



Victory Day

Witnessing the surrender

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

SEVENTY-ONE years ago, the misty winter morning of December 16, 1971, the day the nation celebrates as Victory Day, brought the glorious independence of Bangladesh. It was the day the whole nation had waited to see during nine months of genocide that the savage Pakistani occupation army launched to eliminate the ethnic Bengali nation. The massacre, taking a toll of 3 million lives, was unprecedented in the history of the world.

Indian Army chief General Manekshaw's stern warning to the occupation forces was being beamed around the country since early morning of December 15, alerting the occupation forces to surrender or face the consequences. The morale of the Pakistan army was completely broken. East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) had already fallen to the Mukti Bahini-Indian army joint forces. The people were euphoric in spite of some uneasiness in the air.

The surrender took place at the then Race Course (now Suhrawardy

Uddyan). Jagjit Singh Aurora, C in C of Eastern Command, India, accepted the surrender of Lt. Gen A.K. Niazi, his batch mate in the army before partition, now G.O.C of Eastern Command of the Pakistan army. Bangladesh side was represented by the then Air Force chief of Bangladesh A.K. Khondakar.

Enthusiastic citizens from all over the city gathered at the venue to witness this auspicious and long awaited moment of victory through the surrender of the barbaric Pakistan army. Tears welled up in many eyes while reflecting on the fierce struggle, sufferings, atrocities and deaths they had to encounter to win this freedom.

With the rejoicing going all around situation dampened the gala mood of the people. Possibly with orders from the occupation forces army command, Pakistani troops were marching towards the cantonment. Because of the brutalities they unleashed for nine months on innocent people, the crowd jeered them. The soldiers suddenly started firing after taking positions inside the Sakura restaurant and the

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alleyways beside the restaurant. We were at our wit's end at this sudden ominous development. By the grace of almighty Allah, Indian Brigadier Balabir Singh, with two convoys of troops, reached the spot. At that time a stream of bullets from some unknown direction smashed the window pane of the Brigadier's jeep. Instructing us to go into the Inter Continental Hotel, which was then a neutral zone, the brigadier told his troops to fight back. When the firing

stopped, we came out of the hotel and saw some Pakistani soldier's bodies strewn in areas near Ramna Park and Minto road crossing.

While the whole country and government become busy in celebrating the memorable occasion year after year, our thoughts go back to those days of atrocities and genocide carried out by the occupation forces.

Throughout the nine months, the ruthless occupation forces were

extracting a terrible vengeance. True, at this dawn of freedom after 41 years, Bangladesh was still reeling because of the events of the nine months in 1971. Even today, 41 years on, the horror is still fresh in the memory of the survivors. It was simply a "kill and burn mission," in the words of Anthony Mascarenhas, the Sunday Times reporter who had often made secret trips to Bangladesh during this period.

After my brother's killing in May, 1971, while I was travelling to Satkhira, I was often interrogated by the Pakistan army personnel at several points of the road journey from Jessore, I saw whole villages devastated in reprisal because the freedom fighters had either damaged a bridge or cut off a road. At many points like Navaron, Kalaroa and Jhaudanga, Pak army stopped me, suspecting that I might attempt to cross the border. But a letter issued on his official pad by the Vice Chancellor of EPUET (now BUET), Dr. M. A Naser, saved me. He had written: "Md. Asadullah Khan, Assistant Professor of Physics

at EPUET is proceeding to Khulna to transact some urgent official business." The semi-literate crack captain who took a glance at the letter did not know that at that time EPUET had no business at Khulna and moreover I was going to Satkhira and not Khulna as mentioned in the letter. They repeatedly asked me: "Who is this person who signed this note?" I told them in broken Urdu that he was the *baara admi* (big boss) in the office I was working. After glancing at the letter several times, they allowed me to go.

Now Bangladesh is a reality. But the country is still in a state of turmoil. The war that was won almost four decades ago had objectives that are yet to be achieved. The nation's social ills have not been cured. Thousands of wounded and disabled war heroes lie uncared for and the families of the Shaheed war heroes, killed either inside the country or the in the war field, are yet to be rehabilitated.

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Economic emancipation still elusive

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BANGLADESH was born out of a war for freedom, democracy, social justice, self reliance and economic emancipation, what Andre Malraux once called "the last noble cause." After achieving independence and sovereignty in 1971, the densely populated nation has swung between hope and despair, between mass apathy and violence in the streets.

