

Historic 7th March A red-letter day for Bangladesh

FOR Bangladesh, several days are embossed in gold in its history. March 7 of 1971 is one of them, for it turned the course of history for the nation and the subcontinent as a whole. The day, 49 years ago, stands out for two main reasons—the oratorial brilliance of Bangabandhu demonstrated in the 23 minutes of extempore delivery tempered by logic, reason and sobriety, and delivered without a pause or hesitation. It stands out also for the substance as well as the soul of the words that Bangabandhu uttered in the impassioned speech to the Bengalis in 1971, which will rate among the best speeches by any world leader in the annals of world history. It was also the day that the nation, under Bangabandhu's direction, started its final preparation for the concluding stages of the liberation of the people and the formation of an independent nation, with a Flag and a Country of its own. It laid out clear guidance for the Bengalis as to how to conduct themselves during the interregnum and issued a warning to the Pakistani military junta to shun the path of violence and force.

The speech, which has been included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register as a "documentary heritage", encapsulates brilliantly the struggle of the Bengalis for their political rights. For the Bengalis, post-1947 was the continuation of the yoke of deprivation and repression under British rule, despite being the majority. It was an authentic testimony of the failure of multicultural and multiethnic societies to coagulate as a nation under misrule, motivated by prejudice and a politically bigoted polity that was unwilling to feel the pulse and the sentiments of the majority of the people and concede to the majority will.

The speech was also effectively a declaration of the independence of Bangladesh, if not a direct call to arms. For the final words of the memorable speech, "The struggle this time is for emancipation; the struggle this time is for independence", carries no other meaning. And those are the words that launched the people into the final phase of the independence struggle of the Bengalis, our glorious Liberation War, from March 26, 1971.

We need more research to develop the SME sector

The authorities should heed the PM's directives

THERE is no denying the fact that in order for our small and medium enterprise (SME) sector to fully flourish, more research needs to be done on demand, production, and marketing of SME products. Our Prime Minister has rightly stressed this urgent need while addressing a programme in the capital recently. While the PM asked researchers to find solutions to meet the demand for raw materials of SME products, she also directed them to ensure that these are supplied locally. Another important factor highlighted by her was that products should be made taking into account the demand of the buyers.

Although small and medium enterprises have the potential to create numerous jobs and increase contributions to the gross domestic product (GDP), the contribution of the sector to our economy is still negligible, a recent study conducted by the International Cooperation Organisation for Small and Medium Enterprises in Asia, Japan, has found. The contribution of SMEs to the GDP is only 20.25 percent in Bangladesh, whereas it stands at 80 percent in India and 60 percent in China. Some of the key reasons why the sector has not developed properly are: scarcity of fiscal incentives, management problems, access to finance and bureaucracy. Another study done by the World Bank Group and the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh last year found that access to finance for SMEs is limited in Bangladesh, compared to the average in South Asia.

Since the barriers for SMEs to grow here have already been identified, it is now time for the government to address these issues and give the sector a boost. Although the sector currently accounts for 35.49 percent of the total employment in Bangladesh, if developed properly, the sector will surely have the capacity to create job opportunities for a large section of our unemployed youth. To that end, we need to take proper policy initiatives, including increased research, in this sector.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Will noise pollution ever end?

It is indeed very unfortunate that schools which are located by the roadside tend to suffer horribly from the unavoidable noise pollution that surrounds us. The constant honking is like a curse for us students as it hampers our day to day activities at school. What make the situation even worse is the fact that we are unable to concentrate, especially during our examinations. And as a result, it has a negative impact on our grades too. Furthermore, exposure to such high levels of sound pollution may have grave consequences on human health, as well as on the conditions of foetuses in pregnant women.

