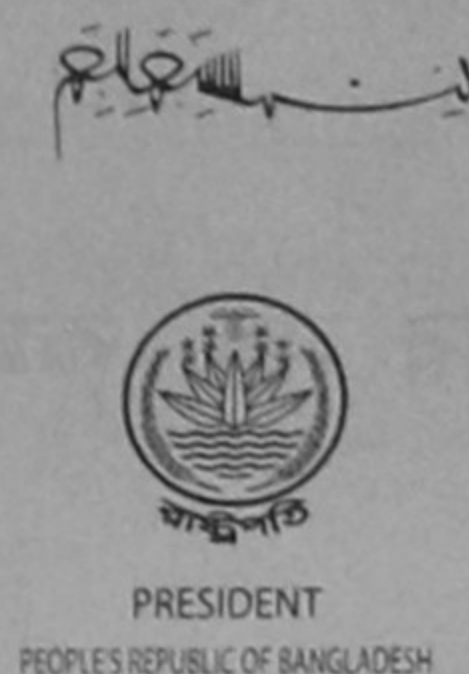
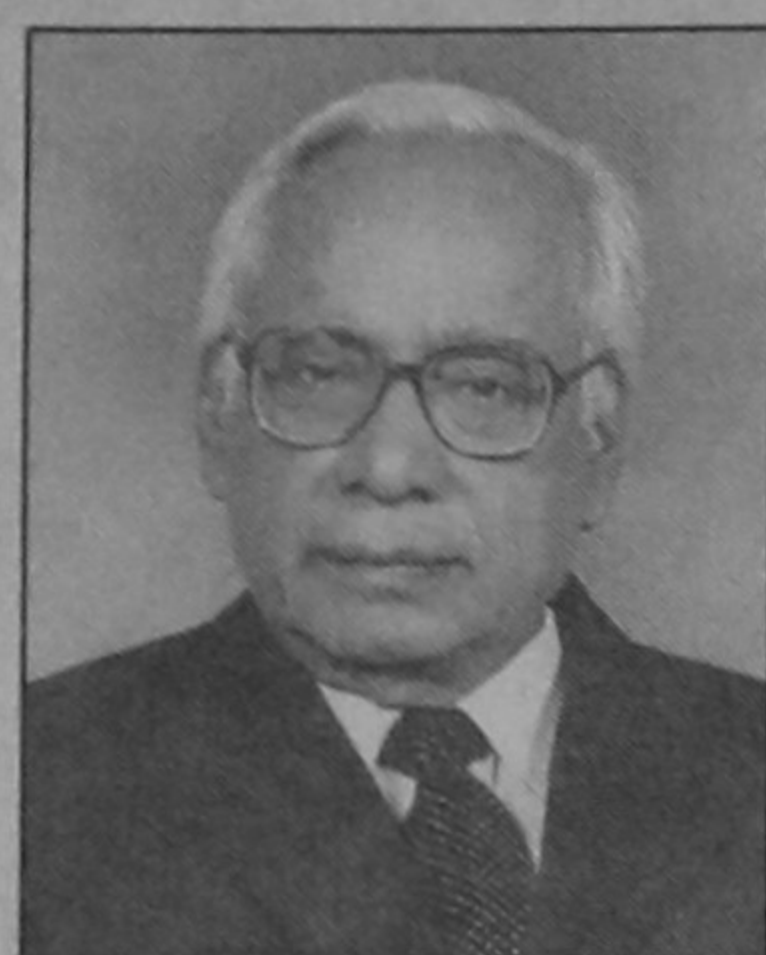


26 March Independence & National Day 2008



Special Supplement

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Message

On the occasion of the great Independence and National Day, I convey my heartfelt greetings and congratulations to my countrymen living at home and abroad.

The historic Independence and National Day is a glorious day in our national life. On this solemn day, I recall with deep respect and pay my homage to the martyrs of the liberation war who made supreme sacrifices for our Independence in 1971. I pray for the salvation of the immortal souls. I also pay my profound respect and gratitude to the valiant freedom fighters, organizers of the liberation war and people from all walks of life who rendered their dedicated efforts and extended enthusiastic support that expedited the achievement of our long-cherished independence. The supreme sacrifices and unmatched valour of the valiant freedom fighters will be ever remembered in the history of our country's independence. On this day, I also recall with deep respect the national leaders, who played significant role in awakening the sense of nationalism and independence through their prolonged movement and inspiration.

