

(Continued)

Expectation from the Liberation War and the Reality

different areas of Sylhet and Comilla. The purpose was two fold: firstly, it is much easier to disarm soldiers in small groups for the Pakistani. Secondly, communication among the Bangalee soldiers will be far less for not living together and so decisions cannot be taken unitedly. But this arrangement suited the Bengalees much better, far less creating any difficulty. Our stay at Brahmanbaria greatly facilitated us to understand the minds of the local people and public representatives through direct contact. We got opportunity to study the places that would be convenient to start a war.

The situation became uncertain when on first of March the postponement of the Parliament session was announced. We in our Pakistani military uniform were suspect in the eyes of the common people. They on this account created lot of problems in transporting our foodstuff from Comilla. The suspicious public repeatedly wanted to know the role of the East Bengal Regiment. The situation however took a dramatic turn after Bangabandhu's speech on 7th March. At that time the Non-cooperation movement got such a momentum that none of the Army units was allowed to change their places. But we, after much effort as Bangalee Army officers and soldiers were able to establish rapport with the people. We tried to convince them that we as Bangalee soldiers shall always remain on their side and we would start our operation in right time. We cautioned them any immature step might cause serious debacle to the on-going movement.

After the time-honoured 7th March speech of Bangabandhu we understood what we were required to do. We were waiting only for the appropriate moment. We were not able to keep contact amongst us for living far apart. But we who were stationed at Brahmanbaria like me (the writer), Major Shafayet Jamil, Captain Enam (embraced martyrdom on 29 March, 1971), and Lt. Kabir continued consultation amongst us. On 23 March, our another Company 'A' headed by Major Khaled Mosharraf (later Major General and Bir Uttam) was sent to Shamshearnagar of Sylhet. Portion of another Company 'B' along with the Battalion got united with us on 25 March in Brahmanbaria. On the very same day when Pakistan Army launched a sudden aggression with arms bought by the money of the Bengalees on the unarmed Bangalee people, we realised we could no longer afford to remain idle. We must take arms. On 26 March we tried to establish contact with Bangalee soldiers stationed outside Brahmanbaria and succeeded on good many occasions. On 26 March we promulgated curfew at Brahmanbaria town for the whole day. During that period, we contacted the leaders of the Awami League and Chitra League and students. They helped us in our activities endangering their lives. Of them, Jahangir Osman (later Captain in the Army and Bir Pratik), Humayun, the then MPA and current MP Lutful Hye Sachchu were notable. They were our source of information. We decided we could no longer serve the Pakistanis and that we must stand on the side of our people. Accordingly under the leadership of Major Shafayet Jamil we arrested the unit-head, Lt. Col. Khizir Hayat Khan, head of Delta Company, Sadek Newaz Khan, and Lt Amjad Syed at 8.30 AM on 27th in front of the WAPDA rest house in Brahmanbaria and we announced to rebel and declared our loyalty to the Bangladesh government. In this context, I must not fail to mention that without the timely and courageous steps taken by Abdul Gaffar Howlader (later Colonel and Bir Uttam), the lives of the Bangalee soldiers serving at Comilla Cantonment could not be saved. Besides

Subedar Anwar, Nayek Subedar Siddik, Habildar Belayet, Habildar Munir, Habildar Rezaul, Nayek Munir, Nayek Kashem and many are also mentionable for their help. After the rebellion at 4 P.M, Major Khaled Mosharraf came to Brahmanbaria from Sylhet along with his company and took charge of our battalion. Indeed from that very day, liberation war at Brahmanbaria was started.

Initial plan was to build a defense arrangement around Brahmanbaria town and declare it as a liberated zone and set-up a store-house for military arms and ammunitions. In that context, I with my Company 'D' was given the responsibility of developing a defense system on the southern side of the town on the banks of the Titas river and Captain Gaffar with Company 'B' was charged with building a defense on the Dhaka-Brahmanbaria rail-line and Gokarna landing area. The rest of us went to Teliapara and other areas to do our assigned job. The moment we made our announcement, the people of the entire area joined us spontaneously. That was really a rare emotion-charged moment. Hundreds of people came forward with whatever they had. They all were keen to join the war! It was really difficult to control their emotion. We convinced them that 'let us build our defense system first and then we shall send you to war-fields properly trained and



armed'. We indeed are grateful to the local people the way they contributed to the liberation war supplying us with foodstuff and medicine. Later, I took part in operations outside Brahmanbaria town at Gangashagar of Akhaura, Akhaura jangshan, Kharampur, Singerbeel and towards the end in other places including Kasba, Latumura etc. A close cooperation had developed by now between the Army and the people. Even without arms, they were so eager to join the war. Many youths even carried arms and other supplies to far-off places. Many of them served as guide and gave information about the locations of the Pakistan Army. The spontaneous service of those young fighters in fact paved the way of our Liberation War to proceed a lot.

