

Joi Bangla

Joi Bangabandhu

The Glorious Independence and National Day '99

Special Supplement

Concept & Design : Step Media



President
People's Republic of Bangladesh
Dhaka

26 March 1999

Message

On the 28th anniversary of Independence and National Day, I extend my felicitation to my countrymen living at home and abroad.

On the occasion of Independence and National Day, I pay my homage to the memory of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and pray for the eternal peace of the martyrs of War of Liberation. The country's Independence, achieved through the praiseworthy heroic deeds, courage and endless sacrifice of the people of all walks of life including patriots and freedom fighters, is an unforgettable event of our national life. The glorious history and acts of heroism of the liberation war would continue to inspire the people of the country with patriotic zeal through the ages.

On the restoration of parliamentary form of government all should now be responsible and tolerant in the exercise of democratic rights and must ensure accountability. Tolerance to the opinions of others, avoidance of blaming each other, to keep away from confrontation, to reach consensus on important national issues and to solve all problems through discussion are the main pillars of political society particularly of the parliamentary system.

So, I appeal to my countrymen to widen the path of democracy, development and progress through peace, amity and broad-based unity. It is my sincere desire that all the people would rise above personal and party interests and combine their talents and efforts for the development of the country and welfare of the nation.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed

1971 : Old Battles, Remembered Songs

Syed Badrul Ahsan

There are voices that rise from the depths of the heart, telling men and women everywhere that they need to be free. For freedom is one of those attributes of life, of the broad framework of societal living, that provides substance to politics and sustenance to the soul. In 1971, when the moment of reckoning, of decision, came for the Bengali nation, it was the heart that spoke again, and a number of voices, those of the multitudes, were heard protesting the continuity of things unjust and the endlessness of thoughts

December day, to the state of the free. He has stayed free since.

But freedom brings with it all dreams, all the hopes that have for ages contributed to the construction of the edifice of history. Every freedom fighter is an individual who understands keenly his own place in the universal scheme of things, for it is through that understanding that he is able to forge links with the world around him. The man who wages war to be free is the man who values the spirit of

spot it at all. Politics in the land of Jinnah's creation, always a hollow affair, was rendered progressively meaningless. The decade of Ayub Khan proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that within Pakistan the Bengali was in danger of turning into dead meat. Outside it, there was a considerable chance that he would be able to reclaim himself.

It has always been in the nature of the Bengali to be secular in the pursuit of his politics. That was an important

swathes of the citizenry. Mujib, it was argued loudly and vociferously, was finally on his way to assuming control of Pakistan. Only Mujib knew what was coming. Bangabandhu suffered from no illusions, even if he had legitimately turned into the majority leader in the National Assembly of Pakistan. The ruling coterie of the feudal-military-civilian bureaucracy was not ready to see the Bengalis climb the peaks of power in Pakistan. He was proved right. Do note, though, that for Bangabandhu politics



perverse in a state where democracy mattered, if at all, very little. For the Bengali, therefore, the options were obvious: stay within the confines of the communal dispensation built upon a hideous structure on the departure of the British colonialists in the forties and be damned, or fan out in search of a reclaiming of national and cultural identity and be redeemed. In the long months of the war of liberation in 1971, the Bengali nation

liberalism. In the sixties and early seventies, it was basically the liberal politics at the heart of the Bengali soul that was at work. There are many, and indeed will be many, inclined into believing the notion that had the Pakistani army not plunged into the job of genocide against the Bengalis, the people of this land would have worked out a modus vivendi for co-existence with Pakistan. That belief is a denial of logic. The Bengali disillusionment with the communal status of Pakistan set in as early as 1952. The Language Movement was more than a battle for a positioning of inauguration of the philosophy that in course of time the people of the eastern part of the country would need to recreate themselves in the mould in which their cultural legacy had placed them. Go through all the motions, all the half-hearted efforts of the feudal ruling classes towards assuaging the hurt sentiments of the Bengalis. It was a way of keeping the coming deluge at bay. The reality was of course different. Late on a night in 1957, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the young man destined to play the biggest role in the historical transformation of the Bengali nation, wondered, in the presence of the dozing Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, if it was a feasible proposition going along with Pakistan any longer. And of course there was Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani with his stated, though hasty, intention of bidding 'Assalam-o-alaikum' to Pakistan. The point, though, is that in the fifties, the spirit of compromise among Bengalis was beginning to give way to the urge for militancy. The myopic men in Karachi and then Rawalpindi and then Islamabad simply refused to