One of the prime objectives of our hard-earned independence was to build a happy, prosperous and self-reliant Bangladesh. Keeping that in mind, our untiring efforts have been advancing that direction. With the span of time, we have achieved a significant progress in the fields of education, agriculture, industry, communication, rural infrastructure, health care services, empowerment of women etc. Our achievements are significant not only in national life but also in international arena. In UN Peacekeeping Missions, the members of our Armed Forces and Bangladesh Police have been acclaimed by the world community due to their professional excellences. The expatriate Bangladeshis are also making significant contributions to our national economy. Despite attaining these developments, we have to go a long way for achieving the cherished goals of Independence.

On this great Independence and National Day, I urge the citizens, living at home and abroad, to work unitedly with continued efforts aimed at expediting overall economic self-reliance and democratic advancement. On this day, I wish a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. May the Almighty Allah be with us.

Allah Hafez, Bangladesh Zindabad.

Iajuddin Ahmed

Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed

THE NIGHT AFTER 25 MARCH

By A B M Musa

Nobody hither has done complete recollection of the dark night of 25 March. The dark night has been mentioned many times incidentally while discussing the war of liberation. But nobody has discussed in details the ory of death and destruction wrought on the city of Dhaka, its neighborhoods, lanes and by lanes on that dreadful night. Nevertheless, in the real sense the 9 month long armed struggle began on that uncertain and cruel night of 25 March when the invading Pakistan army unleashed its carnage and slaughter in the then East Pakistan. The war ended on 16 December 1971. Meanwhile, three million people lost their lives, more than one lakh mothers and sisters were violated and dishonoured. However, there is one difference between the Hollywood movie, 'The Longest Day' and the night of 25 March. While the one was about the final chapter of struggle to escape from fascism, the other was the first chapter of the bloody beginning of the liberation war.

Practically, the story of that night began two days ago on the morning of March 23. The farcical drama of 2 week long Mujib -Yahya dialogue, which began on 15 March ended on that day. The much talked about non-cooperation movement began before the historic call of struggle for freedom by Bangabandhu on 7 March. Soon after, President Yahya of Pakistan arrived in Dhaka. Hard bargaining continued for 10 days in the president's house regarding transfer of power to Bangabandhu. Everyday in the morning Bangabandhu along with Dr. Kamal Hussain, Tajuddin Ahmed and sometimes with Syed Nazrul Islam and Qamaruzzaman went to what was later known as prime minister house and Foreign service Academy for a meeting with Yahya Khan and returned after one hour to his house in Dhanmondi on road 32. He called few of us journalists, who if not intimate but were close to him, to a small room in the first floor at the back of his house. Reclining on an armed chair he said in a sad voice, 'They will not give, they will not give voluntarily'. But outside the



In the cycle of years, March 26, the glorious day of our independence has arrived again. As long as the country exists and the people inhabit the reality of independence - a grand achievement in our nation's life - shall remain undiminished. The vocabularies such as war, death, life, blood, martyr, operation, torture, freedom-fighter not merely add to the wealth of our lexicon with special significance, they are indeed the essential elements of our history's legacy, - a long narrative of the independence day. The lives of millions of people are mirrored in those precious words. They are in poverty but it cannot touch their bravery. Which is why they could face the enemy bullets right on their chest instead of on their back as they embraced martyrdom in battlefields. This is how we achieved freedom. Similarly our independence shall continue to draw its sustainability from the bold and beautiful hearts of our coming generation.

1971 In Retrospect

Selina Hossain

The freedom struggle of Bangladesh is a unique event of this subcontinent, a crowning glory of the Bengalees in thousand years. On March 7, 1971 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a clarion call for freedom to the Bengalees. He said, 'This struggle is the struggle for freedom, this struggle is the struggle for independence'. On March 25 Bangabandhu in his late night telegraphic message said: 'Bangladesh is independent from today. Continue your fight till Pakistani occupation force is totally uprooted from the soil of Bangladesh. Allah shall help us. Joy Bangla'. The historic speech of Bangabandhu on March 7 and his telegraphic message are comparable to the liberation history of any country in the world. The Declaration of Independence of America announced on July 4, 1776 reads: 'That all men are created equal, that they are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness'.



