

MARTYRED INTELLECTUALS DAY

Martyrs and memory



BLOWN' IN THE WIND
Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

The systemic targeting and killing of intellectuals and professionals during the nine-month-long Liberation War of 1971 was a calculated effort to annihilate the foundations of freedom in what is Bangladesh today. Albert Camus once wrote, "Freedom is nothing but a chance to be better." The victims and targets of this selective genocide either aspired to or had the potential to improve the nation. The Pakistani junta and their local collaborators executed the plan to separate the brain from the body of resistance. On the eve of their impending defeat in 1971, the occupying forces unleashed a killing spree with an aim to break the intellectual backbone of a nascent nation.

Over 200 educators, journalists, artists, doctors and engineers were abducted and murdered in the killing fields across the city of Dhaka, particularly in Mirpur and Mohammadpur, on the night of December 14, 1971. Maj Gen Rao Farman Ali made a list of 3,000 intellectuals, according to a diary later discovered in the governor's house. The total number of slain intellectuals is around 1,000. *The Washington Daily News* described this atrocity as "Slaughter in East Pakistan" in its editorial on June 15, 1971, noting, "Naturally, the military regime of President Yahya Khan denies it is committing selective genocide. But evidence mounts that it is cold-bloodedly murdering minority Hindus, Bengali separatists, intellectuals, doctors, professors, and students—in short, those who could lead a self governing East Pakistan."

The positioning of Martyred Intellectuals Day just hours before Victory Day highlights the paradoxical entanglement of suffering and triumph, of sorrow and joy. It symbolises the crucible of sacrifice that is required for a greater positive change. The price of freedom was paid through immense individual and collective loss both before and during the Liberation War. The pattern is echoed in the student-led mass uprising in July-August 2024. The irony is, in 1971, the fight was for freedom against an



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

occupying regime. In 2024, the fight was to reclaim intellectual and moral freedom from an increasingly oppressive regime that was our own. At this critical juncture in history, we must reassess our core values as a nation. The sacrifices of 1971 laid the foundation of hope for generations to come. The martyrs of 2024 stand on the shoulders of those in 1971. Both occasions have left indelible scars on our national psyche. They can impart powerful lessons in resilience and unity.

The systematic annihilation of intellectuals

in 1971 and the violent repression of students in 2024 typify trauma that poses, in Cathy Caruth's phrase, a "crisis of truth." Our nation's collective tragedies have caused a rupture in the continuity of experience that defies rational explanation. How can we explain the fact that the party that guided us through the Liberation War in 1971 could turn against its own people with such cruelty? There is a growing sense of betrayal that fosters

Frustration over the erosion of meritocracy and the monopolisation of opportunities by nepotistic elites motivated the Generation Z youth, who led the July uprising. What began as a demand for fair reform quickly evolved into a larger movement for justice and accountability. The parallels between the Liberation War and the 2024 uprising resonated deeply with the public, expressed through memes, slogans, and graffiti.

connects the present with the past. The night before one of the martyred intellectuals, Dr Fazle Rabbee, was abducted, his wife dreamt of her family visiting a tomb in Mecca. The physician interpreted it as his impending death and shared his premonition with his family. These anecdotes serve as a reminder of the human side of sacrifices, often overlooked in the tally of figures and numbers.

We should use Martyred Intellectuals Day as an opportunity to meaningfully engage with their memories. We should try to discern the symbolic significance of such personal and collective loss. More importantly, we should use the day to remind us of the peril of viewing freedom as an inherited gift that we can take for granted. Protecting freedom requires vigilance and sacrifice. Freedom is not only a political entity. It has intellectual, cultural, and moral dimensions. Then again, we will be doing a disservice to the countless ordinary people, without whose sacrifice these movements would never have been possible. While focusing solely on intellectuals, it's important to remember that during the Liberation War, the majority of participants were peasants. Similarly, ordinary men and women, facing significant challenges, bravely battled to reform the system, thereby bolstering the student-led mass uprising in 2024. Highlighting a part without recognising the whole can present a history with many holes.

