



21ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE MARTYRDOM OF SHAHEED PRESIDENT ZIAUR RAHMAN

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প্রেসিডেন্ট জিয়াউর রহমান বাংলাদেশের ইতিহাসের গর্বিত সন্তান।

স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধে তাঁর ঐতিহাসিক অবদান এবং বাংলাদেশে বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্র প্রতিষ্ঠায় তাঁর অবিস্মরণীয় কর্মকাণ্ড, ইতিহাসে তাঁর স্থান চূড়ান্তভাবে নির্ণয় করেছে; তিনি ইতিহাসের অবিস্মৃত অংশে পরিণত হয়েছেন।

মহান রাকবুল আলামিনের দরবারে আমি তাঁর রুহের মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি। বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা ও সার্বভৌমত্ব সংরক্ষণ এবং বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্রকে জাতীয় জীবনে সার্থকভাবে প্রতিফলনের মাধ্যমেই তাঁর স্মৃতির প্রতি সত্যিকারের শ্রদ্ধা জ্ঞাপন করা হবে।

Benazir Bhutto

অধ্যাপক এ কিউ এম বদরুদ্দোজা চৌধুরী
রাষ্ট্রপতি
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ



An abyss of uncertainty was prevailing in the political arena of Bangladesh at the end of March 1971. When the failure of the political leadership to provide direction became acute, when the people were dazed and dumbfounded by the barbarous brutality of the Pakistani military forces, the young military officer Major Ziaur Rahman provided direction to the struggling nation by declaring the independence of Bangladesh. His name would have been written in golden letters in the history of the nation even if he had not played any other role throughout his life. Even then, the nation would have recalled him with great respect. The masses would have assembled at the place where he lay in eternal sleep with bouquets of gratitude. But a man who had so dearly loved the people and the soil of Bangladesh, to whom Bangladesh was always the first priority in life and death, how could he stop there? After he assumed power to fill the vacuum created against the backdrop of the sepoy-people revolution of 7 November 1975, if the political outline of the subsequent period is analysed, it can be said without any hesitation that the politics of Bangladesh was transformed. New melodies were added to that politics and new rhythms were incorporated. That politics became both creative and productive. The appeal of that new politics of Ziaur Rahman was universal. It is modern. It is welfare-oriented. It is people's politics. It is national politics.

In a section of his popular play 'An enemy of the people', renowned dramatist Henrik Ibsen had written, "A community is like a ship; everybody ought to be prepared to take the helm". It is very much true that all passengers in the ship of a state should remain prepared for taking up the captaincy. Everybody has to prepare himself to play the role of a sailor. This is a great teaching of the democratic system. Everybody has to grow up as participant-citizen. The post-modern definition of citizenship is also the same. Otherwise, a democratic system would not be successful. The independence and distinctiveness of the people would not be meaningful. The resolve for people's rights would also become meaningless. Brought to life from the flames of the freedom struggle, no change would touch the lives of the Bangladeshi people. Nor would there be any stamp of progress.

But this transformation cannot take place automatically. In the underdeveloped third world, the resolve for people's rights never materialises out of its own volition. A people's leader is needed everywhere - a revolutionary soldier, a person representing the spirit of the age, or somebody who pioneers an era. This visionary in the political arena of Bangladesh has been the greatest son of this nation Ziaur Rahman. Touched by the touchstone of his successful leadership, waves of change were created in the hearts of millions of people in rural Bangladesh. This made the people think anew about their role in the politics of the country. This made them conscious about their

The Politics of Ziaur Rahman

By Emajuddin Ahmed

rights and responsibilities. Ziaur Rahman had identified rural Bangladesh as the focal point of his endeavour. He pinpointed the uplift of the rural populace - neglected for centuries - as his political priority. He also identified the rural people as the hero and superhero of his creative politics, those who would bring about changes for their own benefit. By raising sky-high confidence within them, by opening up a thousand doors of contentment through solving their own problems, Ziaur Rahman wanted to write a new chapter of progress based on proper utilisation of available resources in the country. In this way, he initiated the programs of grassroot development.

He could correctly comprehend that in order to bring a people - who were habituated to a traditional lifestyle for centuries - into the fold of a new world, arrangements had to be made for their participation in governance. A participatory system could not evolve if all links with traditional feudal rule were not snapped. The grandeur of power politics was not thrown away, and the role of an all-powerful ruler was not shelved; it had to be attained by standing besides the people and by assimilating their views. So, on the one hand, he made the rural areas the principal target of his administration, and on the other hand he toured villages after villages - rising above bureaucratic complexities - in order to observe directly the condition of the rural people. It was he, who established 'Gram Sarkar' for the first time in this country, so that the people could solve their own problems through discussions among themselves.

