

SHAHEED ASAD DAY

'The biggest way to show respect to the martyrs is to know their history well'

January 20 is observed as Shaheed Asad Day. On this day in 1969, Amanullah Mohammad Asaduzzaman, an MA student of Dhaka University and a leader of the East Pakistan Students' Union, was killed by the Pakistani police forces while students were holding processions against the repressive regime of Ayub Khan, breaking Section 144 of the constitution imposed by the government. Renowned actor and Member of Parliament Asaduzzaman Noor, who was a student activist during that time, talks to The Daily Star's Naznin Tithi about some of the historical events of that time and the day on which Asad sacrificed his life, turning the movement against Pakistani oppression into a mass uprising, which eventually led to our Liberation War.

How do you remember January 20, 1969, the day Asad was killed by the Pakistani forces?

In 1969, I was a student of Dhaka University and a resident of Iqbal Hall (now Zahurul Haq Hall) which was the centre of all political activities of that time—all the political programmes would be decided and declared from that hall. During that time, the Six Point Movement by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was gaining popularity among people. The West Pakistani rulers were scared of this because they knew the seeds of East Pakistan's independence were sown in the six points. In January, 1969, the Sarbadaliya Chhatra Sangram Parishad (All Parties Student Resistance Council) was formed. The then Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducusu) VP Tofail Ahmed was the convener of the council. The Parishad added another five points with the six points of Bangabandhu and announced its 11-point charter. At that point, people like Mahbubul Haq Dolon and Nazim Kamran Chowdhury, who were part of the National Student Federation (NSF), left that organisation and joined with the students' 11-point movement, which was a very significant development.

As the 11-point demands were gaining popularity among the students, the peasants and labourers also started to join the movement. The demand for the release of Sheikh Mujib (yet to be Bangabandhu) and withdrawal of the Agartala conspiracy case were the most popular demands, while the demand for the autonomy of East Pakistan was also very prominent. The popular slogans were:

"Padma, Meghna, Jamuna/ Tomar amar thikana."

"Dhaka na Pindi/ Dhaka, Dhaka."

On January 20, 1969, a strike was announced by the students to put pressure on Ayub Khan's government to fulfil their demands. During that time, the political parties also formed a forum named Democratic Action Committee (DAC), which held some programmes that day. The



Cultural activist and MP Asaduzzaman Noor.

PHOTO: STAR

Sarbadaliya Chhatra Sangram Parishad had announced that a demonstration would start from Dhaka University and move towards Shaheed Minar, and the political parties were supposed to start a procession from what is now the General Post Office area and move towards Gulistan. Being a student of Dhaka University, I participated in the students' procession. When we were marching towards the Shaheed Minar, police attacked our procession and sprayed coloured hot water on us. The clash between police and students started even before we crossed Jagannath Hall. At one stage, the police retreated. There was another procession which came from Changkharpool and was trying to cross Dhaka Medical College to move towards Shaheed Minar. Asad was in that procession. When the protest march was in front of what is now Dhaka Medical College Hospital's (DMCH) main entrance, police fired on the procession and killed Asad instantly. Now, there stands a monument in memory of Shaheed Asad there.

How did Asad's martyrdom impact the political movement of that time? Would you share with us the events between January 20 and January 24 (which is now known as Mass Uprising Day) as you saw them?

After the police shot Asad in the chest, students immediately took him to the Emergency unit of DMCH where the doctors declared him dead. Students became furious at his death and continued the processions with Asad's blood-stained shirt. Immediately after the incident, renowned poet Shamsur Rahman wrote his famous poem *Asader Shirt*. The angry protesters instantly changed the name of Ayub Gate in the city's Mohammadpur area into Asad Gate.

The killing of Asad completely changed the political scenario of that time. Demonstrations erupted all across Dhaka as lakhs of people took to the street. The Chhatra Sangram Parishad announced its programmes—on January 21, there was a protest rally at Dhaka University; on January 22, all the buildings

in Dhaka hoisted black flags; on January 23, students brought out a torch procession; and a complete shutdown of all the educational institutions in East Pakistan was called on January 24. When the *hartal* was being enforced on January 24, police again opened fire on the protesters, killing Matiur, Rustom and three others. In fact, we heard that more people were actually killed by the police but their dead bodies disappeared. From January 24, the movement reached such a level that there was basically no control of the Pakistan government on Dhaka, as well as on the whole of East Pakistan. Both the incidents of January 20 and January 24 gave a serious impetus to our movement. The movement continued with the same pace and on February 21, 1969, Bangabandhu was released from jail and the notorious Agartala conspiracy case was withdrawn. The rest of the events of how we gradually moved towards our Liberation War are known by all.