The onus is on the leaders who are backed by students. Celebrating the contributions of specific groups may risk appearing selective. For greater unity of the country, we need "re-membering"—a process of collective recollection that shapes our identity as a nation. Forgetting the sacrifices of our martyrs would mean losing sight of our essence as a people.

History takes on different forms as it unfolds, revealing new opportunities and challenges with each era. The triumphs of 2024 are moments of both pride and sorrow, standing on a foundation built by the sacrifices of 1971. The intellectuals who perished laid the groundwork for every subsequent victory, providing a moral compass to guide the nation through its struggles. To disrespect their legacy would be to undermine the very foundation of Bangladesh's identity. By critically engaging with history and freeing it from monolithic narratives, future generations can carve out their own stories, standing firm against oppression while championing intellectual freedom and justice.

The Republic TV's gospel of gibberish



H.M. Nazmul Alam
is lecturer at the Department of English and Modern Languages of the International University of Business, Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT). He can be reached at nazmulalam.rijohn@gmail.com.

H.M. NAZMUL ALAM

The magnificent, maddening, melodramatic world of Republic TV, where facts take a back seat and shouting is a virtue. It's a place where Arnab Goswami, India's loudest voice box, reigns supreme, and his Bangalore counterpart, Mayukh Ranjan Ghosh, tries valiantly to match his decibel levels.

For the uninitiated, tuning into Republic TV is like walking into a soap opera. Every broadcast feels like an audition for the role of a lifetime—except Arnab isn't acting; he believes he's India's moral compass and, on occasion, its official spokesperson. Meanwhile, Mayukh crafts his own absurd tales, convinced that every tea stall in Bangladesh is a secret meeting ground for anti-Indian conspirators.

Arnab Goswami wasn't always the yelling sensation he is today. Once upon a time, he was a relatively calm and collected journalist. A graduate of Delhi University and Oxford University, Arnab began his career at *The Telegraph* before moving to NDTV, where he earned a reputation as a balanced anchor. That all changed

when he joined Times Now in 2006 and launched his signature show *The Newshour*. This was where the seeds of his now infamous style were planted. By the time he founded Republic TV in 2017, Arnab had transformed into a fully fledged shouting machine, with his iconic catchphrase "The nation wants to know" becoming less of a question and more of a command.

Arnab's evolution from journalist to demagogue can be traced through a series of controversies that highlight his penchant for sensationalism over substance. One of the earliest incidents that cemented his reputation was his coverage of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Arnab turned his studio into a theatre of outrage, lambasting government officials and questioning their patriotism. His fiery rhetoric resonated with a section of the middle class, who saw him as a voice of their frustration.

But Arnab's true colours began to show when he started prioritising narratives that aligned with the ruling BJP's agenda. During the 2019

Pulwama attack and the subsequent Balakot airstrikes, Arnab's coverage crossed the line from patriotic to propagandistic. Leaked WhatsApp chats revealed that he had prior knowledge of the airstrikes, raising serious questions about his ethics and his proximity to power. The chats also included a chilling moment where Arnab expressed glee over

Republic TV claims to be India's most-watched news channel, and Republic Bangla has a growing fanbase in West Bengal. Their viewers aren't just passive consumers; they're believers, convinced that the duo are the last bastions of truth in a world gone mad. This, of course, is the real danger. Arnab and Mayukh aren't just entertainers; they're propagandists. They use their platforms to spread misinformation, fuel communal hatred, and distract from real issues.

the Pulwama attack, viewing it as a political opportunity for the BJP.

Arnab's relationship with facts is tenuous at best. During the early days of the Covid pandemic, he falsely accused the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary group, of being "super spreaders." This baseless claim fuelled a wave of Islamophobia, leading to hate crimes and social ostracism against Muslims across India. Courts later cleared the Tablighi Jamaat of any wrongdoing, but Arnab, true to form, never apologised or corrected his statements.

Take the time he accused Sonia Gandhi of orchestrating the lynching

of two Hindu monks in Maharashtra. Most journalists would investigate the root causes of such an incident. But Arnab skipped the investigation and hopped onto his moral high horse.

