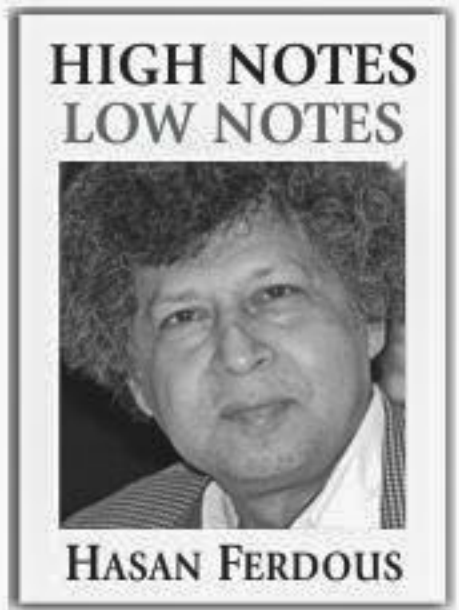


1971: Our war, their battles



HASAN FERDOUS

**HIGH NOTES
LOW NOTES**
IN 1971, during Bangladesh's Liberation War, much of the action was confined to the territory of Bangladesh, but there were battles being fought in locations many

oceans away. In Britain, Action Bangladesh brought together numerous international organisations to rally support for Bangladesh. In France, septuagenarian statesman and public intellectual Andre Malraux announced his readiness to take up arms alongside Bangalee guerrilla fighters. More than 60 international luminaries, among them Mother Teresa and Senator Edward Kennedy, signed an Oxfam petition calling for international intervention. The Concert for Bangladesh at New York's Madison Square Garden, the first of its kind, drew global attention to the ongoing strifes in Bangladesh. Even the government of South Yemen said it was ready to coordinate the collection and distribution of arms for Bangladeshi soldiers. The most spectacular intervention was by a small group of peace activists in the US, who stopped a Pakistani ship from docking at the Baltimore harbour for collecting weapons by offering their own bodies as "mines." Sounds unreal, and yet this is exactly what happened on July 14, 1971. Recently, two young Bangladeshi filmmakers in the US have pieced together their story and produced a fine documentary. Simply called *Blockade*, this film traces the bravery of these Americans and their Bangladeshi friends, who risked their own lives to stand for a cause they thought was "just."

and stop it from proceeding any further. The Quakers were led by Richard Taylor and his wife Phyllis. They had long been involved in non-violent protests, often using the tactics used by Gandhi in South Africa and India. They quickly got in touch with Friends of East Bengal, another support group in Philadelphia that included mostly Bangalee academics teaching at various US universities. Among them was Dr. Sultana Krippendorf, a young professor who had just become a mother. She was assigned with contacting the dock workers at Baltimore and convincing them to support the peace activists. Passionate about the cause and dogged in her persuasion, Sultana was able to sway the president of the local trade

union. Soon, the media was notified of the big event. The group first learned that the ship would arrive on the 11th, three days ahead of its schedule. At the appointed time, everybody gathered at the port, anxiously waiting for the ship to make its way to the shore. But it turned out to be a false alarm. The media got furious, berating Richard and his friends for wasting their time. Disappointed but still determined, they soon regrouped. Now definite about the date, several hundred people gathered at the harbour on July 14. As the sun dipped in the west, casting its long shadow on the gathered crowd, somebody noticed in the distance the

Nation at 46

Much achieved, much yet to be

AS we step into our 46th year of independence and celebrate our freedom, we bow our heads to all the freedom fighters known and unknown, who put up spontaneous resistance to the dastardly Pakistani forces not knowing what lay ahead. We recall the leadership of the Father of the Nation whose clarion call on 7th March coagulated the people, and also his able lieutenants under whose direction the nascent nation was guided through the nine-month long war.

If economic emancipation and a pluralistic democratic dispensation were the twin objectives of our liberation struggle it becomes a day also of taking stock of what we have achieved and where we might have done better than we actually have.

