



Special Supplement

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# What does Freedom Mean?

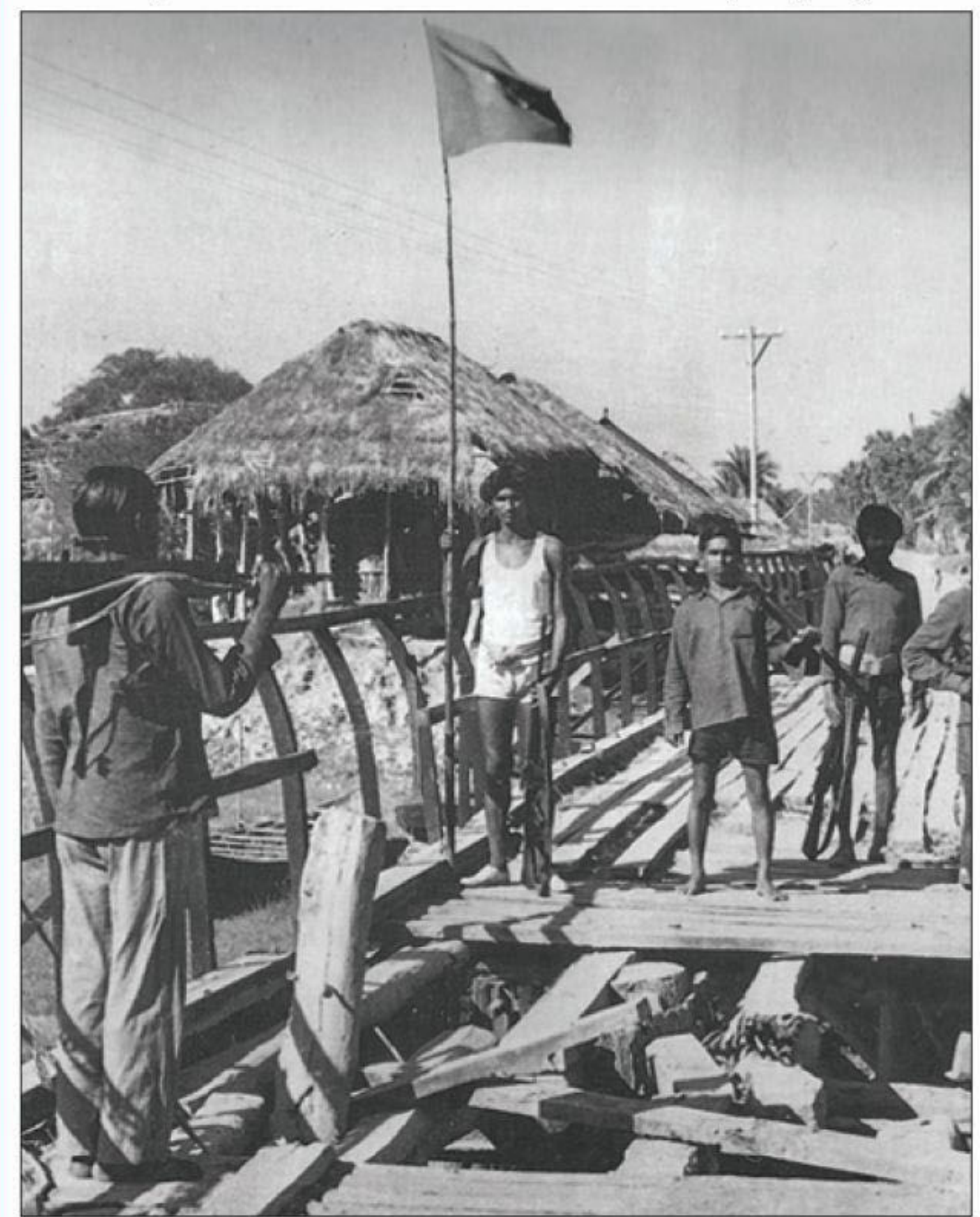
Syed Anwar Husain

In 1911 Emperor George V asked Gokhel, the nationalist leader of India, why the Indians wanted freedom in spite of their ample prosperity brought about by the English. Gokhel's prompt answer was that being independent the Indians wanted to establish self-dignity. That means, in Gokhel's opinion freedom was synonymous to self-dignity.

