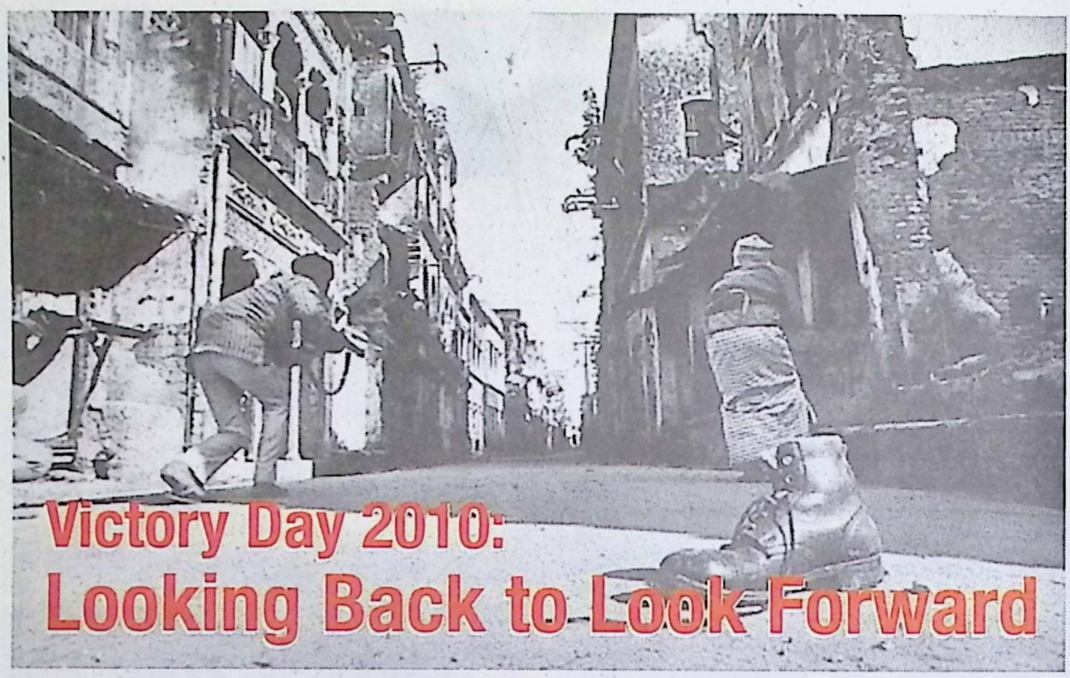


Victory Day 2010: Looking Back to Look Forward

PHOTO: KISHOR PAREKH

Asrar Chowdhury

Shabash Bangladesh
This world looks at you amazed
Raped to the last drop of blood
And yet your head is still raised
- Sukanta Bhattacharya;
Transliteration Asrar Chowdhury.

1971. 266 days. Three million lives. 7.83 lives per minute. An estimated ten million dislocated in neighbouring India. Countless victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. This is just the human price a nation paid for her freedom to write a ten-letter word BANGLADESH on the world map.

The genocide against the innocent people of Bangladesh ranks as one of the most brutal genocides of the 20th Century alongside that of World War II. It challenged the conscience of the freedom loving people of the world. The Friends of '71 responded with whatever weapon they had to fight alongside the people of Bangladesh. With the help of all Friends of '71 and the resilience of a nation that refused to say no to the last drop of blood, Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation on 16th December 1971.

"The story of Bangladesh is an ancient one again made fresh"

- Joan Baez, 1971

After her bloody birth Bangladesh stumbled over one stone after another in her first decade. The oil shock of the '70s, the Bangladesh Famine of '74, political change through the bullet- not the ballot- in '75 and again in '81 challenged the euphoria and aspirations that '71 generated. The independence war and all its values seemed to be evaporating into the ether.

Henry Kissinger's 1974 remark that Bangladesh is a "basket case" seemed to be becoming ever so true by the end of '70s. There was not much to show in the basket that by then appeared to have too many holes in it. The economists Just Faaland and J Parkinson in their 1975 treatise Bangladesh: The Test Case for Development argued, "If Bangladesh could attain development there would be no country without it [development]".The problem with Kissinger as a political analyst; and Faaland and Parkinson as economists is their ignorance of history and observing the Bangladesh experience over a very short time span. Bangladesh [and Bengal] has a very rich history of struggles against oppression. Social changes can sometimes take decades even centuries to happen. When the Sun of Bengal set in 1757 giving rise to a never setting Sun of the British Empire, darkness overshadowed this region for more than two centuries. It took 214 years from 1757 to 1971 for the Sun to rise in the Eastern Horizon of Bangladesh again. In between there were many independence struggles. The Indian Statesman Gopalakrishna Gokhale rightly observed and appreciated the historical potential of this region and defined Bengal in his immortal statement, "What Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow". The beginning of the third decade of Bangladesh- the nineties of the 20th century- ushered in a new dawn for Bangladesh- the road to institutionalised democracy.

The answer my friend, is blowing in the wind
- Bob Dylan at Concert for Bangladesh, 1971 2010.