

On The Release Of Begum Khaleda Zia: Bangladesh's Greatest Political Legend

Q M Jalal Khan

It was a cynical and sinister-minded quarter release of Begum Khaleda Zia, who may be regarded as the greatest and most admired daughter of Bangladesh. Quite senior in age, she was lacerating in confinement imposed upon her by the tyrannically ruling Sheikh Hasina Wajed's partisan and obliging court in her corrupt police and prison state. By no means, the Hasina regime should have taken the people's leader and unofficially the people's prime minister Khaleda to jail. Yet she was sent to prison in what millions of people think was a politically manipulated miscarriage of justice. In the eyes of the nation, her vindictive conviction, far from being carefully crafted with truth and reason, was foolishly and frivolously premeditated to the exposure of the evil conspiracies of the regime. Proverbially polite, popular and patriotic with an inviolable seat in the hearts and minds of the people of Bangladesh, Khaleda (like Shakespeare's tragic heroines--Lavinia, Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia) remains as innocent as she ever was, without any blotting blemishes that the regime would want to paint her with. It wanted to do so in a pretty loose and lousy manner, quite laboriously, lunatically and frantically.

Just as the Awami black would take no other hue, no Awami-created venom and vitriol would ever touch the image and status of Khaleda, iconically popular and prominent. Arguably or even undisputedly, she is the greatest political legend of Bangladesh ever, too stellar, too phenomenal and too stately to be torn and tarnished by the devilish designs of the fascist regime. With the nation of Bangladesh first and the nation of Bangladesh last, under the banner and legacy of Bangladeshi nationalism, Khaleda stands tall and vindicated as she deserves, uniquely so. No wonder, the people of Bangladesh were besides themselves with joy at the news of her release, no matter how small-minded it was. The Hasina police, particularly Covid-19, were in control of the public outpouring of that joy, pushing the overflow to take the soft and virtual route in this age of social media, which is also, unfortunately, under the tight control of Hasina's digital acts allowing no freedom of expression.

Yet many were swift to express their joy either by humming "ditties of no tone," or in the "heard melodies" of Rabindranath Tagore, to borrow the two immortal phrases from Keats's *Ode*

on a Grecian Urn. Tagore composed a 22-line lyric “আজি বাংলাদেশের হৃদয় হতে কখন আপনি” in 1905 in the context of the Partition of Bengal that he strongly opposed in favor of a united Bengal. Despite, ironically, his “আমার সোনার বাংলা,” also composed about the same time in the same context, has been made, nearly 66 years later, the national anthem of the separate East Bengal that emerged as an independent country, Bangladesh, in 1971. Tagore never wanted Bengal to split, just as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, one of the leading political leaders of Bangladesh, never wanted the united Pakistan to break up into Pakistan (currently, former West Pakistan only) and Bangladesh (former East Pakistan). As the evidence of what he is reported to have said in early 1972 suggests, Mujib also did not like “আমার সোনার বাংলা” to be the national anthem of Bangladesh because, apart from other reasons, the song has had nothing to do with the struggle for the newly independent country. Anyway, turning to the specific subject in question, the first and the last stanzas of the first-mentioned song are as follows:

আজি বাংলাদেশের হৃদয় হতে কখন আপনি
তুমি এই অপরূপ রূপে বাহির হলে জননী!
ওগো মা, তোমায় দেখে দেখে আঁখি না ফিরে!
তোমার দুয়ার আজি খুলে গেছে সোনার মন্দিরো।
(When did you come out of the heart of Bangladesh,
O, Mother dear, with such inexplicable splendor!
It's impossible to take away eyes from you!
The doors of your golden temple have unlocked.)

আজি দুখের রাতে সুখের স্রোতে ভাসাও ধরনী—
তোমার অভয় বাজে হৃদয়মারবে হৃদয়হরনী!
ওগো মা, তোমায় দেখে দেখে আঁখি না ফিরে!
তোমার দুয়ার আজি খুলে গেছে সোনার মন্দিরো।
(You flood the world with the flow of happiness on the distressed nights
O the mindblower, your word of fearlessness drum the heart
It's impossible to take away eyes from you!
The doors of your golden temple have unlocked.)

That is how, especially in the tune of the last four lines, millions of supporters of *DeshNetri* (Leader of the Country) Begum Khaleda Zia and her party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), have expressed their feelings with tears of joy at the news of her release, albeit half-release, from the meanest and most mischievous imprisonment she was suffering from for more than two years.

Horrendously subjected to a number of offishy and flimsy lawsuits cynically harped upon her by the fascist Hasina regime, the 75-year old leader, Begum Zia, was released at the point of her near death with the predicament of a number of stringent strings attached. That also came in the midst of the dangerous corona pandemic that, as if a blessing in disguise, added to the আপোসহীন (uncompromising) *DeshNetri*'s legendary popularity while making the regime's plan of lavish 400-crore taka cult-worshipping *Mujib-and-Modi-and-Tagore-Borso* extravaganza (some say, Awami-BAKSALi Bango-Virus) dull and dreary, vapid and vacuous, almost conspicuous by its absence, as are the press freedom and the freedom of speech.