Freedom is essential to realize human dreams. Without freedom how the message of equality can be pronounced and also that all children of God are equal. Dreams need to be realized to launch humanity on way to progress. A triumphant call of good-fortune should be invigorating. Such perceptions were meaningfully expressed in the days of 1971. We need to visit those days again and again. For, they will inspire us like Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address which said: 'That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth'.

Such extraordinary utterance by the head of a nation inflates the dream of independence. Any resolve to serve the cause of humanity is inspirational. To this end many activities are initiated. March 26, the day of our independence, is a milestone in such endeavour. On this day, the dear motherland appears before the eyes of the millions of people in her brilliance.

What was the real motive of the enemy behind taking many of our intellectuals blind-folded to the killing field in 1971? Was it in enemy's mind that they would not allow our intellectuals to see their dear motherland before their death? Our intellectuals staked their life for the independence of their motherland. But could they really succeed in stopping our intellectuals from seeing their motherland through the eyes of their hearts? If our enemy was successful in its design, our intellectuals would not have been perceived as the conscience of our freedom. That life was a trifle against freedom was the mantra they taught us.

Our martyrs are part of our legacy. We surely can never pay back the debt we owe to them. We must never stop reminding their extraordinary role in over historic battle for freedom. We perceive their presence in our consciousness, patriotism and fight for a just course. They are the integral part of our country's map, flag and national song. They have their unique presence in the celebration of the Independence Day on March 26. This indeed is true not for a day only, but for each day in our consciousness which is undiminishing, immortal. We need to look back to the historic 1971 with such a perspective. That was the time when we were united for a cause so close to our hearts. The urgings of liberation fixated the consciousness of the entire people. The besieged town-dwellers were all ears to hear sounds of bombs

room he gave a broad smile to journalists and said 'there is satisfactory progress in the talks. It will conclude with a happy note'.

One exception happened on 23 March when he returned from the talks after a few minutes. He entered straight into the small room of his house and called for Col. Osmani. After an hour he went upstairs without telling anybody. The following day on 24 March, he did not go outside his house at all. But he informed the journalists that Dr Kamal Hussain and Tajuddin had gone to Yahya Khan with a draft proposal. It was talked about that out of six points, five points had been resolved. For resolving the remaining point, a consensus agreement would be taken on that day. It has never been known what that point was nor did Bangabandhu even tell us about it. Our speculation was that the issue revolved around different structural arrangement of Armed Forces of the two countries. Besides, differences arose over the observation of

Pakistan Republic Day on 23 March. This was the first time after 24 years of the establishment of Pakistan that Pakistan flag was not hoisted anywhere in East Pakistan on that day. Flags containing the map of Bangladesh studded with a bright red sun engraved in green fluttered in every rooftops. This heralded the beginning of a new

hurled by the guerrillas. They violently shook the roads, shops, office buildings, five-star hotels and created panic in the hearts of the Pakistani soldiers. They wanted to draw the attention of the world community to the fight they were waging against the occupation force to achieve freedom. The Pakistan government had been saying continuously that the situation here was normal which was a travesty of truth. The world media took notice of it. In foreign papers Bangabandhu was described as a poet of politics. Inside the country, the sound of bomb explosion pleased the people most. Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra was the most popular radio station, war-fields were dear to hearts and the recoilless rifle was the darling to hold. The warrior-patriots forgot the warmth of their homes, taste of their favoured food, laughter and songs of their dear and near ones, sweet cacophony of babies laughter, diversity of birds and flowers and the blue horizon of the sky.

The captive men and women in towns or villages had their ears alert to hear the footsteps of freedom-fighters. Whenever freedom-fighter knocked the door, they would readily open it, greet them with smile and rice was cooked for them. The freedom-fighters only needed some rest, some food. Everyone knew what the freedom-fighters needed at that moment, and for explaining such needs none needed to sit together roundly in their premises under a moon-lit sky. In like manner ended the waiting of women for the freedom-fighters. Ignoring the threats of the Pakistani army, they used to open the doors at any hour of the day or night. Whenever the freedom fighters used to ask for food, the southerly wind would take away their fear in no time. The roof-tops busted with dreams, the women had almost completed their unearthly bath under a full-moon sky. More than providing food to the freedom-fighters, the opportunity was utilised for treatment of the wounded freedom-fighters, gathering of information and carrying ammunition. It was an extra-ordinary time that touched our life in myriad ways. Precisely that was the reason why we need to look back to 1971 and to explore the strength of unity in our collective national endeavour.

