

## Cash in on jute renaissance

### Take steps to expand export markets

THINGS have changed for the better for the jute industry in the last several years as the government has once again adopted measures to boost jute production in line with growing foreign demand for this versatile, bio-degradable fibre. And strict enforcement of the policy of mandatory use of jute for packaging in 17 products has enhanced its internal market greatly.

We are once again exporting jute and jute products to countries like Australia, China, Turkey, etc. Farmers took up the challenge and last year, 817,000 hectares of land were cultivated to produce 9.17 million bales of raw jute. While farmers have performed commendably and some diversification has taken place, particularly, the making of viscose, which is the primary material from which cotton yarn can be produced, much more needs to be done with this amazing fibre.

As the RMG sector comes increasingly under pressure due to emergence of new players, we must move quickly to diversify the usage of jute by introducing new product lines. The government should provide incentives to growers to produce better quality jute. Private sector involvement is also crucial to take forward the discoveries made by Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI), whereby jute cotton may be fused with cotton to give way to a range of new wearables. Only if we can offer a diversified range of jute products can we hope to fully revive the potential of jute-based products as a major export sector. And with expansion of market for jute products the performance of the public jute mills must also be enhanced.

## Is five years not enough?

### Taqi's murder remains a 'mystery'

THE lax progress in the Taqi murder case is deeply disturbing. Five years have passed since the seventeen-year-old boy was brutally killed in Narayanganj and Rab, the investigating agency in this case, has not yet been able to submit the charge sheet. It is frustrating to hear the same thing over and over again from the Rab officials that they would submit the probe report soon. How soon is soon enough?

The murder triggered a huge public outcry in the country at that time. People of Narayanganj formed "Santrash Nirmul Taqi Mancha" and held countless demonstrations and public events demanding justice for Taqi. The eminent citizens of the country including educationists and writers even made repeated pleas to the authorities calling for proper investigation to find out the real killers. The media has also been vocal in this case. But as it seems, nothing could make the investigating authority complete its investigation process as yet. One wonders whether the charge sheet will ever be submitted.

It is suspected that there are politically powerful quarters behind the murder and they are trying to interfere in the investigation process. Taqi's father Rafiur Rabbi submitted a complaint to the SP Narayanganj in 2013 accusing seven people and several unnamed others, of murdering Taqi. But yet, no palpable progress has been made.

The inordinate time taken to process this case is unacceptable. Law cannot be applied selectively. Not only does it make a mockery of the system, it also causes people to lose faith in it.

## BANGABANDHU'S MARCH 7 SPEECH

# Now a part of world heritage

MOHIDUL HOQUE

PEOPLE of Bangladesh know very well the intrinsic value of the historic speech delivered by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib on March 7, 1971. A country of the South and its leadership in the struggle for national emancipation has too often been presented through the prism of the North, the power base of most things on earth. To create a proper perspective of history and recognise the common heritage of mankind is a long and persistent struggle. As part of this effort, UNESCO has introduced a few programmes such as World Heritage Site, Intangible Heritage of Mankind, etc. The Memory of the World (MOW) International Register is a comparatively new programme initiated in 1992 with the aim of increasing global awareness about the existence and significance of documentary heritage. MOW International Register is regarded as one of the most prestigious forms of recognition for documentary heritage with outstanding value and global significance, as stated by UNESCO in one of its publications.

I had the opportunity to be associated with the process of nomination when I was invited to join a training workshop in the Asia-Pacific region organised in 2013. The organisers had sent the MOW nomination form to be filled in and brought to the workshop to be discussed. On behalf of the Liberation War Museum, as a custodian of many historical relics, including documents and artefacts related to the March 7 speech, we prepared the submission for inclusion of the great speech as a MOW. Unfortunately, the workshop was not held as planned and the draft found no use.

In 2016 the Bangladesh Ambassador to France, Shahidul Islam, picked up the idea to submit the nomination for March 7 speech as MOW. Through the concerned ministry, he came to know about our previous preparation and contacted me to get that file. Subsequently, a proposal was submitted to UNESCO on April 2016 with co-sponsorship of the Government of

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Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivering his March 7 speech.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangladesh represented by Ambassador Shahidul Islam and Liberation War Museum represented by me as a trustee. After going through a long process of scrutiny, the International Advisory Committee and UNESCO approved the List of 2017 MOW with Bangabandhu's March 7 speech getting the recognition it deserved.

