

Special Supplement

The Great Independence and National Day

Thursday 26 March 2020

The Legacy of Bangladesh's...

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greatest national loss, and brought back on track Bangabandhu's inclusive development strategy which focused on benefiting the disadvantaged. But unfortunately there was another setback in 2001 when Bangladesh lost the continuity of the government. It took eight more years for Sheikh Hasina to return to the helm of the government. Since 2009, Bangladesh has been moving (prominent economists like Kaushik Basu terming it to be 'booming') at an accelerated pace. The growth rate has jumped to 8.1% from 5.7% since then. The per capita income increased to USD 2000 in 2019 from USD 900 in 2009. If this trend continues, then the economy could double in the next decade or so and it will be on its way towards developed country in 2041. Besides spectacular growth performance, the country has witnessed a dramatic fall in poverty to about 20.5% and extreme poverty to about 10.5% in 2018-19 fiscal year against 31.5% and 17.6% in 2009-10 respectively. The total national consumption tripled and investment quadrupled in this period. Thanks to a number of mega projects, the public investment has picked up significantly along with the private sector investment which tripled to six trillion Taka during the last decade. The total export earnings was USD 15.5 billion in 2008-09, which rose to nearly USD 40 billion in ten years. FDI has also been flowing into Bangladesh at a significant pace. The remittance has been a strong pillar, more than doubling to USD 16.4 billion in 20019-20 from USD 7.9 billion in 2007-08. The foreign exchange reserve increased more than five times from USD 6.1 billion in 2007-08 to USD 32.2 billion in 20019-20. And the government undoubtedly had guts to implement the mega Padma project with its own resources.

The progress in social development indicators has been equally impressive. The maternal mortality dropped from 3.48 per thousand in 2008 to 1.69 in 2018. The drop in infant mortality from 41 per thousand live births to 22 during the same period is equally stunning. The life expectancy went up to 73 years from 66.6 years in this period. Women empowerment bolstered through the processes of enhanced incentivized girls education and greater participation of female labourforce in the formal sector including



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Inaugurated Dhaka-Maowa-Vanga Expressway on 12 March 2020 over Video Conference From The Ganabhaban

export-led manufacturing industries was key to this macroeconomic transmission. In other words, Bangabandhu's daughter has been rising up to the people's expectations despite many challenges. Like Bangabandhu she has pursued a balanced economy, providing enough space for the private sector without



losing sight of the need for human resource development with public investment support. Her development strategy promotes high growth with inclusivity and remains faithful to heritage. At the same time it embraces technology (including leading a 'Digital Bangladesh' campaign), believes in collaboration, and promotes self-reliance. Her government is boldly facing the challenges of how to quickly generate more employment, strengthen institutions to raise Tax-GDP ratio and improve overall governance including that in the financial sector, ensure food and nutrition for all, provide electricity to all, diversify exports, manage growing urbanization and above all address climate change challenges. And now it faces the menacing coronavirus pandemic. In addition to being a human disaster, it also has a huge economic and financial implications including the danger of a meltdown which is already on globally.

However, Bangladesh is a resilient country. It has been doing quite well in facing climate change and other disasters. The central bank and the government implemented 'out of box' innovative inclusive policies in 2009 and weathered the global financial crisis well. The incentives provided to agriculture, SMEs and export sector helped bolster both demand supply side responses to that crisis. As a result Bangladesh maintained its continuous accelerated growth process with seamless reduction in poverty. I am sure the government and the central bank will come forward to provide incentives and stimuli to the private sector, with adequate social security support for the extreme poor. We got to remain focused on the SMEs and small units to keep the bottom of the social pyramid economically engaged at any cost. Let us not panic and be prepared to address both the human and economic dimensions of this crisis. Let us move fast to protect and equip our healthcare providers who are indeed the 'frontline soldiers' and bolster social distancing strategies. The government alone cannot comprehensively face this disaster. Society at large must wake up and help reduce the further spread of this menace. We must stand together to fight this war as well. We have won many such wars in the past. Let us do it again. Let's remain connected.

Author: Dr. Atiur Rahman, Bangabandhu Chair Professor at the University of Dhaka and Former Governor of Bangladesh Bank. □

26 March: The Day...

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Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman raised the 6-points demand in Lahore on 6 February 1966 against these inhuman colonial exploitations of East Pakistan. The silhouette of two states and an outline for two economies were depicted through these 6-points. It also called for separate currencies for East and West Pakistan and maintenance of two separate accounts in the central bank, so that the transfer of assets from East to West Pakistan could be stopped. The provincial governments were also to be accorded autonomy in the area of trade and commerce. Arrangements were kept for raising the provincial militia forces. The rule by the centre was to be limited to the areas of defence and foreign policy.

As the 6-points contained the vision for two states, this proposal could not be condoned by the West Pakistani ruling coterie. They ultimately did not accept it. Following the placement of 6-points, Ayub Khan commented that Sheikh Mujib did not understand the language of logic; that is, the language of weapons would be applied for making him understand if he did not withdraw the demands.

As Bangabandhu did not agree to sacrifice the right of freedom from bondage of the Bangalis at any stage, not even in exchange for the post of prime minister, the Pakistani civil-military bureaucracy and politicians applied the language of arms on the night of 25 March 1971 precisely for that reason. The Bangalis had to sacrifice 3 million lives at the altar of independence during the nine month-long liberation war. They snatched victory through a struggle that triumphed over deaths. For the first time in the thousand year history of Bangalis, it was announced that 'the people were the owners of the state'. Through this constitutional declaration on 16 December 1972, Bangabandhu endowed the Bangla-speaking Bangalis with real political independence for the first time in their thousand year-old annals.



The Father of the Nation returned to the country from a Pakistani prison on 10 January 1972. The country he got was a completely destroyed one, looted and empty. Bangabandhu took numerous measures swiftly for turning the land into a golden Bangla. Among those, two deserve special mention. The first one was framing an extraordinary constitution within a span of mere 10 months for putting the country on a firm political footing. Secondly, the First Five-Year Plan was formulated in order to rid the country from poverty on an urgent basis. We should not forget that 60 percent of the population of a barren Bangladesh that Bangabandhu inherited due to colonial exploitations were living below the poverty-line. Moreover, the country had no industrial base with the only exception of the jute industry. Besides, although the main livelihood in the country was agriculture, that agriculture was so neglected that annual food-grain deficit stood at 2 million tons at the end of the decade of 1950s.

Bangabandhu therefore attached maximum priority to agriculture in the First Five Year Plan, so that the country could be made self-reliant in food. After that, he put emphasis on industrial production and education. The growth that Bangladesh witnessed in the area of industrialisation during his rule of three



and a half years could not be attained even after seven years following the termination of his rule. The huge economic activities initiated by Bangabandhu would have amazed any knowledgeable person. He even made progress in demarcating the maritime boundary with India, the agreement for exchange of enclaves and the land boundary pact. It becomes clear when an analysis is made of his rule that it was he who laid the foundation for today's journey towards development of the Bangalis, although the global context was quite adversarial at that juncture. It may be recalled that the fuel prices had suddenly sky-rocketed in September 1973 due to the Arab-Israeli War. Despite these obstacles, Bangabandhu could bring to light the luminous rays for economic revitalisation of Bangladesh by the middle of 1975. He also took measures for inclusive growth of the economy. There was bumper production in agriculture due to his initiatives within August-September 1975. But before that could materialise, the agents of the defeated Pakistani enemies assassinated him along with his family members through a huge conspiracy. The country was then pushed back in all areas for a few decades once again.

It was after a lapse of two and a half decades that Bangabandhu's daughter Desh-Ratna Sheikh Hasina assumed the charge of running the statecraft. She strove to make the country free from poverty, ensure food and shelter for all, and develop the country's health, education and culture. This has opened up the doors of extraordinary possibilities for the Bangladesh economy during the previous decade. Bangabandhu had spoken about this economic emancipation while addressing one million people on 7 March 1971. He uttered in the last line of that speech, which is considered to be the greatest speech for independence in world history – 'The struggle this time is for our freedom, the struggle this time is for independence'.

Author: Educationist

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed □

Bangabandhu's ...