God/Allah the Almighty does not like the excesses committed in any form, be it torture, tyranny, repression, persecution, abduction, rape, murder, abuse of power, vote rigging, looting, stealing, smuggling, widespread corruption and spendthrift expenditures, especially in a poor country like Bangladesh. It is particularly under Sheikh Mujib and his daughter Sheikh Hasina that those excesses have been and continue to be committed in Bangladesh where millions are unemployed and living below the poverty line, forcing many to look for crumbs from dustbins and waste disposal landfills. However, deprived of the loving company of her immediate family for decades, Khaleda Zia's plight as a political prisoner was further exacerbated by her jail-cell loneliness (cut off from her long political and public career) and her old age complications that allegedly went without adequate medical care in the hospital where she was forced to stay for her treatment.

The ruthless Hasina regime whose members freely fly around and abroad to Singapore and the UK for their treatment did not allow the suffering Khaleda to seek medical care in the hospital of her choice even at home—United. The regime found yet another mean and small-minded opportunity to cause mental and psychological torture to Khaleda by taking her, against her wishes, to a hospital that bore the name of Hasina's father Sheikh Mujib, who, however, remains a controversial figure to the people of Bangladesh and who is not recognized by the political opposition the way the regime would like. Due to her jealous and vindictive nature (like her examples in many other violent men and women in the real life of her Bangladesh today as well as the ancient folklore and Roman and English revenge plays, Sheikh Hasina is inclined to politics of division and destruction, deep and cruel.

Comparable to the vengeful Queen Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's first and bloodiest tragedy, Hasina failed to adopt any constructive measure of peace, unity and harmony

following Khaleda Zia's stately and stateswomanly speech in the parliament in 2009. She (Hasina) could take the lead from the noble opposition leader Khaleda's momentous and memorable speech in which she paid tribute to all the founding fathers of Bangladesh, not just one or two, as they deserved. Khaleda's epoch-making and state building speech could be seized and banked upon by Hasina for the beginning of mending the wall, bridging the gap and uniting the nation on which great goals and aspirations she missed out, lamentably and miserably, for the sole and silly purpose of pursuing her anti-state and Indian backed mean and myopic oppression, repression and persecution in a proto-Nazi-and-BJP-and-RSS style of fantastic fascism.

That is why there are dozens of court cases against Khaleda Zia. That all are fictitious and fabricated is borne out by the fact that there is no criminal evidence whatsoever to implicate her at all. Elsewhere I argued:

When hundreds of millions and billions of dollars have been and are being looted from the banks and businesses every now and then under this regime, Khaleda has been savagely silenced and sentenced for slightly mismanaging a peanut worth (only 2 crore and a half, which, still intact and, in fact, grown into triple the amount, is nothing compared with Hasina's old and octogenarian finance minister Maal Muhith's dismissal of 4000 crores blatantly stolen by others under Hasina's watch as simply nothing and with the countless of other crores brazenly embezzled under the carefully careless connivance of the Awami regime).

In a way, Khaleda Zia's confinement, nastily and nefariously imposed on her by the rogue regime, reminds one of the young English poet and essayist Leigh Hunt. After two years of imprisonment for what the royal authorities unjustly considered a libel (due to a lack of flattery and sycophancy) to the young extravagant Prince Regent (later King George IV), Hunt was released on 2 February 1815. He was a man of liberal politics and wrote his masque *The Descent of Liberty* in prison. His friend John Keats, a major English Romantic poet, eleven years younger than Hunt, celebrated the latter's release by writing a sonnet, "Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison." In the poem, Keats describes his subject as: "Kind Hunt was shut in prison, yet has he/In his immortal spirit, been as free/As the sky-searching lark, and as elate./ Minion of grandeur!" He describes Hunt as one who became more famous, "far happier, nobler was his fate!"

due to his “fortunate incarceration,” to use a borrowed oxymoron, during which he was reading the greatest epic or narrative poets of England, Spenser and Milton, and thereby took “happy flights” with them to the imaginative region of his own.

The politically engineered jail sentence on Bangladesh’s political legend Khaleda Zia bears historical significance when many other great minds—poets, writers, thinkers, philosophers, politicians—faced the wrath of tyrants and met with the similar fate of imprisonment throughout the ages and centuries. Mention may be made of a few politicians and statesmen only, such as the early 6th century Boethius of Rome, Sir Thomas Malory, Mary Queen of Scots, Sir Walter Raleigh, Nelson Mandela, Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia and Mahmudur Rahman of Bangladesh. Similarly, Tarique Rahman in exile is a 52-year old dynamic leader who embodies the spirit of Bangladeshi nationalism and patriotism. He is the torch bearer of the Zia family and Acting Chairman of the BNP, next only to his mother in popularity, way above any Awami leader. He has been suffering and sacrificing for more than twelve years now, facing the fate of the historic exiles, such as the ancient Trojan hero Aeneas, 5th century (BCE) Greek historian Thucydides, 17th century English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, King Charles II, English philosophical historian Edward Gibbon, French philosopher Voltaire, French emperor Napoleon and Russian writer Dostoyevsky.

As mentioned at the outset, Bangladesh’s three-time former Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, of singularly stellar prominence in the politics of Bangladesh, was released from prison on Wednesday, 25 March 2020, after more than twenty five months in jail. It was since February 8, 2018 that Khaleda Zia—a Voice of the Third World/ ‘খালেদা জিয়া : তৃতীয় বিশ্বের কণ্ঠস্বর,’ as a new book by that title (April 2019), by Professor Emajuddin Ahmad and poet Abdul Hye Sikder, describes her—was languishing in jail, confined to a damp corner in a deserted and dilapidated dungeon and then for less than adequate treatment in a jail-cell hospital which was not the hospital of her choice.

Her release followed the temporary suspension (of her seventeen years of a framed and formulated draconian sentence) by an executive order from the horrendously ruling Hasina. The corrupt regime is widely thought to be maliciously manipulating and interfering with the jaundiced, biased and lameduck judiciary as it does with all the rest of the state machinery, including the shamelessly yielding and spineless Election Commissions since 2008/09. Under the power and control that the fascist Hasina regime wields in an absolute authoritarian way as the German Nazis did, the judiciary, far from being free and independent, is willingly or unwillingly

dependent on the regime's regressive and retrograde whims and caprices--an allegation that, as tons of evidences suggest, is an open secret in the popular perception of the people in Bangladesh.

In her critical condition for which the regime's inhuman neglect and illegal imprisonment for years is responsible, the ailing opposition leader, already in her advanced age, cannot move or stand or even sit up on her own; she cannot even use her hand to eat. One can only speculate about the fascist regime's reason/s to release the great leader. There could be a combination of factors: infectious spread of corona, Khaleda's deteriorating health throughout the period of her incarceration in jail, repeated political and family requests for her release, her inability to do anything anyway at this stage—public or political, show of police-power by the tyrannical Hasina through her so-called executive order, international pressure, pressure from human rights groups, and so on.

In addition, there are conspiracy theories as suggested by Ranu Chowdhury of the USA, a former army officer, decorated freedom fighter, diplomat and currently a political analyst and essayist on Bangladesh affairs. Mentioning the case of the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Chowdhury claims he got the clue to those theories from two sources. "Surely, Khaleda Zia was a 'bomb' to Hasina, the reason to put her in jail in the first place. As the bomb continued to tick even in confinement, the regime wanted it to be deactivated sooner than later. So a slow poisoning was administered. Short of six months lifetime, the regime decided to send Khaleda Zia to her family to die. So was the release condition not to go abroad for treatment, which could detect the 'poisoning,' if any. To my query why Khaleda Zia's personal physicians could not detect it, the response was that their চৌদ্দ গোষ্ঠী would be eliminated if they opened their mouth. The second source did not mention the poisoning theory. According to him, the authorities discovered that KZ had six months to live. They did not want it to happen in their custody."

By virtue of being the most popular leader and Chairperson of the largest political party of the country, Khaleda Zia, still actually holds the same laurel of premiership in the people's hearts and minds. Though out of power, she remains the People's Leader and People's Prime Minister, as opposed to the "midnight vote dacoit" regime's prime minister in power—Sheikh Hasina--accused of illegally occupying the office by force and through the wholesale rigging and mugging of votes. Imprisoned by the endlessly repressive regime, to the extent of being fantastically fascistic, Khaleda was put in jail out of the "unelected" and "auto-elected" Hasina's vindictive venom and vitriol. Also popularly called Mother of Democracy and Humanity, Khaleda is Hasina's

only and unbeatable political rival superbly excelling the latter, by all accounts, in every respected aspect of life and leadership—both personal and political: honesty, dignity, decorum, morality, popularity, fairness, firmness, openness, tolerance, truthfulness, democratic principles, nationalist spirit and patriotic impulse.

At Khaleda's release, her party--the BNP, rendered as weak as EC-type toothless and spineless by Hasina-inflicted torture and tyranny through her police/RAB and law courts, rushed to thank the regime: "তারা এ জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে ধন্যবাদ জানান।" Although all credit goes to the extended Zia family and none to the party's useless highest body, which utterly failed to secure its top leader's release either through the legal battle in court or open movement in the streets, its unimpressive General Secretary Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir thanked the regime as though there was an indirect admission of guilt on the part of its freed leader. Simple and senile BNP leadership under the frightened Mirza Fakhrul is only good in swiftly thanking the fascist Hasina and the members of her rogue regime for anything in case they can hope (against hope) for some sympathy from what is one of the dreariest and most oppressive regimes in modern times. The BNP was quick to do so after Hasina's so-called "sea-conquest" against Myanmar; it did so with regards to the initially Hasina-supported *Shah-bugee shontrashis* (terrorists), only to regret and withdraw its hastily made "thank you" in no time. Now it has done so again—extending a “quick rental” thank you, however cold, small and lukewarm it must have been.

People pity the hopelessly poor BNP trying to catch at a straw and swim with its hands and feet tied, brought to its knees by hundreds of thousands of lawsuits filed by the regime against its thousands of both local and national leaders and its rank and file members, most of whom have been busy running back and forth between home and the corridors of courts. Even then, the party, as large as it is, should have been strong enough to hold its ground by standing up to Hasina with a show of people's power.

Unfortunately, its Standing Committee members (some of them being weary and worn-out) are never on the street and can never make it to the street, always remaining seated, as cold and cowardly and homebound as they ever have been. They find themselves in that position of stasis and stagnation and sterility, particularly in the absence of the party's two top leaders--Khaleda and Tarique, both of whom are formidably impressive in their own (exemplary) ways, suffering under the yoke of the Hasina steamroller. It is the fascistically driven Hasina, a Lhendup

Dorji-type stooge of India, who should say sorry a hundred times for the injustice done to the most majestic and most popular leader of Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia.

Khaleda Zia, unofficially the supreme leader of Bangladesh, should not have been in prison in the first place. Nelson Mandela never thanked the white minority government for his release after 27 years of imprisonment because he said he had no reason to thank them for releasing him and that he should not have been put in prison in the first place. One may ask, “Where have the dozens of mega corruption cases against Hasina gone? Where are the hundreds of millions and billions of dollars stolen and smuggled by the goons and gangs, allied with or connived at by the ruling axis? How come the regime is able to get away with its countless lies, blunders, scams, scandals, mischiefs and massacres?”

The weak and poor BNP with their older septuagenarian and octogenarian men, disabled from within and without (minus the two top ailing or exiled leaders) in its upper echelon—the Standing Committee--should have some courage, dignity and integrity; they should not prostrate and kneel down before the autocratic Hasina regime surrounded by and infested with countless crooked elements in looters, smugglers, sycophants, rapists, abductors, murderers, *shontrash* terrorists and intimidators in its different branches and beyond countrywide. To achieve the lowest common denominator with the BNP, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), the least popular, must have weeded out all those culprits and criminals, be they in uniform or white clothes and must have held itself accountable in the conspiracy of the BDR massacre and thousands of other misdeeds and mischiefs committed all across the country, especially in the capital Dhaka.

In an email post, former Bangladesh Ambassador to Japan Serajul Islam says: “The Prime Minister and her ministers had all along maintained that there was nothing that the Prime Minister could do about Khaleda Zia's release because her release was in the hands of the judiciary that was independent of the executive branch. Now the Law Minister says Khaleda’s conditional release was the decision of the Prime Minister.” Similarly, Professor Syed Serajul Islam of Lakehead University Canada says: “What is there to thank PM Hasina for? All along we heard that her government had nothing to do with Khaleda Zia's release or her bail and the court was independent. Now, suddenly, for whatever reason, she is granted conditional release and the Law Minister says Hasina has granted the release. This indicates that Madam Zia has been in jail for personal grudge of Hasina against her formidable rival. I do not see any reason for the BNP to thank Hasina.” One cannot agree more with what the two distinguished people said. The statements made in the present

tense above by them are an ever continuous and customary reality with the administration of the Hasina-brand fascists while the past tense statements are the ever continuous and customary falsehoods and fabrications by the same regime of unprecedented corruption, repression, terror and tyranny.

One cannot but concur with what Ranu Chowdhury says: “Additionally, during the short press briefing, the Law Minister said that the Prime Minister's action was in response to the request made by Begum Zia's family members--he even read out the names--who met the PM. What a demeaning act! Before the journalists asked too many questions, the Minister ran away from the venue. My question: Is it the first time such a request was made? Why such charity!! Why should there be any reason for the BNP to thank Hasina?”

It is in the same manner that Engineer Rashed Anam of the USA writes: “আওয়ামী দখলদার স্বৈরাচার এখন আর বলে না এটা আদালতের বেপার ! বিচার বিভাগ থেকে শুরু করে সমস্ত রাষ্ট্রীয় প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলোই যে একক ভোটহীন অবৈধ স্বৈরাচারীর পায়ের নিচে সেটা আবারো জাতির কাছে নগ্নভাবে প্রদর্শিত হলো ! ৭১ এর চেতনা বটে ! বাকশাল-২ তে স্বাগতম ! খা কাপুরুষ-মিসকিন বিএনপি খা ! স্বৈরাচারীর দয়ার ও করুনার ভিক্ষা খা ! খেয়ে মর ! নিজেরা কিছুই করতে পারে না, রাজনৈতিক মূল্যবোধটা, রাজনৈতিক অবস্থান ও আদর্শের গলাবাজি করার জায়গাটাও রাখলো না ! দেওলিয়া টোটালি ! স্বৈরাচারীর পা ধরে দয়ার ও করুনার উপর ছুড়ে দেয়া উচ্ছিষ্ট খেয়েই অস্থিসর্বস্ব নিয়েই বেঁচে থাক বিএনপি ! Kick out all these imbecile gone case waste case leaders and reform and revive a true professional nationalist democratic political party.”

Highly active in political commentary and campaigning, Zoglul Husain of the UK observes in the same vein as if he were speaking the mind of the entire Bangladesh nation: "The government has committed a grave crime by sending Khaleda Zia to prison on trumped up charges. If it has suspended the sentence for 6 months for its own tactical reasons, there is nothing to thank the government for it. We demand withdrawal of all false charges against her and punishment of all those involved in planning them and the deliberate imprisonment of her. We demand compensation."

DeshNetri Khaleda Zia is Bangladesh's only and unique leader in her nobility, popularity, majesty and magnanimity, all of which match her lofty looks, noble stature, and leader-like garb and gait. She is seriously, perhaps even critically ill at the hands of the crappy and cantankerous Hasina-orchestrated legal game: a decadent spectacle of so-called court after court – high and low. It is the mean and monstrous vote dacoit Hasina who is responsible for Khaleda's near death deterioration. Years of her lonely and unjust detention and the regime's denial of proper treatment

contributed to the worsening of Khaleda's physical and psychosomatic illness. There must have been millions who suffered feeling psychologically and intellectually shocked and shaken at the imprisonment of a person who is also regarded, as mentioned above, as Mother of Democracy and Humanity.

On a personal note, I dreamt about her for two consecutive nights, Sunday and Monday, to wake up on Tuesday morning (March 24) to receive the breaking news of her release from Zoglu Husain. During the first night, I saw her kind of half-walking in her prison room in the PG hospital from a field outside. In the second dream, I was visiting her there along with somebody else; I don't exactly recollect who he was. Beginning her jail sentence more than two years ago, I had a number of sleepless nights, as I am sure many others had, feeling quite perturbed.

One of the finest political and intellectual minds of Bangladesh, Dr Asif Nazrul once asked the BNP leaders how they were sleeping at night with Begum Zia in prison. Well, I'm none of the BNP hierarchy, but I had my share of sleepless nights with wet eyes at her sight on the media on many occasions. She suffered too much for nothing--without her family beside her and without her political freedom, with her husband and former President Ziaur Rahman assassinated in 1981 when she was still at the prime of her life—an assassination in which, as alleged by Matiur Rahman Rentu, her archrival Sheikh Hasina had a hand. It is beyond doubt what Ambassador Serajul Islam and senior journalist Zainal Abedin of New York observed about the political standing of Khaleda Zia. In their view she surpassed all subcontinental leaders, not just those of Bangladesh, in her long-standing sacrifice and struggle for freedom and democracy since the early 1980s.

Ambassador Islam would also say, “You know my view on Begum Zia; that I would unhesitatingly place her ahead of all leaders in South Asian history for contributions to the cause of democracy and people's rights. All leaders of South Asia who suffered in the hands of colonial/dictatorial/fascist rulers had given some cause for which they were incarcerated. Begum Zia went to jail in 2018 on a 100% cooked up case but she accepted her jail sentence because she knew that was the best way to expose and prove to the people of Bangladesh and outside who were watching the unadulterated fascist nature of the present rulers of the country. It is a matter of great regret that the BNP failed miserably to stand up to her sacrifices and do anything for her release” (May 1, 2020).

The fact remains that the BNP is the party of the lordly, magnificent and magisterial President Ziaur Rahman (1936-1981), a great statesman, who proclaimed the independence of

Bangladesh in March 1971 and then founded this popular and patriotic party later in the decade. He was at the forefront of both the emergence and existence of Bangladesh—first as a decorated freedom fighter in 1971 and then at the head of an army-people uprising in November 1975. It was the following year that President Zia introduced the highest state award Swadhinata Padak/Puroskar (Independence Day Award/ স্বাধীনতা পদক) and the next highest Ekushey Padak/Puroskar একুশে পদক, thus making history as he did in every step he took during his short administration. It was he who allowed Sheikh Hasina to return home from abroad in 1981 and enter politics for which she should have remained ever grateful to him. Unfortunately, as the events unfolded, starting with his internationally conspired assassination by a number of misguided and deviant soldiers the same year, it seems, by allowing her to return and enter politics, Zia invited his own end: শেখ হাসিনাকে দেশে আসতে দিয়ে, জিয়াউর রহমান "খাল কেটে কুমির এনেছেন" (he brought a calamity by his own imprudence or made way for his own and his family's and his party's destroyer).

In light of his numerous contributions, his milestone reforms, his incandescent collective vision, and his vigorous pursuit of lofty national goals and ideals, including his most major contribution of the ideal of Bangladeshi nationalism—an inclusive, comprehensive and far-reaching identity for the Muslim-majority, yet multi-ethnic and multi-religious geographical territory called Bangladesh, separate from the neighbouring communal strife-ridden Hindu-majority India and Indian West Bengal—all this during his only five years of rule (or even less), President Zia may be regarded as হাজার বছরের শ্রেষ্ঠ বাংলাদেশী (the greatest Bangladeshi ever, of a thousand years).

