

Bangabandhu's enduring legacy

GOLAM SARWAR CHOWDHURY

In this month of mourning, we need to re-evaluate Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's overwhelming presence in our history as the leader of the Bengali nationalist movement that culminated in our War of Liberation and the glorious independence of Bangladesh.

In 1947, Bangabandhu returned from Kolkata where as a student leader he had been involved with the movement that led to the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. Within a year of the birth of Pakistan, the young Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had the foresight to realise that the state of Pakistan would never bring freedom in its true sense to the Bengalis of the then East Pakistan.

When in 1948 the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, unequivocally declared in his speech to the students of Dhaka University that Urdu alone would be the state language of Pakistan, the educated Bengali middle class could well foresee the status of the Bengalis in the newly created Pakistan.

It was from this time that Bangabandhu began to shape himself as the future leader of a nation. His political mentor, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, was also disillusioned as were many of the political leaders who had supported the creation of Pakistan.

After the Language Movement of 1952, it became absolutely transparent as to what would eventually happen to the people of this land.

Of course, even when the Awami Muslim League metamorphosed into the secular Awami League, there was no open debate on the necessity of breaking out of Pakistan and forming a new country that would meet all demands of the Bengali people. There were some leaders, mostly students, who had this latent dream of creating a country of their own. This was a well-guarded secret because the time was not yet appropriate for demanding independence.

Once Ayub Khan imposed martial law and started repressing the people more than ever before, the Bengali middle class started to unite under the leadership of the Awami League. People throughout East Pakistan got increasingly involved in the demand for greater autonomy and an end to the economic exploitation.

When Bangabandhu was arrested in the Agartala Conspiracy Case, the unity of the people to free him from incarceration started a new phase in the life of Bangabandhu who at this stage was clearly the most influential leader of the Bengalis. When he was freed from imprisonment, even Ayub Khan could understand Sheikh Mujib's unprecedented popularity among the Bengalis. Ayub Khan after ruling Pakistan for ten years



Bangabandhu's homecoming.

was ousted by mass movements that took place in both wings of Pakistan. For the Bengalis, this created a new opportunity under the towering leadership of Bangabandhu who had by now surpassed in terms of popularity, all other political leaders of East Pakistan.

The leftwing politicians of the time were honest, patriotic, and pro-people; however, they were not able to go as close to the heart of the masses as could Bangabandhu's Awami League. He and his party represented middle-class values but were very sensitive as well to the plight of the downtrodden.

When the military dictator Yahya Khan announced the date for the general elections in Pakistan, to take place in 1970, Bangabandhu without spending much time decided to take part in the elections and seek a mandate for his six-point formula. Many of the leftwing politicians were opposed to participating in the elections, which were to be held under a legal framework order (LFO) enforced by General Yahya Khan. Political parties participating in the elections were required to follow the LFO. There were many sceptics who thought the LFO would in the end not allow the Awami League to implement its six points even if it won an absolute majority in the ensuing elections.

When Bangabandhu was touring every district of East Pakistan appealing to the masses to support him in the elections so that he could change the fate of the Bengalis, it became clear as to who was the singular leader of the Bengali people.

Bangabandhu had first-rate political colleagues such as Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Quamruzzaman and Monsur Ali. They were all extremely talented people with maturity and political sagacity. Their patriotism and love for the people were genuine; but it was Bangabandhu who they regarded as their indisputable leader.

After Bangabandhu and his Awami League won the 1970 general elections, it was obvious that Yahya and his military cohorts along with ZA Bhutto, the leader of the Pakistan People's Party, would start conspiring to keep away the Bengalis from power. This was when Bangabandhu realised that the Bengalis should come out of Pakistan and form their own nation-state.

Bangabandhu was arrested at the very start of the Pakistan Army's genocidal action on the innocent Bengalis in the evening of March 25, 1971. And during the entire nine-month War of Liberation, Bangabandhu was incarcerated in a Pakistani jail. The freedom fighters and the people of Bangladesh who were trapped in their own homeland were inspired by only one name, and that was Sheikh Mujib's.

Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and the other leaders of the Bangladesh government-in-exile served the nation at this crucial time with utmost patriotism. Throughout the War of Liberation and after the liberation of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971, Bangabandhu's name cast a magic spell on the people of Bangladesh and their friends across the world.

Bangabandhu is the founder of Bangladesh, he is the Father of the Nation, and there is simply no scope to put him at par with other leaders who had also fought for the independence of Bangladesh.

Golam Sarwar Chowdhury teaches English at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

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The invisible cost of roads and bridges

"The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world." — Paul Farmer



TEN, Didi," he told me in a flat voice, "Ten indigenous women were raped while constructing a road. One road."

"How long was the road?" asked Sathi. Why did it matter? I looked at her quizzically.

"When did this happen?" I asked him later.

"While constructing the Alikadam-Thanchi road last year."

The perpetrators would not be held accountable because as soon as the deed was done, they had the luxury of leaving the area. Their job gave them mobility, a freedom that was paid for by others.

I hadn't known Riton for longer than a couple of days. Sathi and I have been part of a common network for about three years now. We converse often and about many other things; our predicaments as development workers in the respective communities we work with, humanity heartbreak. As we were having this particular conversation, we were sharing

breakfast: ruti, bhaji, cha.

I hadn't visited the Chittagong Hill Tracts in a very long time. The last time I had visited Rangamati and Bandarban was when I was about nine years old. It was a family trip that I don't remember much about. Except that there were a lot of *jharnas*, pretty mountains and a lot of greenery. I also remember a boat ride on a lake, which must have been the Kaptai Lake. I don't remember if I was concerned with the lack of roads and bridges at that point. I probably had no reason to be, since we were able to access all the tourist spots quite easily. Neither was I concerned about the price that the people there were paying for my luxurious travels.