Poet Shamsur Rahman says in a poem, "Freedom, you are the farmer's smile in his crop-laden field". It is not difficult to understand that freedom here means economic emancipation.

Eminent American historian Hannah Arendt has an epoch-making essay entitled "Freedom". One of the eye-catching sentences in the essay is: Freedom means responsibility. To flourish in the spirit of independence is, indeed, a responsibility, especially for the leadership of an independent community of people.

The meaning of our freedom and its balance sheet can be made by interpreting the three



meanings of freedom. To celebrate the Independence Day is not merely ritualistic; nor is it to be overwhelmed with emotions. The celebration of independence is also to make a balance sheet in the deep corner of the psyche. It may be mentioned that the meaning of freedom will be manifested if such a balance sheet is made year after year. That means, we will be able to realize whether we are making any progress or not in the achievement of the meaning of freedom. However, there is doubt about how many of us do it or if anybody does it or not. But it appears that everybody should do it, because the equation of expectations and achievements centering the freedom will not be possible until we do it.

In fact, to make such a balance sheet expecting the meaning of freedom, we have to be

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Message

I convey my heartiest greetings to my countrymen as well as to all expatriate Bangalis on the occasion of the great Independence and National Day of Bangladesh.

26 March is the day of earning self-identity of our nation. It's the day of breaking the shackles of subjugation. On the eve of the Independence day, I recall with deep gratitude the greatest Bangali of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, under whose dynamic leadership we earned our great independence.

I pay my deep homage to the 3 million martyrs and 200 thousand women who lost their innocence in the War of Liberation. I also pay my tributes to four national leaders who led the War of Liberation. My homage goes to the valiant freedom fighters, including the wounded ones. I extend my sympathies to those who had lost their near and dear ones, and were subjected to brutal torture during the war. I recall with gratitude our foreign friends who had extended their whole-hearted support and cooperation for the cause of our liberation.

The occupation forces launched sudden attack and started killing innocent and unarmed Bangalis on the black night of 25 March, 1971. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh at the first hour of 26 March, 1971. Bangabandhu's proclamation was spread all over the country through telegrams, tele-printers and EPR wireless. The international media also had circulated Bangabandhu's proclamation of independence.

Earlier, Bangabandhu in his 7 March historic address at the Suhrawardy Udayn, made a fervent call of independence. He said, "The struggle of this time is for our freedom, the struggle of this time is for independence." He instructed the Bangali nation to resist the enemies. Under the brave and dauntless leadership of Bangabandhu, we earned the ultimate victory on 16 December, 1971 after a 9-month bloody war.

The independence earned through supreme sacrifices of millions of people is the greatest achievement of Bangali nation. To ensure that this achievement remains meaningful, all should know the history of our great liberation war and retain the spirit of independence. The history should be passed on to generation to generation.

Whenever Bangladesh Awami League formed government, it remained committed to developing the country and the nation upholding the spirit of our great independence and freedom struggle. During the last 7 years, we have implemented vast development programmes in all sectors, including agriculture, education, health, law and order, information technology, energy and power, communications, sports, foreign relations, urban and rural development, human development, social safety-net and women development. As a result, our purchasing capacity, per capita income, foreign currency reserve, export, investment and employment have multiplied manifold. Bangladesh has emerged as a role model of development. Various countries and organisations, including the UN, have lauded Bangladesh and honoured.

We have executed the verdict of the killing case of Bangabandhu and most of his family members, the verdicts of cases against those who committed crimes against humanity are also being executed. The defeated anti-liberation, communal forces are still engaged in undoing the democratic and development process of the country. On this auspicious day, I urge the countrymen to foil any plot of the evil-forces together.