Here it is important to dwell on the substance of the proposal where the pertinent issue was to highlight the global significance of the speech. The nomination form contains many technical questions regarding the description, nature, ownership of the heritage, but special focus has been given on the "world significance" of the heritage with questions like—whether the heritage is unique and irreplaceable, whether it had a great impact over time and within a particular cultural area of the world, whether it had a great influence on the course of history, etc. The other areas of explanation were time, place and people, to analyse the heritage from such a perspective was not a problem because the speech had a great impact in terms of time, place and people, but the core issue was placement of the speech from a broader world outlook. Bangabandhu's speech was delivered at a time of high national tension and complex international scenario. The world was divided by the Cold War, but the general consensus prevailed that the post-World War II state boundaries could not be altered. At the same time, the international community agreed on the right of nations to self-determination.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib had to steer the struggle of Bangalis not as a secessionist movement, but for the sake of upholding the inherent right of people to self-determination. Highlighting this significance, the proposal stated:

"The speech has great world significance for its contexts and contents, as well as its far-reaching impact on the key assumptions on which the post-World War II international system was built. One of the assumptions was that the international borders redrawn after the WW II were sacrosanct. Even the most arbitrarily and hastily drawn national boundaries of post-colonial states were considered not to be put into question. The March 7 speech constituted a compelling case of how the failure of post-colonial nation states to develop inclusive, democratic society could alienate their populations belonging to different ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious groups and lead to the dismemberment of nation-states. In fact, the speech triggered the first successful war of liberation by means of cessation since the international boundaries had been redrawn after World War II."

The history of the colonial past and the struggle to wipe-out its legacies to create a free and fair world need to be rewritten from an unbiased perspective. Here the significance of the emergence of Bangladesh as a state that unshackled the bonds of a colonial past and established a nation-state based on linguistic-ethnic identity has great importance. Contextually the speech

highlighted a national cultural identity which is not chauvinistic, but syncretic in nature, embracing religious diversity. Such intrinsic values have contemporary relevance, which made the speech transcend time and space. In the proposal it was stated, "The struggle to uphold the national right based on cultural-linguistic identity, essentially secular and liberal, will contribute in building a society of tolerance and harmony in today's strife-ridden world."

The time has come to place Bangladesh's struggle in the context of national liberation struggle of the nations of the third world. If we take this perspective, then we can get a deeper understanding of the role Bangladesh played in the march for freedom in a post-colonial world and the leadership given by Bangabandhu. The inclusion of the March 7 speech as MOW has drawn the attention of all to the broader significance of this struggle. Sheikh Mujib, delivering such a speech, deserves a rightful place among the leading figures of national liberation struggles all over the world, and it is our duty to do the historical analysis and research to put post-colonial history into proper perspective and be the proud possessor of a Memory of the World in its truest sense. That calls for a struggle of emancipation of history and recognition of the leadership of the wretched of the earth. Bangabandhu, through his call for freedom, will be with us in the struggle that lies ahead.

Mohidul Hoque is a cultural activist and essayist. He is the founder trustee of the Liberation War Museum.

# The voice that touched people's hearts

SM MASUM BILLAH

THE March 7 address by Bangabandhu—the great poetry of our emancipation—is a time-tested speech. This great speech still ignites people. It flames forth our unquenchable thirst for justice. It makes us move in tune with the spirit of the Liberation War. Martha Nussbaum calls it a 'love', and thus distinguishes it from the simple embrace of principles. This love involves the feeling that the nation is *one's own*. Consider "*bhayer amār*" or "*amar manush*" from the March 7 Speech or "*Amar Sonar Bangla*" from our national anthem, you will see a ground for this claim.

The art of oratory occupies a special place in our history. Sher-e-Bangla's oratory, for example, is omnipresent in our historical narratives. When he would speak, it would move everyone no matter what their socio-economic status. For Bangabandhu, eloquence was one of his many defining leadership qualities. The March 7 speech spanned for 19 minutes, but if you hear it, you get the feeling that it lasted for a moment.

Every utterance of the address can form the basis of a ballad to express the intensity of the Bangalis' political emotion. Bangabandhu starts with an inclusive term, *Bhayera amar*, and by that compels the masses to attention. He acknowledges and respects people's wisdom by saying *apnara shobi janen, ebong bojhen*. He narrates the context, injects a strong emotion directed to a general welfare, involves our hearts in something beyond greed and egoism. He establishes the justification of the demand for independence. He echoes peoples' thirst for a constitutional government and mentions that the people wanted to see the Constitution framed for economic, political and cultural emancipation.