Growth oriented development economic models, which create both the gross and net happiness for the elites, are yet to bring genuine and lasting happiness for the broad majority. It is necessary to formulate a self-reliant social development model for our country, whose people are striving for political, economic and social emancipation. Self-reliant development must be measured and indicated on the basis of social proficiency and happiness, not only on economic efficiency and productivity.

Bangladesh was a prosperous region of South Asia until modern times. It had the advantages of a mild, almost tropical climate, fertile soil, ample water, and an abundance of fish, wildlife, and fruit, allowing a high standard of living compared with other parts of South Asia. Independent Bangladesh, from the beginning, has been regarded as a test case for development by economists, policymakers, and programme administrators of donor countries and international financial institutions.

In 1971, Bangladesh had 75 million people and its per capita annual income was \$100. In four decades, its population has increased to around 150 million and per capita income to \$644. Since 1991, its average annual growth rate has improved at the rate to 4.4%, compared to the 5.1% average of all South Asian countries for the same period. Bangladesh was a self-reliant country in the past in the sense that it depended entirely on the efforts of its own people, but the introduction of the Green Revolution in the 1960s caused a sharp change in its self-reliant stance. It led to dependence on outside aid, which is a well-known phenomenon that slows down the journey towards

sustainability.

Development plans which depend on substantial foreign aid may do much damage to the spirit of self-respect and self-reliance of the people. Even in the narrowest economic terms, or in academic sense, the loss is greater than the gains. Resources, particularly money, are not value-free. Aid may not be available in the future, and has significant disadvantages that outweigh the advantages. Carmen (1996) notes that development aid is tied to the power of money, and the power of money is identified with the right to intervene. Such interventions generally impact negatively on traditional systems in a society, causing a breakdown of its integrity.

Bangladesh's dependence on foreign aid can be traced to the compulsions of a war ravaged economy of 1971, but what initially began as a necessity for the rehabilitation of 10 million refugees displaced by the nine months of war, soon became a pattern of dependent development. It seemed a convenient and easy option in place mobilising domestic resources and improving the yield of dying investments. Bangladesh receives various aids, grants and loans in the form of food aid, commodity aid and project aid. An empirical study (Rehman Sobhan, Iftekharuzzaman and Rumana S. Khan) revealed the following:

- A new elite class has emerged in Bangladesh whose affluence derives from such aid programmes, so much so that the percentage of businessmen and industrialists among the legislators has increased from 4% in 1954 to 24% in 1973, 59% in 1991-92 and around 70% in 2008-09;
- Bangladesh's human rights record, defense expenditure and other internal developments, all remain under the observations of the donor countries;
- Privatisation and disinvestment of the public sector enterprises have grown due to foreign aid, but at the cost of lack of sustained industrial growth. It is estimated that a significant percentage of aid went to the donors in the form of costs of procurement of projects inputs and consultancy fees to foreign experts;

- Aid leads inevitably to a heavy debt burden that future generations of Bangladeshis will have to pay one day or the other. Aid dependence may erode the sovereign power of any country in the economic realm. The massive amount of borrowed (about \$28 billion from 1971-June 2012) has imposed a serious financial burden on future generations of Bangladeshis. The high loan burden has substantially curtailed the country's development spending;
- Heavy dependence on external resources for public expenditure has had an impact on the domestic economy. Domestic savings as a percentage of the GDP have fallen, and this declining rate of saving in turn reflected in the low rate of gross investments. This could explain the lack of dynamism in the economy.

Self-reliant sustainability and economic emancipation involve a simple lifestyle with enough for basic needs. Self-reliant living is a viable means of caring for nature and other human beings, hence achieving sustainability.

Grassroots people should be encouraged to realise that they are the key agents to a better future; that the best route to sustainable development is one where development is managed by the people themselves; that their work will be strengthened and much more successful through unity and solidarity; and that they should form local self-help groups in order to initiate income generating activities.

Against the backdrop of high loan interest and a very low number of registered taxpayers, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) may move to generate tax money from potential taxpayers to help the government out of the credit trap; urge people to pay their taxes spontaneously; create a client-friendly tax administration; and narrow the gap between the taxpayer and the collector by changing their mindset. All these should help to transform the economy from credit dependence to self-reliance, to ensure economic emancipation of the mass people.