Did you personally know Shaheed Asad, since both of you were Dhaka University students and were actively involved with politics?

No. I didn't know him personally. As you may know, there were two factions of Chhatra Union during that time—the Chhatra Union Matia group was pro-Moscow, and the Chhatra Union Menon Group was pro-Peking. Although Asad was an organiser of the Menon group, many of us (especially those of us who belonged to the other faction) didn't know him. The reason could be that he was not only a member of the Chhatra Union but was also involved with the Krishak Samity in his village home in Narsingdi. Although he used to spend much of his time in Narsingdi organising the farmers, he would regularly come to Dhaka to perform his organisational responsibilities since Dhaka was the centre of all political activities during that time. On that fateful day, he was in Dhaka and participated in the procession.

I do have a personal story to share relating to Asad's death. I was quite active in Dhaka

during that time and had good relations with many organisations, including the Chhatra League. As the news of Asad's death spread, a lot of people thought that it was me who was killed. The news also spread to the small town of Nilphamari where I grew up. Students from schools and colleges came out hearing the news and brought out processions in Nilphamari town in protest. My mother fell ill after hearing the news. Once I realised the confusion, I immediately sent a telegram to my parents saying that I was alive and well. Later, I met Shaheed Asad's two brothers with whom I still have good relations.

How can we make sure that Shaheed Asad and the other martyrs of 1969 get their due place in history?

It is not possible to give proper respect to a martyr only by observing a day in his name. Our independence and all the national achievements from 1952 till 1971 came through the supreme sacrifices of lakhs of people, particularly our young generation. We should all know about them and the history of their contributions. If you now ask people about Asad Gate or Asad avenue, most of them will probably not be able to answer your question. I think, the lack of interest among people to know history is our weakest point as a nation. And the biggest way to show respect to the martyrs is to know their history well.

Matiur, the schoolboy who was killed on January 24, 1969, participated in the namaz-e-janaza of Shaheed Asad. Who would have thought four days later, he would also become a martyr? I heard from Matiur's father that Matiur ran away from home to participate in the namaz-e-janaza of Shaheed Asad. He fled from home on January 24 as well to participate in the mass movement of 1969. It was remarkable how a schoolboy was inspired with such patriotism and had the spirit to fight for his country and sacrifice his life. Sadly, people do not know much about them. To learn about them and hold their ideals in our hearts are the biggest ways to show them respect.

Pluralism and politics

SUBRATA MUKHERJEE

PLURALISM contends that the modern liberal state is too complex for any single group, class or organisation to dominate society. It regards the political system to be all inclusive and consensual, taking into account everyone's interests and ensuring their satisfaction as a part of a larger group or association.

It affirms the separation of state and civil society and distinguishes economic from political power. It differs from the elite theory that establishes a dichotomy between the ruler and the ruled. It differs also from the classical democratic theory with regard to two crucial aspects: (1) unlike classical democratic theory that perceives individuals as isolated and discrete persons, pluralism views individuals as members of a group that overlaps and accepts that a person in a modern society has multiple identities; (2) It accepts that groups have particular interests and these do not necessarily

advance their political interests, while preventing any individual faction from encroaching on the freedom of others. However, they differ from Madison in not regarding factions as a major threat to democratic associations or as a source of instability or as undemocratic in nature.

They consider the existence of diverse competitive interests as the basis of democratic equilibrium and for a favourable development of public policy. Other than Madison, the pluralists combine Locke's individualism and Dewey's participatory ethic with Burke's concern for continuity and stability.

The pluralists view politics as an arena of resolving conflict between different groups who represent all the dominant interests in a society.

They see conflict, as pointed out by Lipset, to be "democracy's lifeblood" and, as stated by Dahl, to be one of the prime facts of all communities. By accepting conflict as given, they prescribe democratic forums to accommodate it. They concede that some marginal groups might be left out, but assert that all the major streams usually get represented.

They also argue that certain groups try to establish close links with particular departments in the government which may lead to a neglect of other interests.

However, Wilson points to the existence of Whitehall pluralism, meaning that even if one department ignores the interest of a particular group, it is not necessary that others would ignore them as well. Their views could be taken up "by the fact that other departments have checks and have different departmental views accordingly".

The pluralists perceive the state as a balancing factor between departments that represent a range of interest groups.

Thus, interest groups are accepted as the basic building blocks of the theory. Interest for the pluralists means "subjective interests" or "attitudes" according to Truman. Authority is distributed within government, meaning that the state is not controlled and dominated by any single interest.