Infrastructure-based development has its many benefits, the primary one being that it is easy to measure, easy to see. Theoretically, when a substantial proportion of a nation's resources are systematically directed towards long-term assets such as transportation, energy and social infrastructure, e.g. schools, universities, hospitals, we achieve long-term economic efficiency through growth in economically lagging regions and technological innovation and social equity by providing free education and affordable healthcare. So, when we measure development, we usually measure infrastructural development. Roads, bridges, railways, dams, power plants, things that are easy to see,

expenditures which are easy to justify.

The Final Report on the Evaluation Study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project cites responses by 95.8 percent of the study respondents who had "suffered innumerable critical problems due to lack of infrastructure". The lack of bridges over rivers, canals and between the hills, and severe



communication problems create immense difficulties especially in the rainy seasons. Farmers lose out on business, children cannot go to school, the sick remain untreated, and expectant mothers give birth in dangerous conditions because they cannot be carried to hospitals and treatment centres. All of these

scenarios present dire consequences of not developing the infrastructure.

The Thanchi-Alikadam Road in Bandarban is 33 kilometres long and cost about Tk 120 crore. What else did it cost?

The cost of a human life traumatised by rape and violence is not so visible or easily measurable. Even on the body of the rape

survivor, the price she paid for existing is only temporarily visible. The psychological effects are, however, deeper and less temporary. Survivors of sexual assault experience both short- and long-term psychological effects of rape. Often, the most common psychological consequence of rape is self-blame,

which the survivor uses as an avoidance-based coping tool that slows or, in many cases, stops the healing process. That is, if she survives.

But many women do not survive. Once they are raped, they are killed. The aftermath of rape involves a cluster of acute and chronic physical and psychological effects. It is important that survivors receive comprehensive care that addresses both the short- and long-term effects of rape as they become apparent. So, I wonder if killing her off is considered a favour to the nation. After all, rehabilitating her, providing her with adequate medical and psychosocial support, are costs that we no longer have to bear. The stigma of surviving rape isn't something that she, or her family, has to deal with.

I met Dipen, a vibrant young man who worked relentlessly to collect funds and aid for Longadu, a few weeks after my conversation with Riton. When I mentioned the conversation that was haunting me, he said he knew someone who was raped and killed by day labourers in the Chengi Chor area. "This was in 2014. She was a mother," he said. I read later in a Kapaeng Foundation report that when her body was found by the villagers in a crop field where she was working, it had clear marks of grease and oil. Some Bengali labourers, who were seen loading up a truck with sand near the crop field

at the time when the victim was last seen alive, were then accused of raping and killing her. Her belongings were found near the truck. Cases were later filed, but no arrests made.

There is a quote in *Violence, Mourning and Politics* by Judith Butler, "If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again)."

They were sitting right across from me, eating the same things I was, sharing the same concerns as me. The tea had too much milk in it. The *bhaji* had gone cold. The *ruti* was tough to bite into. Riton with his crinkly eyes, usually full of mirth, following and preceding every sentence with 'didi', could not have been more animated if he tried. Sathi, in her fits of anger at injustice, as ranty as mine, could not have been more real. Maybe that is why they must survive so much violence. For as long as they remain alive, violence will not have succeeded in its purpose. And if violence loses its purpose, what kind of society would that be?

Shagufta Hossain is founder and project director of Leaping Boundaries and a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

QUOTABLE Quote

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
AMERICAN ESSAYIST, LECTURER, AND POET

Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising up every time we fail.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Said with a twang
- 6 Wound reminder
- 10 Steer clear of
- 11 Welcomeing
- 13 Poet TS
- 14 Yucca's kin
- 15 Morse E
- 16 Camera type
- 18 Brewed beverage
- 19 House painters' aids
- 22 Gloss target
- 23 Eject
- 24 Showed interest
- 27 Makes healthy
- 28 Molecule part
- 29 Drinking spree

DOWN

- 1 Must have
- 2 Parcel out
- 3 Deluxe hotel room
- 4 Commotion
- 5 Say inadvertently
- 6 Pottery piece
- 7 Machinery part
- 8 Nonpro
- 9 Overturn
- 12 Baker's supplies
- 17 Pet perch
- 20 Chubby
- 21 Potential bread
- 24 Talks back
- 25 Now and then
- 26 Pedicure target
- 27 Brief rests
- 29 Painter Vermeer
- 31 Steak cut
- 32 Chosen few
- 33 Assessed
- 34 Tale
- 39 "— pig's eye!"
- 41 Director Spike

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

I TIED MY SHOELACES TOGETHER BY ACCIDENT AND I CAN'T UNDO THE KNOT

THAT LAME EXCUSE IS NOT GOING TO GET YOU OUT OF THE HIKE

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

BLAB SPIT
KOALA WINAT
ADDER INCUR
RELENTS ANY
AGE RESENTS
TASTER ASST
ADMIT
TRIP INSIDE
REGENTS GOA
EVE REPEATS
NUTSO ELITE
DEBUT CITED
SYNC TEED

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

I'D NEVER PUT ZOE IN A CONTEST LIKE THAT. NO WAY.

I BET SHE COULD WIN IT, THOUGH.

SHE IS PRETTY CUTE.

BUT SHE WOULD NEED A SPECIAL TALENT.

WOULD RATTING OUT HAMMIE COUNT?