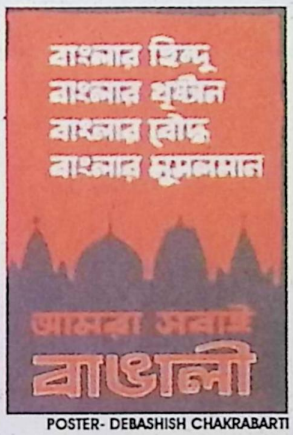
Bangladesh completes 39 years of Victory Day celebrations and enters her fifth decade as an independent nation. It is now time to look back and prove the critiques of critics incorrect. Stop to wonder and ponder.

Since 1991 Bangladesh has slowly and steadily cemented the institutional foundations of parliamentary democracy. Critics can argue things could have been better. They are 'partially' correct when they say so. What critics often fail to observe is, in South Asia- after India- Bangladesh has the longest surviving practice of parliamentary democracy. Bangladesh is one of the few States in the world that has a very homogenous configuration in language and ethnic background.

There was a time when the population density of Bangladesh was described as if all the people in the world could be taken and put into the USA, the population density would still be less than that of Bangladesh. This is true. This is also a statistical data where statistics can be a deceiving white lie. This large population and its high density have made Bangladesh one of the most lucrative markets for mobile telecommunication. In the last four decades, in all her ups and downs, Bangladesh has one of the best road-connectivity in South Asia.



POSTER- DEBASHISH CHAKRABARTI

At the time of independence the population of Bangladesh was more than today's Pakistan. Observe the population statistics today. Family planning in Bangladesh through State intervention and help from donor friends is a success story. An equally impressive achievement is the immunization programmes that have reduced child mortality rates. A fertile land blessed by the waters of the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta somehow has never lead to serious food crises. However. The real potential of Bangladesh does not lie in the few of the many examples narratives above. It lies in the potential of its youth.

With every mistake, we must surely be learning - George Harrison at Concert for Bangladesh, 1971. The youth of Bangladesh has always been potential. This youth answered the call of the time in '71. That same youth, a generation later, is powering the wheels of the economy in the RMG sector. They are remitting their hard saved money back home. The youth is proudly carrying the national flag as one of the most successful armed forces in the UN Peace Missions.

Every year thousands of potential graduates enter the labour market. These graduates have the potential to contribute in new avenues like book publishing, call centres, the software industry, the hospitality industry, the medical industry and many other avenues that have not been properly explored yet. The uneducated population also has the potential to contribute to the wheels of the economy if they could be trained in languages such as Arabic for the Middle Eastern labour market. The labour force going to the Middle East could find better jobs and fill in the gap between skilled and unskilled jobs of that region. Training in more languages can help the ever-potential youth of Bangladesh explore labour markets such as the French and Spanish speaking nations.

YES.' Bangladesh has problems and setbacks. Which country doesn't? After all the hiccups over the last four decades, today, Bangladesh foresees herself to become a middle-income country within the next decade or so. Henry Kissinger in 2008 declined to comment on his 1974 remark that Bangladesh is a 'basket case' a bottomless basket. Faaland and Parkinson made a u-turn on their 1975 remarks in a 2007 statement saying, "with three decades and more of experience of limited and chequered progress, sustainable development in Bangladesh appears to us within reach".

Here comes the Sun

- George Harrison at Concert for Bangladesh, 1971

Who will carry Bangladesh forward in the 21st Century? It will certainly be her youth. Fateh Ali Chowdhury, freedom fighter of Crack Platoon, told this author for the Daily Star during Victory Day, 2008, "Very few nations have the privilege of fighting a War of Independence". The youth of yesteryears played their role in '71 and other freedom struggles in the history of this region. It is now the responsibility of today's youth to take Bangladesh forward to her rightful place on the world stage.

National days like Victory Day are like the floods of Bangladesh. They come with a powerful message that reminds us of the rich history and heritage of this wonderful country. Like the floods they go away fertilising the soil from the waters of the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta. We revisit history to make our journey forward worthwhile. In four decades Bangladesh has come a long way to make a launch towards becoming a middle-income country. And that can only be possible if the youth of today responds to the needs of the moment. As Bangladesh enters her fifth decade as an independent nation- Generation Next takes Bangladesh forward. The mantle now rests on your shoulders. It no longer belongs to us, or those before us. Shubho Bijoy Dibosh.

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