

India push-ins need better response

Pursue all options to stop such unlawful expulsions

India's continued expulsion of ethnic Bengali Muslims to Bangladesh, as again highlighted by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) recently, is totally unacceptable. According to HRW's Asia director, "India's ruling BJP is fuelling discrimination by arbitrarily expelling Bengali Muslims from the country, including Indian citizens." By falsely labelling them as "illegal immigrants", Indian authorities are unlawfully deporting Indian Muslims to Bangladesh—at least 200 of whom have since been returned by Bangladeshi border guards after being found to be Indian citizens.

The Indian government has provided no official data on the number of people expelled so far. However, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has reported that India expelled more than 1,500 Muslim men, women, and children to Bangladesh between May 7 and June 15, including around 100 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. Among them, some were found to be Bangladeshi nationals. Others were unable to prove their Indian citizenship due to various factors, including India's controversial new citizenship laws and verification processes. But the bypassing of established legal channels and international obligations renders all such push-ins—whether of Indian citizens, Bangladeshi nationals, or Rohingya refugees—unlawful. Moreover, as HRW has noted, it also reflects the Indian authorities' disregard for due process, domestic legal protections, and international human rights standards.

According to HRW's findings, authorities in BJP-run states such as Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, and Rajasthan have rounded up Muslims, mostly impoverished migrant workers, and handed them over to Indian border guards. In some cases, Indian border guards threatened and assaulted the detainees to force them to cross into Bangladesh, without adequately verifying their citizenship claims. The Indian government has had to readmit dozens of such individuals who ultimately proved their Indian citizenship. One such citizen, a former schoolteacher from Assam, said that Indian border officials tied his hands, gagged him, and forced him into Bangladesh along with 14 others.

Meanwhile, in May, Indian authorities also expelled around 100 Rohingya refugees from a detention centre in Assam across the Bangladesh border. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that Indian authorities forced another 40 Rohingya refugees into the sea near Myanmar, giving them life jackets and making them swim to shore.

Despite repeated protests by our government, India has continued its illegal push-in campaign, in blatant violation of international norms and in an unneighbourly manner. Given these circumstances, while we must keep diplomatic channels open, it is perhaps time for Bangladesh to internationalise the issue and seek intervention from global forums like the UN to ensure that India puts an immediate stop to these operations.

Death toll confusion is unfortunate

Timely, verified updates vital to dispel rumours

Following the Uttara training jet crash that has killed around 30 individuals so far, mostly young students, it is understandable that citizens would be left with deep scars and traumas. The visceral expressions of shock, fear, or anger that we have witnessed since are natural reactions in the face of a tragedy of this magnitude. Right now, we need clarity, closure, and a calm, collective commitment to ensure that such a disaster is never repeated. But confusion and chaos do not help. One particular source of confusion of late has been about the death toll, caused by conspiracy theories based on unsubstantiated claims, which is undermining the vital process of national reckoning.

While the interim government has been rightly criticised for its indecision, mismanagement, and poor coordination and communication—which, to be frank, are symptomatic of a deeper dysfunction that long predates this administration—casting aspersions on the casualty figure only adds to public distress and hampers the collective healing process. Ever since the tragedy, we have seen how misinformation and rumours about death and missing person figures have spread rapidly on social media. That said, the chaotic rollout of information by those in charge is equally responsible for the confusion. We have seen conflicting casualty figures emerge from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), the Milestone School and College authorities, and the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) division of the armed forces. While the revising down of the casualty figure from 32 may be temporary, the fact that the authorities have failed to ensure centralised, coordinated communication has only fed the rumours.

Given the circumstances, it is high time the government set up a national strategic communication unit comprising all relevant stakeholders, so that any update shared is one verified and endorsed by all. The media too has a responsibility in this regard. Media outlets, instead of chasing sensationalism or circulating unverified figures, must uphold the public's right to credible information. At the same time, citizens should exercise restraint and verify facts before sharing content, including graphic videos, online. We must understand that the victims and their families need more than our sympathy—they need dignity, truth, and justice. And the nation needs disaster response systems built on transparency and accountability. Let us do what's required of us instead of creating more problems.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



First woman walks in space

On this day in 1984, Soviet cosmonaut Svetlana Yevgenyevna Savitskaya became the first woman to walk in space.

TRIBUTE TO TAJUDDIN AHMAD ON HIS BIRTH CENTENARY

The unsung leader of our Liberation War



THE THIRD VIEW

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Tajuddin Ahmad was an exceptional leader on many counts. His commitment for the downtrodden, his personal values of austerity, his self-discipline, his ability to focus on the task at hand without being distracted, his unselfish nature, and his determination and fearlessness together made him a rare leader anywhere in the world, especially in Bangladesh where moral values of politicians and their capacity to put the country above their personal interests is always a rare trait.

It is sad that an occasion like the birth centenary of a man like Tajuddin Ahmad is not being celebrated at the national level or by many more civic, intellectual and academic bodies. This is evidence of our lack of respect for history, dismal record of honouring our heroes, and the intellectual bankruptcy and, more sadly, intellectual cowardice in which we now live.

The decision by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 25, 1971 to stay back and court arrest by the Pakistanis and that by Tajuddin to venture into the totally uncertain world of armed struggle to gain our freedom marks for the man—and of course for the nation—the most significant turning point in our history. A lot has been written about Sheikh Mujib's decision to stay back. Many views have been critical and some not so. Arguments exist on both sides. My purpose today is not to discuss the merit or demerit of Bangabandhu's decision but what impact it had on Tajuddin's life.

From being Bangabandhu's second in command, the task for Tajuddin now was to lead the nation. And he did so with stupendous courage, determination, patriotism and exemplary leadership.

When we follow his journey through those nine crucial months and focus on how he evolved from a successful party organiser to the de facto commander-in-chief of our independence struggle, we realise the versatility and strength of his inner potential. He rose to the occasion, expanded his capabilities of thought and action, widened his knowledge and vision, and, most importantly, established

The most serious decision that Tajuddin had to urgently implement was the formation of some sort of internationally acceptable government-in-exile so that our war acquired legitimacy, a visible existence, a command structure that was both representative and authentic. Such a set-up would expedite the process of international recognition and receiving assistance.

his leadership to face the various and unprecedented challenges and served the cause of our independence as no one else. No politician of the era, let alone Tajuddin himself, was remotely prepared to lead in an armed struggle. Yet, with confidence, dignity, strategic instincts, and unmatched integrity, he led the nation in spite of ever new impediments that emerged most damagingly, from within his own party.

To put it simply, his task now was to mobilise the nation to fight and convince the world to help.

Imagine this man, along with his associate Barrister Amirul Islam, hiding in Old Dhaka for the first two days, slipping out of the city disguised as a day labourer, criss-crossing the countryside mostly walking and

sometimes on boat, all the while deeply contemplating how to organise the armed struggle against Pakistan.

The first glimpse that we get of his state of mind is when he reached the border and said he did not want to enter India as a "refugee" seeking shelter but as the "representative of an independent country" seeking assistance. According to Amirul Islam's account, they waited for a long time to hear from the Indian side (Indian border forces had to consult their superiors) and at one point, being extremely tired, fell asleep on a culvert. The man who was destined to become prime minister of the Liberation War government within a few days thought nothing of sleeping on a culvert. That was how his revolutionary mind was already set.

The next testimony of Tajuddin's



Tajuddin Ahmad played a tremendous role in terms of inspiring and motivating our forces during the Liberation War and giving them that crucial psychological and emotional support that troops needed at such a crucial moment in history.

PHOTO: ARCHIVE

mental make-up and exceptional leadership quality is his first meeting with the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The importance and gravity of this meeting cannot be overemphasised. It sowed the seed of a crucial partnership that sailed us through the following crucial nine months of genocide and brutal war.

Here was a man bereft of literally everything except his self-respect and faith in his people's desire to fight for freedom and the willingness to die for it, sitting face to face with the powerful prime minister of the biggest country in the region—with a most famous dynastic heritage—making a case to assist us in our fight for freedom.

According to Barrister Amirul Islam's account published in *Aloker Anantadhara* (Vol 1, Pg 69), Tajuddin said, "... This independence war is ours and we want to do everything ourselves. What we need from you is shelter for the Mukti Bahini in the Indian soil, facilities for training and arms supply. Within two to three weeks there will be a huge influx of refugees whose shelter, safety and food India should help us with. We also need help to let the world know about our independence struggle. We also request your help in the field of diplomacy." The war, he said, was ours. He didn't want it to appear to be an India-Pakistan war, nor a civil war within Pakistan. It was our war for freedom and independence.

The most serious decision that Tajuddin had to urgently implement was the formation of some sort of internationally acceptable government in exile so that our war acquired legitimacy, a visible existence, a command structure that was both representative and authentic. Such a set-up would expedite the process of international recognition and receiving assistance.

This proved to be a serious challenge because of internal dissension. The younger leadership led by Sheikh Moni and Sirajul Alam Khan (as well as Tofail Ahmed, ASM Abdur Rab, and some others), which had emerged quite powerful during the non-cooperation movement of March '71, demanded a revolutionary government. This would give them far more power and manoeuvrability than otherwise. This contrasted with the more mainstream view, carried by Tajuddin and other senior leaders, of gathering a large number of the elected 167 central and 288 provincial members of parliament in Calcutta and forming the government-in-exile with their support.

In forming the government, Tajuddin's formula was to follow the same leadership group that operated under Bangabandhu during the non-cooperation movement. Opting for a presidential form, making Bangabandhu president and Nazrul Islam the acting president, Tajuddin as the prime minister and M Mansur Ali, AHM Qamaruzzaman and Khondakar Mostaq Ahmad as ministers, helped to solve the problem for the moment.

However, the Sheikh Moni-led younger group, though forced to

psychological and emotional support that troops needed at such a crucial moment in history. Tajuddin, who visited the war zones, built a very warm personal rapport with the freedom fighters.

One of his biggest successes was negotiating with the host country, India, and keeping the supply of arms and ammunition going, though not as much as we wanted and needed. Obviously, here the Indian decisions and actions were determined significantly by their own strategic considerations, but Tajuddin was able to always put our needs successfully forward and get his way to keep the operations going.

There are two initiatives of Tajuddin that are not well-known.

First was his attempt to create a platform to forge a unity of all political parties that supported the freedom struggle. He held a meeting in September with the leaders of various parties, including Maulana Bhashani, Muzaffar Ahmad, Comrade Moni Singh, and others. This was an astute move that greatly strengthened the image and prestige of the government-in-exile, especially globally.

Tajuddin also thought ahead and made advance plans of reconstruction

and rehabilitation to be implemented after the creation of Bangladesh. His most significant project was to create a militia force consisting of all the freedom fighters. The idea was to turn the young who took up arms to defeat the enemy into a massive force for nation-building. He did not want to send any freedom fighter home empty-handed but to engage them to build the Sonar Bangla of our dreams.

As we pay tribute to Tajuddin Ahmad on his birth centenary, we must ask ourselves the critical question as to why this man's legacy has been so neglected till date.

The answer lies in the mockery that we ourselves made of our Liberation War history. As regimes would change, so would our history books, the national symbols, the heroes, and school textbooks. Just imagine the harm we have done to the younger generation by tailoring our most glorious legacy into party-centred narratives. Since no pro-Tajuddin party ever came to power, he remained uncelebrated.

Can any nation grow with such a short-sighted, dishonest and myopic view of history? The indifference and lack of respect we see today in the younger generation to the history of our Liberation War is caused, in many ways, by the personal and partisan games we played with our most sacred past, our independence struggle in which we faced genocide, ethnic cleansing, and the prospect of destruction as a nation, not to mention the huge number of lives we lost and many more millions who lost their homes and livelihood. When and how will our mind shift to fact-based authentic history? As I see the degradation of history, falsification of truth and false narratives replacing crucial ones, I wonder how we can rebuild our nation's history based on truth.