We are committed to reaching the fruits of the independence to every nook and cranny. Our target is to turn Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021, and a developed and prosperous one by 2041. We have been striving hard to accomplish the target.

I hope that all citizens of our country would engage themselves with their utmost sincerity, honesty and dedication to build Bangladesh as a peaceful, non-communal, developed and prosperous country and help place it on a prestigious position in the comity of nations.

Let us take a fresh vow to build a Golden Bangladesh by the Father of the Nation being imbued with the spirit of the war of liberation.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Sheikh Hasina

Special Supplement

## What does...

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like the legendary Roman God Janus. Janus is known to have two faces and four eyes. As a result, he could look both forward and backward. Physically we cannot be Janus but mentally we can. We can make a comparative study of the present and the past opening our mental eyes to the front and the back; we can even visualize the future.

Let us then come to the first item of the balance sheet, which is self-dignity. A well-known poet's verse goes: "Say who wants to live without freedom". To live without freedom is to live without dignity. Be it individually or collectively, the spirit of freedom is, therefore, the most desirable thing. In both these perspectives, the process of fulfilling such expectations is called the establishment of self-determination. When Bangabandhu said in his 7 March speech, "You can no more suppress the Bangalis", the message of the Bangalis' establishment of self-determination was implicit in it. And the process of establishing self-determination was the Liberation War. The Liberation War proved: Bravo, Bangladesh/The world gazes in wonder/The Bangalis will be burned to death/ Yet they won't bow down their heads.

We have not bowed down our heads. With the success in defeating our enemies we have made a place in the world by raising our heads, straightening our backbones and freeing our freedom from any risk. In the above-mentioned quotation poet Sukanto has hinted at the Bangalis' eternal revolutionary spirit. That the Liberation War was the final expression of our revolutionary spirit does not require any argument and evidence. It is not an exaggeration to say that the revolutionary spirit of the Bangalis has created a sovereign existence in the name of Bangladesh on the board of linguistic nationalism. It is this state which indicates the Bangalis' self-dignity. Freedom is our achievement. The safeguard of freedom is our credit.

Has anything been added to this achievement and credit in the last four and a half decades? On the basis of more than one index, we can say without any hesitation that we have had a lot of additions. The ruined Bangladesh of 1972 is now the name of a country with a lofty position in the world. We have a lot of failures and deviations; yet Bangladesh is now a model in the third world for various reasons.

Poet Shamsur Rahman has expressed many meanings in his poem "Freedom, You". But the meaning expressed in the quoted verse is economic emancipation. It may be remembered that the reference to freedom has come more than once in Bangabandhu's 7 March speech but the reference to independence has come only once. However, the step to freedom is created on the basis of independence. And Bangabandhu gave instructions for an over-all freedom to be achieved in the independent Bangladesh. For that reason we can say that the liberation war came to an end on 16 December 1971 and the struggle for freedom started from 17 December 1971 and that struggle is still going on. This struggle is not to end; it will go on until the final goal is achieved. However, the achievement of the final goal has not been possible in any country or system but to remain steadfast in the aim is all important. In other words, independence without the aim of freedom is nothing but a farce of independence. Therefore, the on-going struggle for an over-all freedom in Bangladesh will go unabated until the goal is achieved. Until now, we have both success and failure in this struggle. However, failure means that we have not been able to achieve what we should have achieved or what we are determined to achieve.

The successes in the socio-economic sector that did us proud and surprised the world actually started in an unfavorable environment. Looking at the post-war

## 26 March...

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participation in election by accepting the LFO, Bangabandhu said after summoning us, "This election is not for going to power. You continue your job by considering this election as a referendum on independence. Tell people clearly in public meetings, there would be a 1-point (or independence) movement if the 6-points are not accepted. Utilise the election as the best opportunity for creating public opinion. The leader of the Bangalis would also be decided through this election. If the Bangalis cast their verdict in my favour, then I know how to throw the LFO into the Sindh River after crossing the Buriganga. Independence is our ultimate objective. Continue your work by reposing faith in me. I do not want to die as a betrayer - I want to uphold the honour of the Bangalis keeping my head high after freeing the country" (almost in Toto).

