



EDITOR'S NOTE

Bangladesh stands at forty three today and while it is a time for celebration, there is also need for introspection as we observe our Victory Day. Freedom came across the land, across villages and towns after much bloodletting, pillage and plunder and at a massive human cost in lost and shattered lives. A marauding Pakistani occupation army let loose its war machine among an unarmed populace over the course of nine months costing us three million dead, two hundred thousand Bangalee women violated and a campaign that killed off some of the brightest of our

intelligentsia on the eve of victory.

Though our hearts are heavy at the price paid for freedom, it is also a day to look back upon the stories of freedom fighters, both Bangalee and foreign who took it upon themselves to fight for and in many instances, die for the ideals that drove us to seek independence. We recall the visionary leadership of the time as we acknowledge the assistance of India in caring for ten million refugees seeking shelter away from the massacre. But most of all, we will never forget the resoluteness of 70million

Banagles who never wavered from the belief that the cause of freedom was a just one which they strove to achieve in a do-or-die struggle. This morning we recall the sacrifices that went into the making of our finest hour and the eternal source of inspiration that we will return to year after year. It devolves upon the present generation and those to come to live up to the aspirations generated by our victory in 1971.

The victory and the defeat

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VICTORY requires defeat, just as correction requires mistakes. In 1971 there was a glorious victory in this land of ours and consequently an equally, if not more, ignominious defeat. The Bengalis won defeating the Pakistani occupation army. And the evidences and signs of that victory are many and some of them conspicuous.

A comparatively unknown and undeveloped land and its people have found a place of honour in the comity of nations. The semi-colonial domination has ended, yielding place to independence. And for the first time in history the Bengalis are ruling over themselves. The country has a flag, a national anthem, a constitution and a state language, all of its own. Avenues of development and progress have opened up. Bangladeshis have spread themselves to all parts of the world, working with efficiency, winning recognition and remitting foreign exchange. The country has made impressive economic strides. The rate of literacy has gone up, so has life-expectancy. Infant mortality has declined and growth of population is under control. Per capita income has gone up. Money has trickled down to the poor. We speak of an explosion in the field of education, and we have reasons to do so. Women have come out of their relative confinement and are visible in all fields of economic and administrative activities. They are in the army, the police, and are also working abroad. The manufacturing sector has flourished particularly because of the labour power provided by women. In the public examinations women are competing with their male peers, and sometimes faring better. Our

writers have produced worthy works of literature, researchers have made noteworthy discoveries. Painters have done well, so have dramatists, film-makers and musicians. What is of particular significance is that people today are fully conscious of all that is happening in their own world and even abroad.

The Shahbagh uprising of youth last year was neither a freak nor a nine day's wonder; it was a spontaneous upsurge of the youth against heinous acts of the dastardly criminals of 1971. Having lost trust in the government's sincerity to try the criminals, the youth protested, displaying their sense of honour and readiness to act. Taking an over-all view of the situation, there is no denying that material and intellectual progress, even if tardy and jerky, is visible.

Developments in different fields are too well-known to merit counting. Abidingly important is the fact that with the resolution of the national question and the replacement of religion-based nationalism by linguistic nationalism, we have gained, as never before, the opportunity to look closely at our secular questions, including the very basic one of class-relationship. The spirit of liberation, which is indeed the spirit of social revolution, has come to the fore and refuses to be put aside, much to the chagrin of the ruling class.

But we have failed as well. The failures need inspection because they are both unexpected and dishonourable. The first failure lay in our inability to try the perpetrators of genocide. We allowed them to get away with impunity and did not put on trial even their ring leaders of whom 195 were conclusively indentified. What is

more, we made it possible for their local collaborators to be rehabilitated — socially, economically and even politically. Trial of the genocidal criminals was necessary not to settle scores but to vindicate national honour internationally and to assure the people within the country that justice shall and must prevail.

Other failures have followed. The rightly-hailed constitution of the state continued to be amended with some of the cumbersome changes hurting the very principles of secularism, democracy and socialism on which the constitution itself was based. Economic advancement has not ensured equity in distribution. On the contrary, prosperity of the few at the cost of many has contributed to an increase in social inequality. As always, inequality has been more unbearable than poverty; those who are at the top of the economic ladder can in no way be called models of patriotism and social commitment. In fact, the rise in private prosperity has been marked by a decline in patriotism. That explains the why and how of the continuous draining of our scarce resources — material and human, known as well as potential. The custodians have not shied in acting as betrayers.

The Bangladeshi state that came into being through immeasurable suffering and sacrifice of the people has not fulfilled the expectation of a democratic society. Power has remained concentrated in the hands of the executive, resulting in continuation of autocratic rule. Legitimate and illegitimate governments have come and gone vying with one another to promote private interest and simultaneously, to act against public well-being. As far as interests of the

people are concerned, these governments are all alike — sometimes the successor having been worse than the predecessor. The apparatuses of the state remained bureaucratic and oppressive. The ruling class rules without accountability, and, patently, politics has become the preserve of the rich. The roads to riches are paved with plunder and deceit.

The legislature is ineffective. Elections to the National Assembly have often been rigged and manipulated. In general this very important organ of the state has been unable to represent the electorate. There were times when it did not even exist. What is worse, its prime function seems to be not so much to put the breaks on the anti-people activities of the executive as to legitimize them. Abuse of human rights is rampant; extra-judicial killings and abductions are on the rise. The statutory commissions which are supposed to protect rights of the people work at the behest of the government that be, and, in consequence, act against public interest, assuming anti-people roles.

Despite the much-vaulted rise in the students' examination performances, the average academic standard has declined. And, irony of ironies, the advancement of education, flowing as it does along three contrary streams, is tearing the people asunder on class- lines instead of bringing them together. This does not bode us well, to say the least. Then there is the problem of cultural development. Unbelievably, the public universities, the best among the seats of learning, have been without elective students' bodies for decades. One has to admit, is precisely the reason why these institutions have turned culturally, into

modern slums for the bright youth on whose leadership our future depends. In keeping with the same dispensation, the workers have been denied the right to form unions. Women are active and visible, but they are more vulnerable today than they were in the pre-liberation days. They are harassed, subjected to all conceivable kinds of violence — at home, at work places, on the streets and in the society at large. The extraordinary rise in the use of hijabs and burqas does not speak of the emergence of a new fashion or of indulgence in luxury, but displays the sense of insecurity women suffer from. The curbing of their freedom should have put the men folk to shame; shamefully, it does not.

What do these and other failures, tedious to recall as they are, add up to? Clearly a defeat. There was a gloom even at the dawn of liberation. The damage — human and material — has been enormous. The figures we cite to indicate the loss of life and abuse of women does not plumb the depths of suffering we had gone through. Later, as the years rolled on, failures piled up, and the joy of liberation was darkened. There were weaknesses in the liberation war itself. Of these three were basic. Firstly, neither politically nor strategically were we prepared for an armed uprising. It was forced upon us. And taken aback, we were obliged to depend heavily on Indian assistance. Secondly, although all our democratic movements had drawn their strength from leftist participation, the war was fought under a nationalist leadership that was positively allergic to the idea of a social revolution.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

