

Special Supplement

Great Independence and National Day

Thursday, 26 March 2015

Self Identity

Nasir Ahmed

Independence hadn't arrived then; the struggle for freedom transcended centuries when overcoming the horrific British rule (in '47), Bangladesh exuberantly awaited her freedom only to get struck by a new trepidation: her mother tongue in jeopardy; Nation's azure sky was swathed by black clouds.

The struggle for freedom, awakening from the shrieks of dread, voyaged from Palassey to this Race Course in incessant journey for which Bangladesh immersed herself for decades in a pool of blood; And then, as if from the fairy tales emerged a savior Prince!

Not a Prince actually, he was a valiant son of this very soil. From time unknown, he kindled his people by dreams of passion for mother tongue and nation's freedom; then like a magic one day the nation broke the shackles of captivity by his wake-up call.

As if a surreal, stirring storm had blown all over the place. Independence peeped through Bengal's sky on 7th March 1971, And thus commenced our war of independence, our war of emancipation...A river of blood engulfed Golden Bengal till independence came, till Bangalis earned nationhood.

Since then, Bangladesh, March and the Father of the Nation's soul have mingled as one sky

Since then, being a Bangali is my self-identity;

I am the son of a heroic freedom fighter.

Since then, independence became more precious to me for which I can smilingly embrace death

Since then, my spirited Bangladesh has stood tall in pride.

Since then, my country has been the child of progress whose evolution knows only the sky as limit.

Can a fanatic militant be her citizen?

Impossible! This ignominy I refuse to accept.

Translation: Zahidul Islam

Thus the Freedom Comes

Faruk Nawaz

It wasn't written in the Charyapada by Lujipada, Kanhapada or the else one. It hadn't found in the works of Vidyapati or Chandidas. It wasn't depicted in the epic genre of Madhusudan. It hadn't heard in the alliteration of Bihari Lal or the others.

In the poetry of Tagore, I wanted to find this blessing. To say it, Nazrul had sung his songs of the treason. I had to become much stronger for saying it by my struggling. To kick the devils out, we had to lose much blood of our own.

Though we wanted to tell, we couldn't; they had made our voice stopped. We've removed the hands of the tyrants by pushing and striking. We've made the processions with a thunder tone and they were quaked. We've lighted the lamp of our mother tongue by our brothers' bleeding. I did dream to tell how the unheard history of our thousand eras was. I had flushed like the sun along the way of the Twenty First's memory. I did learn that the free-life was true and the captive life was false. I had confined myself to fight to make this fact into a real story. To destroy the enemy, our soft souls became as an unrestrained brain. The soil had become gory by the blood of our brothers and our mothers' tear. The days passed in the wars to wars and the nights had lost in pain. Thus the freedom had come to us by sacrificing our lives year after year.

Because of that, I've been able to scribe this history in my poem. I've written, because of that, the lyrics of the best tuned song. And, I've been able to write the best story in the glory of being a released name. I've been able to tell the best stories and the sweet notes of my life along.

The war of the Seventy One is the best war of the thousand eras, I see. The victory on December the Sixteenth is the best win of our history. The tune of the song, Joy Bangla, is the best lyrics of all the melodies. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the greatest hero of thousand eras in our glories. Bangladesh, my land, is also the best story of the thousand eras, I read... It won't be possible to write her history in a thousand pages indeed.

Translation: Rakib Uddin Ahmed

The Onset of Armed War

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would capture Chittagong by starting the war, and requested them to join the war by bringing the people with them.

I issued secret instructions by summoning some trusted Bangali JCOs and NCOs to town from their duties at different important places on the border and told them where they would have to position themselves. I showed them the places by discreetly carrying them on my vehicle.

There were many Bangali soldiers outside the EPR in Chittagong. There were around 250 Bangali soldiers in 8 East Bengal Regiment located at Sholoshahar of the city. The commanding officer of the regiment was a non-Bangali named Colonel Zanjua. Next to him were some Bangali officers – Major Ziaur Rahman, Major Mir Shawkat Ali, Captain Oli Ahmed, Captain Khalequzzaman, Lieutenant Shamsher Mobin, etc.

There were around 2000 Bangali soldiers in Chittagong Cantonment. A Bangali Brigadier was the commander there. Besides, there was another senior Bangali officer named Colonel M R Chowdhury.

It seemed to me that the whole of Chittagong could be kept under control if Major Zia and Colonel Chowdhury could be involved through discussions, as many other Bangali soldiers and officers could be inducted into the war then.

With that objective, I first met Ziaur Rahman at his home towards 13 March. Later, I held secret meetings with Colonel Chowdhury and Ziaur Rahman more than once on the railway hills. If Major Zia had gone towards the cantonment with the soldiers of 8 East Bengal after I started the war and started firing towards the Baluch regiment by taking position on the hills beside the cantonment, then the Baluch regiment would have been forced to take defensive positions. Taking advantage of that situation, Colonel Chowdhury could launch attack against the Baluch regiment by swiftly mobilising the Bangali soldiers of the cantonment and our victory would have been very easy.

As per the directives of political leaders, the port workers declined to unload arms and ammunitions from the ship MV Swat. The angry Bangalis engaged in clashes with the Pakistani troops in different towns and cities. The Pakistani soldiers indiscriminately killed many innocent people. The outside world also became concerned at the prevailing uncertainty, lesser deterioration of law and order and stalemate in the political arena.

Under these circumstances, some senior officials of Pakistani military came to Chittagong by helicopter on 24 March and took Brigadier Majumdar, who was stationed there, to Dhaka. A non-Bangali named Brigadier Ansari was then given the charge of Chittagong area. After taking charge, he immediately announced transportation of arms and ammunition from the ship MV Swat to Chittagong cantonment.

On that day, the Pakistani troops killed those port workers who did not obey their orders. There were sounds of shooting at different places of the city. I had just arrived at my quarters then. Instantly, I went to the railway hills coming out of my house quickly.

From the house of one of my relatives on the hill, I told the EPR JCO Zainal to send my two previously composed cryptic messages to the border outposts and all distant EPR positions. These cryptic messages were: (1) 'Arrange some food for me' (meaning, war has to be started within half an hour, remain prepared); (2) 'Bring some wood for me' (meaning, I have started the war; you should arrest or neutralise all non-Bangali soldiers, come to the town for fighting and take up defensive positions allotted for you at different places of the town).

It was evening then. Sounds of shooting were still coming from the Chittagong Port area. I was waiting for reports from all the outposts. Within a short time, Major Ziaur Rahman and Colonel Chowdhury arrived there with a baby-taxi.

They asked me, 'What is happening?' I told them about the happenings since Brigadier Ansary took charge. They told me, 'Yahya Khan was still continuing dialogue with the political leaders. We should not take this type of measure at this juncture'. I told them, 'If we do not take steps right now, there may not be scope for taking action later on'. As they were vehemently opposed to starting the war that night, I had no alternative but to cease operations for the time being.

I then directed Subedar Zainal again to hold in abeyance my second message. But almost two hours had elapsed between sending the two messages first and then suspending the second message. The border outposts had taken steps on both the messages. They arrested or neutralised all non-Bangali soldiers at the border outposts.

The whole day of 25 March was spent in anxiety. I was not getting any specific news from Dhaka. Dr. Zafar and Kaisar came to me at 4.30 in the afternoon. They could not provide any information about what was happening in Dhaka. I told them: 'Please collect news about Dhaka. I am staying here; something will happen by today'.

25 March, 1971. It was 8.30 pm. Dr. Zafar came to my house with Mr. Kaisar. Both of them seemed very worried and frightened. They told me, 'Dialogue has broken down. President Yahya Khan has secretly left Dhaka for Karachi. The Pakistani soldiers were preparing to move towards the city from Dhaka cantonment. Machine-guns and LMGs were fitted on the vehicles of troops and arms-ammunitions were being loaded. The troops would move towards the city anytime'. They further said, 'After hearing this news, the top leaders of Awami League in Chittagong held a secret meeting and decided that 'It is now the show of people like Mr. Rafiq; the political parties would be active with them'.

I telephoned our Halishahar headquarters and told Subedar Zainal to rescind my second cryptic message that was halted on 24 March. I told everybody to keep full control on all vehicles and keep a watch so that the Pakistani soldiers could not go out of their houses.

I told Zafar, 'You go to 8 East Bengal Regiment to tell Mr. Ziaur Rahman, and to Colonel M R Chowdhury of Chittagong cantonment, and try to convey the message that 'Mr. Rafiq has started the war'.'

After leaving home, I came to Halishahar at 8.45 pm. Subedar Zainal and other senior Bangali JCOs/NCOs had taken control of the whole area by then. Almost all Bangali soldiers were ready for the war. We tactfully arrested the non-Bangali soldiers staying in different barracks of Halishahar.

The situation started to become complicated for me due to some unexpected developments. When I was positioned on the railway hill, Major Zia was going to Chittagong Port to bring the arms-ammunition unloaded from MV Swat to the cantonment. His vehicle got stuck at a barricade in Agrabad area. At this time, an officer of 8 Bengal arrived there with a jeep in search of Major Zia. After learning about the situation, Major Zia swiftly went back to Sholoshahar and set off for Cox's Bazar after bringing together all Bangali soldiers. But we had an understanding that I would capture the town with the help of EPR and Ziaur Rahman would move towards Chittagong cantonment with 8 Bengal to help the Bangali officers and soldiers stationed there. Why they moved out of the city instead of doing that remained a mystery to me.

But their latest action resulted in a terrible setback. The Baluch regiment suddenly launched an attack on the unarmed Bangali troops towards 11.45 at night in the cantonment. Through that assault on the midnight of 25 March, the Baluch regiment killed around 1,200 Bangali soldiers. Many were also taken prisoners.

I received a message at 4 a.m. dawn on 26 March that a large convoy of 80 to 100 vehicles had started its journey for Chittagong from Comilla. I instantly sent a company of soldiers led by a JCO from Halishahar to ambush this group. Apart from light and heavy machine-guns, this company of ours had mortars and rocket-launchers.

The Pakistani column that was coming from Comilla comprised 24 frontier forces regiment, a team of field engineers, 88 mortar batteries and troops of 3 commando battalions. The commander of 53 Brigade Brigadier Iqbal Shafi was himself leading the column. On 26 March afternoon, they reached Kumira, which was 12 miles away from Chittagong. The local people had already put barricades at this intersection of the highway in Kumira. The Pakistani soldiers stopped here to remove the barricade. All our soldiers started to fire at them simultaneously on a massive scale. Iqbal Shafi and his troops were bewildered by the firing from all three sides – left, right and front.

Many vehicles of the Pakistanis as well as over 70 of their soldiers were killed by this ambush at Kumira. It could be gathered from another source that the commanding officer of Pakistan's 24 FF and 10 soldiers were killed on the spot. Iqbal Shafi saved his life by escaping to a nearby hill. We also suffered a casualty of 14 personnel.

This highly successful ambush against the Pakistanis at Kumira was a notable incident in our liberation war and its impact was momentous.

Captain Haroon reached within 5 miles of Chittagong town on 26 March dawn. On the road, Haroon's troops were chanting slogans of 'Joy Bangla'. But after coming closer to the town, Haroon became confused for some time. He saw that the soldiers from Chittagong cantonment and 8 Bengal regiment were moving towards Patiya after crossing Kalurghat Bridge. There, they met the troops of Major Zia. Major Zia told Haroon to remain in the Kalurghat bridge area. As a result, Haroon could not join me in the battle inside the city in accordance with the previous plan.

Subedar Mofiz started for Chittagong with two companies from Cox's Bazar in order to join me. But they were stopped on the eastern end of the bridge before crossing Kalurghat Bridge and the soldiers of Major Zia told him to take defensive position there along with the troops of EBRC and

8 Bengal. On the other hand, the soldiers of Ramgarh area also could not come to town; because clashes were going on between us and the Pakistanis at Kumira and they had to cross that highway in order to reach the city. In this situation, I had no other alternative but to continue the fight in the town with whatever troops I had in my control. Consequently, My plan of capturing the naval base and port areas had been impossible to execute.

Apart from defending our positions, we were very active so that the Pakistani soldiers did not link up with each other after coming out of the cantonment and the naval base. But the Pakistanis did not face any trouble while coming out of

Captain Haroon and Ziaur Rahman were going in the opposite direction to Cox's Bazar. They were told, there was none in the town, and the city had fallen. This information was erroneous, because I was still fighting in the town.

The leaders of Awami League found a number of Bangali officers on the other side of the Karnaphuli River. Of them, Major Zia was the senior one. On being requested by the leaders, he came to Kalurghat transmission station in the afternoon of 27 March and delivered a speech over radio from there. He mentioned himself as the head of state in that announcement. As a result, there was a misunderstanding as well as adverse reaction among the political leaders. Mr. M

R. Siddiqui and Mr. A. K. Khan telephoned me to say, 'Who is this Major Zia?' Major Zia had no linkage with the political leaders and they did not even know him.

I told them, 'You don't have to worry about it. Maybe he issued such a statement because of the excitement generated by circumstances. You please prepare a draft on what should be spoken in an address; he would read that out'.

Then the political leaders prepared a draft and that was sent to Ziaur Rahman. After making some amendments to the draft, Ziaur Rahman again came to Kalurghat transmission station in the morning of 28 March; there, he said in his statement that he was reading out the declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Through this amendment, the misunderstanding between us was removed.

We could capture the city within 11.30 pm on the night of 25 March. But the situation went out of control because of the incidents in Chittagong cantonment and the exit of 8 Bengal.

There was a furious clash with the Pakistani soldiers at Halishahar on 30 March. After many confrontations on 31 March, I ordered my troops to take positions at New Market and Chittagong Port area after leaving Halishahar.

The Pakistanis made a fresh assault on our Court-hill position on 2 April. They utilised a complete battalion in this assault with the help of mortars, tanks, artillery, and navy cannons. From our side, only 30 EPR soldiers fought on for a few days in that position. Their lone rocket launcher became dysfunctional at this stage. The ammunition was almost exhausted. The Pakistani infantry soldiers then went up the hills with two tanks. The Court-hill was occupied by the enemies a few minutes after noon; Chittagong city then went out of our control for an indefinite period.

When the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Radio station of independent Bangladesh) went out of order due to Pakistani air attack on 30 March, all broadcasts from there stopped. On the other hand, we held no other positions in the city following the fall of Halishahar and Court-hill. Although the EPR soldiers were carrying out ambushes in small groups against the Pakistanis on 3 April, the Pakistanis consolidated their position by 4 April and the city thereafter went under their full control.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

Economic Attainment and Prospect

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streets are highly crowded with bicycles, motor-bikes, baby-taxis, private cars, buses and trucks. There are complaints about vehicular congestions on streets and air pollution. But can it be denied that these are all signs of development, progress and life-style improvement? This life-style improvement has been possible because of the increase of people's buying capacity, availability of buyable commodities and large participation of women in economic activities.

One crore six lakh women are now working in agriculture, industry and service sectors. Women engaged in industries now outnumber men. Now the number of workers in the recognized main-stream economic sectors is about 50 lakh, while this number was only 5 lakh in the Pakistani regime. Among these 50 lakh workers, 22 lakh 17 thousand are women. Of these the number of women workers in mills and factories is 21,01,830 and that of men workers is 19,95,567. In respect of women's regular employment, Bangladesh occupies the highest position in Asia. In the total labour force women's participation was 15.8% in the fiscal year 1995-96, 16.1% in 2002-03, 26.2% in 2005-06 and 39.1% in the fiscal year 2011-12.

With a few exceptions, this region was historically 'manga'-stricken. In 1950 the import of food-grains was 1.4 lakh tonne, in 1980 it was 29 lakh tonne and in 1996 after Sheikh Hasina's assumption of power the food deficit was 40 lakh tonne. Now overcoming the deficit we are exporting food-grains. 'Manga' in the North Bengal has become a matter of history.

The Malthusian theory of population increase and food production has proved false, although temporarily, in Bangladesh. The production, communication and market management have undergone a tremendous improvement due to the development of information technology. The Jamuna Bridge has strengthened the cultural and economic bonds between North Bengal and South Bengal. The revolutionary change in the transport system and education has opened up the eyes and ears of both men and women. People are now much too conscious, awakened by a deep sense of self-dignity and deeply related with development. Having met their basic demands they are now busy in fulfilling higher demands.

In the fiscal year 2013-14, in comparison with the world's 3.1% or the developing countries' 4.7% average growth, the attainment of Bangladesh is not negligible.

As a result of the victory in the maritime boundary dispute, a huge area of the sea has come to our control. The sea is full of various resources and prospects. If the sea resources are fully utilized, the target of changing Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021 and a high-income developed country by 2041 may be reached earlier. The growth will increase further if corruption, hartals, blockades and money-laundering can be prevented.

Our income in foreign currency is 11,727 crore dollars and its reserve has exceeded 22 billion dollars. Four to five crore people of the country have risen from the poverty line to the middle class. In Bangladesh Economic Review 2014, depending on the GDP growth in the previous years, the projected GDP growth has been shown 7.3% in the 2014-15, 7.6% in the 2015-16 and 8% in the 2016-17 fiscal year. It is shown below:

Heads	2009-10 (real)	2010-11 (real)	2011-12 (real)	2012-13 (real)	2013-14 (revised, estimated)	2014-15 (budget)	2015-16 (projected)	2016-17 (projected)