Then there's the infamous TRP scam, where Arnab's Republic Network was accused of manipulating ratings to claim it was India's most-watched news channel. If this were

any other network, it might have been a moment of reckoning. For Arnab, it was just another day at the office. He emerged from the scandal as he does from every controversy: louder, brasher, and utterly unapologetic.

Then there's Mayukh Ranjan Ghosh, Arnab's eager apprentice, Republic Bangla, the Bangla wing of the Republic empire, has taken Arnab's formula and added its own regional flavour. While Arnab is busy accusing Pakistan of plotting world domination, Mayukh has set his sights on Bangladesh. According to him, Chattogram is India's rightful territory, Bangladeshi satellites

are spying on Kolkata, and China is secretly building airbases in the Chicken Neck region.

Mayukh's show, *Jabab Chay Bangla*, has become a cultural phenomenon, not because it's informative but because it's so outrageously absurd. It's the kind of programme you watch with a mix of horror and amusement. His claims are so outlandish that even die-hard Republic fans would sometimes pause and say, "Wait, did he really just say that?"

The real tragedy here is that this isn't just entertainment. Republic TV and Republic Bangla are dangerous because they blur the line between news and propaganda. Arnab and Mayukh don't just report events; they twist them into narratives that fuel division and hatred. The Palghar lynching, for example, wasn't just a tragedy; it became a weapon in Arnab's arsenal, used to vilify political opponents and stoke communal tensions.

Mayukh, too, is no stranger to fearmongering. His rants about Bangladesh are designed to inflame nationalist sentiments and distract viewers from real issues. In one episode, he claimed that Pakistani warships were docking at Chattogram. The Bangladesh Navy, no doubt baffled by this revelation, probably had to check their port schedules just to be sure.

Arnab and Mayukh aren't journalists; they're performers. Their broadcasts are less about informing the public and more about putting on a show. Arnab's trademark shout

is his opening act, his panellists are the supporting cast, and his audience is the unsuspecting victim of this nightly spectacle.

Mayukh, not to be outdone, has perfected his own dramatic flair. His facial expressions range from righteous indignation to exaggerated shock, as if he's just discovered the eighth wonder of the world. His scripts are masterpieces of melodrama, filled with ominous pauses and declarations of doom.

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This, of course, is the real danger. Arnab and Mayukh aren't just entertainers; they're propagandists. They use their platforms to spread misinformation, fuel communal hatred, and distract from real issues. Their programmes aren't about holding power accountable; they're about reinforcing the narratives of those in power.

Viewers need to be more discerning, seek out news sources that prioritise facts over theatrics. Until then, the circus continues. Arnab will keep shouting, Mayukh will keep spinning his tales, and Republic's audience will keep lapping it up. As for the rest of us, we can only watch in disbelief and hope that someday, sanity will return to the screens.

CROSSWORD BY
THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Drift onto the beach
- 7 Parting tool
- 11 Texas city
- 12 Lotion ingredient
- 13 Talked at length
- 15 Twin of Romulus
- 16 Docking spot
- 18 Go by
- 21 Tadpole's home
- 22 Continuing story
- 24 Under the weather
- 25 Buck's mate
- 26 Carnival city
- 27 Prepared potatoes

DOWN

- 1 Spider's home
- 2 Completely
- 3 Mud bath setting
- 4 Enmity
- 5 Theater worker
- 6 Ode or ballade
- 7 Roman ruler
- 8 Archaic
- 9 Cow call

- 10 Writer Jonson
- 14 Indian coin
- 16 Magnet ends
- 17 Cove
- 19 Ambulance sound
- 20 Virtuous fellow
- 21 Card spot
- 22 Lawn starter
- 23 Place to park
- 25 Ocean measure
- 28 Despise
- 29 Venus's sister
- 31 Insertion sign
- 33 Ties the knot
- 34 Look upon
- 35 Pet perch
- 36 One in a hand
- 37 Really enjoy
- 38 Mine rock
- 39 Silent assent

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MONDAY'S ANSWERS

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