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NRB NEWS HIGHLIGHTS 2011

Netaji Research Bureau had a very active and productive year during 2011.

On the evening of January 22, 2011, the Sisir Kumar Bose Lecture 2011 was delivered by Ambassador Satyabrata Pal on “An Empty Cup: Human Rights in the New India.”
Professor Sugata Bose was in the chair.

The traditional Netaji Birthday Assembly was held at Netaji Bhawan on the morning of January 23, 2011. Professor Sugata Bose gave the welcome address. Pramita Mallick performed the opening music. Mr. N.R. Narayana Murthy, founder of Infosys, delivered the Netaji Oration 2011 on “If only Netaji had participated in post-independent India building”.

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NRB NEWS HIGHLIGHTS 2011

Shri M.K. Narayanan, Governor of West Bengal presided over the prestigious assembly and paid rich tributes to Netaji.

On the occasion of Sisir Kumar Bose’s 91st birth anniversary on February 2, 2011, Rohini Ray Chaudhuri presented a programme of Tagore songs in the evening at the Sarat Bose Hall.

NRB members gathered as usual on Poila Baisakh (April 15, 2011) at the invitation of Mrs. Krishna Bose, Chairperson, to ring in the Bengali New Year with poetry and songs.
His Majesty’s Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India’s Struggle against Empire

Professor Amartya Sen released the book in the presence of the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, at a special function in the Kolkata Town Hall on July 8, 2011. A large audience listened to the conversation between Amartya Sen and the author of the book.
Release ceremonies followed in Mumbai on July 13, Delhi on July 18, Dhaka on July 20 and Chennai on July 25. The author was in conversation with Shyam Benegal in Mumbai, M.J. Akbar and Shashi Tharoor in Delhi, and Gopal Krishna Gandhi in Chennai. At the Delhi ceremony Sharmila Tagore read excerpts from the book.

In Dhaka University’s Senate Hall the panel of discussants included Sonia Nishat Amin, Tahmima Anam, Iftekhar Iqbal and David Ludden. Professor Sirajul Islam moderated the discussion between the author and the panelists as well as the audience. Professor Salahuddin Ahmed formally released the book in Bangladesh. The Finance Minister, Abdul Mohit, spoke on the occasion.
The Sarat Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture 2011 was delivered by Dr. Kamal Hossain, distinguished lawyer and former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh on “Bangladesh: the Road to Independence 1960 to 1971” in the Sarat Bose Hall on August 25, 2011. Professor Sugata Bose was in the chair.

On December 18, 2011 there was a debate at the Sarat Bose Hall on the subject “The Days of Democracy are Over”. The speakers were – Dr. Kunal Sarkar, Dr. Sandip Chatterjee, Professor Swapan Chakravorty, Dr. Krishnendu Mukherjee, Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, M.P., Sabyasachi Chowdhury, Pradip Gooptu, and Ritabrata Banerjee. Derek O’Brien, M.P. served as the moderator.
Netaji Museum continued to be a major attraction for visitors from different parts of India and abroad. Many young students from disadvantaged backgrounds were allowed free entry. More visitors came in 2010-2011 than in 2009-2010. Distinguished visitors included Mr. N.R. Narayana Murthy, founder of Infosys and Mr. Satyabrata Pal, Member, National Human Rights Commission, on January 22, 2011, Mr. Akitaka Saiki, Ambassador of Japan in India, on June 2, 2011, Ms. Karen Tan, High Commissioner of Singapore to India, on July 31, 2011, Professor Sankar Chatterjee, Texas Tech. University, on August 10, 2011, Dr. Kamal Hossain, distinguished lawyer and former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, and Dr. Hamida Hossain, from Dhaka, on August 25, 2011, Mr. Rakesh Singh, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Mr. Alok Pande, Director, Ministry of finance, Government of India, Mr. J.P. Dua, CMD, Allahabad Bank, on November 8, 2011, Mr. Martin Strub, Ambassador of Switzerland in India, on November 12, 2011, Mr. Robert Jehanson, Chairman, Australia-India Institute, Dr. Amitabh Mattoo, Director, Australia-India Institute, on December 6, 2011.
Welcome Address  
by Professor Sugata Bose

Your Excellency, Shri M.K. Narayanan, Governor of West Bengal, Mrs Narayanan in the audience, Shri Narayana Murthy, Ambassador Satyabrata Pal who gave the Sisir Bose Lecture last evening, distinguished guests,

Seventy years ago on 17 January 1941 at around 1.35 am, Subhas Chandra Bose left this house disguised as Muhammad Ziauddin. Dressed in a closed-collar brown long coat, broad shalwars, and a black fez, he wore his oval glasses with a thin frame of rolled gold that he had stopped using over a decade ago. He felt uncomfortable in the Kabuli chappals that Sisir had bought for him, and so chose to wear his own laced European shoes for the long journey. It was a moonlit night. After silently coming down the rear staircase, Subhas quietly sat in the left rear of the car. Sisir took the driver’s seat on the right in front, started the engine, and drove the Wanderer BLA 7169 out of 38/2 Elgin Road as he had done on so many occasions in the past. The lights in Subhas’s bedroom were kept burning for another hour.

On behalf of Netaji Research Bureau it is my great privilege to warmly welcome you to this historic house, this amrita sadan, to borrow a phrase from Tagore’s song, rendered so beautifully by Pramita Mallick. In his political testament composed on the eve of his hunger strike in November 1940 Subhas Chandra Bose had expressed his conviction that nobody could lose through suffering and sacrifice. “If he does lose anything of the earth earthy,” he had written prophetically, “he will gain much more in return by becoming the heir to a life immortal”.

Subhas Chandra Bose knew that that his life had a mission – the freedom of India from bondage. It is on this day, January 23, in the year 1897, that he was born at the high noon of the Raj. He would devote his life towards ensuring that the sun did finally set on the British Empire. He had cast off all inhibitions of colonial subjecthood very early in his life. When he took the momentous decision to resign from the Indian Civil Service at the age of twenty-four, he was already done with the British raj in India. Throughout his long years of incarceration and exile, he was essentially a free man in the sense of his having rejected submission to the British.
Having himself refused to owe allegiance to a foreign bureaucracy in 1921, he embarked on a mighty crusade in 1941 to subvert the loyalty of Indians to the armed services of the British Empire and to replace it with a new dedication to the cause of India’s freedom. He was remarkably successful – measured by the yardstick of his own aspiration - in fulfilling his life’s mission by 1945. On what would have been his 50th birthday on January 23, 1947, Mahatma Gandhi summed up Netaji’s achievements:

He had sacrificed a brilliant career for the sake of the country’s service. He suffered various imprisonments, twice became President of the Congress, and at last by great strategy gave the slip to the guard put over him by the Government of Bengal and by sheer courage and resourcefulness reached Kabul, passed through European countries, and finally found himself in Japan, collected from scattered material an army of brilliant young men drawn from all communities and from all parts of India and dared to give battle to a mighty Government. A lesser man would have succumbed under the trials that he went through; but he in his life verified the saying of Tulsidas that “all becomes right for the brave”.

Knocking out the keystone of Britain’s worldwide empire was no mean achievement. Britain’s Indian Army had served for more than a century and a half as the empire’s rod of order against recalcitrant and rebellious colonial subjects. Netaji’s tireless wartime activities not only hastened the process of Indian independence, but undermined the prospects of re-conquest in other parts of the colonial world. The rejuvenation of a flagging freedom struggle at war’s end was his signal contribution. His friend Dilip Kumar Roy vividly described how Subhas’s “suddenly amplified figure, added to the romance of an Indian National Army marching, singing, to Delhi, galvanized a frustrated nation out of its torpor and substantially damaged the insulation of the Indian army from the magnetic currents of popular enthusiasm for immediate independence”.

Netaji’s great wartime achievement had been to unite India’s diverse religious communities in a common struggle. The absence of the leader who had inspired this sense of unity did matter in the aftermath of the enthusiasms surrounding the Red Fort trials. When Gandhi visited a group of INA prisoners in the Red Fort, he was told that they had never felt any distinction of creed or religion in the INA. “But here we are faced with ‘Hindu tea’ and ‘Muslim tea’,” they complained. “Why do you suffer it,” asked Gandhi. “No, we don’t,” they said. “We mix ‘Hindu tea’ and ‘Muslim tea’ half and half, and then serve. The same with food.” “That is very good,” exclaimed Gandhi laughing.
Welcome Address by Professor Sugata Bose

Netaji’s many admirers passionately believed that had he been on the scene India would not have been partitioned along religious lines. It is one of those great “ifs” of history to which there can be no definitive answer. What can be said with a measure of confidence is that based on his record Netaji would have been generous toward the minorities and worked resolutely towards an equitable power-sharing arrangement among religious communities and regional peoples. As the partitioner’s axe was about to fall, the Mahatma may have missed the rebellious son whom he had cast aside in 1939 in favor of the more obedient ones. Gandhi stood as a tragic lonely figure during the communal holocaust that accompanied partition. The saint and the warrior acting in concert may have had a better chance of averting the catastrophe that engulfed the subcontinent in 1947. But this was not to be.

Bose’s critics had charged that he would become a dictatorial leader if he made a triumphant entry into India. His strategic alliance with totalitarian regimes opposed to Britain was seen as evidence of his ideological predilections. That he had no affinity with the pernicious philosophies of the Axis powers with whom he allied during World War II is beyond a shadow of doubt. The empowerment of women, peasants, workers and the subordinate castes had always figured prominently on his political agenda. The inertia that accompanied the formally democratic Indian state’s approach to the gigantic problems of poverty, illiteracy and disease might well have exasperated him. He may have been tempted under those circumstances to deploy the instruments of a strong party and state to bring about the revolutionary change he sought. However, it is doubtful that he would have been personally enamored of the trappings of state power. His entire life was characterized by a series of renunciations of wealth and weal, worldly comfort and joy. The streak of self-abnegation was stronger in his character than that of self-assertion.

Our Governor has been with us already on a couple of occasions, but we extend to him a very special welcome on this shubha din, auspicious day. You will be amused to know, Your Excellency, that when Netaji was sent home from prison on 5 December 1940 the plan was to re-arrest him by implementing a “cat and mouse” policy devised by the then governor of Bengal, John Herbert. “If he resorts to hunger strike again,” Herbert blithely wrote to Viceroy Linlithgow on 11 December, “the present ‘cat and mouse’ policy will be continued, and its employment will serve both to render him innocuous and to make him realize that nothing is to be gained from a series of fasts.” As former National Security Advisor, you will appreciate the priorities that Netaji set for free India in an address to the faculty and students of Tokyo University. He delineated with great clarity the three most urgent tasks facing free India – national defense, eradication of poverty and provision of education for all.
Welcome Address by Professor Sugata Bose

We are very fortunate to have Shri Narayana Murthy, the visionary leader of contemporary India’s information revolution, in Kolkata to deliver the Netaji Oration today. He has flown in from Hong Kong especially for this purpose and will be leaving for New York tonight. It is fitting that someone who has contributed immeasurably to India’s progress in science and technology should be giving the Oration named after the great leader of our freedom struggle who had called for “far-reaching cooperation between science and politics”.

When Netaji asked the poor and obscure to come forward with their poverty and obscurity for the service of the motherland, they heard a voice of sincerity and were ready to respond. “In this mortal world, everything perishes and will perish,” Subhas Chandra Bose had written in 1940, “but ideas, ideals and dreams do not.” As he prepared for a fast unto death, he was confident that the idea for which one individual was prepared to die would incarnate itself in a thousand lives. That, he believed, was how the wheels of evolution turned and the ideas, ideals and dreams of one generation were “bequeathed to the next”. Today’s India needs to take a leaf out of his book of life and relearn the currently unfashionable values of seva, service, and tyag, sacrifice. “No idea has ever fulfilled itself in this world,” Netaji asserted, “except through an ordeal of suffering and sacrifice.” Let us not forget in paying tribute to him today that it is his immense sacrifice, in the sense of tyag as taught by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and kurbani as enshrined on the INA memorial, that has made him the heir to a life immortal.