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doctors for actively participating in the war. It may be noted that many Arab countries had not accorded formal recognition to Bangladesh till then. Above everything else, Bangabandhu sent the assistance out of humanitarian consideration despite the uncertainties and risks inherent in the situation.

That historic decision taken by Bangabandhu was very courageous one that wielded a far-reaching impact. It may be mentioned that only a few Muslim countries outside the Middle-East had taken such a brave decision against powerful America, Europe and Israel. Bangabandhu summoned the Director and Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Muhammad Zamir and directed him to accompany the medical team after completing all administrative formalities. He also called the Army Chief Brigadier Shafullah and the Director of Army Medical Services Colonel Khurshid Uddin Ahmed, and told them that the Middle-Eastern Arab and Muslim countries were in grave danger; it was therefore our humanitarian obligation to stand beside them at this critical juncture. Although our capacity was limited, standing beside the suffering brethren was our duty.

Colonel Khurshid became very emotional on hearing Bangabandhu's words. It may be mentioned that Colonel Khurshid Uddin Ahmed was one of the principal accused in the Agartala Case. He was then a captain and was the accused number 34. The Pakistani intelligence agency ISI had brutally tortured him during interrogations while the case was in progress. Bangabandhu had great affection for Khurshid Uddin from that time onwards. Glancing at Khurshid Uddin he said affectionately: Khurshid, I am sending you on this tough mission. After saluting Bangabandhu, Khurshid Uddin said: Sir, I shall accomplish this mission successfully even at the peril of my life. Later on, Bangabandhu instructed 7 officers from the Army Headquarters and 21 soldiers were assigned for this task and directed them to take preparations swiftly. Before the mission's departure, Bangabandhu invited the 28-member contingent to his office and issued necessary directives. While concluding, he said: The welfare of the repressed people and the prestige of Bangladesh our future depend on your successful performance. This prediction by the Father of the Nation proved to be accurate. Later Bangladesh also sent 4 tons of tea-leaves with the medical team that went to Egypt and Syria.

The team of Bangladesh Army that participated in a foreign mission for the first time left Bangladesh on 19 October 1973. The group included Colonel Khurshid Uddin Ahmed, the Director and Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Muhammad Zamir, Major Amir Ali, Major Shaful Islam, Captain Shahjahan, Captain Noor Hossain, Captain Rezaul Islam, Captain Mafidul Islam and others. The Bangladesh contingent took off from Tejgaon Airport aboard a Boeing 707 aircraft at 10 am in the morning.

In accordance to their plan, the team was supposed to land in Baghdad first. But the Israeli planes were attacking the place. Therefore, the Bangladeshi aircraft flew towards Syria after refueling from Dubai. But the plane could not land in Damascus and Beirut as well due to persistent Israeli air attacks there. The British pilot of the plane Captain Macintosh then overflew the Caucasus Mountain, the Island of Malta and Syria and then landed at night at Benghazi of Libya after sending SOS signal, although the plane did not have permission to land in Libya. This was done as the plane had only 30 minutes of fuel left. The landing of the plane carrying the Bangladesh contingent inside Libya was an unexpected event. But the Libyan authorities extended all-out assistance to the Bangladesh team after learning about its importance.

With the help of the Libyan authorities, the contingent moved towards Beirut the next day i. e. on 20 October noon aboard a Middle-East Airlines flight. The ambassador of Bangladesh welcomed them at the airport after the plane reached Beirut. The team then set off for Damascus on a bus at 10:00 p.m. after crossing the Lebanon-Syria border checkpoint. They arrived near the city of Damascus at dawn. There was war-like situation all around. The siren started to blare immediately after they entered the city as 5-6 fighter jets of Israel attacked the area. The Health Minister of Syria Dr. Madani Al Khyami formally welcomed the Bangladesh contingent on that day 21 October.



The Bangladesh contingent was deployed at Dares Salamat behind the 9 Division of Syrian Army, about 4 kilometres west of Damascus. The team set up a field hospital there with facilities for operations at a 2-storeyed girls' school building. The Bangladesh team stayed there until 22 November. A few thousand army-men, Mujahids and wounded villagers were provided with treatment at this hospital over a period of 30 days. The members of the medical team untiringly took care of the war-wounded patients. The Bangladesh contingent became well-known in Syria as it earned a good reputation while discharging its responsibilities. A number of newspapers in the Arab world commended the activities of Bangladesh team.