factor in the zeal he employed to break free of Pakistan. And together with that spirit of secularism came the ceaseless realization that his economic opportunities were being squandered within Pakistan. The two regions of the country grew poles apart; the eastern one dwindling progressively into the state of an economic morass which threatened to turn into a nightmare. And together with that came the shrill reality of the absence of a pluralistic order for the country. Ideologically and philosophically, the state of Pakistan was not equipped to be governed on the premise of democracy. It was a thought that came to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, earlier then it came to many others, and it worked well for the Bengali nation. Recall the euphoria with which the results of the 1970 general election were greeted by board

was a distinctly evolutionary process. He did not, all of a sudden, pass from the stage of Pakistani politics to Bengali independence. His six point programme had earlier, in 1966, prepared the country. In 1970, he went to great lengths telling his people and the outside world that the elections were a referendum for Bengalis. And they were. The success of 1970 was a far cry from what the Pakistanis had

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TRIBUTE OF A GRATEFUL NATION

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

Had he been alive now Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would have turned exactly seventynine today. That would be quite an old age by any measure of life expectancy. By our standard he would have been the grand old man of politics. He would have had

retired from active life at least a decade ago and would be spending time writing memories and advising young people to be honest, truthful, courageous and determined in their pursuit of success in life. He would have been another Jomo Kenyatta or a Julius

Nyerere acting as the conscience keeper of the nation and play the role of a friend, philosopher and guide. He could have turned into the Willy Brandt of Bangladesh, or the Winston Churchill of the post-second world war era. Infact, weeks before his assassination in the hands of a bunch of breakaway military conspirators, he had told some of his close associates that he would retire from active politics a few years from then, after restoring peace in the country and putting the wheels of democracy and economic development on the right track. He expressed his wishes to roam about the vast expanses of the countryside of Bangladesh like the great patriarch of the Biblical era to see for himself how the poor people of his country lived. He dreamt of visiting their homes, talking to them by becoming one of them. He wanted to put his hand on their heads with paternal affection and feel the warmth of their hearts by embracing them close to his own. The killers did not allow him that. Instead, they gunned him down and pierced his

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Those turbulent days in March '71

Ranjit Biswas

We made it happen on 26 March, 1971 throwing away disdainfully into the Bay of Bengal the stone-heavy autocracy which tormented us for long 25 years. Before that, we spent 25 blood-drenched days in March, 1971. Since the onslaught on our mother tongue in 1948, our struggle for self-determination gained in strength and intensity through the events of 1952, 1962, 1966 and 1969. The dormant dissatisfaction of the populace was ready to explode any moment. Newer chapters were being added to our chequered history through addition of newer events and perspectives. It is worthwhile to look back and see what happened during those turbulent 25 days.

March 1

Yahya Khan gave a big jolt to the nation on the very first day of the month. He postponed the session of the National Assembly. Bangabandhu was then busy with the conference of his party at Hotel Purbani. The leaders were stunned at this unexpected announcement. The student community called hartal the very next day. What was implicit in Yahya Khan's announcement was that whatever might have been the electoral verdict, Bengalee rule in Pakistan would not be tolerated. Press briefings at Bangabandhu's house at Dhanmondi Road-32 was started on the day.

March 2
Strike was observed

throughout East Pakistan including Dhaka. Processionists were fired upon in Dhaka. Bullets from the Army, BDR, and the Police took life. A meeting of the student community was held on the Arts faculty compound of Dhaka University. The main agenda in the meeting was to



protest the announcement of Yahya regarding postponement of National Assembly session. The meeting was attended by frontline leaders of 1969 and 1970 students' movements.

From a procession which joined the meeting, an individual came forward with a provisional flag of Bangladesh. The student leader ASM Abdur Rab displayed this flag to everybody and holding the flag aloft he declared-"this is the flag of independent Bangladesh". The map of Bangladesh was etched on the

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rediscovered itself, root by root, and came forth with the discovery that its future was embedded in a rediscovery of its past. Yes, that rediscovery of the past in order to pave the road to the future was not easy to come by. Three million Bengalis needed to buttress the struggle with their blood; two hundred thousand Bengali women were forced into shame by the occupying Pakistani forces; and villages burned ceaselessly and bridges blew up every few days. It was all these, and much more, that caused the Bengali to rise, in that enormity of victory on a

