

16 DECEMBER

THE GLORIOUS VICTORY DAY 2006



Art & Design : Department of Films & Publications, Ministry of Information

Special Supplement



President
People's Republic of Bangladesh

Message

Victory day is one of the most memorable and glorious days in our national life. Our long cherished Independence was achieved after the nine month-long armed struggles and the supreme sacrifice of millions of our people. On this auspicious day of Victory, I pay my deep respect and heartfelt gratitude to the thousands of freedom fighters and countrymen who gave their lives for freedom of the country. I also congratulate and extend my sincere greetings to all my countrymen, including those living abroad.

Bangladesh's Independence and democracy have been achieved through a long drawn movement, forbearance and sacrifices of the patriotic people of the country. It needs united efforts to consolidate this hard-earned achievement and to make it meaningful. We can further strengthen the process through exercising and expanding democratic culture and values and showing fortitude and respect to each other, at individual and national level. Despite differences of opinion among political parties in the system of democratic pluralism, we must make concerted efforts irrespective of party affiliations to solve all our national problems. The upcoming 9th Parliamentary Election is of paramount importance to continuing constitutional process and democratic advancement. I earnestly call upon all the citizens to elect Members of Parliament of their own choice during the upcoming elections and contribute towards advancing the democratic progress.

I firmly believe that our concerted efforts and sincerity will contribute significantly towards building a self-respectful nation, including the attainment of self-sufficiency at every level of our national life. In the spirit of the Victory Day, let us all pledge to shun all differences to solve our national problems through united efforts and contribute to building a happy and prosperous country.

On this significant victory day, I wish Bangladesh continued prosperity.

Allah Hafez, Bangladesh Zindabad.

Professor Dr Iajuddin Ahmed

Introduction

16 December 1971 remains the most memorable day for the people of Bangladesh as it marked the nation's "Victory" in a nine-month Liberation War. A state was born - a nation reinvented - by the sacrifices of millions of people who came from all walks of life. Symbolically, it was a triumph of our Bengali identity and in reality it exemplified the resilience and dynamism of the people of this land who struggled against economic deprivations, social injustice and political unfairness. Although short of a 'social revolution', the victory of the people on 16 December raised high expectations among them for a better life in terms of democratic ideals and an exploitation-free society. Today, after 35 years, we witness a Bangladesh that aspires to marching forward as a democratic nation with a serious 'hold-up' created by its political leaders with a convulsive politics. A Non-Party Caretaker Government with a constitutionally limited mandate is putting its best efforts to resolve the differences created by the contending parties. Visions of our political leadership seem to be under clouds, the nation is drifting with a slide in discipline and order in the society. The unending conflict between the two opposing political forces at this transitional phase cast a somber shadow on the prospect of transfer of power through a free and fair election.

Areas of dynamism

The greatest dynamism of Bangladesh as a nation comes from its overwhelmingly poverty-stricken people who in different phases of history struggled and survived against many adversities of nature and man-made crises. The modern history of the region can be traced back to the 12th century when Bengal fell under the Muslim rule. In the colonial British rule, the ordinary people of this land fought against injustices and deprivation by foreign rulers as well as local power holders. During the two and a half decades of Pakistan period, the same people also fought to establish a separate homeland for better life and a participatory system of governance. Indeed, we were liberated twice, and many things have changed around us. Yet it is one of the greatest ironies of our history that the relationships between the rulers and the ruled transformed little to effect qualitative changes. No wonder, the cracks are now coming from the fault-lines when we work seek to work out a democratic system of governance. Bangladesh is fortunate to have a laudable Constitution where "all powers in the Republic belong to the people". In reality, however, it is far from the copy book -the people have continuously been subjected to marginalization by the political process, and the Constitution could hardly help them. The much-coveted transition to democracy in 1991

Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state on the 16th of December, 1971. The nation's victory was achieved at the culmination of nine months of the War of Liberation. The people were emancipated from subjugation and ten million refugees returned to their homeland.

