

# VICTORY DAY

## SPECIAL

DHAKA SUNDAY DECEMBER 16, 2012

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Forty years is not a long time in the continuum of a nation's life. But it is long enough to require us to indulge in serious introspection. We have indeed come a long way, and achieved many good things, but is it the way we wanted to take? Or should we rather have taken a different path to attain the goals that our founding fathers had envisaged?

Forty-one years after we were delivered from the clutches of a rapacious occupation army, after nine months of a bloody war that cost the lives of three million of our men and women, it is time for us to look back, and look back we must to take stock of where we are and where we are heading. Only then can we make adjustments to our way ahead.

We are celebrating 41 years of our Victory amidst a degree of political uncertainty stemming from the apparently inflexible positions of the two major parties on a core

issue. And it does little honour to the memory of our martyrs that we are yet to evolve more nonviolent and acceptable way of addressing the core national issues.

Today we join with the rest of the nation in recalling the sacrifices of the martyrs and freedom fighters and pay our homage and respect to them. It is a day when we must also recall with gratitude the support of those individuals and countries that had come forward unhesitatingly in support of our cause, in particular to the people and the armed forces of India without whose unstinted support our Victory would have been certainly delayed if not stunted.

But above all it is a day when we must take a resolve to fulfil the hopes and aspirations that motivated our freedom fighters to take up arms against a vastly superior force and give us a free country.

# In my mind's eye

SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

*What was going through the people's mind? Euphoria mixed with a solemn sense of responsibility. The vow that every Bangladeshi I came across took was this: "We are ready to do whatever our leaders ask us to--dig rivers and canals, cleanse drains and do every bit of reconstruction on the ashes of the war." But that 'we-could-move-the-mountain' blast of resolve would peter out when they saw the ominous beginnings of 'each for himself or herself' kind of attitude coming into play.*

**T**HE backdrop was emotionally highly charged, if only because we were being delivered from the clutch of a genocidal strangulation. Not since the World War II such a human cost had to be paid for freedom.

Beleaguered Pak President and Armed Forces chief Yahya Khan in a delirious *qaat-e-iman aur deni jashba* (force of faith and luminous zeal) clarion call to his forces urged them to fight India. Soon thereafter, he would direct Rao Farman Ali to write to the UN seeking ceasefire on December 11.

Yahya did it over the head of elected Pak leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was present at the UNO to represent what by then had become a fait accompli for Pakistan--the inevitability of Bangladesh's emergence.

Mitra Bahini that had victory in its sight did not have an iota of intent to yield any ground to an all but vanquished army.

Two days before the victory day though, Bangladesh was divested of its intellectual wealth through an elimination of iconic figures of Bangladeshi intelligentsia. They embraced martyrdom for the principles they held so dear. As passions ran high and we struggled to cope with the melancholic episode, we were at the same time bracing up to a

'showdown' in Dhaka. For General Niazi like a hedgehog had pricked the empty-worded defiance 'upon my dead body'.

I heard from some young compatriots about the soured mood among the subalterns or foot soldiers: the West Pakistani paramilitary rangers who were trooping out from one of their dismantled camps expressed disgust over what their military leaders were still swearing by. *Buzdeed*, they blurted out as the ground reality palpably pointed to a humiliating defeat.

Leaflets from the air dropping off to the ground calling for immediate surrender had its effect on Pakistani troops. Niazi realising the futility of a showdown in Dhaka simply backed out. So, the stage was set for a surrender ceremony.

I remember going to the Tejgaon airport and closely watching General Aurora, the chief of the Indian Eastern command, arrive to an enthusiastic welcome.

The dawn of freedom set the forbidden breath for nine months free and the jeep loads of freedom fighters sped away as crackling gunshots reverberated with the shouts of Joy Bangla, Joy Bangla in a refrain. The pedestrians rolled out into small processions and with clinched fists thrown up in the air they greeted the freedom fighters as well as any Indian soldier coming by.

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That's the first wave of frustration sweeping public consciousness. Then a series was to come. In all of this, what vexed the public mind most of all was the anticipation for an equal opportunities society being reduced to a delusional dream.

Consider the breaking down of all strata of the society with the differences leveling down to a single platform of humanity in distress. The urban-rural divide evaporated as people from the city took refuge in the rural interiors. They shared space and food and hardship in unprecedented demonstration of handholding awash with commonality of anxiety to cross the dark shadows into the lighted clearing of freedom and dignity.

This naturally made people aspire for non-discrimination in every sphere of

national life. They have had enough of discriminatory treatment that the Punjabi-led Pakistani establishment dispensed in the then East Pakistan to countenance any of it.

I, for one, having briefly worked in a central government establishment, was appalled to see the stark disuniformity in treatment to different classes of officials which to me, as an 'emancipated' product of Dhaka University, was quite irksome.

I had expected to see the scramble for bigger houses, cars, tables and chairs with their regal hoods, vanish in the newly-born Bangladesh. How naive was I? It is the position and designation that should matter more than the size of the tables and the flamboyance of carpets and what have you!

Forty-one years on, many of the aspirations at independence remain unfulfilled. If we had taken one step forward in politics, we took two steps backwards in terms of consolidating democracy. In socio-economic indicators we are certainly much better off today than we had been before independence. But if only politics stabilises so much more dividend would we be reaping by virtue of good governance, rule of law, investment and creative genius of our people.

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