By all appearance, liberation war was a peoples' war. Barring a few black sheep every body's participation was direct and spontaneous. As a result, only in nine months we won in a direct battle against a so called well-trained, well-equipped armed forces. We snatched our long cherished Independence. Liberation war was not a sudden event. The

consolidate that resistance.

The 26th of March was also inevitable. The deaths and horrors of 25 March undoubtedly gave birth to a deathless spirit and resolve, for liberation and freedom. We therefore called for our independence and freedom on 26 March even while living under terrible subjugation; we took up arms in our hands and went to war for our country. The significance of 26 March as our independence day is therefore enormous. When a nation takes a decision, where its thoughts are free, its culture is invincible and it knows only to keep its head high, the footsteps of the enemy is not allowed in its territory and it becomes independent from that very day, or that very moment. When all citizens of the country express such a resolve, then even when there is a capture of territory by the enemy, it is bound to end. The seizure ceases symbolically on that very day, although some time may be needed for its complete materialization.

The 26th of March is a complete day of celebration for us. We celebrate our tenacity for freedom, our vow for emancipation of the masses, the fire and ammunition of the Bangalee psyche and its peace-loving disposition alongside many other attributes. At the same time, we celebrate the spirit of democracy and secularism. The Awami League had gone for the general election of 1970. They also could have avoided it, because by then our logic for independence had become forceful and the Bangalees were united in fact the demand for separation from Pakistan had become very strong and as a result it was not impossible to launch an armed struggle. But the Awami League chose the path of election, and the people welcomed that. The people had clearly conveyed their desire through the electoral verdict. The election proved that the Bangalees sought a peaceful resolution of the crisis in establishing their right of self-determination.

But when the Pakistanis put up stone-wall on this orderly path and sought to bury the Bangalees under that wall on the night of 25 March, the Bangalees had to opt for an armed struggle. And ultimately they emerged victorious. Consequently, we celebrate 26 March as a victory of the armory of conscience against barbaric weaponry and as a triumph of the irresistible spirit of the struggling Bangalee people. And this celebration should not be for a mere day, it should be for all days. Otherwise, we shall not be able to renew our cherished desires, principles and beliefs. If we do not constantly go back to the ideals of our liberation war, then we cannot remain resolute as a nation and would weaken gradually.

2. The sunrise of another independence day has taken place after 38 years of our independence. The 26th March of 1971 was full of sorrow and hazards; people were afraid and terrorised on the run for a sanctuary. Everywhere, there was an air of uncertainty and danger. But despite that, people could hear the call of independence inside the depths of their minds; they knew that the days of subjugation would end. But

language movement of 1952, Joint Front election in 1954, 6-Point movement of 1966, the mass-uprising of 1969 and the election of 1970-all climaxed in the 1971 liberation war. The events following the emergence of religion-based state of Pakistan, and our achievement of freedom in 1971 through a war of liberation amply proved that religion cannot be the sole basis of statehood and no state can sustain on it alone. The fundamental principle of the liberation war was to found a respectable nation on the basis of non-communalism, secularism, democracy, and economic self-dependence. These were the basic elements of the first constitution of Bangladesh that we adopted in 1972. Sad though, we drifted away many a times from those principles and its basic character was changed through amendments at different times. We lost our focus to incite mutual acrimony, and fundamentalism started emerging. Incidents like the killing of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu in 1975, killing of four national leaders later in jail, killing of liberation war heroes, the sector commanders and so it continued unabated. Later we also have seen the murder of MPs, ministers, judges, university teachers, top bureaucrats and so many national intellectuals and genius. Our culture too was not immune from such attack. The grenade attacks were on the Pahela Boishakh fair and Udichi function. Grenade attack on the 21

August meeting, consignments of huge armaments, confiscation of several trucks loaded with arms and ammunitions, simultaneous bomb blasts in 63 districts and lastly the hellish killing that took place at the Peekhana BDR Headquarters on 25 February, 2009-all these were part of continuous killings that had started in 1971 and conspiracy to make the nation void of good brains and leadership prior to liberation war victory. Injustice and rehabilitation of the killers with state-patronage are responsible for all these heinous acts. So long these culprits shall continue to move freely in the society and not brought to justice, such killings shall continue, and our honour in the world forum shall also continue to be defiled.