The war of liberation marked a glorious chapter in the history of the people of this land. Many of the military strategists had earlier declined to recognize Bangalees as a warrior nation and predicted that they would not stand any chance in the event of an uneven war with the Pakistanis. These experts had even cautioned that to support them in such a war would be to push them to a useless confrontation and to eventual annihilation. But eventual it was proved that these experts had failed to understand this particular generation of Bangalees. To their utter astonishment the people of the whole world witnessed the level of the Bangalees' morale, their outstanding courage and their readiness to make supreme sacrifices. The entire world was at the same time, gravely shocked at the barbaric repression on an unarmed nation by the Pakistani army. Accounts of these acts of repression were brought to world view predominantly by foreign journalists who succeeded in unearthing the facts from the smokescreen of false propaganda by the Pakistanis.

Most of the ten million people who look refugee in India during the war were exposed to a sub-human life. Yet, they were relieved to have avoided the persecutions inside their own homeland. The plight of those refugees had also contributed to garnering world support to the war of liberation.

India's direct support to our war of Independence, as well as the diplomatic backing from the Soviet Union, did immensely help us in the war. Otherwise, we might not have succeeded in attaining independence in those nine months.

Yet, we cannot afford to forget that Bangladesh's war of liberation does not essentially mean the nine months of armed engagement. Indeed, the war traces its origin in the political

Reflections on the Victory Day

Anisuzzaman

struggles of the previous 24 years. And those political struggles were intertwined by demands for elimination of economic disparity and for cultural emancipation. The 24 years of political struggles, comprehensive and multi-dimensional, had progressed through many slides and uphill. The movements culminated in the demand for self determination of East Bengal and in the event of self determination not coming, for an all out struggle for independence.

We would be failing to understand our war of liberation unless we understand the history of this political process. Those who try to present a history of our war of liberation by isolating it from the history of those 24 years are failing themselves and confusing the others. And that is where lies the cause of ignorance and confusion on the part of our younger generations about the real history of the country.

No objective history of the war of liberation has been written till now. Such an objective history could only be written when we would have demonstrated the same level of devotion and dedication as we had shown in 1971 in offering our best selves for the country by rising above all our petty interests-personal and group interests. True, the main stream of the war of liberation looked like a straight line. Yet, there had been many other elements of influence beyond that line. Many of our successes, failures and fallacies in post liberation Bangladesh would be better explained if we understand those other elements.

The great bond of unity of our war of liberation days,

which we missed during the post-liberation period, was reinvented in the struggle for restoration of democracy. But, once again, we failed to hold that spirit of unity after the goals of the pro-democracy movement were achieved. The people of the country today are divided manifold. There is still no denying that democracy remains our ultimate objective. We have to work for attaining that objective; and the democratic institutions have to be sustained firmly. We had been unlucky to have played to the evil tune of a handful of self-seeking forces to destroy our democratic institutions rather than building them with utmost care. Despite our efforts in Bangladesh to correct those lapses, we had been cheated at every turn of the road. The great majority of the country's population recognize that there is no alternative to democracy. Then, why should our efforts and our determination to give democracy a firm footing not take the lead?

What we owe to the martyrs of the war of liberation, as also to the martyrs of the movement for restoration of democracy, can never and by no means-be written off. If we don't take care and allow to be lost what the martyrs had earned for us at the cost of their life, we will find no forgiveness when we are at the stands of posterity.

Today, 35 years after being crowned with our coveted independence, we are now at a crucial juncture of our history. We have achieved independence, and it is the aspiration now of all our people- both villagers and city dwellers, men and women- irrespective of their religious beliefs- to have democracy established on a solid base. We cannot afford to meet with failure in our mission to establish democracy. If any force of interest puts any hurdle, we will have to cross that hurdle and sustain our pursuit for democracy.

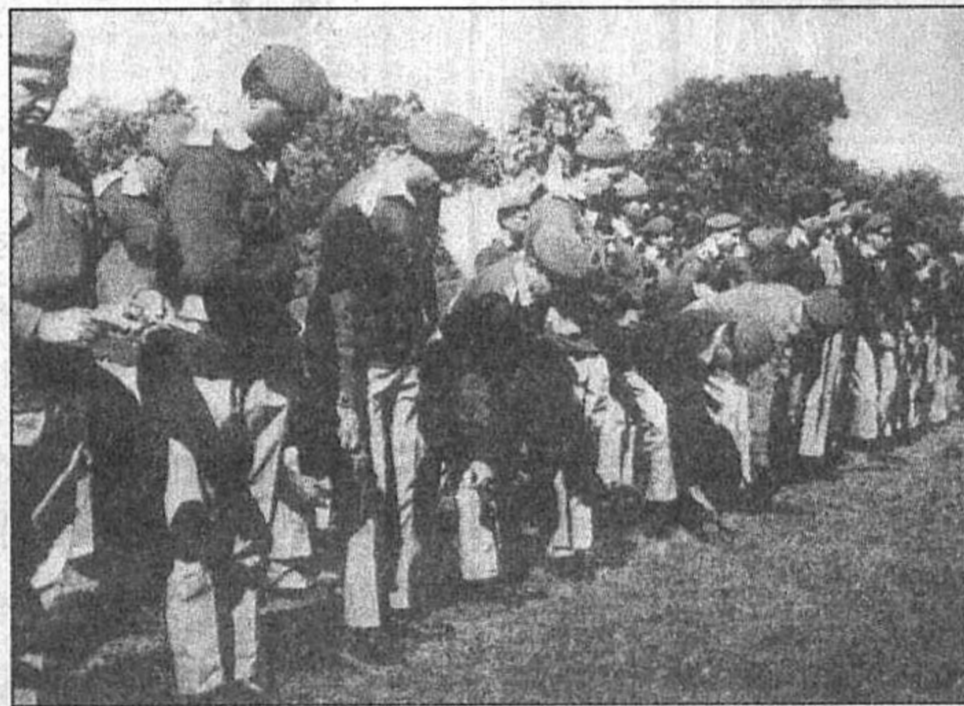
We hear the call of history- we cannot delay our response to the call.

Translation : Deen Mohammad

Dynamic Nation, Convulsive Politics

Professor Dr. Ataur Rahman

rekindled hopes and expectations among the people. The continuation of democratic rule for the past fifteen years signified Bangladesh's success in sustaining a semblance of political stability, but the peoples' expectations were not realized. Their empowerment has been very slow, the decentralization process was extremely weak, and income inequality widened compared to the growth of economy. Bangladesh has become a country of NGOs who have an impressive record of working with the people at the grassroots. Bangladesh is proud to produce a son like Dr. Muhammad Yunus who along with his organization Grameen Bank won the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 2006. Bangladesh can also claim to have the largest NGO - BRAC with a global reach to cater to the alleviation of poverty, empowerment of women and social uplift. The relentless efforts of many of these organizations along with government's social-sector initiatives, particularly in the areas of primary education and reproductive health and improving status of women in the society have created a strong base for human development in Bangladesh.



resulting in politically motivated murders, extortion and rise of militants - Islamic or otherwise.

Economic progress

The Geo-strategic location of Bangladesh coupled with its growing and vibrant work force opened many windows of opportunities for Bangladesh in the globalized world. Bordered by India to the Northeast and West, Myanmar to the Southeast, and the Bay of Bengal to the South, Bangladesh has a long history of unique relations in trade and commercial networks with Asian and European countries. The port of Chittagong served for many years as the hub of trade activities with the outside world. One of the most remarkable changes that Bangladesh witnessed over the past twenty years was the transformation of its economy from an overwhelmingly agrarian to a manufacturing and service-oriented structure. During the past decade, the country witnessed an economic growth that averaged nearly 6 percent. There has been a steady rise in agricultural production and Bangladesh can now claim to be self-sufficient in food except in flood-disaster-years. In fact, agriculture continues to show its resilience. It is also evident from most of the reports of the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and UNDP that Bangladesh continues its industrial growth including the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to sustain its huge population.

The manufacturing sector is the main engine of Bangladesh's economic growth anchored mainly on ready-made garments, and earning about 80 percent of foreign exchange amounting to US \$ 8 billion. This productive sector is human-driven and illustrates the creative energies and abilities of the ordinary people. This factor also attracted a substantial Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Bangladesh

during the past years despite allegations of corruption, inefficiency and lack of congenial business atmosphere. The most spectacular success in economic sphere has been the growth of exports exemplifying Bangladesh's productive capacity. Earnings from exports amounted to US\$ 10.52 billion in 2006 with an increase of 22 percent over the previous year. It is also noteworthy that remittance inflow from Bangladesh workers abroad has reached beyond \$ 5 billion in 2006. That shows Bangladesh's productive engagements with the outside world.