We can justifiably be proud of the progress made in the economy and agricultural sector. We have crossed the threshold of a low middle income country and are able to feed a population that has nearly tripled since 1971. Our social indicators and our efforts to reduce child mortality and empower women have elicited praise internationally, and we have ventured on one of the most ambitious projects - the Padma Bridge-on our own

However, it is in the field of politics where fractious attitude has kept the people divided on national issues. Our democratic institutions remain vulnerable to extraneous pressure and if elections are the index of the political adulthood of a nation, then the recent union parishad elections would suggest that we have a long way to go.

It cannot be lost on our leaders that whatever might be our shortcomings, those can only be overcome by shedding our differences and coming together on vital issues of national concern.

Sylhet city crippled

No excuse for ignoring concerns over water shortage

WE are at a loss to understand why the authorities are assuming such a lacklustre attitude in solving the water scarcity in Sylhet, which has all but crippled the city. The Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) is only being able to supply 3 crore litres of water a day as opposed to the demand for 8 crore litres of water. Many areas of the burgeoning city remain without supply lines altogether, and residents claim that even areas with water connections do not supply water on a regular basis, although the authorities bill them for water usage anyway.

What is even more flabbergasting is that a new surface water treatment plant, whose construction work under the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) was completed a couple of months ago, is still not operational. It is feared that the plant, which cost a whopping Tk 130 crore and was supposed to add 2.8 crore litres of water using water from the Surma river to the daily supply, may not be functional as the water level of Surma is "below expectation." Why, we wonder, are we only realising this now, when the project has been already been completed? Did we not conduct a situation analysis prior to constructing the treatment plant with the taxpayers' money?

Meanwhile, by pinpointing the fingers at DPHE and the consumers themselves, the SCC seems to be shirking its own responsibilities. It must solve this crisis without any delay, for access to safe water is a basic requisite of a nation that prides itself on its GDP growth and development. An alternative way to make the treatment plant work has to be devised without any bureaucratic delay.

It all started on July 2, at the monthly meeting of the American Friends Service Committee, an organisation involving mostly the Quakers who are committed to social justice and peace through non-violent means. Many of them were veterans of anti-Vietnam war protests, courting arrests and police harassment. Soon after news broke of the Pakistani crackdown in Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh, they formed "Friends of Bengal" to mobilise public support for Bangladesh. They also established contacts with the Bangladesh Information Center, a Washington



mammoth ship. With its propeller shafts creating huge waves, it was cruising its way to the port. Several small dinghies had been collected and were ready to be floated. But the harbour police told them in no uncertain terms, it was too dangerous to take such small dinghies closer to the ocean-going vessel. "You will all drown in the blink of an eye." Undaunted, Richard went behind the police barricade and found a small marina that seemed unguarded. Quickly several dinghies were lowered into the water. No sooner had the peace flotilla begun its slow journey, the port police surrounded them. One by one they lifted each of the peace activists onto police vessels, arresting them for violating police order. Hundreds of

people that had gathered at the harbour clapped joyfully as they courted arrest. Next day, after spending a night at a semi-darkened police station, they were all produced before a local judge. Issuing a stern warning, the presiding judge let them all go. Later, the judge took Richard aside and told him, his son, too, was among those arrested. I had met Richard several times. It seemed unreal to me that these people, completely unconnected to Bangladesh or its people, would risk their lives to register a protest. What had prompted them to this drastic act? Richard, his demeanour always calm, told me, there are times when people must listen to their inner voice and do the right thing. Protesting against a genocide and denouncing the US government for its alliance with the marauders was the right thing to do. Syed Arif Yousuf and Tasbir Imam Shakhhor, the two filmmakers and their friends had spent some eight long years to reproduce this story on video. Film enthusiasts and self-taught, they spent many a nights on their storyboard, debating how best to tell the story. Arif told me, they were deeply touched by the support given by the Taylors to the project. They spent countless hours, allowing the novice filmmakers to shoot at their home, often recording the same shots several times. Through Richard and Phyllis, they were able to connect with many of the original Friends of Bengal. Dr. Sultana, still as passionate as ever, brought alive the hours of the blockade with painstaking detail. Dr. Monaem Chowdhury, another Bangladeshi academic, seemed still dazed at the heroism of these people as he recalled the event. Arif told me they were deeply moved by the complete lack of any sense of heroism on the part of Richard and his friends. "They never thought they were doing anything heroic. Neither did they expect any reward for their action. For them it was a call for duty, they just wanted to wake people up to the brutalities taking place in Bangladesh."

The blockade at Baltimore was one of the many battles that had taken place in 1971. Everyone who took part in that battle is a freedom fighter and deserves our deep gratitude.

The writer is a journalist and author. His latest book, *Ekkator, Je Bhabe Shuru* ("1971, This Is How It Started"), was published this year in February by Shomoy Publication, Dhaka.

Unfinished agenda of the Liberation War

BRIG R P SINGH, VSM (RETIRED)

FORTY five years ago, at zero hour on March 26, 1971, Pakistan Army launched one of the most heinous genocides in human history which could put Halaku and Hitler to shame due to the scale of the carnage. During nine months of barbarity, three million Bangladeshis were killed, four hundred thousand women were raped, as a result of which more than seventy thousand war babies were born, and Bangladesh was ravaged.

The USA and China supported Yahya Khan's military junta in the savagery. US President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor (NSA), Henry Kissinger, ignored the public and media opinion. However eminent leaders and citizens like Edward Kennedy, George Harrison, Bob Dylan and numerous others in the USA and all over the world supported the cause of the Bangladeshis. The reason for Nixon turning a blind eye to Yahya's misdeeds was Pakistan's facilitation of a historic secret visit of Kissinger to Beijing in July 1971. The new found bonhomie between USA and China was a significant alliance against the Soviet bloc and its de-facto supporters like India. Being under obligation to Yahya, Nixon ignored US Congressmen, his Secretary of State and the world opinion when Bangladesh was being devastated by the Pakistan army and their collaborators.

India, with USSR's cooperation, came out in support against all odds for the cause of Bangladesh liberation. Despite being a poor nation, India shared whatever it had with their Bangladeshi brothers and sisters, and opened its door for the refugees whose numbers rose to ten million by November 1971. New Delhi helped in

establishing the provisional government of Bangladesh which was operating from Kolkata. The Indian army provided all assistance in raising, organising, training and equipping Mukti Bahini (the Bangladesh Liberation Force). By the end of November 1971, Bangladesh forces were organised in three Infantry Brigades with requisite artillery, one hundred thousand guerrillas and seven sectors deployed along the Indo-Bangladesh border for facilitating guerrilla operations. Bangladesh also had a small navy and air force. With the formation of joint command of Indian and Bangladeshi forces in November 1971, the noose around the Pakistan occupation army was tightened.

The military junta had whitewashed the news of genocide in West Pakistan. Due to the jingoistic statements of military commanders, war hysteria was created in the West Pakistan where frenzied "Crush India" slogans were raised. On December 3, 1971, Yahya Khan ordered air attacks on eight Indian airfields. The Joint Forces were waiting for such provocation and launched their multi-pronged offensive from all directions to liberate Bangladesh. The Indian Navy blockaded the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Air Force pounded the Pakistanis from the skies. The whole affair was finished by the Joint Forces in just 12 days, forcing all 93,500 ranks of the Pakistan Army's to surrender. The victory was gained against all odds. The US dispatched its mightiest naval task force of the Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal. It was supported by Great Britain, which dispatched its Royal Navy armada to the Arabian Sea. Both naval forces were checkmated by the USSR's navy, forcing the British armada to make a U-turn and the seventh fleet downing its anchors in the

mid of the Bay of Bengal.

China made noises on India's Himalayans frontiers, which were contained by India and countervailed by the USSR, by deploying its forces on the Sino-USSR border. The clouds of a nuclear war were on the horizon. But the biggest challenge was on the diplomatic front. In the UN, all western countries, allies of the USA, and the Muslim nations formed a bloc to strangulate Indo-Bangladesh forces' attempts to liberate East Pakistan. However, these moves were stalled with the usage of veto power by the USSR and skilful diplomatic manoeuvring by India.

Despite losing in numerous battles, the sadistic genocide activities of Pakistan Army continued until the end of war. A day prior to their surrender, the Pakistani occupying force picked up numerous Bangladeshi intellectual and prominent citizens, and killed them in cold blood. After the war, 194 army personnel, three from the Pakistan Air Force and three from the Pakistan Navy were identified as war criminals. This, however, did not include the name of Lt Gen Tikka Khan, who wore the twin hats of being the Chief Marshal Law Administrator and Commander of Pakistani forces in Bangladesh from March 26 to 11 April 1971. He was the mastermind behind the butchering of hundreds and thousands of civilians. Having been let off, he later earned the sobriquet of the 'Butcher of Baluchistan', where he again killed thousands of innocent people.

India and Bangladesh wanted to try the war criminals as per international laws, but Pakistani President ZA Bhutto convinced Indira Gandhi that Pakistan would conduct trials on its own soil. But this promise turned out to be a false promise. With Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,

Bhutto tried completely different tactics. He held prominent Bangladeshi citizens, who were in West Pakistan at the time of the war, hostage and bargained for the release of Pakistani Prisoners of War from Indian camps. Numerous rounds of talks, initially bilateral between India and Pakistan, and India and Bangladesh, and subsequently joint parleys amongst the three countries, resulted in an agreement to release the war criminals for "ushering an era of peace and tranquility in the sub-continent".

Releasing the war criminals was a terrible folly. Barring few senior officers among them, who were sacked for professional incompetence and not war crimes, the services of all others were continued. Some of them became Major Generals and Lt Generals. Some of these officers were also alleged to be behind the conspiracy to murder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his kin in August 1975. They also allegedly orchestrated the Sikh militancy in Punjab, which ultimately resulted in the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 24, 1984. Thus instead of "ushering an era of peace and tranquility", the release of the war criminals resulted in unleashing the reign of terror. There is hardly any family in Bangladesh which had not been affected by the Pakistani genocide. However, the surviving perpetrators of the war are still enjoying luxurious retired life on the wealth looted from Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's efforts in trying the 1971 collaborators are commendable. But the agenda of the Bangladesh Liberation War will remain unfinished until all the war criminals are brought to justice.

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

COMMENTS

"Power for bandwidth"
(March 24, 2016)

Hasan Masud

We all know that trade with India is a one-sided relationship and we also know about the existing trade deficit between Bangladesh and India. We cannot also forget that Bangladeshi citizens are frequently killed by the Border Security Force of India.

Rakesh Kotla

More collaboration in all sectors between the two countries is needed.

Lihan Mothin

Speaking of collaboration, the lane that leads to India is smooth but the lane towards Bangladesh is rough and uneven.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

BCB chief selector should resign

Going into the T20 World Cup 2016, the selection of an unknown Mohammad Mithun (aka Mithun Ali) over veteran Imrul Kayes was a blunder.

Bangladesh had a glorious 2015 in cricket. It could have continued this year but for these "experiments". No person has the right to play Russian roulette with the nation's hopes and aspirations.

Taking responsibility for these blunders, the chief selector should resign from his post.

Engr. ABM Nurul Islam
Milton, GA, USA

Thoughts on the Independence Day

On the 45th Independence Day, I recall the courage of our valiant freedom fighters who risked their lives for the cause of freedom. They are the true patriots. I recall the father of the nation, Banagabandhu, whose March 7 speech inspired the people to take arms to liberate the land. Their sacrifice for the motherland will never be forgotten.

We all must uphold the history of our independence and show due respect to the martyrs of the Liberation War.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Why Mithun, not Anamul?

Mohammad Mithun's performance did not live up to the standard in the recent matches but the selectors continue to include him in the final eleven. Why don't the BCB selectors choose Anamul Haque in spite of Mithun? Anamul has performed outstandingly in the recently held domestic matches. We hope that the selectors would be more prudent in selecting the national team.

Md. Abdul Karim
Alamdanga, Chuadanga