

March 26

The day of commencement and resolve

MARCH 26 was the commencement of a nine-month long arduous resistance against a rapacious military that wanted to suppress the rights of the Bengalis by force. Never before in the annals of human history perhaps has there been such a diabolical attempt to deny the political rights of the majority by the minority, and never before has the majority been forced to the fight to reclaim their rights. And that led to what we saw so proudly emerge as an independent country not only as the symbol but also an affirmation of the political rights of the people of Bangladesh.

It is a day that we recall with a deep sense of gratitude those valiant sons and daughters of the soil, the martyred and the living freedom fighters, whose motivation was neither recognition nor acknowledgement but only to see the defeat of an oppressive military machine. But for their supreme sacrifice it would have not been possible to achieve our military objectives as quickly as we did.

It is also a day to remember the leadership of Bangabandhu, and recognise the Mujib Nagar government and the four national leaders who, in his absence, steered the course of the nation's future through the rough seas during the nine months of our liberation war. It is a day that we must also recognise the active support of the millions of Bangladeshis at home and abroad who actively stood by the Mukti Bahini.

We would be remiss if we did not recognise the help provided by India and the sacrifice of the Indian people and soldiers in the cause of our Independence, and the innumerable friends abroad who individually and collectively had brought to the notice of the world the plight of the seventy million people of Bangladesh and garnered international support for our cause. We are happy to note that the GOB is fulfilling a long-overdue obligation of acknowledging their contributions formally.

We are happy to note that some of the war criminals have been charge-sheeted but would reemphasise the need to conduct the trial conforming to international standards.

It is a day that we must spare some time to ponder whether the very lofty ideals that motivated our liberation struggle have been achieved, even partly. Where have we fallen short in establishing an egalitarian society with justice, fair play and equal opportunity for all?

It is a day to promise to cast aside petty differences and gel together for the cause of the country and the people. If the people do not become the centre of politics in Bangladesh the sacrifices of the martyrs will have gone in vain.

A plea for Limon

When will he get justice?

AN entire year has passed since Limon, a young HSC student from Jhalakathi, was left crippled after being shot by Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) personnel for being a cohort of a criminal. So far no evidence has been provided to prove such an allegation. Instead, two false cases have been filed against him, one under the Arms Act and another for 'preventing law enforcers from discharging their duties'. Meanwhile Limon has had to bear the agony of losing a leg just two weeks before his HSC examinations and then appearing in court for these cases against him. Not only has his family had to bear the burden of the costs associated with his defense in court, Limon, who would have been the bread earner of the family, has had all his dreams shattered.

It is to the credit of the media that the plight of this young man has been projected regularly. But there are many other young men in this country being at the mercy of trigger happy and corrupt law enforcement agents whose lives are crippled forever without anyone ever knowing about it. Although a case had been filed by Limon's mother accusing six RAB personnel of attempting to murder her son, the police have failed to submit an investigation report and charge sheet.

This kind of covering up to protect offending law enforcement agents is an ominous sign of how law enforcers continue to abuse their power with impunity.

Limon has shown laudable strength in continuing to pursue his studies despite the odds so that he can one day support his family. The government must show that it has the courage to take action against the brutality of those law enforcers and the heart to help Limon to pursue his

KALEIDOSCOPE

March 26 in retrospect



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

ON this 41st Independence Day, it is time we had a fresh stocktaking of the past. The very remoteness of those tumultuous days of March

1971 has placed us at this vantage point to consider those from a dispassionate outlook.

The need for this retrospection has become necessary as we are yet to settle many of our fundamental issues of national importance. As a result, the leading political parties have failed to establish democracy even after restoration of the elected and parliamentary form of government at the peak of a mass struggle against military autocracy in 1991. Again, that long-drawn struggle was necessary, because before 1991, the country had gone into the hands of military dictators for a decade and a half.

Since independence, the country has been falling from one pitfall into another. And all these national calamities have seriously disrupted the normal functioning of the state, its politics and economy. And the new faces that assumed power in the wake of each such changeover did impose their own brand of politics on the country and run it at their whims and caprices. These proved to be a serious blow to the nation's desired progress and economic growth, because the nation had to start fresh from scratch after each such upheaval and the political changes that ensued.

The absence of constitutional civilian power over 16 years stymied the normal growth of democratic politics in the country. The long political vacuum distorted even the characteristics of the constitutional civilian politics.

Which is why, even after the nation got back the elected civilian government in 1991, healthy growth of democracy still remains a far cry. Each of the two major parties, the Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh

The situation demands a broad national unity to resolve all the core national issues still keeping us divided. In spite of the negativities of the past, our achievements have not been little. It could have better, but for the lack of sagacious and farsighted leadership. This is what the nation is waiting for.



FILE PHOTO

Nationalist Party (BNP) that now dominates the political scene has been embroiled in an endless bickering and they are often at each other's throat. As a result, they have not yet been able to restore socio-political stability and play by the rule of the game to run the country smoothly along the path of continued peace, progress and growth.

The sum total of these failures on the political front has been that the dream to establish a democratic, just and egalitarian society that the people cherished has been left unfilled. The ideals that inspired them to take up arms in 1971 and wrest the country's independence from the clutches of Pakistani occupation forces appear to have proven hollow.

At this point, it is important to note that it was not exactly the Black Night of March 25, 1971 when the Pakistani

military junta let loose its blood thirsty military on the unarmed population of Dhaka that the War of Independence had begun. True the abattoir that the Pakistani junta had turned the sleepy provincial capital of Dhaka into on that Black Night proved to be the *casus belli* for the people of Bangladesh to begin the war for their total liberation. The history of our liberation struggle can be traced back further into the past in the great mass upsurge against the dictatorial military rule of the Pakistani junta in 1969. Before that there was a decade-long democratic struggle of the people against the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan. The long period of military dictatorship was preceded by more than a decade of civilian rule under a multi-party democratic dispensation, since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and

The Anniversary that brings joy and pain

MOHAMMAD SHAHIDUL ISLAM

THE nation observes today the 41st Anniversary of independence with usual zeal and gaiety, in spite of the deep frustration because of unfulfilled expectations. Independence, gained at the cost of a sea of blood and sacrifices of millions, stays a symbol of hope and an eternal source of inspiration. It is a day of great joy and high spirits because the nation came into existence on this day.

As a matter of custom, the acts of commemoration and showing of honour to the state heroes are performed in a routine fashion on this day. The day of our independence has been honoured in this way for the past 40 years. Meanwhile, we have passed our childhood, adolescence and even the early years of adulthood. The liberation war generation is now crossing middle age and many are already in their old age. Many have died. Many war heroes who embraced the enemy's bullet, but survived, are the living memories of the unparalleled courage and sacrifice the freedom fighters had to make for the great cause of national independence. They are also honoured for their sacrifice and valour.

But is the day of national independence only one of commemoration and festivity? Is it the only way to honour the martyred war heroes as well as those who are still alive bearing the memory of the war? There are others who were crippled by enemy bullets and passing their days in wheelchairs. What are they witnessing? Are their feelings, in spite of their emotion and pride for what they did for the nation, full of unadulterated joy and merriment? All big questions need to find intelligent answers.

The celebration apart, the obser-

vance of this anniversary offers an opportunity to the nation to look back to see how far the very objectives of the War of Liberation have been fulfilled until now. This remains an essential exercise to evaluate the past and plan for a better tomorrow. The liberation war was not waged only to have a free country spreading over few hundred thousand kilometers and a flag of our own. It meant something

mishaps, and quality of politics that is being pursued by the major political parties.

The heroes of the national liberation war, and all the people who were behind them, fought the war because their mission was to present their progeny with a nation that would be able to stand with its head high among the global community of nations. And if the nation and its

The main purpose of telling and retelling the story of our of liberation war and the great cause for which it was fought to our children, lest they be oblivious of our glorious national past, will be to show that we are also worthy of that noble legacy. But while telling the story of our national war of liberation, we need also to take great care that we are not lost only in the emotion-choked memory of the suffering, the sacrifice and the heroism that went with the war.

more. The war was for bringing an end to years of exploitation by the Pakistani ruling class and achieving both political and economic emancipation. We have, literally speaking, achieved political freedom.

But we are still miles away from gaining true economic emancipation since nearly 40% of the population is still finding it hard to meet the bare minimum needs for their living. However, it did not go all wrong since the country achieved independence in 1971. There have been many positive developments on both the political and the economic fronts. But the people are not happy over the quality of governance, marked by massive

people are really to bask in that kind of pride, they will have to do more than just remember the day and tell the rest of the world how we suffered and also with what great bravery the enemy was fought and vanquished in the end.

So, the main purpose of telling and retelling the story of our liberation war and the great cause for which it was fought to our children, lest they be oblivious of our glorious national past, will be to show that we are also worthy of that noble legacy. But while telling the story of our national war of liberation, we need also to take great care that we are not lost only in the emotion-choked memory of the suf-

emergence of Pakistan.

At that time, this deltaic plain, which is now Bangladesh, was part of that Pakistan. Soon after the emergence of Pakistan, the Bengali population of this land realised that they have been betrayed by the political leadership that was at the helm at that time. Then on started the Bengali people's broader struggle to protect their culture, language as well as democratic and economic rights. In the long tortuous struggle for national liberation, one watershed was February 21 of 1952, The Muslim League government then in office showed its true face by ordering its police to fire on students who were demanding that Bengali be established as a state language. The blood that the students spilled that day continued to roll until the moment of truth arrived in 1971.

So, the Bengali people's struggle for nationhood did not start on a fine morning. The 1971 was the biggest watershed on the long trek to independence. But after the entire struggle and the blood that it spilled, what has the people's net gain been so far? Have they been able to fulfil their mission of an exploitation-free just society after all these years?

Now, to all appearances, even after the last two decades of democratic civilian rule, we are again back to square one and much of it is due to poor leadership. The nation is divided. And this division is largely the handiwork of the present breed of politicians. All is being done in the name of partisan politics. At the moment, the situation demands a broad national unity to resolve all the core national issues still keeping us divided. In spite of the negativities of the past, our achievements have not been little. It could have better, but for the lack of sagacious and farsighted leadership. This is what the nation is waiting for.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 26

1971

The commencement of a bloody nine-month long Liberation War against the Pakistan Army that followed millions of deaths leading to the Independence of Bangladesh.

1973

Stock Exchange admits women. Women have been admitted to the London Stock Exchange for the first time in the institution's 200 year history.

1974

Gaura Devi leads a group of 27 women of Laata village, Henwalghati, Garhwal Himalayas, to form circles around trees to stop them being felled and giving rise to the Chipko Movement in India.

1979

Israel and Egypt shake hands on peace deal. In a ceremony at the White House, Israel and Egypt end 30 years of war with a handshake, after the signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty.

1981

'Gang of four' launches new party. The Social Democrats have launched their new political party pledging to "reconcile the nation" and "heal divisions between classes."