Fault-lines of democratic politics

The people of Bangladesh love democracy, but the way parliamentary democracy unfolded in the past fifteen years disillusioned many. Power and money interchangeably became the sole consideration for the 'new political class' that has surfaced in the democratic era. Political leaders acted mostly for personal and party interests. Party politics in the past years reflected the 'nexus between politicians and criminals' -

resulting in politically motivated murders, extortion and rise of militants - Islamic or otherwise.

Bangladesh also faces a challenge to reconcile its Muslim identity with democratic rule, particularly in the context of American global War on Terrorism. But the tolerant nature of the people and their determination to reject religious extremism exemplified Bangladesh's success in this war. The most disconcerting fact is that, despite fifteen years of opportunities, political leaders could not learn the art of compromise and negotiation so essential for working out a parliamentary system of governance. There is no single national issue where they could come to a consensus in the Parliament. Time and money were wasted there on irrelevant debates and personal attacks with highly objectionable languages. Intolerance marred the culture of democratic politics and there is no way to come out of this malice in the short-run. Political intolerance is of particular concern at this time of transition of power. But events and circumstances prove that political leaders have so far failed in creating a non-violent political process. Inter-party trust is totally missing in the relations among the political forces. The current generation of top political leaders will hardly be able to overcome these barriers. There is a serious concern that these negative aspects of our political culture would pose, serious threat to the foundation of democracy unless there is vigorous socialization to overcome them.

Concluding Observations

Today after thirty- five years of victory as a nation, Bangladesh's achievements in different areas of economic and social life are clearly marked despite a 'flawed democracy' and convulsive politics. The nation's potential is enormous, but their realization is held back by the current confrontational and counter-productive politics. There is a strong perception among the people in general that the nation needs to address a host of issues at this point of our journey as a nation. These issues include: restoring confidence in public institutions, curbing corruption and misuse of resources, encouraging

Valiant Witness of this Flag

By Al Mahmud

Look, today is the day for watching this flag. Start talking, spell out The Language of freedom. Let me keep on gazing with you.

I stand beside you with my opaque tearful eyes. How crimson is the circle Sitting inside the green flag, As if this sun has been painted with the red blood corpuscles Of the freedom-seeking people of the world.

So many people speak out from within me The bright gaze of so many aspirations, of those Who never came back. I recall one person. His camp was on the path leading to Bantia Bazar from Montala Station. While receiving training There was a scar in his elbow because of bleeding. He did not return. There was no language or words In the Bangla dictionary to console his mother. In response to my allusion while I stood before her, The lady only looked up at the sky With tearful eyes. As if she could see her son Inside that spherical sun.

I knew another person Who went to war from Comilla. This bullet had Struck her waist. I went to see her at Agartala hospital. She could not walk anymore, though the doctors could Bring out the poisonous piece of lead. I took her to the celebrations of freedom After putting her on a wheel-chair. Some drops of her blood Lay on the red part of that flag. As I look on, I recall her constantly. It is amazing that the history of liberation war Has been written by excluding her name. She was the member of a Hindu family of Comilla. Her father's profession was music. I bear witness to the red corpuscles of her blood Which mingle in the red part of that flag. Oh history, write her name.

Another boy had jumped into the fray Beside the custom colony of Kushtia. He attempted to wipe out an enemy jeep with bombs But parts of his arms, thigh and back were torn away By that blast, Hasibul Islam Had launched that attack by uttering 'Allahu Akbar' His heart remains stuck on that flag After flying out from his chest. Write down his last words- 'Allahu Akbar'

Oh the noisy mega-city of Dhaka You have to write on that blood-drenched sphere These extraordinary narratives. You have to see Who creates history? And who snatches away The medallions of valour!

Look, today is really the day for watching flag. Speak out, Pronounce the Language of freedom. Let me keep on gazing with you.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed