

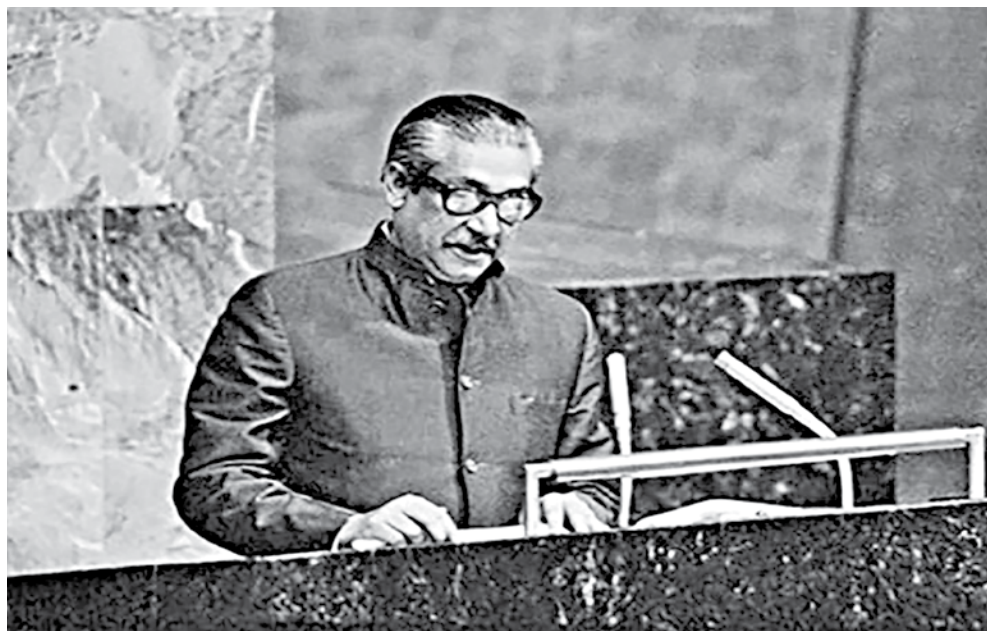
LOVE, PEACE AND FREEDOM: The philosophy of Bangabandhu



ZUNAI AHMED PALAK

BANGABANDHU Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, spent most of his life in politics outside state power. He struggled against colonial and undemocratic regimes—first against the British for nearly seven years, and later against Pakistan for 24 years to establish the economic, political and cultural rights of the Bengalis. If we look into his long, arduous struggles and 3.5 years' rule in independent Bangladesh, he emerges as an exceptional figure to shape the lives of Bengalis and others, transforming the world into a better place. Bangabandhu had a few specific political ideals and goals, and he worked consistently to achieve them. Through his accomplishments, he presented before us and the world a philosophy of love, peace and freedom.

In my opinion, Bangabandhu is one of the greatest leaders the world has ever produced. He acquired his philosophical belief from his love for the people and the country, and through unusual courage, honesty and sincerity. He did not follow Marxist or Maoist philosophy to bring about sociopolitical change—he had his own philosophy. Bangabandhu declared that he would not import socialism from other countries, but he would form a socialist society of our own, keeping democracy, social justice and people's rights undisturbed. The aim was to transform society by establishing socialism in a democratic way and making it functional. At the core of Bangabandhu's philosophy was love for the people. He became the conscience of humanity, and asserted the right of the common people to live with respect. Bangabandhu wrote: "As a man, what concerns mankind concerns me. As a Bengalee, I am deeply involved in all that concerns Bengalees. This abiding involvement is born of and nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to my politics and to



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the 29th UN General Assembly in 1974.

PHOTO: ARCHIVES

my very being." This quote makes it clear how Bangabandhu identified as a human being and as a Bengali. His self-identification thus asserted helps us understand the main features of Bangabandhu's philosophy—love, peace and freedom.

Bangabandhu deeply loved his people and the country. His people were dear to him. It was his people who were his strength and source of power. His biggest weakness was also his love for people. In reply to the question by British TV journalist David Frost—"What is your strength and weakness?"—during an interview on January 18, 1972, Bangabandhu said, "My greatest strength is the love for my people; my greatest weakness is that I love them too much."

Frost also asked, "When you see them digging a grave and you think of everything you have to leave behind you, do you think of your country, or for instance, of your wife and children first?" In reply, Bangabandhu said, "I

feel for my country and my people, and then my family. I love my people more. I suffered for my people and you have seen how many people love me."

Bangabandhu always stood by the poor. He was involved in many social and political movements, such as the movement of the peasants against the introduction of the Jinnah Fund, prohibiting inter-district trade in rice known as the "cordon" system, etc. He supported the movement of the fourth class employees of Dhaka University and was imprisoned in 1949.

Bangabandhu, throughout his whole life, was involved in politics and movements, and talked about people's emancipation from exploitation and oppression. However, he never deviated from his stance of peaceful, non-violent movements. He transformed the Bengali nationalist movement into a movement for independence, following democratic norms and culture, from 1947 to

1970. The movement turned into an armed struggle in March 1971 after the Pakistani military junta refused to hand over power to the Awami League, which secured an absolute majority in the 1970 elections.

