



Shahabuddin Ahmed

## From tribulation to triumph

**B**ACK in 1971, the people of Bangladesh waged a spirited, strenuous struggle for liberty even as the Pakistan occupation army and its local collaborators went on a killing spree over a stretch of nine long, arduous months. The genocide left, according to popular estimation, about 3,000,000 Bengalis dead, 200,000 Bengali women molested, thousands of villages razed to the ground and roads, bridges, build-

ings and other infrastructure destroyed. It was a war that the Bengali nation waged in its own name, in its defence and as a resolve to reclaim the cultural and political heritage it had been heir to for ages.

In 1971, there was the quality of the seminal that came into the Bengali struggle for self-determination. Deprived of the fruits of electoral victory it achieved under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, prey to the

chicanery of a military regime determined not to let power pass into Bengali hands, the nation felt it was time to move on, to go beyond the parameters it had confined itself in, and into a search for self-identity. As a first step, the very first Bengali government in history, led by such political stalwarts as Tajuddin Ahmad and Syed Nazrul Islam, took shape in April 1971. And in its wake came the

of dedicated sector commanders and the thousands of Bengali youth who trekked through hamlets and woodland, through danger and the possibility of death at the hands of the enemy, to align themselves with the War of Liberation. Over Shwadhin Bangla Betar, the message of freedom went out loud and clear to the world outside a captive Bangladesh. Academics, artistes, journalists, diplomats, civil servants, soldiers, policemen, students,

women, indeed men and women from all strata of society went to war in the defence of liberty, both in Mujibnagar and inside occupied Bangladesh, and would not return home before martyrdom came to them or freedom came to their country. On a December afternoon, as 93,000 soldiers of Pakistan army surrendered to the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Command, a sovereign republic of Bengalis took its place in the global community of nations.

It is that monumental endeavour for liberation that we celebrate today as we observe Victory Day. We celebrate too the aesthetics that defined the Bengali nation as it went to war as also the ethos that has shaped up since the moment of ultimate triumph. In short, we speak of our achievements and our dreams and our hopes around the annus mirabilis that 1971 was.

--Editor