Village Defence Party was also constituted in this country through his initiative for ensuring security at the village level. Arrangements for youth co-operative complexes were made under his direction for proper utilisation of the youth force in the villages. It was he who took the initiative to identify and solve the problems of the rural areas by means of 'Rural Development Board'. Rural Electrification System was developed under his guidance. In this manner, he was the first to develop rural irrigation system in order to improve the agricultural sector of Bangladesh. Avenues were also opened up for developing the fisheries sector in the villages. Arrangements for health care and adult education of the rural people were also made under his direction. The aims of all these efforts were on the one hand to integrate the rural masses with the administration, and on the other hand to make the country self-reliant and self-sufficient in food. His success was notable on both fronts.

For observing the weal and woe of the common people of the country through his own eyes, he did not glance from a higher level. He went to the masses, made them sit beside him, enquired about their wellbeing and talked to them. He talked to the peasants, the fishermen, the porters and the labourers. He talked to the mothers and sisters. He used to arouse a kind of unremitting resolve in them, a new craze for changing one's lot. Professor of Political Science Lawrence Ziring has given a detailed account of the mass-oriented activities of President Zia : "Zia integrated himself with the peasant masses. They received his primary attention and whenever his schedule permitted, he helicoptered around the country, dropping out of the sky often unannounced to view peasant conditions first hand, and to discuss the methods and resources available to raise them from their poverty".

Describing one such incident, AKM Shamsul Bari Mia wrote : "While returning from a meeting, President Zia suddenly entered a peasant's home. He said to the housewife 'allow me to sit'. Sitting on a wicker stool, he asked, 'Mother, what will you give me to eat?' The lady did not know who he was. So she said, 'What would you eat?' He replied, 'papaya'. The lady said, 'We do not have papaya'. He said, 'then what have you got? Banana, lemon, coconut?' The lady replied, 'none of these'. 'Then you must have milk. Give me that'. The lady said, 'We are poor people, we don't have a cow'. Zia said, 'You can at least rear a goat. And it is quite easy to plant lemon, banana, papaya trees. Not much space is needed for that. Please plant those, I shall again visit you as a guest, OK'. In the meantime, the owner of the house had arrived home. In parting, the lady said, 'I shall wait for you, son, after planting lemon, papaya and banana trees and after purchasing a goat'. President Zia did not get the opportunity to go back to that house. The cruel hand of merciless assassins took him away from his dear ones; it was at a time when his presence was most needed for this society. But Ziaur Rahman could generate a new wave of awakening in rural Bangladesh within a very short time. He could involve millions of people of rural

Bangladesh in the overall development process through the canal-digging revolution. He generated hopes for a new future among the rural populace through the mass literacy program. He added a new chapter in the traditional lifestyle of rural Bangladesh through the auspicious introduction of family planning. On the economic front, he provided direction by properly equipping the economy, rectifying the wasteful and corrupt practices of socialism, invigorating private initiative, raising production in the industrial sector and by increasing exports; he restored national pride by erasing the ill-reputation of a basket case. Consequently, Zia's politics has been acclaimed as distinctive and ideal for this country.

But how could that become a reality? How could a professional soldier transform into a great soldier of national development? Without looking for the causes of such a transformation, we can find many such examples when we look at the pages of history. Criticised, condemned and subjugated as the 'sick man of Europe', Turkey needed one Kemal Ataturk to change her destiny. One Gamal Nasser was needed to raise Egypt from the ashes. De Gaulle was needed by the Fourth Republic to bring France to the path of illumination. The French nation still concedes his contributions unhesitatingly. Similar was the contribution of General Zia in Bangladesh.

Those leaders not only resembled Zia in profession, their spirit was also similar. All of them were first-class patriots. They were all nationalists. Their thoughts carried the visions for national uplift, the undeniable distinctiveness of national culture and the independent characteristics of national politics. All of them sought the participation of the whole nation, especially the rural people, peasants-labourers and the neglected segments of society, in national politics. They all carried the same light in their eyes - 'My country, my nation shall never bow down to anyone, shall never extend hand to anybody for begging'. They all wanted that politics should never become power politics. Rather, it should unite the nation through welfare of the people. This is why they are still alive in the national consciousness as the greatest sons of the soil. Who would forget them? Who can afford to forget Zia?

They all wanted to build a self-reliant nation. Like Henrik Ibsen, these leaders believed, "There can be no freedom or beauty about a home-life that depends on borrowing or debt" (A Doll's House, Act 1). Do these words ever become obsolete with time? Never. These leaders can never go into oblivion because they are forever alive in the spiritual ethos of the nation. Whenever we visualise an ideal form of Bangladesh politics, whenever we look for an appropriate outline of our political milieu, we would discover that the politics of Ziaur Rahman is making a comeback through the front door; and Bangladesh is getting back her cherished possession.

Translation : Helal Uddin Ahmed