To repeat, President Zia saved Bangladesh twice, first in 1971 and then in 1975. He did not run away from the battlefield the way Sheikh Mujib did to find himself under the safe custody of Pakistan (which he wanted to lead and keep united) with his family and then pregnant daughter Hasina left under the loving care of the Pakistani military government in Dhaka.

Depending on the context of time, all fiery speeches are not the same. Wanting to remain with the united and unbroken Pakistan and wishing to be its Prime Minister, Mujib's 7 March speech was only a wishy-washy and half-hearted oration about the independence of Bangladesh; it fell short of the clear and complete declaration of independence which remained for the bold and valiant (and would-be President) Ziaur Rahman to proclaim about twenty days later. In late December 1971, Mujib lamented the fact that Pakistan was finally, regrettably, broken up and that

its Eastern wing went independent against the wishes deep down in his heart. According to Stanley Wolpert's book *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, "I told you (Z A Bhutto), it will be a confederation. This is also between you and me ... You leave it to me ... Absolutely leave it to me. Trust me ... My idea was we will live together and we will rule this country. You know the occupation (Indian) army is there."

Then there is the three-time former Prime Minister and BNP Chair Khaleda Zia, who, of stunningly majestic stature and outlook and stately leadership style, has been living a politically fighting but personally lonely life since the prime of her life following the assassination of her husband Zia in 1981. There are many highlights of her political career that have established her as a leader of bold stands and supreme sacrifices, remarkable for her honesty and dignity with moral and political supremacy far outweighing her awfully authoritarian opponent Hasina and her (Hasina's) overwhelmingly corruption-ridden rogue regime. Some of Khaleda's accomplishments as an opposition leader as well as Prime Minister are:

- her uncompromising movement to tear down the military dictator H M Ershad in the 1980s,
- her clean government for more than two terms (corruption-free compared with endless Awami sea-loots and massive and monstrous Awami vote-rigging since 2009),
- her patriotic and nationalist fervor in view of her party's most lasting legacy of Bangladeshi Nationalism wisely and farsightedly introduced by its founding president Ziaur Rahman in the late 1970s -- a nationalism which, while alert and attentive to national interest and integrity, also embraces internationalism in the sense of regional and global engagement, influence and reliability,
- her numerous state-building measures and policies,
- her historic introduction of the interim Care-Taker Government system to ensure the peaceful transition of power through credible elections,
- her quest for freedom, democratic tolerance, national unity and integrity (compared with the fiendish Awami fascism of oppression and repression at home and its mew-mew kitten surrender of national interests to India),
- her patriotically-imbued and nationalistically-driven decision to cancel her meeting with the Hasina-backer Indian President Pranab Mukherjee during his early March 2013 visit to Dhaka,

- her absolutely brilliant performance during the telephone conversation with Hasina, in October 2013, about the valid and legitimate reasons for her to boycott the would-be totally unfair and one-sided election under Hasina in January the following year,
- her resilience in the face of her forced ouster from her decades-old Moinul Hossen Road residence at the military cantonment area and,
- her repeated confinement to her Gulshan office and also her Gulshan home that remained surrounded, time and again, by Hasina's sand-and-cement trucks for days and weeks and her illegal imprisonment for a long period of time (about two and a half years).

Khaleda deserves a lot of attention, especially in view of Hasina trying to obliterate her with a devilishly ritualistic commitment on the part of the latter. Khaleda's historic role and status, her suffering and sacrifice for the cause of peace and freedom and the injustice done to her by the Hasina regime since 2009 (not to speak of her anti-Ershad movement in the 1980s) need to be highlighted equally firmly and faithfully. The late Mahfuz Ullah did a great job in bringing with distinction her image and that of her husband President Zia to the attention of the nation by writing two excellent books on them. Others also can play a similar role in writing about and thereby bringing her selflessly patriotic struggle to the attention of the reading public and the political scene of the world. That will go a long way in countering and dispelling the horrific and harrowing picture that Hasina has been laboriously trying to give her with the help of her (Hasina's) loonies and lackies in the state machinery, including the judiciary. Elsewhere I said:

On a lighter note, like the comic scenes that at the same time intensify and accentuate the serious themes in a tragedy, the two parties (B/AL and BNP) are as divided as their present leaders. One is only Sheikh Hasina of the AL, with her late husband's name hardly used at the end of her good name. Even when he was alive, his wife Hasina hardly wanted to be known by him. (Critics have their own versions about the couple's allegedly cold relationship). The other is Khaleda Zia of the BNP, with her late husband's name always fondly attached to her already beautiful name. Khaleda is older but, even after the age has taken its toll on her, she remains more beautiful, graceful, stylish, glamorous, ladylike, fashionable, fair complexioned, reserved and serious-looking, speaking both Bangla and English with an impressive and impeccable accent and nice pronunciation. One (Hasina) starts her day early and the other (Khaleda) late. They also differ in their traditional wear

to make a personal statement about Bangladesh. While one (Hasina) wears printed cotton saree, the other (Khaleda) prefers lace and chiffon saree with matching satin veil.

These may seem to be small details but no less significant, like the small plants and flowers and ferns and creepers that add to the beauty of the vegetation under the trees of a forest. Women's outfit, more than men, especially the first ladies', is always a news item, a source of their charm, attraction, and gracefulness, all over the world. Hasina wears what goes well with her. Khaleda does the same. Their clothing style and body wear makes a statement about their demeanor and conduct. Apart from major political and ideological differences, those in style and personality also come into play everywhere.

Could there also be, then, a psychological warfare of personal jealousy and personality clash between Hasina and Khaleda? One came to power as the daughter of one of the great political leaders of the country; the other as the wife of a military general, who was also a great liberation hero after having declared the independence of Bangladesh (albeit in the name of Sheikh Mujib) and who later became a great war hero and a great president of the country. Both women are grooming their sons to take charge of their respective parties and eventually the country. Could this family orientation further contribute to their rivalries?

Khaleda and Zia's son Tarique Rahman is a dynamic leader of mission and vision. A great nationalist patriot, an honest, sincere, polite and clean man, much maligned by the vicious Awami circle, he is no comparison with the corrupt Awami scoundrels, mountebanks, hoodlums and hooligans, who turned all Bangladesh into a *kaowa* and *khaowa* and *murgi* bhaban. Terrific Tarique, suffering from terrible Awami wrath, does not need any advice from those talking big and voicing bombast from their comfort zones at home and abroad. There is no point quarreling over the BNP leadership despite its shortcomings. No one is infallible. In these hard fascist times inflicted by Hasina, who is an embodiment of an utterly evil force, to the power of infinity, all nationalist patriots need to get united to thwart and topple the recklessly repressive Awami regime and its cliques and cronies and coteries. However, it is true Mirza Fakhrul is weak and cowardly. He has to go. But let the time decide when and how.

Tarique may have made some mistakes earlier in his life, but those may be seen with loving and forgiving eyes, especially in view of the innumerable Awami-BAKSALi macabre monstrosities during 1972-1975 and, then, since 2009, until today. Orphaned early, the strong and impressive man of great parentage has suffered immensely and is still suffering in exile, away from home and mother, both the son and the mother suffering most unjustly and living their lonely lives for fear of the wolves and hyenas out there in and beyond the horribly Indianized and Hinduized regime and its Gopali police/RAB/judiciary. As mentioned earlier in this article, Tarique must have gone through a maturing process and has transformed himself into a bold and brilliant leader, far superior to those devils and dragons who oppose him for no good reason. He may be compared to Prince Hal, who after some initial youthful pitfalls, grew to become King Henry V (1413-1422), one of the greatest kings of England.

The mistakes the party of President Ziaur Rahman, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her likely successor Tarique Rahman—the BNP—may have made in the past are nothing compared with the carelessly countless and numerous crimes and blunders made by the party of Sheikh Mujib and Sheikh Hasina—the Awami League. A political party is not a party of angels and prophets. Being a platform of people of all kinds of beliefs and backgrounds, a political party would make mistakes, more or less, compared with other parties. The Awami mistakes are incomparably endless and still counting on a daily basis. While one may hold the BNP accountable for the one or two mistakes it made, one cannot indict it in these fascist times under the pretty devilish rule of Sheikh Hasina.

One only wishes Bangladesh's ailing leader Khaleda Zia, gracious and glorious (মহান ও মহত) as she is, may recover fully and completely and be blessed with a second life to be able to provide, once again, a lighthouse leadership that the people of Bangladesh have been deprived of for the last 12 years. Let Bangladesh be free, as soon as possible, from all kinds of viruses—corona, corruption, cruelty, terror, tyranny, discrimination, double standards, rigging, mugging, lying, stealing, rape, abduction, disappearance, murder, immorality, immodesty, lack of the rule of law, absence of social justice, partisan politicization, flattery, sycophancy, nepotism, favoritism, increasing Hinduization and anti-Islamism, and so on. It is only the democratic BNP-led opposition, now under tyrannical suppression, that, through a free and fair electoral process, can bring back the country to its right track from its present institutional destruction, corruption, demoralization and stagnation.

In a way of small diversion or digression, the world is immersed in its pride and arrogance about its material wealth, military might, cruise missiles, lavish luxuries, extravagant spectacles, tall towers, sky scrapers, sprawling cityscapes, royal pomp and splendor, political power and control, large corporations, atheistical/secularist arts and culture, nudities, night clubs, perversions and sexual orientations that it is shamelessly and vaingloriously promoting in the name of (unlimited) individual freedom and animalistic, unsocial and uncivilized freemixing and freelove. The only lesson the world should learn from its being hopelessly under the grip of the small and invisible, yet unconquerably powerful coronavirus is intellectual humility, simplicity and integrity of character, spiritual awareness, religious faith and piety and submission to the Creator God/Allah the Almighty.

