The Star: **How was the Kosovo Liberation Army (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës; UÇK) formed? Why did you decide to break free from Serbia?**

Hashim Thaçi: The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) has been ranked as one of the most successful military organisations in modern history. Its success does not have to do with its military power as it faced one of the most advanced military machines in Europe; rather its power came from the will of the people to break free from a continued long and systematic oppression carried out by Serbian regime towards the people of Kosovo. Indeed, KLA was formed in very difficult moments and initially had very limited military arsenal. However, it managed to organise itself and attract many young people. It was the only hope for the protection of Kosovo people until March 1999 when NATO bombardment was launched to push the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic to accept the demands of Kosovo people and international community to end the war in Kosovo and withdraw all its military and police forces. This happened on 3 June 1999, a remarkable date when the Serbian forces left Kosovo after a century of occupation.

There are two main reasons why Kosovo decided to break free from Serbia. First, Kosovo wanted to exercise its right to become an independent country just like the rest of the republics of the former-Yugoslavia, such as Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Second, Serbia's injustice towards the Kosovo people had reached an unbearable level, expressed through a systematic denial of human rights and immediate imprisonment of anybody who dared to ask for independence. After the horrific massacres of Kosovo Albanian civilians carried out by Serbian paramilitary forces in 1998-1999 and the expulsion of the half of Kosovo's two million population, there was no other alternative than permanently break free from Serbia and build a new and independent Kosovo. The struggle of the people of Kosovo and the KLA fight for a just cause was supported from the democratic world through the NATO alliance engagement in a 78 days air strike campaigns against Serbian military forces. The investment of the democratic countries of the world which helped Kosovo to get its freedom and independence has been paid off. Today, Kosovo as independent and sovereign country has been become key factor of peace and stability in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, Kosovo is in the path to become a member of EU and NATO in the future and give its contribution for the peace and stability in the world.

THE NEW NATION

Kosovo, a Balkan nation that is the size of Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar put together, declared independence in 2008. In an exclusive interview with *the Star*, Kosovo's Prime Minister His Excellency Hashim Thaçi talks about life before and after independence.

AHMEDE HUSSAIN

The Star: **Please tell our readers about the Republic of Kosovo's independence war and how it was fought.**

Hashim Thaçi: The independence war was a long process and fought in different fields. Initially, when Serbia striped Kosovo of its constitutional status within the former Yugoslavia, people of Kosovo started a pacific movement to oppose the Serbian illegal occupation of Kosovo. The system of peaceful opposition has its effects by internationalising to a certain degree the plight of Kosovo people suffering under the apartheid system instigated by the Serbian government.

However, this system was not having the desired effects of solving the issue of Kosovo, as such a more pragmatic approach was required. Thus, the people of Kosovo, the young boys and girls took up arms to defend their innate right to freedom from Serbia.

The war should be thought carefully, and should be last instance for achieving e desired goal. This was the case of Kosovo, there was no other mechanism to change the situation on the ground, and stop the continued oppression, imprisonment and random killings of innocent civilians.

Kosovo fighters were civilians, people from the normal life, as such their approach to fighting was humane, as it was not our aim to inflict same sufferings to Serbs as Kosovo Albanians were suffering from the Serb regime that was imposed by Serbia's president Slobodan Milosevic.