The rivers of our riverine country that flowed from Teknaf to Tetulia were our co-travellers. The easy-flowing waters were of much help in ferrying our passengers and also for transporting ammunitions from camp to camp. The freedom-fighters used boats for their operation. The tolerant behaviour of the quiet rivers filled up the terrain with alluvial deposits. The swelling of river water frightened the Pakistani soldiers most. In West Pakistan they could never imagine such frightful sights of our rivers. They could never think of swimming in these rivers. These rivers were critically helpful in our war of liberation. The fields of paddy, jute, sugarcane, and seasonal crops too came to our assistance. These fields with crops helped our freedom-fighters to hide themselves during operation. The trees, bushes, hillocks were of much help to freedom-fighters when they brush-fired the aggressive Pakistani soldiers. Such was the preparedness of our freedom-fighters in 1971. Irrespective of men and women, all had a total mental perception of a peoples' war which ultimately brought success to our war of liberation war. The valiant Bengalees irrespective of religion or colour fought an extraordinary war to establish a exploitation-free, secular and democratic society in an independent Bangladesh.

A popular sub-continental proverb says, 'If it rains at the end of the month, Magh, King is fortunate for his blessed country.' Indeed that country is blessed where peoples are eloquent with praise for peace and security. The government too is blessed if it translates peoples' dream. The aim of the Bengalees is to fulfil the dream of 1971. Millions of Bagalees are ready to respond to any call of national awakening. Bangla new year and harvesting festival are there to gather them. The perception of the Ekushey shall keep us on right track. Shahid Minar shall call us to fight. We have martyrs memorial to acknowledge the debt we owe to our freedom-fighter martyrs and those living.

Looking back to 1971, let us collectively raise our voice to chant the vows of independence. Let Bangalees be united with the spirit of patriotism to forge the country ahead in its developmental strides.

Independence Day is the beacon of the Banglees.

Translation: Syed Badrul Haque

chapter. In fact, the raising of the flag brought about termination of the hoax of a dialogue.

I did not go to see Bangabandhu that evening or that night. Early in the morning of 25 March I went to road no 32 and climbed backstairs up to his dining room. While taking bread and vegetable offered by Bhabhi, I said, 'Leader, tell me frankly what is happening, what is going to happen. You did not go to the president's house yesterday and it seems you are not going today either'. Without giving me a straight answer he raised his eye from the food he was eating and said, 'Leave Dhaka'. Thereafter he hummed his favorite song 'there will be victory, victory will be there. The earth is for humanity and not for demons'. Then he retired to his bed room humming his song. I did not find the opportunity to ask for explanation of what he meant by 'Leave Dhaka'. I got the explanation later that night and the following day when every area of Dhaka city was littered with dead bodies. I climbed down the stairs in silence. By now the ground floor was full of crowd of local political leaders, local and foreign journalists. It looked strange that other rooms which remained crowded everyday by leaders and workers for three weeks were now vacant. It seemed quiet significant. I was thinking 'Where have they all gone?' Later I realized that Bangobondhu had sent them away without waiting for the result of so called dialogue. The freedom fighters had already gone to the field. As I was coming out of the house a few local and foreign journalists rushed to me. I went out without looking at them. I did not tell them 'I have received all answers from Bangobondhu'. I only muttered 'Leave Dhaka, leave Dhaka'.

I did not go to the house on road number 32 in noon of March 25 nor did I think it necessary. On my way to the office that day I noticed crowds gathering in street corners. It seemed that everybody had realized that something ominous was going to happen. But nobody knew for certain what was going to happen. In the evening on my way to the office, I dropped at the house on road number 32 and found none in the outer rooms of the house. Only Aminul Haq Badsha the press secretary of Bangobondhu was sitting there. He told me that Bangobondhu was in a meeting with senior leaders of the party in the small room at the back of the house. It looked like that the dialogue had



Message

The glorious Independence and National day is an auspicious occasion in the history of our nation. On this joyous occasion, I convey my heartfelt felicitation to all my fellow citizens and Bangladeshis living abroad.

On this great day, I pay deep respect to the martyrs of the Liberation War for their supreme sacrifices. I solemnly remember all the national leaders, organizers, freedom fighters, people who lost their loved ones and freedom loving people of all strata for their supreme sacrifice and extraordinary contribution. We express our gratitude to friendly countries for their support and cooperation in the war of independence.

The glorious liberation is our greatest national achievement. For this achievement to be meaningful, sustainable and effective, it is very important to bring the fruits of the independence to all citizens. It is equally important to establish social justice and good governance and to improve the living conditions of the people. Establishing a modern, progressive and exploitation-free democratic country is the demand of the day. To achieve this, we should play due roles from our respective positions with dedication, sincerity and honesty, imbued with the spirit of liberation war and patriotism.

It is my firm conviction that the nation will succeed in reaching the goal of establishing a knowledge based and just society free from corruption, malgovernance and poverty with the combined effort and active cooperation of all people. It is the fervent expectation of the people that a benevolent Government and a meaningful democratic system will be established through a free, fair, impartial and acceptable national elections. To fulfill this aspiration, I urge upon all citizens irrespective of their affiliation to any group and opinion for united and committed efforts.

Fakhruddin Ahmed
Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed

failed. News was around that Yahya would leave Dhaka in the evening. I waited for preparing a press release containing the directive of Bangobondhu to convey it to the local and foreign newspapers and to a certain special place. The signal core of EPR was that special place. The declaration of independence was conveyed in a feeble voice to the EPR signal on the night of 25th March. Major Siddik Saleh, the then press secretary to the Pakistan army in a book 'Witness to surrender' has mentioned this information.

I roamed about in the city in my car. The city wore a strange look. There was no procession or slogan in the streets. With deep anxiety I reached my office in Motijheel and the first thing I did was to call my wife at the Iqbal road house to tell her 'I am sending my transport, go to your father's place at Dhanmondi'. My colleagues were coming to the newsroom one after another. The chief sub editor K. G. Mostafa asked me, 'What is the progress of the dialogue. Have you been able to gather any information?' I told him that the dialogue had failed. K.G. said, 'No, no, everything will be alright.' The chief reporter Abdur Rahim, reporter Ali Tareq and N.M. Harun waited on the typewriter for my instruction. Rahim asked 'What shall I report?' He informed me that he had left the house on the road number 32 sometime ago at 8 o'clock in the evening. He said 'Bangobondhu is receiving information from different areas that Yahya has left Dhaka in the evening. Pakistan army is on the streets. The foreign journalists are telling that something grave and sinister is going to happen tonight'. I told him to report everything but I was not certain if these would be published. The first hour of 'that something sinister' began soon after evening. Telephone calls received from different areas of the city spoke of truckloads of troops with cannon on the streets. People were raising barricades with furniture, trucks and buses. Those who were told to build fortress in every home by Bangobondhu in his 7th March address, were now building fortress of TituMir in every neighbourhood. Soon at 9 o'clock at night, I heard deafening sounds of heavy artillery fire. Times reporter, my friend Hazel Hurst, Bradshire of Washington Daily News informed from Hotel Intercon, now Seraton that they have been instructed to gather in the lounge early at dawn. 'Perhaps we will be expelled,' they said. They wanted to know what was happening. 'Pakistan army has cordoned off our hotel. We are hearing sounds of heavy arms and gunfire from every direction, they said. In the meantime, Badsha phoned, 'Musa bhai I am at the Intercon. I am coming with a press release from Bangobondhu'. I said, 'You fool don't you ever think of moving out of the hotel.' That press release never saw the light of the day.

Soon after, Dhaka city was covered with a blanked of darkness. Pakistan troops held in siege the Ramna telephone exchange building. Bengali operators had fled. All telephone stopped. Someone at the newsroom at Purbodsh besides our building procured a transistor radio. He informed us that the radio broadcast was stopped. Dhaka center of radio was silent and all radio broadcast from outside was jammed. After much effort, Karachi Radio Center could be heard. We heard Yahya say, 'Traitor Mujeeb wanted to destroy Pakistan, the patriotic Pakistani army has saved Pakistan'. The newsreader in Urdu said, 'Bhutto has returned to Pakistan. After landing at Karachi airport