Bangabandhu goes into the core principle of democracy when he says, "despite our majority, we would still listen to any sound ideas from the minority, even if it is a lone voice, I support anything to bolster the restoration of a constitutional government." Perhaps, the weightiest dictum he utters in the speech is: "the struggle this time is a struggle for freedom, the struggle this time is a struggle for independence." Bangabandhu uses the word "independence" as a leitmotif of "emancipation". He is precise and clear when he says, "what I want is justice, the rights of the people of this land." He respects the people, saluting them expresses his gratitude: "they rescued me with their blood from the conspiracy case. So, I uttered that day, right here at this racecourse, I had pledged to you that I would pay for this blood debt with my own

blood. Do you remember? I am ready today to fulfil that promise!" Bangabandhu kept his promise, ironically in his independent Bangladesh on the horrifying night of August 15, 1975.

Bangabandhu provides a complete guideline about how the country would run in his absence. Then comes his great revolutionary utterance, "use whatever you can get hold of, to confront this enemy...seven crore people of this land cannot be cowed down." Bangabandhu notes the price for independence: "the Bangali people have learned how to die for a cause and you will not be able to bring them under your yoke of suppression." Then comes the thunderstorm: "if a single bullet is fired upon us henceforth if the murder of my people does not cease, I call upon you to turn every home into a fortress...since we have given blood, we will give more

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of it. But Insha'Allah, we will free the people of this land."

Bangabandhu's power in igniting public emotion can be explained by relating the March 7 speech into the thoughts of the French historian Joseph Renan. Renan compellingly argues that the idea of a nation involves a story of the past, usually a story of the adversity and suffering, and then a commitment to the future worth fighting for. For Renan, the concept of "nation" is not merely geographical but also spiritual. Renan thinks that "where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties and require a common effort." Bangabandhu translates Renan's "spiritual principle" by telling the story of the past in a locomotive manner:

"1952 shaale rokto diyechi..." and so on.

Professor Anwar Pasha's novel *Rifle Roti Aurat* offers a useful illustration of Bangabandhu's spiritual principle. Professor Pasha writes: "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—is not only a name but also a souvenir of the self-dignity of the Bangalis...and also of jovial life. The Bangalis who heard Bangabandhu at the Racecourse on March 7, 1971, just for once, would surely turn into a new human entity." Pasha depicts Bangabandhu at the altar of *Shaheed Minar* on February 21, 1971 with his powerful analogy. That Mujib of February 21, 1971, was the very Mujib two weeks later on March 7, 1971, with that thunderous voice! Did any Bangali ever hear a voice like that before? Perhaps, they found the same force in Shashanka or in Hussein Shah or in Siraj—Chief Mohanlal or in the voice of Netaji Shubhas Bose.

Poet Nirmalendu Goon even travels beyond Professor Pasha. In his famous poem, *sadhinota ei shobdoti khibabe amader holo*, Poet Goon in a versatile style resonates that we adore the word *sadhinota* as ours from the very day of March 7 when Bangabandhu utters, "*ebarer songram amadermuktir songram, ebarer songram sadhinotar songram!*" Indeed, March 7 speech places Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a remarkable standing as the Father of the Nation. Farooque Chowdhury said: "(at this event of March 7) the terms of changing the political map started and got embedded in the deepest sense of the seven-crore people...the speech to a rebellious armed soldier was a green signal for entering into the war, to a pen-held intellectual, was an infallible direction and to the mass people of Bangladesh was the great utterance of emancipation."

The Newsweek, in its April 5, 1971 issue sketches a similar emotive figure and an artistic altruism of Sheikh Mujib by terming him a "poet of politics." The magic of the speech is that it never becomes monotonous. Therefore, it is erroneous to regard it simply as a politician's speech; rather, it can be compared with the tune of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, behind whom successive generations run being overwhelmed by its magical power. It is not an address of 19 minutes, but a reservoir of the ideology Bangabandhu had professed throughout his political career and instilled in us a powerful national political emotion. We should assemble every March 7 at the *Suhrawardy Uddyan* to rejuvenate ourselves in the spirit of the Liberation War.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Quota disparity in job services

Bangladesh is a densely populated country where unemployment is a huge problem. The government is one of the largest job providers in the country, but its existing recruitment process is responsible for exacerbating the unemployment problems.

In BCS exams, for example, 56 percent of posts are reserved for the candidates with quota privilege, who account for around one-fourth of all candidates. Three-fourths of the candidates here fight for less than half of all available job positions. This is unacceptable.

Some quota privileges are understandable, but the existing quota system is beyond normal. The purpose of having a quota system is to help the marginalised section(s) of society, thereby ensuring equality. But our system is rather discriminatory. I urge the government to bring an end to this discrimination and make the public recruitment process equal for all.

Shaker Riaz, University of Dhaka