Bangabandhu practiced honesty throughout his whole life. He honestly and wholeheartedly supported and fought for the emancipation of the people, and he got this lesson of honesty of purpose from his family. In *The Unfinished Memoirs*, Bangabandhu wrote that his father Sheikh Lutfar Rahman had said, "If you don't study, you won't become a good human being. And one other thing: if you have sincerity of purpose and honesty of purpose, you will never be defeated." Bangabandhu never forgot this advice.

Bangabandhu believed in peace, harmony and equal rights for all people. Though he was involved in the Pakistan movement, he believed that Muslims in India and Hindus in Pakistan should enjoy equal rights as citizens and live together in peace and harmony. Bangabandhu saved both Muslims and Hindus from acts of communal riots that broke out in Kolkata on August 16, 1947. He, along

Bangabandhu not only thought about Bangladesh or regional peace—he also stood for global peace, and against the nuclear arms race and nuclear war. His speech at the 29th UN General Assembly (UNGA) on September 25, 1974 ushered in fresh ideas and policies to build a brave new world free of economic inequalities, social injustice, military aggression and threats of nuclear war. He said, "Peace is absolutely necessary for the protection of the existence of mankind. The hopes and aspirations of all men and women in the world are embodied in this peace. Peace can never be sustainable if not based on justice."

Bangabandhu was a visionary leader. He thought that Bangladesh must adopt science and technology to help expedite building a poverty-free, happy and prosperous *Shonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). He did not forget to seek international cooperation and partnership in resources and technology to alleviate people's sufferings at the UNGA. He said, "There is no room for doubt at all that international cooperation and partnership in resources and technology can facilitate our task, can alleviate people's sufferings. However, the emerging countries like ours should have confidence in their own efficiency. It should be kept in mind that only through the united and concerted effort of the people, we can be able to reach our specific goal, can build a better future."

"This future will be free from the threats of nuclear war. By the equitable distribution of all the wealth and technical knowledge of the world, the door to such welfare can be opened where everyone will have the minimum assurance of a happy and honest life," he said.

The conspirators, in August 1975, killed a great leader and the best Bengali of all time—Bangabandhu, who fought for the cause of people and brought independence. But they could not erase his name. His philosophy and ideology are with us. Freedom-loving people can get the taste of freedom if they follow the philosophy of Bangabandhu.

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In reply to the question by British TV journalist David Frost—"What is your strength and weakness?"—during an interview on January 18, 1972, Bangabandhu said, "My greatest strength is the love for my people; my greatest weakness is that I love them too much."

with Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, actively participated in efforts led by Mahatma Gandhi to establish peace and communal harmony.

Let's not kill the spirit of journalism



PROMITI PROVA CHOWDHURY

"SAFETY first. Because let's face it. If you get injured while covering a protest, your colleagues will come to see you in the hospital, send good wishes to your family, talk about the incident for some days... but that's all." A representative of a top

Bangladeshi 24/7 news channel said this while speaking as a guest for the students of a course on news presentation that I took recently.

Just to put this into perspective, one may recall that 23 journalists have been killed in Bangladesh between 1992 and 2021, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an independent nonprofit organisation promoting press freedom worldwide. Among them, three died while on what the committee described as "dangerous assignments." The number of journalists injured, harassed or intimidated in various other ways over this period would be more, much more.

In February, Borhan Uddin Muzakkar, a reporter for the news website Barta Bazar and newspaper *Bangladesh Samachar*, became the latest casualty when he was shot in the throat while covering clashes between Awami League factions in Noakhali's Companiganj. He succumbed to his injuries the next day.

Elias Mia, a correspondent of *Daily Bijoy*, was murdered in October last year in Narayanganj for "exposing a criminal nexus" in gas line distribution. The 52-year-old was stabbed with a sharp weapon in the Geodhara area while on his way back home.

Journalists—whether a stringer or full-timer—are targeted or become collateral victims in an atmosphere of intense political tension in Bangladesh. Five of the victims listed by CPJ—Ahmed Rajib Halder, Ananta Bijoy Das, Avijit Roy, Niloy Neel, and Washiqur Rahman Babu—were freelancers who were hunted down by religious extremists

because of their views.

Bangladesh has slipped one notch in this year's World Press Freedom Index. It ranked 152nd out of 180 countries, according to the report released in April by Reporters Without Borders.

Curiously enough, despite this dire situation, we now have 37 television channels, 1,277 daily newspapers, and more are on the way, indicating a fast expansion of the industry. The media landscape of the country is also equally dominated by social media and citizen journalists.

In 1993, only three universities offered undergraduate and graduate journalism, mass communication and media studies degrees in Bangladesh. This increased to 21 by the end of 2016, according to a paper titled "Journalism education in Bangladesh" published by the Deutsche Welle Akademie.

Apart from the universities, the government-run Press Institute of Bangladesh has been giving in-profession training for working journalists since its establishment in 1976. The other significant providers of journalism education in Bangladesh are NGOs, which occasionally offer trainings for in-profession journalists on issues like gender, environment and business.