The main theme of LFO was that, none was allowed to speak about regionalism or discrimination and the constitution of Pakistan was to be framed within 180 days. In case of failure to do so, the parliament would be dissolved automatically. Therefore, the Pakistani military had the notion that no party would be able to win absolute majority and the constitution would not be framed within 180 days. In that case, they would be able to make martial law permanent by putting blame on the political leaders.

But luck did not favour the Pakistanis. Proving all their notions and secret reports wrong, the Bangali nation gifted Bangabandhu with 167 out of 169 seats in the province and elected him as the supreme leader. This historic and memorable verdict of the people was an expression of support for the great liberation war.

I want to mention about some of my own experiences involving Bangabandhu. I went to Bangabandhu's residence on the occasion of his birthday on 17 March 1971 noon along with the leader of my area and later member of Bangabandhu's cabinet Late Shamsul Haque MNA and the then general-secretary of sub-divisional Awami League Late Habib Ullah. Bangabandhu was very tired after receiving felicitations from millions of Bangalis throughout the day. At that time, observing that I was standing with those two leaders, he asked us whether we would say anything. When Mr. Shamsul Haque winked at me, I informed Bangabandhu that we were hearing about a plan to bring all weapons of Second East Bengal Regiment stationed at Joydebpur to Dhaka citing death of arms in Dhaka. What should we do under this circumstance? Hearing this, Bangabandhu roared like a tiger. Scolding me loudly he said, "You are a fool, what have you learnt all these days? The conspiracy to disarm the Bangali soldiers must be resisted at any cost".

I obeyed Bangabandhu's directive in Toto. On 19 March 1971, the Pakistani invading forces led by Brigadier Jahanzeb went to Joydebpur to disarm the

damage of Bangladesh, a Dr. Henry Kissinger made an oblique prophecy that Bangladesh would be a bottomless basket. Dr. Kissinger was famous as a paper diplomat, not as a real one because he was unsuccessful in the real diplomacy of stopping the emergence of Bangladesh. Whatever else he may have been, he was not a seer of the future. The rapid progress of today's Bangladesh in the socio-economic sector is the evidence. There is no denying the fact that Bangladesh appeared to be a bottomless basket at the beginning but today the bottom of that basket has become very strong. Moreover, although the basket is not full to the brim, there is no lack of initiative for it and this initiative has drawn the attention of the World Bank, the guardian of the capitalistic world economy.

However, it is mentionable that there was/is still no dearth of local or foreign conspiracy for keeping Bangladesh as a bottomless basket forever. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has kept its autonomy-based progress unhindered. It may be remembered that because of the conspiracy after the independence African socialism failed in the sixties and seventies of the last century. Had this African pattern of socialism survived, the African countries today would have been able to make a lot of progress. But Bangladesh, on the other hand, could not be suppressed. Bangladesh today is a wonderful country which has turned around at least in the economic standard. And in this regard it has surpassed both India and Pakistan in many fields.

We have the socio-economic growth and progress does not mean that we have achieved the final goal of liberation. There is still a big gap between our expectations and achievements. The number of the rich is apparently increasing and for that reason the gap between the rich and the poor is also increasing resulting in the social unrest. It is remarkable that the index of the social crime is going upward. Moreover, there is also a disparity between the urban and rural areas. There is also employment deficiency and the problem of unemployment. At one point in his speech on his return from the Pakistani prison on 10 January 1972, Bangabandhu said, "If the people of the country have to starve, if the unemployed youths do not get a job, then our independence will be fruitless". The people of the country now have no problem of food, because Bangladesh is not a country of food deficiency. The rate of mass poverty has also come down. But the solution to the problem of unemployment has not yet been satisfactory. As there is initiative, the success is inevitable in course of time.

