

Impact of “20 January 1990” on Azerbaijan’s destiny

In the second half of the 20th century the national liberation movements swept across Africa, Asia and Latin America. In some countries the liberation movement went through smoothly, whereas some others gained independence through bloodshed. Azerbaijan has been a part of Tsarist Russia for 110 years after which it enjoyed its short independence period in 1918-20. But then it became the part of Soviet Union as a result of Bolshevik invasion, though it was called the “unification”.

Throughout the years within Soviet Union, Azerbaijanis have always strived for their national identity. The cream of Azerbaijani intelligentsia has been repressed in 1937 during Stalin period as they were championing for the wider use of Mother tongue. Azerbaijani dissidents were jailed due to their free-thinking. It was difficult to justify and understand why we needed to be a part of the country which oppressed national movements in Prague, Budapest, why it supported communists in Africa and why it started a war in Afghanistan. But intelligentsia could have not fought with mighty Soviet military machine. Luckily, there was an uprising of democratic forces within Russia itself at the end of 1980s and beginning of 1990s. Furthermore, the Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – openly declared their intention to withdraw from the Soviet Union. But the old communist nomenclature, its military-bureaucratic apparatus was still strong and oppressive. As a result of this, the tragic events in Baku, Tbilisi and Vilnius took place. The most apparent crackdown in Baku happened to be on 20 January 1990 in Baku, capital city of Azerbaijan. After the “Black January” massacre the people of Azerbaijan realized that existing Soviet regime is repressive and leaving the Soviet Union was only the matter of time.

Every year people of Azerbaijan commemorate the “Black January” and pay tribute to the memory of the victims of the tragedy. Twenty-five years ago over the night from 19th to 20th January military units of former Soviet Union invaded Baku city and even some regions of Azerbaijan. The invasion was conducted with particular cruelty and unprecedented atrocities: 133 men were cruelly killed, more than 700 people were wounded, 841 men were illegally arrested and 5 people vanished. In fact, women, children and senior citizens, as well as ambulance and militia employees were among the killed people. The soldiers plundered and burnt 200 houses and 80 vehicles, including ambulance cars.

The martyrs, who died that night, sacrificed their lives for freedom that Azerbaijan currently enjoys. Undoubtedly, those heroes will never be forgotten. Those people who were killed at that terrible night paved the way to the national liberation of the Azerbaijani people.

Courtesy of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Malaysia