

## Contemplations on the Occasion of Victory Day

(From page 21)

I thought that the new administration would have three characteristics. Firstly, there would be political leadership here alongside politically sanctioned policies. Secondly, it would consist of workers, not clerks. Thirdly, the structure of the state would be massively decentralised.

• The fourth question that pricked my mind was: what shape would our economic management take, and how would we achieve the 'economic freedom' as pledged by ourselves? Naturally, the rehabilitation and development measures which I contemplated would be implemented speedily.

My mind continued to harbour these ideas ever since the Victory Day of 1971. When I returned to a free Bangladesh after one and a half months, I found out then that the contemplations which had pricked my mind on the occasion of the first Victory Day were quite appropriate. I saw that the law and order situation was naturally improving. I saw that the people were getting rehabilitated themselves. I saw that all of us were dedicated to the task of rebuilding the war-ravaged land. However, it was not the case that a group of plunderers or opportunists were not active even then. But their activities did not appear to be widespread to me.

Forty years have elapsed since 1971. During this period, the supporters of the liberation war had been removed from power illegally. A coterie in the military had assassinated the Father of the Nation along with his family members. Illegal military rule had persisted for almost 16 years. Trading with religion and militancy was on the rise during an interim 20 years. Illiberal democracy destroyed the election process. During these forty years, I worked with the government for the first twelve years, spent the next five in exile in foreign land and engaged myself in foreign



Jubilant at the Victory

employment and monitoring of the nation's fate in subsequent years. I have been discharging the responsibility of a minister during the past three years.

In this backdrop, I shall dwell on the ideas which spontaneously come to my mind while observing the 40th anniversary of the liberation war.

• I feel relieved at the very outset that militancy has been suppressed and we have been able to drive out religion-based trade from our state affairs.

• We have carried forward the trial process of the war-crime and human rights violators to such a level by now that the cases are at present in the courts.

• It seems to me that we have pressed ahead with roughly putting in place a transparent, free and neutral procedure for elections – which is the cornerstone of democracy.

• We have succeeded at last in restoring the glorious Constitution of 1972. The Constitution is certainly changeable, but changes should take place on the basis of people's mandate.

• It seems to me that we are taking strong measures for establishing rule of law. The trial of Bangabandhu's assassination has been completed and most of the culprits have been punished. Investigations of many cases are progressing without any hindrance and law is getting the space to advance at its own pace. The right to vent

grievances has been more or less established. Although extra-judicial measures remain in place, accountability is being strengthened. Discretionary torture has decreased drastically.

• I feel relieved that we have succeeded in adopting an education policy after so many years. We have by now brought almost all children of the country under the cover of elementary education. We are making progress towards providing education on a single stream. However, we still lag

behind in secondary, vocational and technical education. We are striving to open up newer horizons in the area of research.

• I am very happy that we are speedily advancing towards the goal of a Digital Bangladesh. Information technology is making our path of economic growth smoother and faster. At the same time, it is a powerful weapon against corruption and misuse.

• I feel proud that we have been able to drastically reduce the proportion of poor population. We are also having some success in reducing inequality. We are able to take robust steps for our economic freedom.

We still have to go a long way for achieving economic emancipation. We are taking firm steps for development and utilization of the female population, who are the principal actors in this endeavour. Our goal is to increase employment on a massive scale, although our speed has not been as expeditious as expected. Our microcredit programmes have achieved many successes. But many concomitant factors are still not allowing the poor to lift themselves above the poverty level. Our hardcore poor population is also not capable of utilising limited opportunities. Our centralised administration and policy-formulation are big hindrances. I am waiting for an effective reform of the governance structure. Administrative decentralisation is a must for this to happen. I know that economic emancipation cannot be easy with our current level of investments. The prices of goods and services also do not augur well for our economic prospects. We are making efforts to make this inflationary pressure tolerable for the poor. At the same time, we have to look at how wastages in subsidies or social safety nets can be contained; how the burden of subsidies can be brought down to a tolerable level; how the social safety net schemes can be transformed into a comprehensive national pension system.

Political climate and the resultant situations are vitally important on this day. I do not want to make detailed comments on this subject. This environment is not at all encouraging at the moment. There is great dearth of tolerance in our society and the tradition of reaching an understanding through dialogue is very weak. We always tend to arrive at an unchangeable decision very quickly. We do not want to utilise the opportunity for providing directions to policy formulation and government programmes through the Jatiyo Sangsad. Instead, we try to build up agitation. We shall have to find ways for transition from this precarious situation. This is our principal expectation on the occasion of Victory Day. This is the subject which worries me most.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu,  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

## Ballad of Liberation War

Muhammad Samad

At the Racecourse, on 7th March, before a seething sea of people the lion-hearted leader of the Bengalis declared,  
Our struggle this time is for our Liberation;  
Our struggle this time is for Independence...

Since that day, with whatever each one of us had, we threw ourselves into the War of Liberation—bamboo groves, bushes, jungles and rivers; all over Bengal peasants of the field resisted, resisted shy housewives, hungry workers with closed fists, spirited girls and boys back from the university and turbulent adolescents.

In '71, the sky of Bengal poured forth rain-water gushing from its mountains of clouds; soft chests of rivers heaved up in big bravery. These mother-like rivers carried every boat filled with women, children, arms and ammunitions in their affectionate breasts to its correct destination.

Then—  
fire burnt down houses, paddy, straw, turmeric, chili, children;  
Even the garrulous crows in the neighborhood turned mum at the panic, whisper, abduction, killing, firing, blood-shade and groaning all around.  
The milking cows of widows—their lone stays—  
were snatched away for feasting orgies of the killers;  
the chopped-up, blood-smearred corpse of the adolescent freedom-fighter of our school, our dear *Kalam Bhai*, was dealt blows of boot in the face.  
One noon tornado-like swoops fierce from the Pak soldiers and razakars blew away in no time the house, temple and shop of *Nani Kaka*, and the cottage-structure of Narayan sir, our dear teacher.  
The father fell dumb in doomed cries, as he had to stand the scenes of rape of the green girl with black eyes of the deer; and he has not yet got back his voice.

*Buludi* and *Mamatadi* did not come that year to their parents' homes to eat *naru* from cocoanut and *sandesh* and *payesh* from *patali gur*.  
Throughout the Eid day, my mother wiped off tears with her sari behind our eyes as my elder brother hadn't come back;  
my father's sobbing and cries of the pet dog every night did not let us to sleep during the nine months of the War.

With the disgrace of maternity on her, our dear *Moni Apa* disappeared for ever from the military camp ...  
Among paddy-fields, hills, jungle and muddy water fell down dead so many sons of so many mothers ...  
hundreds of fresh lives ...  
with "Joy Bangla" slogan on their lips and rifles in hand.

Thus,  
treading paths of invincible patriotism of *Khudiram*,  
*Surja Sen* and *Preetilata*,  
blood-soaked alphabet of *Salam-Barkat*,  
and dreams of *Asad-Matiur-Mamunia*,  
like the colourful spring of fireworks in the sky our dear motherland burst into jubilation—  
"Joy Bangla; Tomar Amar Thikana—Padma, Meghna, Jamuna;  
Tomar Neta Amar Neta—Sheikh Mujib Sheikh Mujib;  
Ek Neta Ek Desh—Bangabandhu Bangladesh."

The new red sun of Liberation,  
drenched with chastity, tears, and blood,  
painted the glorious mark of victory  
on the forehead of our dreams.

Translation: Kajal Bandyopadhyay

## Bangladesh: Achievements in 40 Years

(From page 21)

has been developed into a mega city over the last four decades. The Dhaka city is now marked with a number of towers on its avenues and alleys. Earlier, the people of this Bangladesh used to watch similar towers in cities like Hong Kong or Singapore.

If we look at the villages, we see they are not without life any more. The gap between village and town has diminished to a great extent. Bangladesh had only a few primary schools at the time of its Independence. There is hardly any village now where one will not find either a government or an NGO or a non-government run schools. Almost everyone of this generation is literate. Though there is illiteracy among the elderly citizens – especially the very senior citizens, the literacy rate has been raised to about 70%, which was only 17% in 1970. The Awami League government has adopted a New Education Policy meeting the demand of the modern times. This Education Policy has attached top priority to the constitutional obligation for a poverty-free, non-communal, liberal and democratic Bangladesh. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the most useful tool to help the people achieve the national goals. In view of the potential of the ICT, Bangladesh has embarked upon an enormous pragmatic programme called Vision 2021. The government is committed to digitizing Bangladesh by the year 2021. Social safety allowances have been introduced for the destitute. Old-age allowance was unthinkable in this country forty years ago. A program titled 'Home-Coming' has freed many floating people. The *Asrayan*, a project for giving shelter to the landless people, has been able to rehabilitate 50 thousand landless people at its first phase. The *Asrayan-2* project has also taken massive programmes to rehabilitate thousands of people. The enrolment of women on the government service including the defense and police services has increased significantly. The quota for the disabled in the government services is ensured in Bangladesh. The females are getting loans without any collateral. The poor and meritorious students will have opportunity study free of cost up to the degree level.

The Bangalis did not own any industry before the Independence. The industries of Pakistan were owned and run by the twenty-two families of the then West Pakistan, and the key to the nation's economy was in their hands. Today, all types of industries have developed in an independent Bangladesh. Waves of development reach from Teknaf to Tetulia. Under international orders, the ocean-going vessels are now being manufactured in Bangladesh. Earlier, no female workers other than the maid-servants were seen on the street of Dhaka city. Now, the city streets are vibrant with the presence of female garment workers.

The supreme sacrifice that this nation made for the mother-tongue has been recognised by all nations of the world. The immortal 21st February is now being observed throughout the world as the International Mother Language Day. Appropriate effort has been taken to establish Bangla as an official language of the United Nations.

The US state department has recently mentioned Bangladesh as a model state for others in South Asia. The Goldman Sachs, one of the largest financial institutes of the world, in its report published last year, has put Bangladesh in the 11th position on the list of the world's potential countries. All these recognitions are indeed an outcome of the stupendous successes achieved in different fields of development. After the MDG award and numerous accolades last year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been ranked as one of the top woman leaders in the world by *Time Magazine* published in August this year.

Indian leader Sonia Gandhi visited Bangladesh on 25 July 2011. In an international seminar on autism, she mentioned that Bangladesh was well ahead of India in reducing the infant and maternal mortality rate, birth rate, low birth weight rate, and increasing the immunization and education programmes and average life expectancy of the citizens.

The inherent characteristics of Bangladesh have been instrumental to its success rather than the imposed concept of development over the last 40 years. The success of Bangladesh in many sectors by overcoming the natural and social barriers over the last forty years, has been highly acclaimed at a Harvard University seminar, held on 10 October 2009. In the world of competition, the seminar told, the people of Bangladesh didn't just wait for their leaders and experts in dispensing with their own activities. The people of this country have continued their journey to progress by ignoring the imposed international prescriptions.

The present government pledged to establish a digital Bangladesh based on their election manifesto and the *Charter of Changing Days*. The initiatives of the present government in the IT sector have created interest of the foreigners in Bangladesh. A fortnight ago on December 01, *e-Asia*, a prestigious information

and communication technology (ICT) event of Asia, was successfully kicked off in Dhaka. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the three-day-long mega event at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre. The endeavor of the present government has brought about enormous changes in the IT sector of Bangladesh. The country has entered the world of broadband and WIFI internet connectivity. The young programmers of Bangladesh have already earned reputation in international arena. The largest database of the world now belongs to Bangladesh. Even as a developing country, Bangladesh prides itself in establishing a database of eighty million voters. (Previously, France had created a database of about 73 million people).

The government has opened a world of new opportunities for its people through establishing a total of 4501 Union Information Service Centers countrywide. Now people from a remote village or an isolated island can avail the online opportunity to share their issues even with the Prime Minister. This success in the field of information technology tells about the position earned by Bangladesh over the last forty years. The progress of the country in becoming a 'Digital Bangladesh' is a significantly great achievement in forty years of Bangladesh. The e-banking, online tax filing and e-voting have also brought about significant changes in the daily and financial matters. The Election Commission has successfully introduced e-voting in Narayanganj

mayoral election recently. Earlier, there were only one state-owned Radio and one TV channel. Now there are about two dozens of TV channels, several FM radio stations and over a dozen of community radio stations operating in the country. Besides, attaining success in poverty alleviation and sustainable development, Bangladesh has made considerable progress in other fields, particularly in games and sports. Now Bangladesh is one of the ten test-playing nations. The adventurous youngsters of Bangladesh have made a mark of hoisting the flag of their beloved country on the peak of the Mount Everest.

The immediate target of Bangladesh is to come out of the list of the 'least developed countries' (LDC) as quickly as possible. The problems of the power sector and port facilities will be resolved with in a decade from now if the practice in democracy is continued. Thus the per capita income of the country will increase by 05 to 06 per cent resulting in an 08 per cent yearly increase in the Gross Domestic Production (GDP). Prominent economists feel this will help Bangladesh come out of the list of LDCs.

In the last forty years Bangladesh has been included in different economic indexes and forums. A certain benefit of this inclusion is that we can have a



Father of the Nation at the formal inauguration of Betunia earth satellite station in Chittagong.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina awarding the newly introduced life-time honor to eminent film actress Sultana Zaman on the occasion of National Film Award-2009



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurating 100 MW power plant at Siddirgonj near Dhaka



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurating national campaign of vitamin A-Plus for the children

picture of the country's advancement in comparison with other nations. There are many factors like resource constraints, complications, and restlessness etc. affecting the position of Bangladesh in these indices which at times may give a poor impression about Bangladesh. Even then, we find Bangladesh capable of moving ahead keeping pace with the rest of the world despite

multiple limitations.

Often many indexes place Bangladesh behind a besieged nation like Ethiopia. The mystery of such indexes is now revealed to the conscious people. Still in 2010, we find on the report of the successes in the global competition that Bangladesh has advanced by five steps and in case of the skill in commodity trade the advancement is by eight steps.

The perseverance and mental strength of the people of Bangladesh is more forceful and valuable than the natural resources. Here everyone is committed to the building of a 'positive' Bangladesh. It cannot be measured by any set theory. Bangladesh has been moving forward over the last forty years by putting behind all the theories. And the progress of the country has gained added force with the present government at its helm.

Translation: Sharif Hasan