Let us now come to the last meaning of freedom. How much responsible were/are we to our freedom? Our responsibility has surely been reflected in our achievement so far. On the other hand, what we have not been able to achieve demonstrates our irresponsibility. However, irresponsibility also entails unfavorable environment. Let us consider the case of democracy. During our long relationship of 8883 days with Pakistan we were deprived of our democratic rights. For this reason, Bangladesh emerged with a kind of structural commitment to democracy. The 1972 Constitution was a symbol of democratic commitment. But later on our democracy got lost like a river in a desert. The military rule, which was unimaginable and which was the tradition of Pakistan, was imposed on Bangladesh and it continued until 1990. In the face of a strong mass movement, the military autocrat retreated and the door to the freedom of democracy then opened. But even if we look back now and ask if democracy has got freedom, the answer is sure to be mixed. We have advanced much on the way to democracy but the destination is still far away. It is known to all that the journey to democracy is a matter of time; democracy does not come overnight within a short time. It has nowhere been possible. So our role in the responsibility to democracy is partial. For the wholeness of the role, initiatives are on. We can, therefore, be optimistic too. Until the final goal is achieved, it is more reasonable to call Bangladesh a state of democratization rather than a democratic state.

Translation: M. Jahurul Islam

Second East Bengal Regiment. After getting this news, thousands of brave citizens of Joydebpur (Gazipur) assembled with whatever they had, e.g. country-made rifles, arrows, chisels, sickles, sticks etc. and attacked the Pakistani forces. The Pakistani forces started firing on the mob by putting the Bangali soldiers in front and the Punjab regiment behind them. But the Bangali soldiers started to fire towards the sky instead of hitting the people. As the convener of the all-party action council at that young age, I had the opportunity to give leadership in this front-line battle against the Pakistani invading force. As a worker of Bangabandhu, this incident has remained the greatest pride in my life. On that day, the whole of Bangladesh chanted the slogans:

"Tread the path of Joydebpur - start the armed war".  
"Take up arms brave Bangali - Make Bangladesh Independent".

The leadership and authority of Bangabandhu was approved through the votes of the Bangalis. The people of this land gave that authority to Bangabandhu through the election of 1970. That was why he declared in the early hours of 26 March 1971:

"This may be my last message, from today Bangladesh is independent. I call upon the people of Bangladesh wherever you might be and with whatever you have, to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh and final victory is achieved".

It was the only legal declaration of independence, because only Bangabandhu was given the mandate to declare anything on behalf of the Bangali nation. Bangabandhu made that declaration based on that right.

In fact, the liberation war was expedited and geared up due to the actions of many leaders at different times. But it was Bangabandhu who had prepared and motivated the nation phase by phase through a movement spanning 23 years. Bangabandhu could arouse the craving for independence in the Bangali nation very successfully. In fact, the craving for liberty and the aspiration for freedom were the main inspirations for our great liberation war. Bangabandhu had prepared the nation for war over a long period of time. The declaration was like a whistle at the start of a game, which Bangabandhu could convey at the right moment. As a result, international public opinion easily tilted in our favour. Otherwise, the Pakistanis would have termed our liberation war as secessionist before the world community, which they always tried to establish. Here, Bangabandhu was unique, extraordinary.

For the liberation of the Bangali nation, Bangabandhu had spent 14 years of his best youthful days in jail out of 23 years of the Pakistani era. As he did not bow down to any evil force, he became the supreme leader of the Bangali nation by overtaking many other front-ranking leaders.

I therefore would like to say that our Independence Day on 26 March was the final outcome of 23 years of struggle.

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

## Independence Day Morning

Syed Shamsul Haq

I've kept my door open this morning  
All sorts of light streams in  
At times the farm land looks so green  
At times dawn's sun completely crimson!  
A highway flooded with slogans—and plumb in the middle  
Of the floodwater I see a boat sail,

On its mast a nation dreaming of days to come  
Certainly, history promised us just such an Independence Day dawn  
I saw just such a dawn

When peering into the future  
And singing morning's raga *bhairavi* every now and then.