Yet the state is seldom neutral but mirrors the range of group pressures it faces as "policy arises from the interaction of various social elements", observes Easton. The state attempts to make policy by bargaining between a range of conflicting interests and the government takes into consideration the interests of "unorganised and potential groups" and, therefore, they do not need, according to Truman,



PHOTO: PETER NICHOLLS/AFP

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"organised expression except when these needs are flagrantly violated". Politics, says Dahl, is a constant process of negotiation, with new issues emerging all the time that ensures resolution of conflicts peacefully.

It is thus contended that an explanation of the actual process of politics is an analysis of groups. Policy emerges as a result of constant method of conflict and exchange between different groups, with the government being regarded as just another group. Only by organising themselves into groups could individuals get their interests represented in government.

The state is a distinct organisation that makes policies in response to the innumerable groups exerting pressure on the government. It is accepted that conflict between groups is persuasive within liberal democracy and this conflict rarely threatens the stability of the system. Consensus defining the limits of political action and the framework of policy outcomes ensures political stability.

The pluralists believe that their view has been actualised by the post-Second World War consensual politics both in the USA and Great Britain, endorsing Dacey, who had pointed out that the two countries had begun to evolve a similar political culture as mass democracy began to consolidate.

The essential assumptions of the pluralists are the primacy of economics over politics, and that the major contradictions of capitalism have been resolved by accommodating all the mainstream players within the political arena. Therefore, politics has become

dull, as observed by Lipset, with a nickel more or less. But this tranquillity of Anglo-Saxon fundamentalism received a rude shock—first with Brexit, followed by Trump's unexpected victory in 2016 and impressive increase in his support base, extending it to Hispanics and blacks, and retaining 45 percent of the Republican Party voters after the chaos created by his supporters on Capitol Hill on January 6.

In contrast, the liberals have a support base of 26 percent, which is extremely shallow as three-fourth of the voters are illiberal or at best lukewarm liberal, in a democracy whose fundamentals rest on Lockean liberalism.

According to the World Value survey, 78 percent of Trump voters feel that Trump should not concede; 88 percent of voters believe in the possibility of electoral fraud to change the outcome, 45 percent approve of the attack while 27 percent don't think that the attack was a threat to democracy.

The Republican voters consider the protestors as patriots, while the Democrats view the protestors as extremists and as domestic terrorists. In 2017, 38 percent of Americans, compared to 25 percent in 1995, considered it is a good idea to have a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections and the Congress.

Democracy's success story had always been reflected by two essential factors: (1) politics of accommodation wherein political parties try to incorporate different groups that were not part of the decision-making process and (2) by a logical assertion that

democracy is as much a necessity for economics as for politics. The fact that pluralist democracy had developed fault lines became evident when Clinton defeated George Bush in 1992 mainly because 20 percent of the vote was captured by a third-party candidate Ross Perot.

The latter was the first public figure to caution against the ill effects of globalisation and NAFTA's unviability as it had accommodated an unequal Mexico into a larger grouping, which led to the inevitable shift of capital to Mexico, leaving thousands of steel workers unemployed in the US.

These marginalised groups became the major ones in 2016 to cause the upheaval in the presidential elections that saw Trump emerge victorious. The other issues which propelled Trump to power were fear and anxieties of evangelical Christians and their overwhelming support in 2016 and 2020, immigration issues, relative decline of the US as an economic power and the rise of non-Western powers in general and China in particular.

It is an astonishing fact that the US primarily and Great Britain secondarily have transformed themselves from being nations with minor contradictions to those with major ones, disproving predictions of political culture theorists like Verba. This unprecedented change was accomplished by the incapacity of the US political system to comprehend the deep-rooted alienation experienced by a large number of people who feel cheated by the political establishment.

For the many, the hope of a better future seems bleak and they long for what their parents had. For many, the increasing corporatisation of political life has made the US a false democracy. A major reason for this perception was the Supreme Court decision to treat corporations as individuals and allow unlimited contribution for campaigns and political activities.

A new kind of New Deal for the next decade is also necessary to restore the faith of ordinary citizens in the political system. A democracy has to continually renew itself in this rapidly changing world with periodic political and economic reforms, and well-established democracies like the US is no exception to this rule. To build consensus and maintain social cohesion, democracies would have to extend the politics of accommodation to losers as well. This is imperative in the world of quick change, where life and profession has become increasingly uncertain.

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indicate the absence of general interest. Classical democratic theory assumes the existence of common good thrown up by the democratic system.

Pluralism, like Madison's theory, is preoccupied with factions and pressure groups, for it considers society to be essentially heterogeneous and divergent with diverse aspirations, interests and wills. It accepts Madison's concern for factions and its modern counterpart—interest groups and pressure groups as a natural counterpart of free association in a world where most desired goods are scarce and where the complex industrial system fragments social interests and creates a multiplicity of demands.

Like Madison, the pluralists accept that the basic function of government is to protect the freedom of factions to