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A Show of Strength

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It was not the usual Victory Day celebration this year. At a time when the nation's morale had reached its lowest point, gripped by fear and uncertainty, a sudden burst of energy and optimism rushed in on December 16, 2013. It is as if people were just waiting for this day, a day that seemed beautifully incongruous with all other days, to express their undeniable love for their motherland.

The scene at Surhawardy Udyan was awe-inspiring. Thousands of people, men, women and children, wearing the symbolic colours of red and green, had congregated spontaneously to share the glorious moment. They were there to commemorate the moment of freedom of this nation by singing together their most loved song.

As the countdown came to an end, everyone –whether present at the venue or watching the event on BTV, sang in unison the haunting lyrics of our national anthem. It was not just a ritualistic rendition of the anthem on a national holiday. It was a show of strength.

The message those voices sent was that we are not a nation to be bulldozed into submission by terror, intimidation and political arrogance. We are also very clear in our demand for a Bangladesh that is free from anti-liberation forces that are conspiring to bring this nation to its knees.

Yes it is true, we are a devastated nation – worn out by political intransigence and callousness. How many more deaths by meaningless violence must we witness, how many of our children will lose their limbs or ability to see? We are not at war as we were in '71. Or are we?

The effect of this prolonged onslaught has wrapped us in a shroud of depression. We feel helpless, afraid and angry. Angry that our leaders have betrayed our trust in them. Frustrated that they have let us down so horribly. Helpless that after 42 years of independence we are being terrorized by individuals who reject the values that our people fought for, who do not believe in the very existence of Bangladesh.

This is why we needed this day so much. To remind us once again of who we are and what we stand for. And just how precious is this gift of freedom our martyrs have given us at the cost of their lives. The number of people who joined this unique congregation and those who took part in hoisting the biggest national flag in history, speaks volumes about what the people of this nation are all about.

Even before the songs of victory could fade out, the announcement of another 72 hour blockade was made. News of people being killed have continued to come in. At this time we must hold on to that moment when we became one, a single entity singing the same song in the same tune, remembering only one thing – our unwavering love for our country.