The seriousness of this calamity cannot be ignored at any cost. As a regular reader of this daily, I have noticed that much has been written about the horrors of noise pollution and many probable solutions were also provided. But sadly, there has been no improvement whatsoever. I earnestly urge the responsible authorities to take the matter into consideration urgently. We can start small, perhaps by controlling the noise pollution near schools and hospitals, and later implement it across our society till we are able to calm the chaos.

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STRAIGHT
LINEMUHAMMAD
NURUL HUDA

IT is now an admitted fact that in the treasury of the world's great speeches, the historic March 7 speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman occupies a special place of honour and prominence. This speech gained international recognition when UNESCO enlisted the historic speech as part of the world's documentary heritage. It has also been included in the "Memory of the World Register", a list of the world's important documentary heritage maintained by UNESCO.

The book *We shall fight on the beaches: The Speeches that Inspired History* by Jacob F Field, which is a collection of "extracts from the most rousing and inspirational wartime speeches of the last 2500 years—Cicero to Churchill, Lincoln to Mao", also included Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic March 7 speech (which effectively declared Bangladesh's independence) as one of the most rousing and inspirational wartime speeches in the last 2,500 years.

The speech had electrifying effects. It transformed the then 75 million people into a people's army, ready to fight till their last blood for the independence of their motherland. It proved to be momentous when the call for action came in the early hours of March 26, 1971.

Former Vice Chancellor of the University of Dhaka and Professor of Mass Communication AAMS Arefin Siddique observes, "Bangabandhu completed this timeless speech in 19 minutes by uttering between 58 and 60 words per minute. In broadcasting theory, 60 words per minute is considered to be an ideal. There were no annoying repetitions in the speech of 1,107 words. There were no unnecessary articulations—only the gist or core points. However, repetition at one or two places reinforced the inner meaning of the speech."

Bangabandhu started his address like this: "My dear brothers, I have come before you today with a heavy heart. All of you know and understand how hard we have tried. But it is a matter of sorrow that the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rangpur and Rajshahi have today become coloured with the blood of my brothers. Today, our people (*Banglar manush*) want freedom, they want to live, they want their rights." It was a highly effective introduction to the speech, which laid the foundation for the main address and provided indications to the audience regarding what was to follow."

Professor Siddique added, "if the contents of the speech are analysed, it is seen that it was basically a message about the emergence of a new State on the global map and a notification cum narrative on the winding up of the eastern region of the then Pakistani state as a natural progression."

An essential characteristic of a statesmanlike and authoritative speech is not only to familiarise the audience with future initiatives and work-plans, but also to motivate and inspire them to participate actively. Bangabandhu's words were inspirational: "I call upon you to turn every home into fortresses, confront the enemy with whatever you have and close all roads for life even if I am not around to give orders." The 75 million people of Bangladesh accepted these orders as more than mere directives. A humanitarian outlook was a key feature of Bangabandhu's character. The March 7 speech demonstrated that his liberal humanism did not diminish even while issuing stern warnings. While standing on the crossroads of life and death of

done in Bangabandhu's speech. The following part of his address shows that there was no change in his humanitarian approach even while announcing tough programmes: "I want to pronounce clearly that the courts, offices, criminal courts and educational institutions will remain closed from today, indefinitely. Other items will remain outside the purview of the strike, so that the poor don't suffer and my people do not endure hardship. Rickshaws, horse-drawn carriages, trains and launches will run; only the Secretariat, Supreme Court, High Court, Judge Court, and semi-government offices like WAPDA shall not operate."

When Bangabandhu said towards the end of his speech, "Set up action committees under the leadership

"we must say one thing" while concluding a speech. But Bangabandhu directly entered the "speech definition" in his historic address—through an appropriate application of communication theory, which was quite unthinkable 49 years ago.

In his address delivered on June 4 1940, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said: "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender." Here, "we shall fight" was the definition of that speech.

Although the historic March 7 speech was extempore, there were no repetitions and hesitations in framing words, as usually observed in such speeches. It was



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivering his March 7 speech.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

a nation, he cautioned, "We will starve them of food, we will deprive them of water." But this was immediately followed by words of reassurance: "You are my brothers—stay in the barracks, and nobody will tell you anything. But do not attempt to shoot at my heart." This coexistence of hard and soft attributes could always be observed in the magnanimous Bangabandhu.

Bangabandhu followed properly the rules of "put the attributes first" while making references to quotations. He made comments after mentioning the source first. For example: "Bhutto said, he would not go;" or, "Yahya Khan took over the government. He said, he would give a constitution and democracy to the country—we accepted."

The main job of a public speech is setting an agenda, which was repeatedly

of Awami League in all villages and townships, and remain prepared with whatever you have. Remember, since we have learnt to give blood, we shall give more of it—we shall free the people of this land by the grace of Allah"; it showed that he could keep the audience hooked with a high degree of efficiency by applying the art and techniques of communication theory.

The last sentence of Bangabandhu's March 7 speech—"The struggle this time is for emancipation! The struggle this time is for independence!"—was effectively a declaration of independence expressed with a firm resolve, which had, in fact, defined the speech. The way he concluded the speech tallied exactly with textbook communication theory. It is said, don't drag out your conclusion. We often use words like "in conclusion" or

possible for Bangabandhu alone to deliver such an unostentatious, direction-giving, poetic speech without any break and without taking any help from notes, while standing in the middle of a sea of people. That is why, the international periodical Newsweek termed Bangabandhu as a "Poet of Politics" in the cover story of its April 5, 1971 issue. This speech was literally a revolution—which culminated in our Liberation War and freedom. Such spectacular application of words was truly an amazing event.

The March 7 address of 1971 was not only the greatest political speech in the Bengali language; it is one of the best in the entire world. This speech was simultaneously the declaration of our independence and the inspiration of our Liberation War.

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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 "*bhayera amar*" (my brothers) or "*amar manush*" (my people) from the March 7 speech or "*Amar Sonar Bangla*" from our national anthem, and 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 socioeconomic status. For Bangabandhu, eloquence was one of his many defining leadership qualities. The March 7 speech spanned 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 elevates people's wisdom by saying "*apnara shobi janen, ebong bojhen*" (you all know and understand everything). 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 emancipation, 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 most, saluting them and expressing his gratitude in this way, "they rescued me with their blood from the conspiracy case. So, I uttered that day, right here at this racecourse, I 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 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."

Bangabandhu kept his promise, ironically in his independent Bangladesh on that baneful night of August 15, 1971.

Bangabandhu provides a complete guideline on how the country would run in his absence. Then comes his great guerrilla utterance, "use whatever you can get a 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 of it. But Insha'Allah, we will free the people of this land."

Bangabandhu's power in creating public emotion can be explained by relating the March 7 speech to 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 adversity and suffering, and then a commitment to a 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 rokti diyechi...*" (we gave blood in 1952) and so on.

Professor Anwar Pasha's novel *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 the Shaheed Minar on February 21, 1971 with his powerful analogy. That Mujib two weeks later on March 7, 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—in Chief Mohanlal or in the voice of Netaji Subhas Bose.

Poet Nirmalendu Goon travels beyond Professor Pasha. In his famous poem, *shadhinota ei shobdoti kibhabe amader holo* (freedom—how did this word become mine), poet Goon in a versatile style resonates that we adore the word *shadhinota* as ours from the very day of March 7 when Bangabandhu uttered, "*ebarer shongram amader mukti shongram, ebarer shongram, shadhinotar shongram*" (The struggle this time is for emancipation; the struggle this time is for independence). Indeed, the March 7 speech places Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a remarkable standing as the Father of the Nation. Farooque Chowdhury said: "The terms of changing the political map started (on March 7) and was 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."

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, overwhelmed by its magical power. It is not an address of 19 minutes, but a reservoir of the ideology Bangabandhu 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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EDITORIAL

Bangabandhu's galvanising speech of March 7

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