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AMRUDUL HUQ/ DRIK NEWS

MOHAMMAD SHAHIDUL ISLAM

VICTORY Day, which is an annual event of great historic significance, offers the nation an opportunity to evaluate its achievements and failures in the light of the aspirations and goals that had inspired it during the arduous struggle for freedom and independence.

This is also an occasion for the people and their leaders to see how they have tuned themselves to the fast-changing world in all respects. While the basic goals of the War of Liberation remain unchanged, people's aspirations have been changing over time.

It is a befitting time for those who have led this nation over the years to search their souls. Unfortunately, they have not done so in an objective, dispassionate and purposeful way. If they had done this before in earnest, they would, in all fairness, have felt themselves embarrassed, even in private, by the outcomes.

This momentous occasion is also a befitting occasion for the people to take stock of how far this nation of about 150 million people now (75 million in 1971) has progressed in these last four decades. The period is obviously too small in the infinity of time. But in assessing the ups and downs, rise and fall of nations, this span of forty years is not inconsequential either.

Countries and nations at a similar level of economic attainments in the seventies, with what is today's Bangladesh, have turned themselves into developed or semi-developed nations. But Bangladesh, unfortunately, continues to lag behind.

This is not to say that Bangladesh's achievements in many areas, notwithstanding all its adversities, are not mentionable. This country has developed a world-class apparel industry in this period and made giant strides in increasing agricultural productivity to be able to almost feed its entire doubled population.

It has had other successes also in social sectors and in building an industrial base for producing many essential consumer goods as well as intermediate products and even some capital equipment. It is currently showing promises in new areas like shipbuilding,

pharmaceuticals, information technologies (IT) and outsourcing businesses.

A number of projections have been made about Bangladesh becoming an Asian tiger. But those projections are yet to become realities. The current poverty rate of some 40% of its people may lead the newly arrived outsiders to this country into thinking that the dream of *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal) is possibly a tall tale only.

Bangladesh has the potential to take its place among the world's major economies. This is borne out by a number of recent international rankings, which have glimpsed such a future or possibility for Bangladesh. But the same would depend entirely on how well the government -- and the successive ones -- can truly play the part of a facilitator in support of the dynamic business and entrepreneurial classes which are growing in this country.

Despite all the statistics about impressive economic growth, nearly 40% of the country's populations are still living below the poverty line. That means a large number of people in Bangladesh earn, individually, less than a dollar a day. Hundreds of thousands of jobless and distressed people are dependent for their survival on the money and food the government distributes under various safety net programmes; where much of it is not properly targeted in some areas. The rate of malnourishment among children is one of the highest, and adult literacy rate one of the lowest, in the world.

The human development indicators in this country are often claimed to be better than many poor developing countries. But the country has yet to go a long way to reach decent levels even on this score card. The government has been able to improve health sector infrastructures, but not the services that the poor need in both rural and urban areas.

However, amidst the long list of failures, there are also some success stories. Increase in food production, impressive growth of export-

oriented apparel sector and remittance earning etc., can be cited as such successes.

Notwithstanding this, Bangladesh's actual performance has been below its potential most of the time since independence. This underperformance does largely account for Bangladesh's present predicament.

Effectively translating the basic goals of the long and arduous struggle for independence into reality remains a cause for wider concern. Despite having promising potential, the country is still far away from achieving, to any satisfactory level, the long-cherished goals because of corruption, intolerance and lack of foresight and pragmatism on the

part of its leaders -- political and otherwise.

A political process is deeply connected with the quality and pace of social and economic advancement,

with opportunities for participation by all sections of the population. This is even truer for developing democracies.

At a time when nations and people are putting their heads and shoulders together to bring forth good living standards for their people, Bangladesh politics has been and is riddled by personal greed, fuelled by unlimited ambition, and ripped apart by uncompromised divisions.

All of those who have abiding and unflinching allegiance to the Constitution of the Republic, those who unequivocally put national unity and sovereignty above party, faction, or private profit, must come together and form a grand alliance.

One cannot lose hope in the peoples' resilience, which is abundantly evidenced in all the calamities faced in the past. The people must be trusted and they will certainly deliver. This is exactly what the present government ought to pursue. Through trust and confidence, all odds may be overcome in the context of future scenario in Bangladesh.

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Where do we stand now?

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