At the end of the war, the Grand Mufti of the Great Mosque of Damascus highlighted the contributions of Bangladesh contingent in one of his sermons and showered praises on them profusely. The significance of this mission was huge and far-reaching. The Bangladesh contingent moved to the Lebanese capital Beirut from the battle-field on 22 November. On 24 November, high officials of Syria gave a hearty send-off to the Bangladesh team at Beirut airport. This support and firm stand in favour of the Arabs played a special role in eliciting recognition from them. In fact, Bangladesh was able to earn the confidence of the Arabs by the end of 1973 and relations with them improved notably. Ultimately, 15 Middle-eastern countries accorded recognition to Bangladesh at the end of 1973. As a token of recognition for Bangladesh's support and contribution, the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat presented a regiment of tanks to Bangladesh.

Today, Bangladesh occupies a place of honour in the international arena because of the foresight, diplomatic positioning, timely and courageous decisions, and competent leadership of the greatest Bangali of all times, the most auspicious leader and Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Until now, Bangladesh has successfully completed 54 peacekeeping missions under the United Nations, with participation of 175,089 personnel. At present, a total of 6,413 personnel are discharging their duties in peacekeeping missions. Significantly, this journey of peacekeeping had started in 1973 under Bangabandhu's directives with the participation of only 28 members of a medical teams.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed □

Genesis of independence

Mahadev Saha

Let me tell that old tale once again
Our freedom born on March Seven,
Thunderous tenor of Sheikh Mujib
Declared and decreed independence.

Lest I should fail to order you all,
Remember it's my liberty war call,
Victory roaring around Ramna ground,
Above stood high the sky stunned.

Millions sacrificed their precious lives,
Motherland freed, so not in a caprice;
Then end of Pakistan in Bangla, my land
Victorious heroes woke up in garland

That's how we got back Bangla, our land
That's how we fought our war of liberation
That's how we sang Sonar Bangla, our song

In Ramna ground birds resonated Joi Bangla
The day we had renamed Bangla as Bangla
Independence first uttered in Mujib's voice
That's the immortal tale of our independence.

Translated by Mohammad Nurul Huda



The Sun of Freedom Rises

Muhammad Samad

Bangabandhu's thunderous voice on the racecourse of Seventy-one
Made Bangladesh roar out –
‘The struggle this time is for our freedom
The struggle this time is for independence’.
The heroic Bangali then took oath
Built up fortresses in all houses.

Under the Banyan tree, on Thirty-two, at Paltan, on rooftop
In factories, the boundaries of crop-fields
Atop the sticks held by hands –
The flags of freedom flew.

On the dark night of Twenty-fifth
The convoys descended in hordes
The sleeping people trembled!
It was as if in a murderous spree
The Yama's emissary knocked on the door.
By the cries of the new-born
Ah, the neighbourhood was silenced!
The city's slums were in flames
The campus- hostels were burnt.

Oh, my country of greenery
Holocaust and Vietnam are today
Similes of genocide! But no fear –
Through the struggles of peasants, workers, masses
Resistance sprang up – Resistance all over the land.

On the wings of birds and riding on winds
At villages, markets, on land and hills
On the banks of Padma, Meghna, Jamuna
On tumultuous waves in the first hours of
Twenty-sixth March all over the country
Came the call of Sheikh Mujib:
My freedom-seeking brothers
My freedom-loving sisters
Get united, form alliances
Raise your voice with the slogan ‘Joy Bangla’
Take up in your hands whatever you have –
The valiant Bangali take up arms
Make Bangla victorious and free.

The falling leaves of that spring
In sun, water, day and night
Arms on the shoulder and hands
The freedom fight rushed in.

On roads, jetties, woods and forests
On river-banks in storms and rains
The daring boys of Mother Bangla
The fiery girls of Bangla Mother
In exchange for their lives and honour
They fired from guns, threw grenades
They fought ... they fought...
The liberation war of brave Bangalis.

After the war in a free land
The eastern sky was daubed in blood
The dreams blossomed in light
On grasses, trees and flowers
The sun of freedom ascends
The sun of independence rises.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed