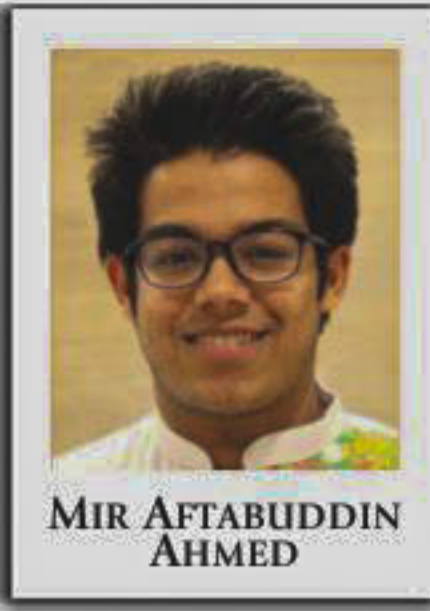


HOMECOMING DAY

The lasting symbolism of Bangabandhu



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

THOUSANDS waited to catch a glimpse of the man who had single-handedly captivated the minds of the Bengali people. Millions sat anxiously by their radios, whilst hoping to get firsthand news of his anticipated arrival. He left as a shining icon and returned as the President of a sovereign republic. An orator of the highest calibre, a vibrant force of political energy and a leader of the masses, he surely enchanted the imagination of the entire country. After all, it was no average politician or celebrity. After all, it was their Bangabandhu, our Bangabandhu. When Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested on the night of March 25, 1971, he left his motherland with no certainty about his life or the future of his beloved people. Mujib was many things, but even his biggest adversaries did not once doubt his courage. Cowardice is not a trait one dares to associate with Bangabandhu. And rightly so. He might have been Husseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy's direct political heir, but Bangladesh's Founding Father also paid justice to the title of Sher-e-Bangla accredited to AK Fazlul Haq. When he was forced into confinement in Pakistan, Sheikh Mujib remained faithful to the Almighty and hopeful about his people. It is impossible to truly imagine what Mujib actually went through in the Pakistani prisons. But what is sure is this: he never gave up and never gave in. After all this, he returned to Dhaka as Bangladesh's sole leader. All his hopes, all his fight, all his efforts, all his passion, all his guile, all his oratory—they all had culminated into a beautiful, sovereign, independent Bangladesh. He inspired us to dream. And our people reciprocated. The one and only Bangabandhu had arrived to his delighted 70 million family members.

Now, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Administrator, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Leader of the masses, are two very different entities for the sake of analysis. It is unwise to establish Bangabandhu's rights and wrongs without understanding the context of post-1971 Bangladesh. And hence we leave that to our historians and academics. But for the average Bangladeshi in 1971, Mujib was simply Bangabandhu, Mujib Bhai, Sheikh Shaheb or Khoka. He was the symbolic expression of the Bangladeshi liberation struggle and the antithesis of Pakistani junta rule. What happened from 1972-1975 is up for political debate, but on January 10, 1972, Sheikh Mujib returned to Bangladesh amidst a wave of popularity rarely seen in the modern world. He had not physically participated in the war. He was not even in proximity to the war zone. He was not leading the Mujibnagar government. Yet in not doing so, he did more than anyone could possibly imagine. Bangladesh's nine-month struggle for independence was, after all, the product of Sheikh Mujib's decades-long efforts to establish the rule of the people in our country. Mujib's arrest, Mujib's confinement and Mujib's release represented Bangladesh's entire liberation story through one man. How could we not love him? On this great day of Bangabandhu's return, let us establish a few things. Sheikh Mujib did not return as the leader of the Awami League, but as the leader of Bangladesh. He should not be revered by those who support the Awami League only, but be admired on all sides of the political aisle. Sadly, our political parties have used Mujib's legacy for their own benefits. BNP's efforts to disrupt Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's political legacy by observing August 15 as Khaleda Zia's birthday and controversial speeches by Tareq Zia from London have not gone well with the people. Nevertheless, even though one has to thank the Awami League for upholding the legacy of Bangabandhu, they cannot and should not have a monopoly on Sheikh Mujibur



The homecoming of Bangabandhu.

Rahman. Sadly, we are indeed constructing a society where the younger generation simply construe Mujib as the popularising tool of the Awami League. But he is something much bigger. In using Sheikh Mujib's name in the way that it has been used in the recent past, are we not tarnishing the incomparable achievements of our leader? Are we not selfishly undermining the reach of Bangabandhu? People of Bangladesh do not like cheap political stunts like BNP's celebration of August 15 as a birthday. But neither do people like it when the country's Founding Father is used in the way he is used by the party which he gave his life to. We should be

honoured to say that a person like Sheikh Mujibur Rahman inspired us in our struggle for liberation. But we should never use his name for personal gain. It is time that we, as a society, study Bangabandhu, his ideals, his beliefs and his legacy in greater depth. And it is time that the totality of Bangladesh accepts his achievements and contributions to the country and its identity. In doing so, would Bangladeshis be deterred from analysing Bangabandhu's shortcomings? Absolutely not. It is as important for historians to understand this if they are to give a full picture of Bangabandhu. Were the likes of Kemal Ataturk, Nelson Mandela or George Washington saints? Of course not. But in no

uncertain terms, they were all revolutionary champions as Sheikh Mujib is. In conclusion, Sheikh Mujib should not be a subject of a verbal battle between the Awami League and the BNP. He is not a tool of political games. Let January 10 remind us of the unifying characteristic of Bangabandhu and his affection for the people. Let us not simply relegate him to the Awami League's history, but celebrate his life as it was, and do so as proud Bangladeshis. Bangabandhu is ours; he belongs to all of us. The writer is a student of Economics and International Relations at the University of Toronto. E-mail: aftab.ahmed@mail.utoronto.ca

Schoolbag, judicial activism and the deficits



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

WE commend the Apex Court for their timely and sensitive decision to limit the weight of school bags that students are forced to carry, due to ever increasing number of books, notebooks and other material. The question is why the teachers, the principals, school management or the management committees of the schools, or even the board or the ministry did not see it necessary to give such a directive. Why did it need the Apex Court to intervene in a matter which is fundamentally the domain of the executive functions of the institutions and of the government? The above incident – the judiciary having to intervene in the work of the executive – clearly indicates as to the inertia of the executive domain of the society. It cannot bode well for any society and for the orderly function of any public authority to see the judiciary having to pass such orders. Nobody will dispute that the judiciary must act if the executive branch fails to do so. But it can't be a desirable situation. To any sympathetic and dispassionate observer, the deficits of executive firmness, both political and bureaucratic, insofar as it relates to expeditious settlement of our public affairs would be apparent. Take for example, the ecologically and economically damaging illegal encroachments on the river-networks, particularly those surrounding the capital city. The court has umpteen times directed the concerned authorities to remove the unauthorised structures that have nearly strangled the metropolis. The response has been less than satisfactory. There is no doubt that the situation would not have deteriorated if the regulatory teeth of the magistracy and the police were operating in full force. Another highly significant segment of enforcement slackness and slipshod investigation relates to the adulteration and poisoning of drugs. Scores of children have died after consuming poisonous analgesic medicine while illicit drugs and narcotics are about to destroy an entire generation. The cost of lax supervision and

enforcement coupled with shoddy investigation in drug administration is very heavy. The deficits therein have created obstacles in dispensing proper justice. Coming to law enforcement scenario of the developing countries, a cynical view is that politicians do not want to professionalise the police because control over it is central in a polarised society. Ironically, our political leaders, who, since 1947, occupied positions of power were enamoured by the administrative and police system left behind and enjoyed exercising power and authority, oblivious of their own demand of yesteryears for far-reaching administrative reforms. The periods of unconstitutional rule in Bangladesh brought out in full virulence the repressive role of the inherited police system. So far as police officers are concerned, the register for inquiry under Section 54 maintained at police stations has not been properly supervised. Every inquiry of arrest under Section 54 needs to be disposed of within fifteen days and if no specific case is made by then, the

democracy. A progressive police force is essential to ensure fair and impartial law enforcement. In the above context, the November 13 report in this newspaper appears very significant and salutary. The said report records the Supreme Court's observation to the effect that "In our country we find no concern of the police administration about the abusive powers being exercised by its officers and personnel. The department has failed to maintain required standard of integrity and professionalism". It is also reported that police's top brass finds it hard to tackle crime committed by lower-tier cops and that there is corruption in recruitment and behavioural recklessness is attributed to errant policemen's political link. The Apex Court further observes, "On a look into the law and order situation, we have reasons to believe that it (law enforcement agencies) has forgotten its core value that it is accountable to the community it serves".

While the role of the Apex Court in the area of police misconduct is enlightening and that of a caring guardian through its selective activism, much of the improvement has to come from within the police organisation itself. It would be relevant to quote Lord Atkin, who famously said: "In accordance with British jurisprudence no member of the executive can interfere with the liberty or property of a British subject except on the condition that he can support the legality of his action before a court of justice. And it is the tradition of British justice that judges should not shrink from deciding such issues in the face of the executive." Finally, it needs to be emphasised that while we may remain poor in per capita income, we should strive to be rich in individual freedom. The writer is a former IGP and a columnist for The Daily Star.

The reality is that the police, the government and the judiciary bear a mutually informing position to one another in democracy. A progressive police force is essential to ensure fair and impartial law enforcement.

arrestee has to be discharged. This has not been ensured. The majority of such arrests lead to no case being made against the arrested persons. However, for unlawful arrest or damage in terms of liberty or honour, no police officer is charged. In a scenario where the police have not been able to adequately revamp itself, the concern of the judiciary to keep the police on the democratic path is gratifying. The reality is that the police, the government and the judiciary bear a mutually informing position to one another in

Table with columns for 'উন্নয়নের অঙ্গিভেদন রাজ্য' and 'জনকল্যাণে রাজ্য'. It lists various government projects and their progress percentages.

QUOTABLE Quote section featuring a portrait of A.A. Milne and his famous quote: 'The third-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the majority. The second-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the minority. The first-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking.'

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH section containing crossword puzzles and 'YESTERDAY'S ANSWER'.