We have to stand erect in world arena with our heads high as a proud nation. With this aim a sector commanders' forum consisting of sector commanders of the liberation war has been formed. There is no

single instance in world history to show that the war criminals were not brought to justice in spite of their crimes. Prior to election, the sector commanders moved all over the country and exchanged views with people at all levels of the society and urged them to raise their voice for the trial of the war criminals. The election of 29 December, 2008, was the peoples' verdict in support of this demand. The peoples' vote for Mohajote on 29 December 2008 election was in favour of war criminals' trial. The Mohajote government in the very first session of the Parliament unanimously decided to try the war criminals. Nation now awaits its implementation.

On this day of Independence, we strongly demand to the government that the trial of war criminals be held on our soil. The people, particularly the younger generation demand to root out all evil forces that encourage fundamentalism, terrorism, and killing. I too as freedom fighter expect such a gesture from the government.

Translation: Syed Badrul Haque

(Continued)

Freedom and Democracy

sought freedom. Their principal aim was to suppress these people. There was democracy in Pakistan up to 1958 and that created the possibility of state-power getting transferred to East Bengal. The Pakistanis became fearful of this possibility and therefore handed over power to the Generals through martial law. And for 10 years after 1958, the Pakistanis thought that power would reside permanently in Islamabad. The Bangalees would remain as their subjects and they would continue as masters.

Cracks developed in the confidence of the Pakistanis when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared his 6-points in 1966. At this juncture, some politicians like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto entered the fray by the side of the Generals. But the tall and erect Sheikh Mujib marched forward with unshaken resolve holding his



head high. All the Bangalees were his fellow travellers. False cases were filed against him, a farce was enacted in the name of trial, but ultimately he came out of jail. There was no other alternative for the Pakistanis except to hold the election. The general election was held in Pakistan in 1970 under the priesthood of another military leader through enactment of another huge sham in history. The Awami League led by Sheikh Mujib emerged victorious with a landslide win. By then, Sheikh Mujib had become the darling of the masses as their 'Bangabandhu'. Everybody used to call him by that name. When the military dictator started to apply devious ploys on the advice of his armed forces and politicians like Bhutto, Bangabandhu let the whole world know about the freedom and independence of Bangladesh through his epic speech at Dhaka's Race-Course ground on 7 March. Maulana Bhashani, a leader of the masses who had waged movements for the rights of peasants and workers all his life, pronounced 'Good Bye' to Pakistan. The military dictator Yahya Khan then sat with Bangabandhu for overt discussions, but his real intention was to buy time for deploying the army throughout the country and covertly bring in arms and soldiers.

The 25th of March was, therefore, inevitable. The Pakistani military were taking preparations over an extended period for the purpose. May be, they thought there would be resistance. But that did not happen immediately as the Bangalees were not ready for that brutality. Besides, the Bangalees had never struck first. They were more habituated with realizing their rights through street agitations, not through armed wars.

But the theme of water and fire was inevitable. As there had been an attack, a counter-attack had to be launched. A fitting reply had to be given to those cowards who had fired hundreds of bullets from machine-guns while lining up students in the middle of night. An armed resistance was born for reaching the taste of death to those fiends who had killed sleeping rickshaw-drivers in rickshaws and floating people on footpaths like birds. And it did not take long to

it was not possible for anyone to know with a certainty that the country would be liberated before the end of the year. Many people thought, we were getting entwined in a lengthy people's war similar to that of Vietnam. Even that possibility was welcomed by the people. As we had entered the war, we were bound to emerge victorious; as we had entered a tunnel, however long that might be, we should certainly see light on the other side of it one day, people had such

faith in their minds. But not many days had elapsed after independence when the defeated forces of 1971 started to conspire against the nation. One incident after another took place. On 15 August 1975, Bangabandhu was assassinated along with most of his family-members; martial law was proclaimed and autocratic rule was clamped. Finally, we saw the face of democracy for the second time. But although the attire of the new democracy was democratic, its mentality was autocratic. Nothing was left of what we understood as the spirit of the liberation war. At one juncture, the pro-Pakistan collaborators of 1971 and even the war-criminals occupied the seats of state-power. And under the influence of moral degeneration that set in as a consequence as well as corruption that devoured the country, state-level arrangements were made for ensuring the victory of a particular political party in election. The changes which took place on 11 January 2007 was a temporary end to a dark chapter, but it pushed the country under emergency rule for two years; we could not yet take full stock of the good or bad aspects of that episode.

3. The nation got an election while under emergency rule; the Awami League led grand alliance came to power by winning that election. This government is now slightly more than two and a half months old. But formidable challenges lie ahead before the government. If these cannot be tackled successfully, then democracy will be in peril, and can even become extinct. The government will have to move forward with steadfastness. Whether they voted for the grand alliance or not, all citizens of the country voted for democracy. The government made numerous pledges before and after the election; these must be implemented. If the government remains sincere in words and deeds, then democracy will remain firm, because the common people are the protectors of democracy. At the same time, the opposition resides on the other side of the democratic coin; they will also have to come forward. The government will have to show due respect to the opposition however small they may be in terms of numbers, because they are the shadow government in a democracy. And the opposition should be brought into confidence in times of national crises. Only then would the democratic force attain fullness.

4. The biggest achievement of the Independence Day was freedom. This independence has many meanings. One meaning is acquiring the capacity and scope to erect one's own future amid an open environment for utilising opportunities. It is only democracy which can weave that free setting. We pay our deepest respect to the martyrs of that dark night and the countless martyrs of our liberation war through a renewal of our craving for democracy on the occasion of this Independence Day.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

Remembering the Liberation War

Muhammad Habibur Rahman

They were used to feel close
Only to their relatives,
Or to their neighbours,
Or at the widest
To the people of their local district,
Suddenly they got enthused
And inspired to give a clarion call
For the whole country
"Rise and take up arms
And liberate Bangladesh".

After a long time
After many many a year
They took up arms
And did liberate their country.

The mother of the liberator
Stood at the end of the mango-grove
Leaning on the last mango tree.
And she saw her warrior son
Vanishing on the horizon.
Could she visualize at all
That her son's departure was for good.
And he would not come back home?

Mother's tears were on the son's cheeks
The son did not wipe them
Mother's wet kiss was printed on his forehead
The son did not wipe out
The lingering kissing trace..

When the liberation war was over.
Independence was won
And victory was celebrated
Her heart was filled with a unique joy
And an unforgettable satisfaction.

All the warriors came back home.

'Where is my son?'
She had a lurking suspicion
And alas! It was true.

Both of his legs were blown off by a grenade,
Before his death he tried to touch his forehead
Where his mother kissed
After touching the middle of his forehead
He murmured 'Oh! Mother' and fell dead
He could not cry for his creator
But don't they say that
Heaven lies at the mother's feet?

When we remember the liberation war
With great joy our hearts get filled
When we remember the liberation war
Our hearts also get sadly all emptied.

We remember the liberation war
With joy and sadness
It was our most joyous time
And it was also our saddest time.

Grandma and the Pigs

Muhammad Samad

We had a swampy patch beside our house-
Sundry things occupied the plot, like
wild arum plants and various undergrowths.
The cremation-ghat of the local Zamindar
stood by a horizon-kissing marsh, field
with water-hyacinths.

After the autumnal harvest was over,
We would light a bonfire of paddy stalks
and thus drive away the freezing cold.
The marshy 'beel' would adorn herself
with violet flowers, and the dew on green leaves
would wink at the sun and dissolve in rippling laughter.

And, right then, an avalanche of fat pigs
would come down the slopes of the Garo hills
led by a bunch of pigherds who would
cry a shrill voice, "Hei, O, Ho, Ha!"

I was a very sickly boy then, and chicken hearted, too
Seeing the pigs, Grandma would put a strong
Bamboo *lathi* in my hand
and say sharply-
"GO and give the pig a smack,
that will put courage into your heart
go, strike!"

I remember Grandma now very keenly-
Our small hut is besieged by a horde
Of grunting, tasked pigs...

I would like to get back the courage of my heart
in order to smash their spines.

Grandma, where have you kept that
pig battering *lathi*?
We are sore need of it, now.

Translation: Dr. K. Ashraf Hossain