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NETAJI ORATION 2011

If only Netaji had participated in post-independent India building!
at Netaji Bhawan, Kolkata, On January 23, 2011
by Narayana Murthy (Chairman, Infosys Technologies Limited Bangalore, India)

Your Excellency, the Governor of West Bengal, Shri M K Narayanan, Mrs. Krishna Bose, Prof. Sugata Bose, Ambassador Satyabrata Pal, distinguished guests and, most importantly, the youth assembled here, it is a pleasure, an honor, and a rare privilege to deliver this year’s Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose lecture. To stand here and speak in the land of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Satyajit Ray, Rabindranath Tagore, Amartya Sen, Sarat Bose and Netaji, among many illustrious sons of this great state, is truly exhilarating. I thank the organizers for this honor. Right from my childhood, I have been a great admirer of Netaji. There was hardly a week when my father and my school teachers did not extol the virtues of this great patriot of India. When we hesitated climbing the steep Chamundi hills; when we did not do prepare well for our examinations, when we did not complete our home work; when we did not help our less-fortunate classmates; or when we could not speak confidently in our class debates, it was always Gandhiji’s, Nehru’s and Netaji’s stellar qualities of courage, intelligence, discipline, hard work, sacrifice and self-confidence that would be used as examples by my father and teachers. Therefore, Netaji, as a role model for my generation, is well etched in my psyche. However, many feel that this nation has not paid its proper dues to Netaji, one of the heros in our fight for independence.

I have titled this lecture as, “If only Netaji had participated in post-independent India building!” due to the following reasons. One, the youth of the country will realize the extraordinary qualities of Netaji that we need in abundance today. Second, they will see many role models who exhibit the attributes of Netaji amongst their milieu and benefit from these role models. Third, some of these youngsters may be inspired to become Netajis of today.

Netaji was first and foremost a patriot. He put the interest of the country beyond his life and his future. He realized that gaining India’s freedom was the first step in creating a better future for India and this world. He gave up what would have been a stellar career in the Indian
Civil Service to fight for India’s freedom. In his letter to his brother written soon after he received encouragement from his mother to follow Gandhi and resign from the civil service, he says, “I cannot tell you how happy I am to receive such a letter. It will be worth a treasure to me as it has removed something like a burden from my mind”. What a mother and what a son!

The India of today is very different from the India that Netaji fought for. We have come a long way from being considered a poor, pitiable, and weak country to an important global economic power. Our GDP growth rate is the second highest in the world. Our exports are flourishing. Our stock exchanges are on fire. Foreign direct investment is galloping. Our cricketers have become top performers. India has more billionaires than Japan. Our software industry is the talk of the whole world. Our learned have done so well that President Obama keeps talking about how Bangalore will take away jobs from Buffalo. I never thought India would be feared as a job snatcher from the most powerful country in the world – the US!

However, this is not the whole story. There is another India that has not participated in this happy story of India’s phenomenal economic progress. Our Prime Minister keeps exhorting us to make this impressive economic progress an inclusive one. He is right because India has the largest mass of poor – over 400 million earning less than Rs. 40 per day. We have the largest mass of illiterates in the world – about 400 million. We have more than 250 million Indians not having access to safe drinking water. We have more than 750 million Indians not having access to decent sanitation. Yesterday’s wonderful lecture by Ambassador Pal about the sorry state of human rights in India makes us all feel miserable and ashamed. The list goes on. Unless we can create hope and confidence in the future for every Indian, our progress will not be sustainable. This is an onerous responsibility that rests on the shoulders of every one of us, in general, and our youth, in particular. This is where role models like Netaji can instill courage, confidence, discipline, sacrifice and hard work in every one of us in our efforts to wipe the tears off the eyes of every Indian child – from Nagaland to Rajasthan, and from Kashmir to Kerala.

There are many supporters of Netaji’s chosen path for fighting the British and there are many who feel he was not right in pursuing a path of violence and for being in the camp of the Germans and the Japanese. This lecture is not about those issues. There are expert historians who can debate that. My concern is about how everyone of us can learn from role models in our history to work hard, honestly and smartly to wipe the tears off the eyes of the poorest child. I have often talked about the need for good governance, education, modernity and focus on quick and efficient execution in making this country a better place for everyone. Therefore, today, I will talk about a dream that I have often imagined in my moments of despair. It is a dream about what India would be today if Netaji had not chosen his path and had been part of the mainstream
politics post 1939 and played a prominent role in post-independence reconstruction along with Nehru, Patel, Rajaji, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and other modern thinkers. What would have happened if he, who believed in industrialization, had joined Rajaji in persuading Nehru to abandon the License-permit Raj? What would have happened if he had brought even more weight to modern thinking in the early days of our republic? What would have happened if he had joined Mahatma in preventing the British from partitioning India? I venture to make a few bold predictions. India would have done a better job of population management and, perhaps, achieved true demographic dividend. India would have embraced modern methods of scientific agriculture. India would have embraced industrialization better and become much more export-oriented rather than import-substitution-oriented which has led to most of our current problems. India would not have been partitioned. India would have had a common script. Indian bureaucracy would have become the best performing bureaucracy in the world. India would have accelerated her economic progress right from the first day of independence and become the second largest economy in the world and eliminated most of our poverty.

Why do I say all of these would have been possible? Because, Netaji was one of the most courageous leaders of his era. Netaji was a rare bold Indian leader who could have stood up to anybody. He would have been a great ally of Gandhi, Nehru, Rajaji, Patel and Mukherjee in convincing the Congress Party about their wonderful ideas. I was once asked at Davos if there was an attribute of a great leader which helps all other attributes in him or her find utterance. It took me less than ten seconds to pick courage as that attribute. Courage gives a person confidence and conviction, ability to take bold risks, and ability to move ahead towards difficult tasks in the face of naysayers. Courage helps a person to stand up for integrity, secularism, discipline and sacrifice. Let us remember that the courage of one leader – former Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao – in introducing economic reforms in 1991 transformed India from the pity of the world to the pride of the world. Netaji had courage in abundance. Our youngsters need such a role model to emulate. That is why celebrating the personalities of people like Netaji is extremely important to exhort our young people to achieve the plausibly impossible and realize the dreams of our founding fathers.

In the early days of our independence, we needed a critical mass of strong, effective leaders who created urgency for change. The first step towards change is awareness. Leaders must encourage public dialogue on our economic policies, our population growth, the need to bring about inclusive growth, our models of governance, our education and healthcare systems, and our competitiveness in the global market. Netaji would have been a perfect ally of Nehru in creating such a critical mass. Netaji, like Nehru, was a believer in discussion, debate and pluralism.
He was wedded to data and facts. When armed with conviction he had no hesitation to differing with Mahatma Gandhi on the need for full independence rather than the dominion status for India. We need this kind of openness if we have to adopt out-of-the-box ideas and accelerate our progress. This is why I salute Shri. Rahul Gandhi’s efforts in holding organizational elections and bringing true intra-party democracy to his party.

While at one level we have achieved great economic progress, at another level, we have become a nation of empty words. We use superlatives in describing our ordinary achievements. We debate endlessly whether we are a superpower when we have the largest mass of poverty and illiteracy in the world. By submerging ourselves in delays and bureaucracies and shunning quick action, we have made the world equate us with a neighbor 1/7th our population. The same mindset has made us rationalize our inactions while another neighbor, with just 20% higher population, has enhanced its GDP enough to become the second largest economic power in the world. The compound word “world-class” is used very freely to describe mediocre stuff happening in the country. We have had 33 conferences on the need for a dedicated power supply for Bangalore in the last 25 years and we still have not broken ground for building such a facility.

Rajiv Gandhi and Chidambaram spoke about creating a new Indian Management Service (IMS) in 1985 and nothing has happened. The main reason for all of these is our apathy and inaction. We have not yet setup the office of Lokpal even after years of discussion and debate. In this country, articulation has been equated with accomplishments. This is where the example of Netaji, a true believer in action, is very necessary to serve as a role model for us to catch up. He was a man in a hurry. He wanted results. He understood the nature of Indians to shun action and hard work and exhorted them to work hard. He said, “I am not against philosophers but I do protest against the trends emanating from inaction... We need in India today a philosophy of work which will allow us to integrate with the modern world... When the country will become free India will have to fight modern enemies, both economic and political, with modern methods.”

Our economic growth and prosperity require not just an adequate level of population but also what economists call ‘good human capital’: a population equipped with the skills and resources to participate in the economy. Good human capital contributes to high levels of labor productivity and entrepreneurship which, in turn, drive growth in the economy. The key to creating good human capital is human development supported by the right policy environment. Critical policy areas include education, public health, family planning and employment-friendly economic policies including labor market flexibility. However, key indicators show how India has fallen behind in its efforts in human development. We rank 119th among 169 countries on the Human Development Index. Adult illiteracy in India is 39 percent compared to 9 per cent in China.
In absolute terms, around 400 million people in India are illiterate. India, according to Amartya Sen, ‘is indanger of becoming one of the most illiterate parts of the world’. Twenty-five million children in India are out of school, accounting for a quarter of the world’s 104 million out of school children. Malnourishment strikes 64 per cent of children in India.

Among the freedom fighters, Netaji was a rare believer in the negative impact our burgeoning population could have on the economic well-being of the country. He stressed the need for controlling the population. In his Haripura speech delivered as the President of Indian national Congress in 1938, he said, :”I simply want to point out that where poverty, starvation and disease are stalling the land, we cannot afford to have our population mounting up by thirty millions during a single decade.” It is time that we remembered the words of this prophet and acted quickly on them. He would have been a wonderful ally of Nehru in starting a fast-paced program for controlling our population pretty early and prevented the problems that we face today. He would have continued and perhaps accelerated our efforts to reduce our population through fair and transparent methods even after the unfortunate excesses we committed in controlling the population during the emergency era.

Inclusive growth mandates that we create decent jobs for our illiterate and semi-literate population of whom we have approximately about 500 million in total. We have to move majority of our people from agriculture to low-tech manufacturing or services for the rural if we want to improve the per-capita income of our rural folks dependent on agriculture. Given the small size of our land ownership and lack of access to modern methods of agriculture, Netaji was worried about the state of our agriculture and about our dependence on agriculture. He said, “Agriculture will have to be put on a scientific basis with a view to increasing the yield from the land.” He also believed that India will have to embrace industrialization to create better prosperity for her people. He said, “However much we may dislike modern industrialism and condemn the evils which follow in its train, we cannot go back to the pre-industrial era, even if we desire to do so. It is well, therefore, that we should reconcile ourselves to industrialization and devise means to minimize its evils.”

The first step in the process of industrialization is encouraging low-tech manufacturing for exports as China has done. Such a policy will create good disposable income for rural folks which will then spawn jobs in the secondary and tertiary areas of our rural economy. Therefore, industrialization is extremely important for our target of inclusive growth. Not only did Netaji believe in industrialization and use of modern technology in reducing our dependence on
Netaji Oration 2011 by Narayana Murthy

agriculture, he also believed in exports. He once said, “India’s foreign trade should be viewed not in a haphazard or piecemeal manner as it is often done in order to provide some immediate or temporary benefit to British industry, but in a comprehensive manner so as to coordinate India’s economic development with its export trade on the one hand and its external obligation on the other.” I believe that India would have been a powerhouse of exports much before China became one if only Netaji had the front seat in our policy making along with Nehru,

One of the drawbacks of our public discourse to arrive at clear and quick decisions is our inability to come straight to the point and ask questions that may be uncomfortable to answer or face. When an Indian audience is given an opportunity to ask questions after a public lecture, most often the moderator has to remind the questioner to stop giving his own lecture and come straight to the problem. We are very comfortable with vagueness since that will prevent us from accountability for action. Even at Infosys, I find that we often stare at a problem but do not come to straight to the problem because we do not want to be confronted with uncomfortable realities. There are very few leaders who believe in asking direct questions like Netaji. Netaji had tremendous clarity of thinking. His first act after joining Congress, after returning from Europe in 1920 was to meet Mahatma and ask him simple yet direct questions whether Congress would fight for independence; whether Gandhi’s method of civil obedience and non-payment of taxes would really force British to quit India; and how realistic Gandhiji’s desire was that Swaraj would be achieved within a year.