PPE (personal protection equipment, like a full graduation gown), masks, gloves, social distancing, washing hands, maintaining cleanliness and staying, as best as possible, in the privacy of home and family (as opposed to outdoors indulgence in freemixing, drinking and eating all kinds of nasty food made out of nonedible insects and animals) suggest the validity of the fact that the all-powerful, all-knowing and all-seeing God cannot be wrong in His instructions, injunctions and recommendations and that He is right in His infinite knowledge as revealed in His holy books and passed on to the humankind through His chosen people and prophets.

It is as if, as some religious communities around the world would assume, the coronavirus was a divine blessing in the guise of a penalty inflicted upon humanity, but ultimately intended for the good of humanity with lessons to be learnt from—lessons taking us closer to earth, nature, and simplicities of (rural and rustic) life as depicted in Shakespeare's romantic comedies, Alexander Pope's "Happy the Man," pre-Romantic and Romantic poetry (especially Wordsworth's, Cowper's, Thomson's, Goldsmith's), Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels, Robert Frost's poems, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden, or Life in the Woods* and the vast amount of environmental writings. It is as if God sent down His wrath in the form of this civilization-collapsing and world order changing corona calamity due to excessive violations of His edicts and injunctions by certain classes, circles, societies, parades and carnivals, who may thus be awakened to rise to a higher level of moral and ethical reform and regeneration. As a politically aspiring writer and thinker from the USA puts it, "This crisis is taking a heavy toll on everything that makes us human, defying logic."

The above is not to question or undermine human progress, human achievement, and freedom of speech and expression but to reflect, review, reassess and reexamine human

advancement in all the fields of human endeavor in the context of the vastness, endlessness and immensity of God's power, God's creation, and His mercy and compassion. Certainly, we depend on God-gifted scientific knowledge and medical studies for treatment of COVID-19 and, hopefully, for a coronavirus vaccine. But everything has a limit, including the freedom of religion and all other freedoms, regardless of how basic or fundamental they may be. In their own interest, God-created humans cannot just do or believe as they wish. All religions recommend limit and restraint as much as they allow for freedom. So is the case with human society, civilization and culture that has grown by taking into account both restriction and openness in a positive, superior and constructive way, not in a senseless, anarchical and beastly manner. Similarly, gender should not be understood as an wide array of identities (as the LGBT community wrongly tends to do), but, simply and conclusively, as only the male-female binary.

Returning to the main subject, it is the boastful and belligerent braggarts and upstarts belonging to the unholy axis of garrulously pompous Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu, Narendra Modi and the horribly fascistic Sheikh Hasina in particular who should learn the values of honesty, morality, decency, dignity, political fairness, tolerance, transparency, openness and accountability from this awfully awesome pandemic plague. It is especially the dictatorial Hasina, acting like a hungry hyena towards the democratic political opposition of Bangladesh, who should be humbled by this crippling covid catastrophe so that she can stop and move away from her horribly dictatorial rule and rise above her government's unlimited corruption, massive vote-rigging, and indescribable oppression meted out to the BNP-and-Khaleda-led political opposition of the country.

What the former Awami speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury said about Sheikh Mujib (not to speak of what the others-- former Awami speaker Abdul Malek Ukil serving under who he called a Feraoun, anti-Awami-turned-Awami Motia Chowdhury, quarter Awami Hasanul Inu, late Col Taher and semi-Awami Rashed Khan Menon--said about Mujib in 1972-1975)--that even as many as one hundred hangings would not cleanse Mujib of his wrongdoings--also applies to the horribly ruling Hasina odiously and abominably oppressive with baseless opprobrium, vilification and vituperation of the opposition BNP led by Khaleda Zia. To reiterate, the BNP is the largest and most popular party of Bangladesh. It is the high time for the foolishly but ferociously repressive and vote-rigging Hasina administration to take a 180 degree about-turn and hand over

power to this enormously popular party in a peaceful transition through a clean and competitive general election.

Q M Jalal Khan

Author of *Bangladesh: Political and Literary Reflections on a Divided Country* (Peter Lang, 2018) and *Bangladesh Divided: Political and Literary Reflections on a Corrupt Police and Prison State* (Peter Lang, 2019), in addition to numerous other publications on literature and culture. After disengaging from many years of full-time teaching abroad, American-educated Dr Khan is currently on the adjunct faculty at an institution of higher learning in North America. His recent work, “*Sheikh Hasina’s Brutal BNP-Phobia and Her Scandalous “Midnight” Power Grab Through Vampire Vote Dacoity and Villainous “S/Election” Rigging With an All-Time High Record of Humongous White-Collar Corruption*” has appeared in Sabria Chowdhury Balland (ed), *Bangladesh: A Suffering People Under State Terrorism* (Peter Lang, 2020).