Seeing such prospects, many juvenile minds are perhaps harbouring the dream of becoming a journalist. But the burning question is, how many of them are actually willing to pursue a career in journalism and then stick to it? How many of them are willing to take the risks that come with the thrill of travelling, being creative, and serving the core purpose of being the voice of the people and contributing to the betterment of society?

Alongside security concerns, low salary and lack of job security, family pressure is often a much bigger inhibiting factor for journalists. As a result, many who start with enthusiasm eventually move on to other fields. In fact, the doubt is sown much earlier when in their undergrads, students are advised by their families and well-wishers to keep courses like business, English, public relations, etc. as



PHOTO: COLLECTED

back-ups in case things get problematic or not turn out to be as well as expected.

It seems there is a long road ahead to ensure the protection, safety, and welfare of journalists in Bangladesh. A staggering 1,600 journalists lost their jobs in 2020 due to the closure and loss of income of media outlets during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Article 19 Bangladesh and South Asia's annual report on Violation of Freedom of Expression in Bangladesh.

It is expected that any government in any part of the world will be wary of the activities of media houses and journalists, as the very nature of the fourth estate is to keep the authorities in check. It will always be the watchdog over any form of power, be it political or otherwise.

being made indiscriminately and the so-called offenders being kept behind bars for indefinite periods. Citing data from Bangladesh's Cyber Crime Tribunal, Amnesty International recently stated that 10 newspaper editors faced legal charges under the DSA for critical reporting on leaders of the ruling Awami League in 2020.

So, with the growing number of instances of journalists and their families being threatened, assaulted, abducted, or worse, it is likely that many creative minds with noble intentions might just drop their aspirations of serving the world through journalism and move to other, safer professions.

In these turbulent times, we need good, inspiring examples to turn the tide around in Bangladesh. For example, the judiciary can and should set strong examples by sentencing those responsible for crimes against journalists through speedy trials. Other responsible state institutions should also come forward to protect the public good that journalism is through greater cooperation with the media, and by removing the roadblocks that exist in the way of accessing vital information for the sake of the interests of the nation. Also, aside from book lessons and assignments, schools offering journalism courses should provide practical tips and advice to their students wishing to pursue a career in journalism. This will inspire and enable them to pursue their careers with more confidence.

Unregulated distribution of licenses to TV channels and newspapers may lead to mushrooming of media outlets, but not the safety of journalists, or freedom of expression. It is high time the authorities paid more attention to improving the quality of journalism and ensuring greater press freedom in Bangladesh, rather than focusing on the quantity of media outlets. Society as a whole should be more supportive of the press, especially the serious press, for the sake of this industry as well as its own.

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QUOTABLE Quote

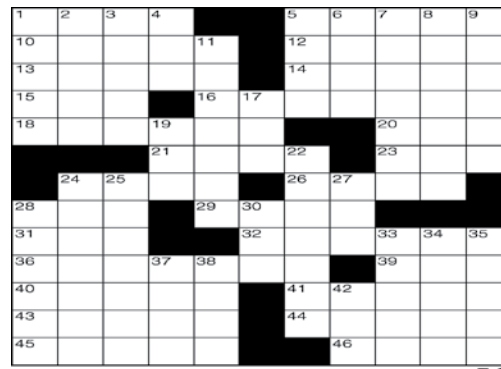


TOM SMOTHERS (born February 2, 1937) American comedian

The only valid censorship of ideas is the right of people not to listen.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Restaurant star
 - 5 Set off
 - 10 Intensify
 - 12 Chair repairer
 - 13 Start of the Spanish year
 - 14 Battery part
 - 15 Blunder
 - 16 Set down
 - 18 Siamese baby
 - 20 Owned
 - 21 River of Russia
 - 23 Golfer Ernie
 - 24 Jason's ship
 - 26 Affectation
 - 28 Ga. neighbor
 - 29 D.C. team, familiarly
 - 31 Hackneyed
- DOWN**
- 1 River feeder
 - 2 Painter Rousseau
 - 3 Tennis star Chris
 - 4 Cat coat
 - 5 Superfruit berry
 - 6 Gasp for air
 - 7 One more
 - 8 Gives out new
 - 9 Directions
 - 11 Boot, say
 - 17 Vaccine basis
 - 19 Gentle pull
 - 22 Selena and J.Lo, for two
 - 24 Cackle from a greedy person
 - 25 Glow
 - 27 Follower's suffix
 - 28 Encourage
 - 30 Penny prez
 - 33 Shire of "Rocky"
 - 34 Correct, as text
 - 35 Low cards in pinochle
 - 37 Hard trip
 - 38 Sea dogs
 - 42 Went first



SUNDAY'S ANSWERS

A T C O S T C A S T
C O U N T Y A N K A
T A R T A R S T Y X
A G A S S I
S N A P P I Q U E
T E N A G R O U N D
R A T R E A A I D
U T I L I T Y R O I
T O Q U E D Y N E
U N S U R E
C R A G S U B P A R
H A R E E N T I C E
I N K S R E S T E D

BETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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