

One genocide, one telegram, and two opportunists

SHARIF MAHMUD

DACCA University Quarter 24, March 25, 1971, Midnight: Professor Abdur Razzak of the International Relations Department of Dhaka University lived on the first floor of Building 24 between the flats of Professor ANM Muniruzzaman on the top floor and Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta on the ground floor. At midnight the military broke into Prof Moniruzzaman's apartment; they dragged him down the stairs, bayoneted him, and finally exterminated him—shooting at point-blank range. And then, in a cold-blooded spree his son, his brother, and his nephew were shot. The military broke into Prof Guhathakurta's house, dragged him outside of the building, and asked him his name and his religion,

Department of State received a telegram from the Consulate General in Dacca, Archer K. Blood. The cable, later known as *The Blood Telegram*, created an uproar in the White House. It reached President Richard Nixon, and the vexed president decided to use his overbearing power to silence the chief dissenter, Blood, with an immediate order to oust him from Dacca for his "inexcusable" offense.

What did that telegram contain that it caused so much fury? Well, this excerpt from the telegram unfolds the mystery:

"Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities. Our government has failed to take forceful measures to protect its citizens while at the same time *bending over backward to placate the West Pakistan-dominated government* and to lessen any

representing a country that prides itself to be the "moral leader of the free world" and the paragon of principality and lawfulness—unabashedly chose to support the despot, Pakistani military leader Yahya Khan, to engineer one of the grossest genocides of the last century?

Nixon and Kissinger's unwavering support for Yahya is rooted in a clandestine negotiation with China, Pakistan's ally, where the latter would work as a conduit between the two major nations to garner support against the Soviets during the Cold War. Lawrence Lifschultz, a prominent chronicler of that period, has documented this reasoning from Winston Lord, Kissinger's deputy at the National Security Council: "We had to demonstrate to China we were a reliable government to deal with. We had to show China that we respect a mutual friend". Even to a casual reader, this kind of rationalisation is rather unconvincing. At any rate, it is a good contender for the crudest possible act of power play ever. Nevertheless, it raises the question: Why did the USA need help from a military dictatorship to open a channel with a People's Republic, that too at the price of blood bath of the Bengalis?

Prominent British-American journalist late Christopher Hitchens in his book *The Trial of Kissinger* concluded that "The Kissinger Policy towards Bangladesh may well have been largely conducted for its own sake, as a means of gratifying his boss's animus against India and as a means of preventing the emergence of Bangladesh as a self-determining state in any case". Whatever the actual reason(s) maybe, the policy is indefensible on any moral or humanitarian ground. To get an idea of what the US backing meant to Yahya, we must know what his regime's Minister of Information, G.W. Choudhury, had to say:

"If Nixon and Kissinger had not given him [Yahya] that false hope, he'd have been more realistic".

However, Kissinger did not stop there. He further looked for some non-existent events of Bengali atrocities to establish his wicked agenda, as Gary J. Bass in his extensively researched exposé *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide* puts, "Kissinger looked for massacres committed by Bengalis, to generate a moral equivalence that would exonerate Yahya. It would be convenient for Nixon and Kissinger to be able to say that both sides were equally rotten." The diplomats demonstrably evidenced their palpable abundance of hypocrisy and lack of a scintilla of morality here.

Nixon and Kissinger may personify astute diplomats and great statesmen to the Americans, but Bangladeshis will always remember them as the opportunists who consciously chose *yin over yang*—as the morally bankrupt and insensitive world leaders who, in the pretext of power politics and/or personal prejudice towards India, maintained laxity on a massive humanitarian crisis—and as the accomplice who abetted the devil, Yahya, with political, economic, and military assistance and stayed unlawfully complicit in the very genocide that they were supposed to forestall.

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PHOTO: AFP

before shooting him. **San Clemente, California, March 31, 1971, Noon:** CIA officer Mr. David Blew was giving a rundown to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger, on the East Pakistan situation at the Senior Review Group Meeting. The conversation went thus:

Kissinger: "Did they kill Professor Razzak? He was one of my students."

Blew: "I think so. They killed a lot of people at the university."

Kissinger: "They didn't dominate 400 million Indians all those years by being gentle."

No, they couldn't kill Professor Razzak. Mr. Razzak, mentored by Dr. Kissinger at Harvard, somehow managed to escape the onslaught.

Washington, April 6, 1971, Morning: The US

deservedly negative international public relations impact against them. Our government has evidenced what many will consider *moral bankruptcy*..." [Emphasis added]

The telegram was referring to US backing for West Pakistan's negation of the Awami League victory in general election of 1970, and the subsequent genocide of the Bengalis protesting for autonomy from the west wing. A criticism of the foreign policy of the Nixon Government, this telegram is considered the most strongly worded public document—from the State Department officials to the department itself—that has ever been chronicled. Yet, this brave, courageous, and defiant reporting of Blood could not shake Nixon and Kissinger's unremitting "tilt" towards West Pakistan.

Why would Nixon and Kissinger—despite

"WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?"

A post-colonial woman's words

SHAGUFE HOSSAIN

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

- Audre Lorde

THE world has made it so that existing as a woman has become an act of political warfare. I happen to be the only Bangladeshi woman, and in fact, the only South Asian in my cohort, studying at this institution, despite the city, the university, and the programme being famously diverse. Since getting a masters degree for women is quite common now in our part of the world, I was surprised to find myself in this position. Maybe it happens to be so because nobody from our part of the world sees the merit in getting a Masters in Education. Whatever the reason may be, somehow I ended up being the one brown woman in the classroom, walking, speaking, breathing, carefully balancing between being too visible and not visible enough. Existing. And when you exist, in a situation like this, what you choose to wear and not wear then becomes determining factors of your existence.

The kinds of classrooms I am placed in are also deeply introspective. Questions like who are we and what shapes our identities emerge and remerge. So, what it means to be a brown woman in Canada is something I am forced to explore. I usually wear woollen tights or jeans, a t-shirt or a top, wrap a scarf loosely around my head. For one who is of the "subaltern", I happen to speak quite often and quite loud. As though, if I don't speak here, there is a risk of me drowning in the noise. And if I drown, we all do. I feel like a ship carrying an entire continent as cargo. And to lighten my burden I become in many ways a bearer of the colonial legacy. Colonialism has left its imprints on our psyche like a long-term, incurable disease. We wear it on our skins, on our tongues, on our fingers as we type words in languages that are colonial. Sitting in classrooms, surrounded by white people, one is forced to look around and ask, how much of colonialism do I carry? How much of it can I fight? And how do I fight it, if, at all, I do? Everything; the skin, the language, the clothes, all of it is a political statement. The very act of existing becomes warfare.

But I know little of the colonial legacy. Second generation Bangladeshis have barely managed to retain a grasp on the post-1971 history with it being so deeply immersed in partisan politics. Going back and learning colonial history seems like such a chore. But if I did, if I managed to look at the woman who existed before the colonial legacy, what would I see? But that is an

irrelevant thought to entertain. We have moved on. There are conflicts that are more urgent and more topical to deal with. Until you come across a moment that splits you and shows you an image in a mirror that is suddenly foggy.

Such as in a classroom, while discussing the participation of women in the academia, particularly in science and technology, when someone points out how in attending an out-of-town conference, women will usually pack two pairs of clothing i.e. a suit for the conference and a dress for the after party. Women who participate in the workforce, are in powerful roles, almost always embody male characteristics. The suit exudes power. It is the garb of a man. Donning a suit transfers some of that power, in an unequal environment, onto the woman. And suddenly you are hit with the realisation of how detached you feel from these scenarios, how unable you are to relate. Because, in the country where you come from, most women strut into conference rooms in saris, confident but not always loud. Strong, but not always hard. Soft, wrapped in nine yards, and decidedly feminine. Most of us definitely do not dress like men to be taken seriously in an academic and/or professional setting. So, in a strange way then, does the oriental woman's garment become transgressive in a patriarchal society? By wearing a garment that is so decidedly feminine while walking into traditionally male-dominated environments, does the woman not inherently make a statement about who she is, about power, about ownership? She does not need the garb of man to transfer power to her. The power of the "oriental" woman is within.

I don't wear a *sari* as often as I would like to, mainly because I am lazy. I do, however, wear another piece of garb that makes me decidedly woman. It enables me to walk into a room, with two yards of fabric wrapped around my head, marking me as decidedly feminine, in spaces traditionally dominated by men. Is the *hijab*, then, not also transgressive in a patriarchal society?

Much has been said this International Women's Day (as is on every other women's day) about what makes a woman, what makes a strong woman, what is empowering and what is disempowering. As usual, much has been done and said to decide for the woman by everyone other than her. I wonder if we are once again letting our colonial legacy decide for us, who we are. Once again, I realise how difficult it is as a woman to simply exist and not be political. As a woman, you challenge the status quo with everything that you put or remove from your body.

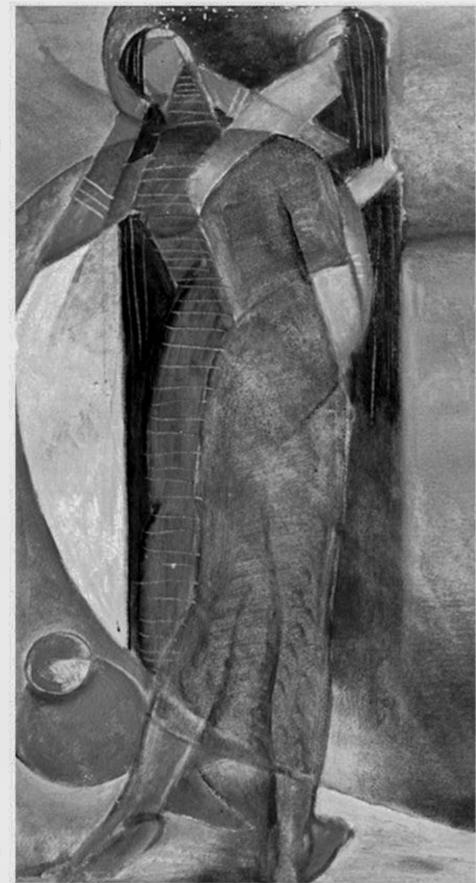


ILLUSTRATION: ZAINUL ABEEDIN

Whether you are wrapping yourself with more fabric or less, you make a political statement. And so little things like what you are wearing, moves beyond indulgence (or acts of faith), and becomes an act of political warfare. A piece of "oriental" clothing then becomes a weapon with which you attack the patriarchy and colonialism at the same time. The personal is political. And we make a difference, simply by existing.

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Genocide Day

Let it be a lesson and reminder

FOLLOWING the Cabinet approval of the parliament's resolution to recognise March 25 as Genocide Day, today marks the first time following our Liberation War that we officially commemorate the brutal crimes against humanity that were perpetrated by Pakistani forces and their local collaborators in 1971. It is a much-welcome decision, especially given that steps are already underway to seek international recognition of the crimes against humanity as a genocide.

It is important to remember that genocide does not involve only those who were directly killed by the Pakistani forces, but also the deaths of those who had been displaced by the war.

The UN definition of a genocide states that it constitutes acts "committed with intent to destroy ... a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; ... [and] deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction". That the Hindu minority and the Bengali community of the then East Pakistani as a whole were systematically targeted for annihilation, sexual violence was used as an instrument of war, and that millions of refugees were displaced testify to the just demand for international recognition, and thereby justice.

We feel this is also the time when research work on 1971 including the documentation of the atrocities is crucial. To preserve history, to remind the world of the horrors of war, and also to submit before international bodies our justification for recognition, the state and academia need to act in cooperation. Thinking of all such in the world who are victims of crimes against humanity today, let us commemorate this day not in the spirit of vengeance, but to portray the dangers such acts against humanity constitute, and in hope that what was done to us is not repeated anywhere in the world again.

London attack

A new mode of terror perpetration?

OUR sympathies are with those that have been killed and injured in the attack on the Westminster Bridge and Palace of Westminster ground. The London terrorist attack, that has so far killed five people and injured nearly forty, proves once again that no one can feel out of reach of the terrorists, more so when there is a palpably new mode of perpetrating attacks, as one can see from the Brussels and now the London attack.

These two incidents in recent times, demonstrate the 'lone wolf' attacks where a single motivated person, like in London or a handful like Brussels, with or without any organic link with any international terror group, can inflict great damage, both psychological and physical, in a very crude manner. That is a lesson we should take from this incident. The attack has not only killed—thankfully the number of dead in London is not large, the purpose was to also impose a sense of terror and bembom a city. And a lesson that we can take from London is that the attack, shocking as it might be, has not created any disorder in the life of the Londoners.

The attack also highlights the fact, and which we in this country should assimilate, is that although there is no 100 percent guarantee against such attacks and neither can those be foretold, the damage can be minimised with heightened level of alertness and quick-response preparedness by the security forces. We should not forget that while the security forces shall have to be successful every single day of the year, the terrorists need to be successful only one of the 365 days.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Remembering a hero

There goes a saying, "Some have greatness thrust upon them, and some earn them by dint of their toils, trials and tribulations." Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman falls within the latter part of the saying, due to his lifelong struggles against the colonial exploitations of Pakistani business and political cabals, and especially with his six-point demand which culminated in his final call for freedom of Bangladesh. The world witnessed the emergence of a nationalistic leader of mesmerising eloquence and charismatic statesmanship. He did not budge an inch from his six-point demand, and when Pakistan unleashed genocide, Bangabandhu declared the Independence of Bangladesh. After a nine month liberation war, fought and won in his name, he became the father of this nation. All glories to him for this day, and for his greatness.
 A. H. Dewan
 Dhaka Cantonment

Saint Martin's Island needs improvements

The Saint Martin's Island is an important tourist spot in Bangladesh, with around 20,000 tourists visiting the place every day. However, the jetty by which people enter and embark on the ships in the island is risky and in poor condition. It also continues to get dirty and lose its natural beauty with each passing day, under pressure of such large amounts of tourists.

This island possesses great potential for contribution to the national economy. Constructive development initiatives should therefore be implemented to preserve and polish the natural beauty of the place.

Ratan Karmakar
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