Netaji was a leading modernist among freedom fighters. He was always willing to explore new ideas to bring the nation together. He believed in the power of technology to make life better for people. He once said, “Further, with the help of such modern scientific contrivances as airplanes, telephone, radio, films, etc., we shall have to bring the different parts of India closer to one another.” He also believed in ways of commonality among Indians by the use of Roman script as a common script. He said, “At the same time, I am inclined to think that the ultimate solution, and the best solution would be the adoption of a script that would bring us into line with the rest of the world. Perhaps, some of our country-men will gape with horror when they hear of the adoption of the Roman script, but I would beg them to consider this problem from the scientific and historical point of view. If we do that, we shall realize at once that there is nothing sacrosanct in a script.”

Like Mahatma Gandhi, he believed that the only permanent solution for a peaceful, independent India would be to integrate Muslim aspirations within the Indian Union. If he had been involved
in the final talks on India’s independence, he would have been a strong ally of Mahatma in forcing the British to abandon their plan to partition India. Like Nehru, he believed that there ought to be a fair and equitable dispersal of power among religious and linguistic communities in independent India.

This is the India’, he concluded, ‘for which one toils and suffers. This is the India for which one can even lay down his life. This is the real India in which one can have undying faith, no matter what Tripura says or does. Folks, this is indeed the India that every Indian wants – a secular, democratic, happy, prosperous, confident, inclusive and respected India where every child is confident of opportunity to seek a better future. I believe that the need of the day is for our youth to dream of an India with Netaji as their role model and work hard to make it a reality. Thank you.

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THE SISIR KUMAR BOSE LECTURE
AN EMPTY CUP: HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NEW INDIA”
KOLKATA, JANUARY 22, 2011
By Ambassador Satyabrata Pal

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must start by thanking Mrs. Krishna Bose and her family for doing me the very great honour of asking me to deliver the Sisir Kumar Bose Memorial Lecture. In a way, it is both entirely apt and utterly ironical that I should speak on human rights at a lecture in his honour, because for many years, at the UN, the Commonwealth and other international bodies, when India was under surveillance on human rights, and a great escape had to be planned, I drove the get-away car. Except that what Dr. Sisir Bose did was right then, and it is right now. I am torn about what I did; I did it in good faith, because a diplomat must defend his country, relying on what his government tells him, and it is true that, in the international debate, human rights are rarely about human beings protecting human beings. Rather, governments assail governments for political reasons; altruism or concern seldom enters the debate. So of course India had to be defended from criticism that was either unfair, or levelled for the wrong reasons.

But, over the last two years, on the National Human Rights Commission, I have had to accept that much of the criticism from civil society, Indian and foreign, is true. If anything, since most of them focus either on themes or regions, they perhaps do not grasp, and therefore do not report, the full horror, which is sometimes macabre beyond belief. We get around 400 complaints a day in the NHRC; as I go through my share of those files, and when I visit the districts we specially monitor, I struggle to make sense of the callousness and cruelty with which we treat our own.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A lecture should make its audience either think, or fall asleep, but what I hope to do tonight is to make you feel miserable. There will be very little intellectual content in what I have to say: I will simply detail some of the many ways in which we, as a nation, have failed our fellow citizens.
Before I do so, let me offer two clarifications. First, while my views were formed by my work on the NHRC, they are not necessarily those of the Commission. Second, I will not give you a litany of all the human rights violations that take place in India; there will be no time for that, and our Annual Reports carry that information for those who want it. I want to present to you some of the challenges that the nation, not just the government, must confront if governance in our democracy is to be for the people.

*Shobar oporey manush satya, tahar oporey nai* - man is the ultimate truth; there is nothing above man. That was written in the heartland of India, now a looking-glass world; there, both for the rulers and the ruled, it seems nothing is too low for humanity, nothing less true than man. Human rights are an absurd abstraction in the reality of rural India, where fatalism, ignorance and obscurantism feed off each other. You cannot claim a right you do not know you have. You may not claim a right if old credos say it goes against custom or faith or their prejudice. You will not claim a right if local despots make the cost to you too high. Our first failure is that the poor and exploited do not know what their rights are, or how to claim them.

We do what we can from the NHRC, as do the State Human Rights Commissions and the other Commissions that try to redress the problems faced by the minorities, by women, by children and by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In a country like India, so large, so mired in apathy, that is a pittance. Only a mass campaign will do, engaging the interest and energy of the nation, of the kind that Gandhi, Netaji and their peers conducted to win India’s independence.

We do not have such a campaign, and it would be naïve to expect governments to launch one. So, in much of India, the array of human rights that we do have, through the Constitution, its bold and sensitive interpretation by the Supreme Court, and by our acceptance of obligations under international treaties, means nothing. These are entitlements, but title means nothing unless you have what you are entitled to.

Which is why I chose the image of an empty cup for this talk: the surreal debate on human rights in India is prefigured in the Mad Hatter’s tea-party, where, at one point, the host asks Alice to take some more tea, and she replies, crossly, that she can hardly take more when she’s been given none. To which the Mad Hatter replies that she could hardly have less; taking more than nothing was easy.
There is, of course, another India, just as real, the India that is expected to be one of the mahanayaks on the world stage in this Asian century. This is the new Asian drama, which will give a Viking burial to the Asian Drama that Gunnar Myrdal wrote of, the poverty of our nations. Both exist, but they cannot peacefully coexist.

This is clear to me from the work we do in our most backward districts. The NHRC chose these, one in each State, because official data showed that political, economic and social rights were all precarious there. So there we monitor local entitlements to the right to food, education and health, of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to equal status, of those in conflict with the law to custodial justice. These, the least developed, the most disadvantaged and the most neglected districts of India, make up our critical list.

There is another list of critical districts now prepared by the Home Ministry, of those most ravaged by Naxal violence. It should not surprise you at all that, up the spine of India, where the Naxals are most active, the same districts figure on both lists.

There is no point arguing about cause and effect. It is clear that years of neglect and exploitation have turned some villagers and tribals into Naxals, or made them sympathetic to their cause. But a vicious cycle has been set in motion. The denial of economic and social rights bred Naxalism; now the State wants to make amends but cannot, because the Naxals will not let them. The millions of people who live in these huge swathes of our countryside where the writ of government hardly runs feel that they are being ground between two millstones.

In a village in the district of Chatra in Jharkhand, where the school had recently been blown up by the Naxals because a police patrol had used it for a bivouac, I asked the villagers why they did not resist, since they and their children were the ones who suffered. How can we, they said. “We did not want the police to stay in the school, but they did. When they went away, the Naxals blew it up. We don’t have guns”, they said, “the police and the Naxals do. The men with the guns don’t listen to us.” That is another refrain we hear in our visits; the villagers and tribals who inhabit these districts where the Naxals confront the State are still voiceless, or, if they speak, they are “scarec heard amid the guns”.

This is not true, some of you might say: India is a democracy, and the poor have shown that they can make their voice heard in the elections. Maybe so, but the first-past-the-post system we have adopted gives no incentive to our politicians to work for the common good.
Instead, each party develops a core constituency, which is made to feel threatened by others, so that it is not tempted to make common cause. If this core of support is around 25-30%, all that a party has to do is to ensure that no other party has more. The entire political effort is concentrated in trying to break the support base of the other party, in establishing sub-ethnic or sub-caste identities that are hostile to each other, in suppressing a common humanity to gain political advantage. The Raj is dead; its legacy of divide-and-rule lives on and flourishes.

I will give you an illustration to make my point, from a State also wracked by Naxal violence and caste dissensions. In a superb bit of political legerdemain, the ruling party created two new classifications for the backward, splintering the vote-banks of its opponents. To win the loyalty of those who now found themselves even more backward than they thought they were, it decreed that they were entitled to rations under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana, meant for the poorest of the poor. In the district I went to, the numbers of those now entitled went up from 50,000 to 300,000. Since the State did not have the money to provide food for its new beneficiaries, it simply divided food meant for 50,000 among 300,000, so they all now received rations for two months in the year. For the 250,000 new beneficiaries, this was a windfall; they wanted rations all twelve months, of course, but even the two months were something they had not had earlier, and gave them every reason to support the ruling party. The 50,000, for whom the food was meant, because they had nothing else to eat, were left starving, but they were not the party’s vote-bank to begin with, and after five years of trying to survive on food for two months, most would die in any case; they would not be a factor in the next elections.

Across the State, this would mean that the ruling party worked a huge swing of votes in its favour in each district, at a terrible cost in human suffering. This was diabolical political engineering, and because it has been shown to pay dividends, will be tried out elsewhere. I am perhaps being unfair and there were other, more benign reasons for the party’s success, but we must face the truth that democracy can be perverted to undermine human rights, and fair elections do not guarantee them. I shall return to this point later.

This State may have used food very cynically as bait but it was not lavishing luxuries on sybarites. On any objective criteria, those whom it was listing as below the poverty line would indeed qualify; there was very little difference between them and those who were officially BPL. Which is why the National Advisory Council has recommended that legal entitlements to subsidized foodgrains should be extended to at least 75% of the country’s population – 90% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas, with priority households, 46% in rural areas and 28% in urban areas,
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given a monthly entitlement of 35 kg (at 7 kg a person). In my assessment, based on visits to the poorest, even this is not enough, because it translates to 230 gm a day, which is pitiful for people who do manual work and have no other food.

These recommendations are not acceptable to Government, for reasons that are not trivial – the impact on the budget, and on food availability, among others. But implicit in these recommendations is an assessment that a huge percentage of the population is still functionally below the poverty line. It is obviously difficult for any government to concede that two decades of sustained growth have made no real dent on core poverty.

This should not surprise us, though, because for two decades the UN’s Human Development Report has made it clear each year that, on every parameter on which growth with equity can be measured, we have done very poorly indeed. In the Human Development Index, India is now 119 in a list of 169. The first HDR, in 1990, had us 37th from the bottom, which means that over twenty years, we have moved up 13 places. The countries below and around us now are almost the same as in 1990, mostly countries from sub-Saharan Africa that have been ravaged by civil wars, ecological disasters, epidemics, mass migrations or a combination of all these evils and more. None of them has had the rates of GDP growth we have had, none has emerged since then as a powerhouse of the new technologies that will drive the world, none claims a permanent seat on the Security Council. How do we, as Indians, either explain, or live with, this paradox?

There is an even more basic yardstick the world now has to measure how far nations have removed human disabilities, the Millennium Development Goals, which all developing countries have agreed to meet by 2015. Let me offer a word of explanation here, and another mea culpa. As someone who took part in the negotiations, I will confess to you that the MDG represent a pyrrhic victory of governments over their people.

Contrary to the public perception, the MDG do not represent the minimum that needs to be done, simply the minimum that governments reluctantly agreed to do. At the negotiations, both the OECD and the G77, the developed and the developing, diluted the goals, the OECD because they thought the poor would demand more assistance, which they were not prepared to give, and the G77, because they did not want to accept standards to which they might be held accountable, by their own people and others.
It should be expected then that if a country does not meet even these inadequate goals, the plight of its people is truly parlous. So how is India doing? The current assessment of the MDG Monitor is that -

- On Goals 1 to 3 and Goal 5 – to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; improve maternal health – it is possible for India to meet targets if some changes are made. (These changes are unlikely, as the debate on food security shows.)

- There is insufficient information on what India is doing, and therefore on whether it will meet targets on Goals 6 to 8 – combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; develop a global partnership for development; and

- It is off track on Goal 4, reducing child mortality.

It is not that the Government is sitting on its haunches. It does have a raft of initiatives meant to address economic and social rights. The problem is that most of these flagship programmes flounder or are being subverted, and sometimes have unintended consequences. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, launched in 2006, is a case in point. It is a project epic in scope and vision. In three phases, it has covered all rural districts, and is built on the assurance that any adult, man or woman, prepared to do unskilled manual labour, will have 100 days of work a year, for which they would be paid Rs.100 a day. Its creation also concedes that GDP growth has not created enough jobs, and that there is chronic unemployment in rural India, for which there is no cure in sight. Without it, millions would not have the money to buy even the most heavily subsidized food, and tip over from survival to starvation. It therefore simply has to work, but does it?

