



Alejandro Jodorowsky

"Birds born in a cage think flying is an illness."

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS** 

1 Better half

7 Easy win 11 Generous diner

12 Egg outline 13 New Hampshire town

14 Miles of film

15 Bogged down

16 Deserve

17 Clothes line

18 So far

19 Audition goal 21 Young fellow

22 Smarty-pants 25 Langley org.

26 Writer Oz 27 Church sights

29 Sandbox toy 33 Brownish gray

34 Piglet's creator 35 Continental coin

36 Yacht spot

37 Bring up

38 Ready for print 39 Shaker stuff

40 Some singers DOWN 1 Holds back 2 Playful sprite

3 Sung drama

4 Musically cheery 5 Parrot snack

6 Mess up 7 Was a nomad

8 General 9 Kind of bliss

10 Gilt, say 16 Words to live by

18 Prunes 20 Tuned in

22 Hawaiian volcano

23 Free of additives 24 Ache battler

25 Stocks the party 28 Left at sea 30 O'Connor's successor

34 Created 36 Ran into

31 Essential 32 Top roles YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

REGIS ARENA DROWN CARED LEDA DEDUCES ARA ELMER ELUDE

### **BEETLE BAILEY**

## HELP SARGE! I'M STUCK IN THIS MUD! I CAN'T MOVE!



#### **BABY BLUES**

MALKER