At the end of 2009, according to the “Report to the People” that the Ministry of Rural Development puts out, job-cards under NREGS had been issued to 108.6 million people, work provided that year to 42.7 million, the average number of mandays of work per household was 47, and the average wage per person per day was Rs. 89. Therefore, less than half of those who need the work get it, those who do get less than half the number of days to which they are entitled, and they do not get Rs. 100 a day.
In the most backward districts, where there is no work for people with skills, villagers tell us that anyone who stays back for the 100 days of NREGS work has nothing to do for the rest of the year, and so the forced migration of labour, stopping which was one of its objectives, continues unabated. Only those who can find no employment elsewhere stay back, and, because they have little or no income for the rest of the year, they ask for guarantees of 200 days of work a year. This is an indication of the extent of unemployment and need in India’s villages.

The Government is unlikely to be able to entertain this request, not because it is not legitimate, but because of its cost. NREGS’ current budget, even while it gives work to less than half of those who need it, is Rs. 39,000 crores; providing work to all card-holders would at least double the cost, giving them the full 100 days of work double it again, and doubling the number of man-days would double that.

There are other flagship programmes which might be having unintended consequences. The Indira Awas Yojana, for instance, set up to give the poor houses to live in, pays a rural family Rs. 45,000 to build a house, and most leap at the offer, because they have never seen so much money in their lives, and the prospect of escaping mud walls, or wattle and leaves, is tempting. They soon find that Rs. 45,000 does not get much of a house, even in a village. So what do they do? When I asked some of them, they told me that they went to the money-lender. This needs to be verified across States, but if what we have noted is not unusual, and there is no reason why it should be, the Yojana could be leading to an increase in rural indebtedness. These are national challenges that can be met only if there is a broad public interest, if educated opinion finds it necessary to read, for instance, the “Report to the People” prepared for them on the NREGS, and to demand, through the media, through the representatives it elects and through every other channel, that things be set right. But our disinterest is profound, including on the fundamental problem I raise next.

The Prime Minister has said that the challenge from the Naxals is the most serious threat to India’s internal security, but it is more than that. The Naxals operate in and recruit from the tribal areas. The tribals are the invisible citizens of India; the Naxal uprising reminds the rest of India that they exist, though, tellingly, the Naxals have never listed tribal demands in their manifestos. It is even more complicated because the tribal tracts hold most of our mineral resources, exploiting which is one of the paths to the growth which we need to eradicate poverty. India’s response will show if, faced with a challenge from its own people, it is prepared to address not just the violent symptoms, but the cause.
The debate that rages in public is between the Ministry of Environment on one hand and the various ministries that want to exploit these minerals, such as the Ministry of Coal. It is almost forgotten, which is not surprising, because the tribals are the forgotten people, that there are many millions of human lives involved. The forests of India are not empty, not areas simply for town dwellers to holiday in, or to be preserved as carbon sinks, or to be stripped and mined. They are central to the lives of the tribes.

Therefore, without being apocalyptic, we have to recognize that, if after 1975, India chose to be a democracy, it now has to decide what sort of democracy it will be. If democracy is the greatest good of the greatest number, the tribes, who are 9% of our population, must sacrifice their interests for the rest. That democracy, though, is the tyranny of the majority. Elected governments gauge the mood of the majority, both because they cannot win elections otherwise, and because their job is to do what is best for the country as a whole. It is only when the majority is mature enough to understand and embrace the problems of the minority that governments will not play the populist card. The responsibility lies with us, the electorate.

Real democracy must accommodate the legitimate rights and interests of all, and, in this weighing of the needs of the environment, of the economy, and of the tribes, the real needs of human beings must be seriously addressed, even if they do not prevail. If we brush aside the needs of the tribals, because GDP growth demands it, we are not very different from a totalitarian system that would do this without any qualms.

All of us would agree that fairness and equity demand that, if a tribe is to have its lands taken away, it must be properly compensated and rehabilitated. That rarely happens. In the NHRC, we have investigated several complaints about mass displacements forced by large projects, and have found that commitments given to the tribals, and to others who have been uprooted in the name of growth, have hardly been honoured.

There is, however, an even more fundamental problem here, which has to do with questions of identity. Orthodox Hindus claim the tribes as part of the Hindu world, but Hinduism no longer practices or understands the passionate animism on which tribal religious beliefs are based. Most Hindus consider them odd, a bit different, not entirely like them. Unlike the scheduled castes, which are part of the ecumenical drama of Hinduism, in which their role was to suffer unspeakable cruelty, the tribes are not. They fit no template, and therefore suffer even greater neglect and disdain. Projects that remove the hills and forests which the tribes worship, and
from which they get not only sustenance, but their identities, bring upon them a forced deracination; India will lose a lot of the diversity on which we pride ourselves, and which, we claim, makes us Indian. And we cannot assume that it will be supinely accepted by the victims.

There are no easy answers, but the questions need to be asked and solutions found by an informed and caring nation. In a judgement delivered on the 5th January this year, drawing attention to the evil we ignore, the Supreme Court has urged that the tribes be treated fairly, describing them as the original inhabitants of India, of Austroic rather than Dravidian origin. Its appeal should not be lost in disputes over ethnology. In the international human rights debate, India does not accept that it has an indigenous population that needs protection, as for instance the aborigines of Australia do, nor does it accept that castes or tribes in India are based on a racial taxonomy. We claim therefore that there is no racial discrimination in India. It would be a great pity if this brave judgement became a matter of contestation on these grounds, because what is absolutely important to remember and to act on is its central message that “the injustice done to the tribal people of India is a shameful chapter in our country’s history”.

Does this mean that growth and human rights are incompatible? Not at all. In India, we often ignore the work done elsewhere that proves that human rights, denied or assured, have quantifiable effects on an economy. Take mental health, like the tribes, something we would much rather not talk about in polite company, and which as a nation we ignore, though it is self-defeating on hard economic grounds.

In 2009, a national seminar organized with the NHRC’s help estimated that nearly 1% of our population has major psychiatric illnesses and 15% other mental health problems. The seminal work of Jeffrey Sachs established that malaria cost Africa 1.3% of its GDP each year; the effect of mental illness on economies is even more severe. A study in 2000 estimated that mental health problems cost the US $83 billion each year. The EU estimates that stress-related illness costs it between 3-4% of GDP. If, despite close attention, mental illnesses cost the EU so much every year, the impact in India is probably more severe, but even at EU levels, halving the economic impact of mental illnesses means we add 2% to our GDP.

Let me put this in perspective. The Planning Commission estimates that poor infrastructure has cost India between 1.5 and 2% in GDP growth each year. To correct this, the 11th Plan has an outlay of $490 billion on infrastructure, supplemented by the private sector and public-
private partnerships. Halving our mental health problems might add as much to GDP growth as the new infrastructure will. We should not abandon the one for the other, but it really is madness that neither the government nor the private sector spends even a fraction on mental health of what is being invested in infrastructure. And this holds good for other human rights as well: last December, a study sponsored by the World Bank estimated that the impact on health of poor sanitation costs India the equivalent of 6.4% of GDP each year. Both government and business should have compelling reasons of self-interest to invest in human rights, and the sane public, all of you, ladies and gentlemen, have very good reasons to urge them to do so.

Some of you may think that I am throwing up these arcane issues to avoid talking about what many consider the core problem on human rights, violence committed by the State. I have not so far, because, though it is a real problem, it pales almost into insignificance against the magnitude of those I have spoken about, and others I do not have the time tonight to raise. But, since I have spoken about Maoism and mental illness, let us stick with the M in manavadhikar and talk about murder.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When public servants kill, terrorise or harm those they are meant to serve, they break the law, because extra-judicial killings, torture or wrongful imprisonment are crimes. But they take place, far more frequently than they should. There are institutional flaws that make these common.

The military and paramilitary pose a particularly difficult challenge. In J&K, for instance, there have been many instances where the local police have investigated and confirmed acts of violence by military units or personnel against innocent citizens. In Assam, in similar cases, commissions of enquiry have found that some complaints were true. In almost all cases, however, military tribunals have held that the charges were false. Therefore, a culture of impunity has set in among the armed forces, whose leaders believe that if their personnel are found guilty, particularly by civilians, morale will suffer. Hence their threats that, if the Armed Forces Special Powers Act is repealed or diluted, they would not be able to come to the aid of civil authority.

The stand taken by the armed forces is an abomination, because in war they must abide by the Geneva Conventions. Because of their opposition, India has refused to sign the Optional Protocol,
which covers actions taken by armed forces in internal armed conflicts. Therefore, when an Indian soldier goes into action in a war against a foreign enemy, he is governed by a set of laws, and is accountable if he breaches them, but, under the Special Powers, unless his immunity is withdrawn, which it rarely is, he is not accountable when he kills his own citizens, whom he has taken an oath to defend. Should a democracy accept this? And even if we look at it entirely cynically, how does it help India’s interest to give the armed forces impunity in the north-east and in J&K, where the Special Powers Act applies, when it alienates even more those of our citizens there who already feel that the rest of India has no concern for them?

We come then to the encounter death, shorthand for a death that takes place when police say that they encountered a criminal or gang, asked them to surrender, were fired upon and were forced to return fire in self-defence. These deaths take place throughout India. From 2006 to 2010, the NHRC has handled 708 such cases, and the practice is common enough to have spawned an Indian neologism; we receive urgent pleas from relatives of men who have been abducted, and who fear that they will be “encountered”.

After an encounter, the police submit a charge-sheet against the dead men; since they are dead these cases are filed, the policemen rewarded, and life goes on for the rest. The NHRC tried to put a stop to this by insisting that every death in an encounter be reported to it, and that, thereafter, the authorities send it copies of the inquest, the post-mortem, the magisterial enquiry, and the report of an investigation carried out by an independent agency. It sometimes takes years, and the threat of summons, to get these, and many magisterial enquiries are of poor quality, usually accepting the police version of events without analyzing them. Quite a few enquiries carried out by State Criminal Investigation Departments, which should be independent, are no better. Two conclusions might flow from this: either the State prefers its employees to its citizens, or those who hold these enquiries are not good enough. Neither conclusion is comforting.

What is also worrying are the patterns we see. This being India, there is unity in diversity. The unity is the fact that encounter killings take place throughout the country. The diversity comes from the regional narratives in which they are couched. Exactly as every fable in India has a regional twist, and the Ramayana is not told in the same way in Bengal as it is in Tamil Nadu, each State in India has its own myth for an encounter.
As examples, in UP, late at night, the police see two men riding towards them on a motorcycle, usually a Hero Honda, ask them to stop, the men spin around and drive off firing at the police, which gives chase. The motorcycle always slips, the men fall off, take positions and resume firing at the police, which then returns fire. One of the men is killed, the other gets away, using the cover of darkness.

In Mumbai, the police receive a tip-off about a criminal, form two teams and lay a trap. Invariably, this is late at night, but on a well-lit road. A three-wheeler stops at the appointed place, and a man gets out, who is identified by the informant by the light of the street-lamp under which he always steps. The police identify themselves, and the rest of the encounter then unfolds as in UP, except that there is no Pimpernel who gets away.

At one level this is comical, but it is also deeply worrying because of what it reflects. Uniformed services believe in rote, and these regional patterns show that these narratives are in one form or the other, or at some level, taught. If policemen are trained in how to mask cold-blooded murders, the implications do not bear thinking about. Sadly, in more than one State, senior officers have told us quite frankly that they have carte blanche to kill criminals who fall into their hands.

And indeed we find that almost every person killed in an encounter has had a criminal record. In other words, the most reprehensible of murders, a completely innocent man picked out at random and killed by police, is very rare. But why are people with a criminal background killed?

For two reasons, both very sad reflections on the state of our society. The criminal records show that many had been accused of mostly petty and non-violent crimes. These men were not a danger to society, or to the police, but were soft and tempting targets, because they did have a criminal background, and killing them brought rewards with it. At this lowest and darkest of levels, policemen kill men for medals and promotions.

The second class of encounters involves men who had committed terrible and violent crimes, and they are killed for reasons that raise troubling questions about aspects of our judicial system. We often find that these men had been tried for the most heinous crimes and acquitted, or had never come to trial. These criminals coerce or frighten their victims, witnesses, and sometimes prosecutors, into silence, and even when a case comes to trial, they walk away free. So the next time the police catch them, they kill them.
If the police feel they must take the law into their own hands, because the due process of law fails them and the common citizen, we have a systemic disorder that needs urgently to be fixed. This can be done if the executive, the legislature and the judiciary recognize it as the fundamental problem it is and work together to fix it. There is no sign of this happening. Politicians respond to public wishes, and even in liberal society, there seems a surprising level of support for the practice of killing criminals. And the murder of Naxals raises barely a shrug, since they kill without compunction. But a society that fights crime with crime, and thinks it can buy itself security by these means, both deludes and debases itself.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to end by speaking about the children of India, for two reasons. First, because they are the future, and much can be borne and forgiven in the present if their lives are better. And because nothing could be more apt than to speak about those to whom Dr. Sisir Bose devoted his working life.

So let us track the life of an Indian child from a village or an urban slum. The first question is, was the child planned and welcome? UNFPA believes 15% of births in India are not, and take place because the inadvertent parents had no access to family planning services. When a woman finds she is pregnant, anxieties set in about the sex of the unborn child; ruthless foeticide often follows if tests that are illegal, but easy to get, show it is a girl. The UNFPA fears 2000 girls are lost every day because of this savage preference for males: 7 lakh girls killed by their parents each year before they are born. On a scale of cruelty, encounter deaths are a tear-drop to this ocean.

Of the children who are born, 25% are underweight at birth, and continue undernourished. In the WHO’s deeply shaming assessment, while the child mortality rate dropped to 90/1000 in 2002 from 202/1000 in 1970, the rate of decline slowed in the 1990s, just when the economy took off. 1.72 million children still die in India each year before the age of 1. Because of our gender bias, the mortality rate is even higher for girls than boys.

A baby who survives must be vaccinated and well fed if it is to thrive. However, the World Health Statistics show that, even in 2010, India’s record on immunization was worse than that of Bangladesh and Pakistan. There is absolutely no excuse for this, particularly when Indian industry supplies the vaccines used in so many other parts of the world.
And on nutrition for children the last National Family Health Survey carried out by the Government of India gives us this report: “The percentage of children under age five years who are underweight is almost 20 times as high in India as would be expected in a healthy, well-nourished population and is almost twice as high as the average percentage of underweight children in sub-Saharan African countries.” 48% are chronically undernourished, 20% acutely malnourished.

This is despite the money and effort spent from 1975 on another vast programme, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), through which children from villages and slums are taken into, vaccinated, fed and taught until the age of 6 in Anganwadi Centres. Without the ICDS, for which the budget in the 11th Plan was Rs. 44,000 crores, the figures I have just quoted would be even more appalling, and therefore it is claimed as a partial success, but the National Family Health Survey and our monitoring of the backward districts shows that this is a mirage.

There are 11 lakh operational Anganwadi Centres which cater to about 72 million children and 15 million pregnant and lactating mothers. Every Anganwadi has to maintain a register of the children it looks after. It has to regularly record the height and weight of every child, on a graph whose four curves list different levels of nutrition. I have rarely come across an Anganwadi that serves the number of children registered, or where the health of the children present is close to what is recorded in the charts.

There are no checks on the Anganwadi workers, though many are dedicated, or on their reports, which are often false. Even without venality, simple village women would be unwilling to record that children in their care were not well-fed. Most States are complicit in this; in several, weighing machines are being issued to the Anganwadis now, 35 years after the scheme started, and they therefore knew that the data they received and sent on was a work of fiction. As is the deemed success of the ICDS.

The child who survives goes to the village school, whose teachers are like gods, believed to exist but never seen, so the Government set up the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which hires people with roots in the area as para-teachers, on the assumption that they would work at the schools to which they were posted. Huge numbers of para-teachers have been hired, but the problems remain. Those who are content are not qualified to teach; para-teachers who are qualified complain that they do the same work as the regular teachers, but get a fraction of their pay. So our village schoolchild either has no teacher, a teacher in name or an angry teacher.
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The child might not learn much but, on the Supreme Court’s orders, must be fed a mid-day meal. The NHRC’s field visits confirm reports from NGOs that in many States the scheme, like the children, is rickety. But, even when it is meagre, children are often sent to school only for the meal, simply because it is one less mouth to feed at home. They do not attend classes.

Figures for enrollment, which have gone up, are therefore completely misleading. The numbers of those notionally at school rise, but the standards fall. The Annual Status of Education Report, which the Vice President released on January 14, found, for instance, that on something as basic as the ability to read, a child who entered Class 1 in 2006 did worse than a counterpart in 2001.

It goes without saying that the infrastructure of schools in the villages of India is either dreadful or absent. Even at the higher secondary level, the facilities, and the standards, are deplorable. Among the village children who complete their secondary education, many will have learnt very little. As an example, a higher secondary school in rural Jharkhand, which I visited, had 1500 students, furniture in about 1/3rd of the rooms, and no electricity. Including the Principal, it had 5 teachers. One was a teacher qualified in the subject assigned to him. Another was a teacher of Persian, sent to the school for reasons that baffled everyone; since he had studied science in school, he was the science teacher. The other two teachers were peons. I have no reason to believe that this school was a unique exception.

It is not surprising, therefore, that children either run away, or are often sent off by their parents to work in conditions and industries banned by law. In our work, we come across far too many children who have had to be rescued. Most of them are bonded labour, which is also banned by law. Most of them are not from the States where they are found, and are therefore migrant workers, for whom special legal provisions exist. Since most officials are unaware of their legal responsibilities towards these children under these Acts, it takes us years to get them even nominal redress.

But what is completely shameful is that, in the 21st century, the world’s largest democracy is still not prepared to outlaw child labour; the law simply regulates it, because, it is argued, economic reality and social practices make banning it impractical. On that argument, sati should have been regulated, and caste Hindus asked to humiliate scheduled castes within permissible norms. India cannot have a law that guarantees the right to education and another that assumes that children of school-going age will actually be at work. The obligation to work, forced upon millions of our children, ensures that they will never be able to exercise the right to education.
That is our little pilgrim’s progress. What conclusions flow from this dismal tale? That if you are one of the hundreds of millions of children growing up in Indian villages, the chances are that you live with hunger and will grow up undernourished, vulnerable to every passing germ, either functionally illiterate or with an education that will not get you far in the modern world. If you are poor and scheduled caste, you are even worse off, if you’re a poor tribal, worse off still, and if you’re a girl, you have even more struggles than your brothers do. That is the future of those who will form the core of the new India.

And so, ladies and gentlemen, I shall leave you with this thought. If we leave them to rot there, if we do not work to transform their lives, what is happening in the Naxal belt now might look in retrospect like a Sunday school tea-party.

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SARAT CHANDRA BOSE MEMORIAL LECTURE 2011
BANGLADESH: THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE
Netaji Bhawan, Kolkata, 25 August, 2011
By Dr. Kamal Hossain

INTRODUCTION

I am indeed grateful for the invitation to deliver this lecture at Netaji Bhawan as we observe the fortieth anniversary of the independence of Bangladesh. Kolkata has special associations for us. The resistance to British colonialism and the emergence of non-communal politics, represented by Deshbandhu C.R. Das, Netaji and Sarat Babu are part of the history of our struggles. In my lecture I have drawn extensively upon my book, which is currently in the press entitled Bangladesh: The Road to Independence.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Twice within twenty-five years, in their quest for freedom and justice, the people of Bangladesh were involved in the creation of a new state. In both cases, a political leadership drawn largely from the emerging middle class, succeeded in persuading the people, composed largely of peasants, that salvation and emancipation from exploitation, and their empowerment, could only be achieved through independence. In both cases, an alliance of different sections of the intelligentsia had supported the quest for change.

A process of change began when Muslims began to avail of special facilities for education and jobs, and a Muslim middle class began to emerge in Bengal, around the beginning of the twentieth century. The concurrent shift in the agrarian economy of Bengal helped in this growth. At the close of the nineteenth century, agricultural crops in Bengal were steadily acquiring a commodity value. Farmers with substantial holdings started to recruit share-croppers from the ranks of the impoverished peasants to farm their lands. Thus a category known as jotedar (middle level landholder/tenant farmer) emerged in rural Bengal. In East Bengal the number
of Muslim jotedars increased over time. Since most of the jotedars could afford the cost of higher education for their sons or provide them with capital to invest in business in neighbouring towns, a large number of jotedar families forged links with the urban middle class. One or more members of the family entered other occupations ranging from a school or college teacher, a lawyer, doctor, businessman, government or civic official, to clerk.

In the twenties and thirties, significant initiatives were taken by the middle class leadership to promote non-communal politics in Bengal. Deshbandhu C.R. Das as leader of the Swarajya Party entered into an understanding with the Muslim leaders of Bengal. Under the Bengal Pact of 1923, it was agreed that the Muslims of Bengal would get separate representation in the Provincial Council on the basis of their population, and 55 per cent of all government posts would be reserved for them. C.R. Das’ death in 1925 was an irreparable loss for the cause of communal harmony. There is a moving testimony to this effect in Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy’s Memoirs.

“Deshbandhu C.R. Das was the greatest Bengali, may I say Indian, scarcely less in stature than Mahatma Gandhi, I have ever had the good fortune to know. He was endowed with a wide vision, he was totally non-communal. I believe with many that had he lived, he would have been able to guide the destiny of India along channels that would have eliminated the causes of conflict and bitterness which had bedeviled the relationship between Hindus and Muslims, and which for want of a just solution, led to the partition of India, and the creation of Pakistan.”

During this period there were other currents entering into the political environment of Bengal. The thirties witnessed a resurgence of militant revolutionary activity. The historic Chittagong Armoury Raid, carried out by young cadres of the Jugantar party, led by Surya Sen, took place in April 1930. This was the period when revolutionaries such as Comrade Muzzafar Ahmed, one of the founders of the Communist Party of India and M.N. Roy, began to exert influence on the youth of Bengal. The origins of the peasant unrest which eventually led to the Tebhaga movement in the forties have been traced back to 1939, when the first agitation by small peasants in Dinajpur district challenged illegal imposts levied by the jotedars.

The University of Dhaka, established in 1921, became the nursery of the modern intelligentsia of East Bengal, and provided leadership to major political movements of the coming decades. Students and new graduates drawn from rural backgrounds started to grow in numbers.
There is, of course, another India, just as real, the India that is expected to be one of the mahanayaks on the world stage in this Asian century. This is the new Asian drama, which will give a Viking burial to the Asian Drama that Gunnar Myrdal wrote of, the poverty of our nations. Both exist, but they cannot peacefully coexist.

This is clear to me from the work we do in our most backward districts. The NHRC chose these, one in each State, because official data showed that political, economic and social rights were all precarious there. So there we monitor local entitlements to the right to food, education and health, of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes to equal status, of those in conflict with the law to custodial justice. These, the least developed, the most disadvantaged and the most neglected districts of India, make up our critical list.

There is another list of critical districts now prepared by the Home Ministry, of those most ravaged by Naxal violence. It should not surprise you at all that, up the spine of India, where the Naxals are most active, the same districts figure on both lists.

There is no point arguing about cause and effect. It is clear that years of neglect and exploitation have turned some villagers and tribals into Naxals, or made them sympathetic to their cause. But a vicious cycle has been set in motion. The denial of economic and social rights bred Naxalism; now the State wants to make amends but cannot, because the Naxals will not let them. The millions of people who live in these huge swathes of our countryside where the writ of government hardly runs feel that they are being ground between two millstones.

In a village in the district of Chatra in Jharkhand, where the school had recently been blown up by the Naxals because a police patrol had used it for a bivouac, I asked the villagers why they did not resist, since they and their children were the ones who suffered. How can we, they said. “We did not want the police to stay in the school, but they did. When they went away, the Naxals blew it up. We don’t have guns”, they said, “the police and the Naxals do. The men with the guns don’t listen to us.” That is another refrain we hear in our visits; the villagers and tribals who inhabit these districts where the Naxals confront the State are still voiceless, or, if they speak, they are “scarcely heard amid the guns”.

This is not true, some of you might say: India is a democracy, and the poor have shown that they can make their voice heard in the elections. Maybe so, but the first-past-the-post system we have adopted gives no incentive to our politicians to work for the common good.
Some of the new graduates were drawn into the Muslim League. It thus came to embrace within it contradictory elements ranging from traditionalist and conservative ‘right’ forces as represented by the Nawab family of Dhaka and an emergent middle class, which had ‘progressive’ attitudes towards social change.

Kamruddin Ahmad, who was one of the young "progressives" describes the schism which was developing within the Muslim League, dividing the reactionary leadership from the progressives, thus:\(^4\)

“Towards the end of 1943, Abul Hashim was elected the General Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. He declared that he would do his best to liberate the Muslim middle class intelligentsia of East Bengal from the shackles and bondage of the reactionary forces and the vested interests. With his knowledge of both Islam and Marxism he could inspire the younger generation - a generation disappointed with the reactionary leadership during the Second World War and the great famine. The Muslim League was clearly divided into left and right. The rightists were led by Maulana Akram Khan and Sir Nazimuddin, the leftists were headed by Abul Hashim. The latter group began to agitate for a total abolition of rent receiving interests in land and for redistribution of cultivable land to the tillers. The approach of Abul Hashim and his followers was never communal. They believed in joint-electorates and a democratic government. They believed in making a common front of all parties and organizations against British imperialism. They were more secular in approach than any other group of Muslim Leaguers in those days in the sub-continent.”

It is appropriate to mention that Sarat Chandra Bose, to whom this lecture is dedicated, had made earnest efforts with Abul Hashem and Suhrawardy that led to the signing of a tentative agreement on 20 May, 1947 for a Sovereign United Bengal, which however, was unable to secure the needed political support.

But the "newly emerging forces" within the Muslim League could not consolidate their position. Communal passions roused by the riots of 1946, and a determined challenge by the rightist leadership, which drew support from the party high command from outside Bengal, sent Abul Hashim into virtual retirement. His followers appeared leaderless and isolated, nevertheless they did not withdraw from the field. According to Kamruddin Ahmad:\(^5\)
“Abul Hashim’s group of workers had shifted their centre of activity to Dacca. They were disillusioned at what had happened and was happening in the name of religion and decided to draw the attention of the people of East Bengal to realities of life. They decided to re-dedicate themselves to the economic emancipation of the common man, to fight the evils of religious fanaticism, and to lead the country gradually but definitely towards socialism. They left the Muslim League and were working out a programme which would make the people more rational in their views. They knew all the time that the reactionary leadership which was definitely growing in strength would persecute and oppress them but they had faith in the people.”

Thus, time honoured colonial techniques through which minorities have ruled majorities were adopted by the ruling group. The minority ruling group from the western wing controlled the administration in the eastern wing by installing weak and pliable persons in positions of political responsibility and by posting non-Bangali officers to key administrative posts. They seized every opportunity to promote disunity and division, by exploiting and accentuating factional rivalries. Six non-Bangalis were elected to seats meant for Bangalis in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, thus diluting the latter’s effective majority in that body. Added to this was the fact that the Bangalis had barely five per cent representation in the armed services, 30 per cent in the civil bureaucracy and fifteen per cent in the entrepreneurial class.

A longer term measure was aimed at undermining a sense of shared Bangali identity. Bangla, the language of the majority of the people, was denied the status of a state language. This was the first of the measures to boomerang. The widespread popular anger provoked by this decision led to the start of the ‘State language movement’ from the university. It was in the university that Jinnah was shouted down by students when he insisted that “Urdu and Urdu alone shall be the language of the Pakistan State.”

The East Pakistan Muslim Students’ League was formed in 1948. The Committee of Action formed in the same year to press the claims of Bangla as a state language was composed mainly of students. They also mobilized around other struggles. When the Students’ League in 1949 led the agitation for a pay increase of lower paid university employees, they suffered arrest and expulsion for their participation in the agitation.

The students were the first to organize themselves in opposition to the activities of the ruling elite. The East Pakistan Muslim Students’ League became the platform for an ever growing
politicized student community to voice their grievances against the existing order. The Awami Muslim League was founded in 1949, with Maulana Bhasani as its President, Shamsul Huq as General Secretary and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Assistant General Secretary. After the Language Movement of 1948, the Party started a campaign against the report of the Basic Principles Committee because it failed to recommend Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan or to prescribe provincial autonomy for East Pakistan. In 1951 the East Pakistan Youth League became a platform for a collective struggle of all political parties against the party in power. This was also the first non-communal organization in East Pakistan in that it opened its doors to people of all castes, creeds and faiths. The Youth League played an important role in the Language Movement of 1952. On February 21 as police fired upon students who were demonstrating in support of their demand for recognition of Bangla as a state language of Pakistan, four students were killed. Barkat, Salam, Jabbar and Rafiq were among the first martyrs in the cause of their language.

The Language Movement made a profound impact on politics and society. It led to an active involvement of the youth and students in national politics and, in the mass campaigns that were undertaken to mobilize support for this cause. The contacts between the students and the masses provided a vital bridge between the urban and rural areas. The movement made a seminal contribution to Bengali nationalism transcending communal barriers. The trend towards a secular political culture became evident in several developments from 1952: the founding of the East Pakistan Students’ Union in 1952; the changing of the names of the East Pakistan Muslim Student League and of the Awami Muslim League by removing ‘Muslim’ in 1955 and the formation of two political parties, the Ganatantri Dal in 1953, and the National Awami Party in 1957. The language movement paved the way for a vibrant cultural movement, led by many artists, singers, musicians and litterateurs deriving inspiration from the songs and writings of Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam. They also recognized the strong syncretic elements in Bangla folklore and music. It was in the sixties that leading TV and radio artists led protests against an Information Ministry order banning Rabindra Sangeet from radio and TV. Women TV newscasters protested because they were forbidden from wearing a teep (a vermilion spot on their foreheads).

Confrontations between the majority and the minority had thus begun in the earliest days of Pakistan. Such a confrontation was to take place again early in 1954, when in the provincial elections in East Bengal, the United Front led by Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy and Bhashani, campaigned for regional autonomy, conceding only defence, foreign affairs and currency to the
centre. The Muslim League, which was seen as a party dominated by the non-Bangali ruling group, was routed. The United Front Government had been in office for less than two months, when it was dismissed under emergency provisions invoked by the Central Government. Military force was deployed to install the then Defence Secretary, General Iskander Mirza as governor.

Confrontation also took place in the Constituent Assembly when it had completed the draft of a constitution which would have established parliamentary democracy. The Bangalis would have had a majority of seats in the Lower House of the proposed bicameral legislature, but before the Constitution Bill could be adopted, Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad, a Panjabi and a key member of the ruling group, dissolved the Constituent Assembly on 24 October, 1954. It is not without significance that immediately after the dissolution, the Central Cabinet was reconstituted to include General Ayub Khan, then Commander-in-Chief of the Army, as Defense Minister.

To fill the constitutional vacuum, a Second Constituent Assembly was constituted in 1955 with members indirectly elected by the provincial assemblies. In this Assembly, the ruling group backed by the military, proceeded to dictate terms into the Constitution, which they regarded as essential to preserve their interest. Adopted in 1956, this constitution merged the four provinces in the western wing into one administrative unit, and provided that this One-Unit would have parity of representation with the other unit, that is, East Bengal, in the central legislature. That this was done at the behest of the Panjabi minority is evident from the working paper which was circulated at the time by the Panjabi group. In this paper it was urged that:

“The main problem of constitution making is a precise definition of the federal structure, which in effect amounts to a settlement of the relationship between East Pakistan and the provinces of West Pakistan. We cannot even enter into such a discussion...unless West Pakistan can speak as one entity...A fragmented West Pakistan has really nothing to ask of East Pakistan, because the realities of the situation in any conceivable constitution would already have given East Pakistan incontrovertible superiority.”

But that was not enough in order to preempt the general election which was scheduled to be held in early 1959. Martial Law was proclaimed in October 1958, the Constitution of 1956 was abrogated, political parties were banned, politicians indiscriminately put behind bars and virtually all public leaders of any importance disqualified from holding elective office. The introduction of Basic Democracy in 1959 and the promulgation of a new Constitution in 1962, which introduced indirect elections, a presidential form of government and a strong centre were
measures that effectively excluded the Bangali majority from participation, if any, in the decision making process.

THE SIX POINTS PROGRAMME
Following the cessation of hostilities in the 1965 India Pakistan war a meeting between the Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and President Ayub Khan was arranged through Soviet good offices in Tashkent, and a joint declaration adopted to restore peace. To the Panjabis, the Tashkent Declaration was presented as a ‘sell-out’, a measure of appeasement towards India. Bhutto too began to identify himself with the anti-Tashkent sentiment. The Bangali reaction to the war had been entirely different. The Eastern Wing had experienced a sense of total isolation. The Tashkent Declaration was therefore widely welcomed by people in the East.

The Bangalis had not forgotten that these political leaders had in their day - in the first decade of Pakistan - systematically discriminated against the Bangalis. This discrimination was accentuated in the fifties and sixties. During this period massive transfer of resources took place of foreign exchange earned from the export of jute and jute goods, estimated in the region of over $2.5 billion, which accounted for nearly 70 per cent of the total export earnings from the eastern wing for the development of the western wing5. This experience which made it imperative for Bangalis to secure specific prior commitments on the question of a balance in province-centre relationship, or in other words on the question of regional autonomy.

A national conference was convened by the emerging front of opposition leaders in Lahore on 3 February, 1966. Sheikh Mujib was among the Bangali leaders who was invited to attend.

At the Lahore Conference, when Sheikh Mujib began to present his Six Points Programme, Choudhuri Mohammed Ali, who was in the chair, ruled it out of order. He would not even allow it to be included in the agenda.

Denied the opportunity to present his proposals to the Conference, Sheikh Mujib walked out and released the text of his statement to the press. In the absence of an agreement on the quantum of regional autonomy, the Lahore meeting broke up with a clear division having emerged between the Panjabi leaders (with feeble support from old-guard Bangali leaders on the one hand) and Sheikh Mujib representing an emerging Bangali nationalism, that expressed itself in a demand for substantial regional autonomy.
CONTENT OF THE SIX POINTS PROGRAMME
The Six Points formula for regional autonomy was elaborated in a written statement which was published under the title “Six Points Formula - Our Right to Live” on 23 March, 1966.

The Six Points as formulated in this statement were:

**Point 1**: The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan and a Parliamentary form of Government with supremacy of legislature, directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.

**Point 2**: The Federal Government shall deal with only two subjects, viz: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other subjects shall vest in the Federating States.

**Point 3**: Either there would be
(A) Two separate but freely convertible currencies for the two wings, or
(B) One currency for the whole country may be maintained, but with effective constitutional provisions would be made to stop flight of capital from East to West Pakistan; separate banking reserve and separate fiscal and monetary policy to be adopted in the eastern wing.

**Point 4**: Power of taxation and revenue collection shall vest in the federating units and the Federal Centre shall have no such power; the Federation shall have a share in the state taxes for meeting their required expenditure.

**Point 5**: There shall be two separate accounts for foreign exchange earnings of the two wings, with the earnings of each wing being under their respective control; with the foreign exchange requirement of the Federal Government being met by the two wings either equally or in a ratio to be fixed; duty free trade between the two wings; and the government of each wing to be empowered to establish trade and commercial relations and set up trade missions in and enter into agreements with foreign countries.

**Point 6**: A militia or para-military force shall be set up in East Pakistan.

FROM AGARTALA CONSPIRACY CASE TO THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE
Sheikh Mujib and his colleagues embarked on an intensive public campaign to explain the Six Points to the people. Mass meetings were addressed. These meetings would be followed by arrests of the leaders, who would then obtain bail, and resume the campaign. When the petitions
were moved in the High Court in early 1968, the Government lawyers appeared and stated that some “investigations” were proceeding against these persons. For the first time in the official press release of 18 January 1968, Sheikh Mujib was named as the principal accused and it was notified that the case would be known as the Agartala Conspiracy case.

For the next five months the entire case was covered in a blanket of secrecy. No information was given about the location of the accused who had by then been shifted from jail and placed in military custody. An Ordinance was promulgated on 22 April, 1968 to provide for trial by a Special Tribunal. The main evidence presented was the testimony of approvers, who, when produced at the trial, alleged torture and tended to turn into ‘hostile’ witnesses.

The substance of the Six Points Programme of the Awami League was to be fully endorsed by the students’ organizations supporting the autonomy movement, though with some interesting changes in formulation. The Eleven Points Charter of demands called for:

- full regional autonomy to former provinces and formation of a sub-federation in the Western Wing. Implicit in this was a demand for dissolution of One Unit.
- repeal of repressive laws and release of political prisoners; significantly, the withdrawal of the Agartala Conspiracy case was demanded.
- withdrawal from CENTO, SEATO and "Pakistan-US Military Pacts" and formulation of a "neutral and independent foreign policy."
- nationalization of banks, insurance companies and all major industries including jute; reduction of tax and land-revenue for writing off arrears of land and loans outstanding from peasants;
- minimum price at Rupees 40 per maund of jute;
- fair wages and various welfare benefits for industrial workers together with repeal of "anti-worker black laws."
- flood control measures.

The Eleven Points Programme articulated by the students thus became a comprehensive charter of demands.

Such a comprehensive charter of demands was significant on more counts than one. The inclusion of the substance of the Six Points Programme meant that these were not only the demands made by one political party, but that they had enlisted support from all the major student groups.
having divergent political affiliations and thus had evolved into a national charter, which included not only political demands but demands for equality and economic justice.

The popular movement continued to escalate. The newly formed Democratic Action Committee called a 'National Protest Day' on 17 January, 1969. A massive procession of students set out from the University and was confronted by the police at Mohammadpur crossing. The police opened fire upon the procession and killed a young student, Asad.

**DEMAND FOR WITHDRAWAL OF CASE AND PARTICIPATION IN THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE**

The Government had convened a Round Table Conference in March 1969. Sheikh Mujib took the position that if his participation was desired he could only participate as “a free man”. The case against him and others under “trial” must unconditionally be withdrawn. A legal notice had already been served assailing the trial, and it was for the Government to accept it.

We understood and respected the position taken by Sheikh Mujib. It required both courage in the face of the threats to his life which were being hinted at and in the wake of the killing of Sgt. Zahirul Huque in custody. Under pressure of the mass movement, news spread on 18 February that Sheikh Mujib was to be released that evening. Thousands of people had started marching down the Airport Road to the Cantonment. In view of Sheikh Mujib’s firm refusal to be released on bail, a military vehicle had rushed out with loudspeakers to inform the processionists that no release was taking place that evening but assuring them that he would be released the next day. The next morning at about 11.30 a radio broadcast declared that the trial was constitutionally invalid and therefore the entire trial had to be abandoned. The formula which had been given in the legal notice to the government had, in fact, been accepted. It was truly a victory of the people’s movement. Sheikh Mujib was unconditionally released.

Sheikh Mujib emerged as a national hero and the unquestioned leader of the mass movement which had developed in East Bengal. He took the position that he would only consider going to Rawalpindi for the Round Table Conference after he had addressed a public meeting in Dhaka and received the people’s mandate. The students continued to play a very active part in the movement and were thus able to radicalize the Awami League position. At a mammoth public meeting of over a million, organized by the Combined Students’ Movement (Samilitto Chattro Andolon) at the Race Course (known today as the Suhrawardy Uddayan), Sheikh Mujib was
given a rousing welcome. He pledged his commitment to the party’s Six Points Programme for regional autonomy and also to the Eleven Points Programme. The students pledged their support to his Six Points autonomy demand and conferred on him the title of Bangabandhu (the friend of Bengal).

When declaring that he would go to the Round Table Conference to place the demands of the Bangali people, Sheikh Mujib pledged that if these demands were not accepted, he would intensify the people’s movement and there would be no compromise.

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE (FEBRUARY-MARCH 1969)
As events were to show, the opponents of regional autonomy were to close their ranks and to refuse even to discuss the Six Points formula. It is known that they were constantly in touch with Ayub Khan. Indeed, even before Ayub himself raised objections to the Six Points formula, Chaudhuri Muhammad Ali, in his opening statement, stated that the Democratic Action Committee's demand for a federal parliamentary government did not envisage change in the parity basis of representation or dismemberment of One Unit. He also contended that the Round Table Conference was not competent to go into these questions.

On 13 March, Ayub Khan, looking weary and exhausted, read out a statement which made it clear that he had been prevailed upon by the hardliners. According to Altaf Gouhar, who was involved with these negotiations, Ayub had little freedom for manoeuvre.

Ayub proceeded to announce what was in effect an unilateral award. In a statement which contained echoes of the arguments used by Chaudhuri Muhammad Ali, he declined to respond to the demand for regional autonomy or dismemberment of One Unit. He announced that he would initiate amendments to the 1962 Constitution to provide for a federal parliamentary form of government and direct elections on the basis of universal adult franchise. Ayub Khan sought to justify his inability to deal with the question of regional autonomy and One Unit on the ground that these were fundamental questions which could only be considered by elected representatives. Subsequent events were to prove that the position taken was purely tactical. When later a body of elected representatives was ultimately constituted, the opponents of regional autonomy took up the position that these questions were too fundamental to be dealt with by that body and should be resolved outside in a Round Table Conference.

At a press conference called on that day, Sheikh Mujib rejected Ayub’s “award”, withdrew from DAC and and urged the intensification of the popular movement. The atmosphere was tense. While messages were being sent to Sheikh Mujib, that efforts were still being made to see if
negotiations could be resumed, the air was filled with rumours that the military was getting ready to intervene.

Sheikh Mujib had correctly assessed the public reaction of the Bangalis. Spontaneous demonstrations in Dhaka denounced Ayub Khan, the Punjabi leaders and those Bangalis who had acquiesced in Ayub’s award, and people resolutely pledged their support to the Six Point movement. Sheikh Mujib’s position as the authentic spokesperson for the Bangali people was confirmed by these demonstrations.

Ayub met Sheikh Mujib immediately after the breakdown of the Conference and pleaded his inability to accept the Six Point demands on the grounds that constitutional amendments to give effect to it would not muster enough support in the National Assembly. Sheikh Mujib countered that, given the mood of the Bangalis, if such amendments were proposed, all the Bangali members could be expected to support them and assured him that draft amendments could be delivered within three weeks.

An advance copy of the amendments was delivered to Ayub on 22 March, 1969. The consideration of the amendments by the National Assembly was, however, abruptly preempted by Ayub Khan's resignation, who cited as his reason his unwillingness to preside over “the disintegration of the country”. The resignation was followed by a series of repressive measures: the 1962 Constitution was abrogated, the National Assembly dissolved and Martial Law proclaimed on 25 March, 1969.

**FROM MARTIAL LAW TO GENERAL ELECTIONS AND AFTER**

On 29 March, Yahya became Chief Martial Law and took on the task of protecting the power structure which had been threatened by the mass upsurge. With the imposition of Martial Law, he bought time. In his first speech he committed himself to transfer power to the elected representatives of the people.

On 28 November, 1969, Yahya Khan declared that he would promulgate a legal framework for setting up a Constituent Assembly. He conceded the principle of one person one vote, or representation on the basis of population. This was to give the Eastern Wing 169 seats in an Assembly of 313. He also announced his decision to dismember One Unit.

Article 25 provided that the Constitution Bill would have to be presented to the President for authentication and that the Assembly would stand dissolved if authentication were refused.
This provision was seen by the Bangalis as formally investing the opponents of regional autonomy and the army with the power to veto decisions adopted by a majority in a sovereign Constituent Assembly. It presented the Awami League with an agonizing dilemma: would it, like many smaller political parties, simply reject what was offered, or find a way of accepting the elections without being bound by the conditions imposed by the LFO? After intensive discussions, it was decided that the setting up of a Constituent Assembly, consisting of representatives elected by the people on the basis of one person one vote should be welcomed through a statement. The statement would, however, assert that the elected body would be sovereign and the exercise of its powers to make a Constitution could not be fettered by provisions such as Articles 20 and 25. The statement also called for the repeal of these provisions, and stated that in any event, such restrictions on people’s sovereignty were illegitimate and invalid.

**NATIONAL ELECTIONS (DECEMBER 1970)**

In the elections held in 1970, the Awami League won 167 out of 169 seats in the East in a house of 313. Nurul Amin, a Muslim Leaguer and Raja Tridev Roy, the Chakma Chief who contested as an independent candidate, were the only two non-Awami Leaguers to be elected to the Constituent Assembly. The overwhelmingly decisive election result, giving an absolute majority to the Awami League, was a clear verdict in favour of its Six Points Programme. This result clearly put Yahya’s whole strategy in dire disarray. He had obviously banked upon fragmented representation in the East, so that he would be free to manipulate and manoeuvre. That he was guided by these calculations is not only an inference from circumstances but has been corroborated by West Pakistani leaders and by foreign leaders in whom Yahya confided. He was now confronted with an absolute majority.

In the elections in the West, Bhutto had emerged with 83 seats out of 131 with majorities only in the Provinces of Sindh and the Punjab. Bhutto’s initial reaction to these results was revealing. His very first statement in the wake of elections was that no constitution could be made except with the agreement of the People’s Party. He asserted that Sindh and Punjab were “bastions of power”. This was followed by the statement that “majority alone does not count in national politics”. It was disturbingly clear that he saw the only way to contain the Bangali majority in the National Assembly was to confront it outside the Assembly. There he could supplement his strength from the one source upon which the ruling minority had always fallen back in order to deal with the Bangali majority, namely the army.

The delay in the convening of the Assembly inevitably led the Awami League to consider its own options. A unilateral Declaration of Independence was seen as an option. Careful calculations had to be made of the magnitude of the military response to such a Declaration and the capacity
of the people to withstand the resulting onslaught. Some calculations were made of existing military strength. The suspension of over flights following a recent hijacking and the difficulty this created for augmenting personnel and material were also taken into account.

In the meantime, the Awami League kept pressing for convening the National Assembly. A joint meeting of all Awami League members elected to the National and Provincial Assemblies and members of its Working Committee was called on 13 February, 1971, where “decisions would be taken on our future course of action”. It was widely believed that this meeting would be called upon to consider the option of declaring Independence. I remember a foreign diplomat asking me on its eve, “Are you going to declare UDI at this meeting?”

There was rising anger among the public at the delay in convening the National Assembly. On the very morning when the joint meeting was to take place, Yahya Khan announced that the meeting of the National Assembly would be held in Dhaka on 3 March, 1971. Bhutto's reaction to this announcement was to take a further step towards the crisis. In a statement on 15 February, 1971, he expressed his Party's inability to attend the National Assembly Session on 3 March in Dhaka, in the absence of an understanding for 'compromise or adjustment' on the Six Points.

NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT (MARCH 1971)
The Awami League had conveyed clear and unambiguous signals to Yahya through Governor Ahsan that postponement of the Assembly would lead to a political explosion in the East. Ahsan confirmed that he had transmitted these signals.

The entire Constitution Drafting Committee of the Awami League was assembled in the party office to finalize the draft constitution bill. The Committee was still working to a 1 March deadline, and had nearly completed its work, when one of the party workers came in to report that an important radio broadcast was to be made around 1 p.m.

At 13.05 hours a radio announcer read out the text of a statement ascribed to Yahya. The operative part was that it had been decided to "postpone the summoning of the National Assembly to a later date." It was thus an indefinite postponement. The reason given was that an accepted consensus on the main provisions of the future Constitution had not been arrived at between political leaders. He referred to a political confrontation between the leaders of East Pakistan and those of the West and "with so many representatives of the people of West Pakistan keeping away from the Assembly ... if he were to go ahead with the inaugural session on the 3rd March, the Assembly itself could have disintegrated."
In other words, Yahya clearly signified that the ruling minority would have a veto on constitution making and indeed, unless there was a prior understanding with them, the Assembly would not be convened.

There could be no greater affront to the Bangali people than was contained in that brief statement. A sense of outrage was widely shared by people every where. Government employees began to walk out of the Secretariat and other Government offices; banks, insurance and other commercial concerns, were emptying out. The students were already out in the streets in spontaneous demonstrations, shouting slogans *Joy Bangla* and *Bir Bangali osthro dhoro, Bangladesh shadhin koro.* (“Victory to Bangalis” and “Brave Bangalis take up arms, liberate Bangladesh”).

Sheikh Mujib, on hearing the broadcast, directed all Awami League members of the National Assembly to assemble at Hotel Purbani at 3 p.m. for a press conference.

There was no doubt that a decisive moment had been reached in our history. It was clear that the ruling minority was not prepared to concede to the Bangali majority. They had a modern army equipped with tanks and armaments and supported by air power which they would use to suppress the aspirations of the people. As against this, on the Bangali side, we demonstrated near total unity of 75 million people, who reacted with a shared sense of outrage and a common determination not to submit. But we were unarmed and in any head on confrontation it was obvious that a heavy price in human life would be exacted if we dared to demand our democratic rights. It was clear that there was only one course for the Bangalis - of defiance.

Sheikh Mujib declared: "... only for the sake of the minority party's disagreement the democratic process of constitution making has been obstructed and the National Assembly session has been postponed *sine die*. This is most unfortunate. As far as we are concerned, we are the representatives of the majority of the people and we cannot allow it to go unchallenged." People were urged totally to non-cooperate with the illegitimate government.

Unilateral Declaration of Independence would mean directly engaging the full force of the military. They would not only have used this as a pretext for applying force but would hit out with everything they had in order to impose their will. Could an unarmed population absorb the shock of such an onslaught and emerge victorious? What would be the reaction of the outside world? Would governments come forward to recognize independent Bangladesh? Would an independent Bangladesh Government be able to hold out for long enough in the face of an
organized military onslaught to obtain such recognition? Apart from that, given the different global and regional interests of the powers, would they accord recognition and accept the emergence of an independent Bangladesh? These were among the many questions which required anxious consideration. In the meeting Sheikh Mujib heard different opinions which were expressed by different members but he reserved judgment.

The implications of making an explicit declaration of Independence were carefully weighed. The fact that such a declaration would give the army the opportunity to launch a military onslaught was clearly recognized. It was decided that such an opportunity should be denied. At the same time, the momentum of the movement must be maintained and pressure should be kept on Yahya to proceed to transfer power to the elected representatives of the people. It was calculated that if the tempo of the movement could be sustained and the unity of the people consolidated then it would become evident to Yahya and the military junta that use of military force could not result in their gaining any objective. It was therefore decided that the position to be taken should not be an explicit declaration of Independence, specific demands would be made, with independence as its ultimate goal. These demands would include withdrawal of the army to the barracks, stopping further movement of troops from the West to the Eastern wing and an enquiry into the killings. Sheikh Mujib’s speech, on 7 March, 1971, would focus on two major demands, namely the immediate withdrawal of Martial Law and immediate transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people.

The historic speech of 7 March lasted only 19 minutes. The operative declaration was: "Our struggle now is for independence, our struggle now is for freedom." The immediate termination of martial law and transfer of power to the elected representatives were put forward as specific demands. The written text which was released, was accordingly amended by Tajuddin to include these two points as specific demands. Thus, although independence was clearly set as the goal, Sheikh Mujib stopped just short of a formal declaration since it was clear that the army had been mobilized and had conspicuously taken up positions at different vantage points in the city in order to immediately strike, should such a declaration of independence be made.

Following the meeting, Yahya, who had travelled to Dhaka, met Sheikh Mujib who reiterated his demand for withdrawal of Martial Law and transfer of power to elected representatives. Yahya again mentioned legal difficulties and stated that he had sent for Justice Cornelius, now his legal adviser, to consider these questions. A meeting between Yahya's advisers and the Awami League team was proposed. Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin and I were deputed to sit with Yahya's advisers namely, General Peerzada, Cornelius and Col. Hassan (the Judge Advocate General).
The meeting commenced with Peerzada observing that the discussions between Sheikh Mujib
and Yahya that morning had proceeded on the basis that Yahya would make a Proclamation.
According to him, Sheikh Mujib had proposed that a constitution for the Eastern Wing should
be drawn up by the elected members from the Eastern Wing separately and a constitution for
the Western Wing may be drawn up by the elected members from the West and thereafter they
should sit together to make a constitution for Pakistan. It was also indicated that provision
should be made for the East wing to enjoy autonomy on the basis of Six Points.

In one of the first demonstrations of an armed resistance to the military, the people in Chittagong
resisted the unloading of arms from the Pakistani Ship ‘MV Swat’, because they realized that
these arms would be used to massacre the people. The atmosphere became immensely tense.
In some excitement, Yahya said, although he had come to negotiate and that he had ordered the
army to exercise restraint, he could not tolerate the obstruction to the movement of ‘military
supplies’ by the Awami League. Sheikh Mujib also reacted strongly, saying that while negotiations
were going on, it was expected that the army would remain in the barracks. Yahya countered
by saying that even if they stayed in the barracks, the movement of army supplies must continue.
Sheikh Mujib then stated that the movement of such army personnel in trucks was a provocation
to the people since earlier they had been fired upon by the military personnel. Indeed, very near
Joydevpur where the latest encounter had taken place only a few days earlier, young unarmed
persons had been fired upon by army personnel, killing some of them, so that the emotions of
the local people had been aroused. Sheikh Mujib urged that, given the roused feelings of the
people, the army should not offer provocations. He also said that if unarmed people were being
shot at, ultimately they may also be forced to take up arms to shoot back, therefore, it was
desirable that there should be a political solution and no further bloodshed.

This strong statement by Sheikh Mujib seemed to have had some effect on Yahya, who indicated
that experts could be entrusted with the task of preparing the necessary legal instruments.
Sheikh Mujib turned to Yahya and said that it was for experts to find a way to give effect to the
political decision which they would arrive at. "If we agree to give the necessary directions it will
be the duty of experts to give effect to them", he asserted.

It was then proposed that the basic points which were to be incorporated in the proposed
document to be drawn up should be noted down. These were to be worked out in the draft
proclamation.

In the evening, the reading of all the clauses and the schedules of the draft was concluded. I
asked Peerzada, with a note of urgency, as to when the draft could be finalized? From the Awami
League side it was proposed that I should sit with Cornelius that very night to finalize the draft, so that it could be put up before Sheikh Mujib and Yahya the next morning. Cornelius was agreeable but Peerzada held him back, saying "No, we have some discussions this evening, you may meet tomorrow morning." When I suggested that a time be fixed on the following day, Peerzada again intervened to say that this could be done over the telephone and that I would be contacted over the phone. I waited for a telephone call throughout the fateful day of 25 March. This telephone call never came. Indeed, when I finally took leave of Sheikh Mujib at about 10.30 p.m. on 25 March, Sheikh Mujib asked me whether I had received such a telephone call. I confirmed to him that I had not. That night the Pakistan military launched its premeditated attack upon the Bangali people, and the genocide and bloodbath, the avoidance of which was the principal objective of seeking a negotiated political settlement, began.

Throughout the day on 25 March, we had been receiving telephone calls from many districts expressing apprehension of an attack. Our directive was to resist with whatever arms could be found. The police armouries and other sources could yield such arms. The resistance would be against an occupation force from the moment the military attacked, the people’s movement culminated in a war of liberation.

**EPILOGUE**

The genocidal onslaught exacted a heavy toll of lives and inflicted untold suffering, as millions were displaced, many of whom crossed over to India, not only to seek refuge but, for those who were able, to play heroic roles as freedom fighters. P.N. Dhar, writes from the vantage point of the Prime Minister’s Secretariat: “...even without help from us they had begun to intensify their attacks on the Pakistani forces, and further writes of “…the reckless bravery of Bengali Freedom Fighters”.

The elected members of the National and Provinicial Assemblies, who had crossed over formed a Provisional Government in April 1971. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was in captivity in Pakistan, was named as President, Syed Nazrul Islam as Acting President and Tajuddin Ahmad as Prime Minister. The Provisional Government was sworn in at a ceremony in a mango grove in Kushtia, and established its operational headquarters in Kolkata. The building from which Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed led that Government is located not far from here.

The war came to an end on 16 December, 1971 with the surrender of the Pakistani forces to the Joint Indo-Bangladesh command. In announcing this to a jubilant Parliament Mrs. Gandhi had
underlined that “India’s objectives were limited - to assist the gallant people of Bangladesh and their Mukti Bahini to liberate their country from a reign of terror and to resist aggression on our own land.”

This victory paved the way for Bangabandhu to return to Bangladesh on 10 January 1972. The return itinerary from London to Dhaka had presented a seemingly impossible task, that we reach Dhaka in daylight hours and attempt to accommodate stopovers in Delhi and Kolkata. The solution we found was for a stopover in Delhi on 10 January, with a firm commitment to a subsequent visit to Kolkata, which materialized on 6 February, 1972.

I recall the reception for Bangabandhu in Delhi on 10 January, 1972. I was privileged to return with him as I too was released from captivity. The Chief of Protocol, Captain Mahbub Ahmed, a former INA officer, escorting us, said that this was an occasion, where a Chief of Protocol becomes irrelevant, as all present were visibly overwhelmed by emotions, appropriate to a very special family reunion.

Bangabandhu in his speech on that day expressed the sentiments of the entire Bangali nation, thus:

“For me, this is a most gratifying moment. I have decided to stop over in this historic Capital of your great country on my way back to Bangladesh. For this is the least I can do to pay personal tribute to the best friends of my people, the people of India and this Government under the leadership of your magnificent Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.”

... ... ...

“You all have worked so untiringly and sacrificed so gallantly in making this journey possible - this journey from darkness to light; from captivity to freedom; from desolation to hope.”

“I am at last going back to Sonar Bangladesh, the land of my dreams, after a period of nine months. In these nine months, my people have traversed centuries.”

“When I was taken away from my people, they wept. When I was held in captivity, they fought. And now that I go back to them, they are victorious.”

“I go back to join my people in the tremendous tasks that now lie ahead in turning victory
into a road of peace, progress and prosperity. I go back not with any hatred in my heart for anyone, but with the satisfaction that truth has at last triumphed over falsehood, sanity over insanity, courage over cowardice, justice over injustice, good over evil. Joi Bangla, Jai Hind.”

It was in Kolkata at a banquet in honour of Bangabandhu on 6 February, 1972, that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made a speech, which was both moving and memorable:

“I think you realize by now, Prime Minister, what a great joy it is to have you with us and perhaps you are the first guest who has been universally welcomed by all the parties and all the people of India. It was your shining faith in your people which inspired the Mukti Bahini to penetrate the dark gloom which had engulfed Bangladesh. This achievement is yet another proof that the human spirit can never be crushed and that the flame of freedom cannot be extinguished ... Our aspirations mingle through our common allegiance to freedom, equality and progress. We, in whom our respective people have reposed their trust, must work incessantly to make our people free of spirit, steadfast in faith, and rich in achievement. Above all we must work for tolerance. As inheritors of a great civilization we know that we have endured because of our tolerance and because we have looked towards the future.”

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2 Tebhaga literally means one-third. The Tebhaga Movement which involved the middle and poor peasantry of North Bengal, demanded that the jotedar’s share of the crop due from the share-cropper be reduced from one-half to one-third.


4 Ibid., p.61-74.

5 Ibid., p.75 et al.


7 It is noteworthy that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was then a first year law student, was expelled from the University for participation in this protest and for his subsequent refusal to submit a ‘good behaviour’ bond that was demanded of him by the university authorities.

8 Report of Panel of Economists on the Fourth Five Year Plan for Pakistan, 1970. A separate report was submitted by the Bengali economists in the Panel (Nurul Islam, Anisur Rahman, Akhlaqur Rahman and Rehaman Sobhan) setting out figures to demonstrate the transfer of resources from the eastern wing to the western wing of the order of around three billion dollars.
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Cover Photograph: Netaji in front of his Sophienstrasse home, Berlin, 1942

Back Cover Photograph: Netaji speaking at the inauguration of the Deutsche-Indische Gesellschaft, Hamburg, September 11, 1942. Surrounded by the orchestra that played “Jana Gana Mana” as the National Anthem.

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