It's the garland in my heart!  
It's the wing with which I fly,  
It's for you that this day the familial world appears so striking.

The heart still seems a highway,  
The river still appears to be coursing its way with so graceful a motion,  
And it's for you that Mujib's face adorns every Bengali canvas!

In one life I built such a boat,  
And with the mechanics of independence  
And the sound of water

Lapping out of my heart and flowing into my ears  
I've been handling the cycle of the fool moon and the new one—  
In only one life! In all these years  
With this very boat, O independence

We've been traversing history  
And the Golden Bengal of thirteen hundred rivers  
Of such bubbling sounds and oceanic dreams  
Has been coming closer and closer to us with every passing year!

Translation: Fakrul Alam



## Our Identity

Dukhu Bangal

"If I don't have the opportunity to order...  
"Fight against the enemies with what you have..."

We had none but you;  
Your fascinating smile was what we relied on.  
This country of drought hardly gets drenched in March.  
But in this very month a strip of cloud  
roared from your heart to turn into a downpour.

Like a messenger dove the clouds  
drifted along every nook and cranny of Bangladesh.  
The blood of the people of this country and the water of rivers  
mingled in this drenched human habitation.

We jumped into a dreadful ocean  
in quest of our mother's pearl-studded necklace.

We jumped into the fire to find our father  
for we were in need of a 'real father'.

We started flying constantly like torn pieces of cloth  
to lie nestled in our poor mother's *sari*.

Eventually we achieved everything - everything became ours.  
Now when we run away from our mother  
hiding her precious necklace she giggles.

Thousands of years or more than that  
without knowing father's identity like *Satyakam*  
the seventy million *Satyakams*  
finally unearthed their father's identity.

Deeply we inhale the smell of purity of our motherland in her blue *sari*.  
Eventually we achieved everything - everything became ours.  
Before ten months and ten days

the baby who burst out of its mother's placenta  
proclaiming its existence was named bloodstained Bangladesh.  
Humble tears of joy of one hundred and forty million eyes  
moisten the grass of our own map.

Simultaneously the exuberant laughter of the youth reverberated in the air.  
We inherited from our ancestors this laughter and the tear-  
glorious mementos of our paternal identity.

We had none but you.  
At your behest we sacrificed our lives to be descendants of martyrs.  
It was your orders that gave us a new identity -  
the heroic race with a crown.

It was only your orders that inspired us to hazard our lives  
while crawling through the ravine as long as the great wall of China.  
And then only in nine months we won freedom.  
Eventually we achieved everything - everything became ours.

Translation: Saera Habib

## 26 March '71: Final Outcome of 23 Years of Struggle

A. K. M Mozammel Huq

The person without whose birth Bangladesh would not have been born was none else than our noble leader, teacher and great personality Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He started contemplating about making Bangladesh independent ever since the creation of Pakistan. He had roamed all over East Bengal like a bard as a travel-mate of his political guru and champion of democracy Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy after getting elected as the general secretary of Kolkata Islamia College in order to generate public opinion in favour of Pakistan. That very Pakistan refused to accord recognition to the mother language of the Bangalis as the state language. The young student leader Sheikh Mujib could realize then that the English masters were merely replaced by the Punjabi rulers through the creation of Pakistan and Punjabi exploiters had monopolized power in place of the English exploiters. But the Bangalis who had created Pakistan continued to remain subjugated.

What was interesting was that those who were then Pakistanis had mostly voted in

favour of Congress in the election of 1946, which implied they had opposed the creation of Pakistan, while the Bangalis gave birth to Pakistan by voting in favour of the Muslim League. This far-sighted leader could realize and decide in 1948 that the Bangalis must be freed from exploitations and a free and sovereign country must be carved out for the Bangalis. He started to work with this goal in mind and founded the Chhatra League on 4 January 1948. He was arrested and imprisoned on 11 March 1948 while participating in the movement for making Bangla a state language; he was then elected assistant general-secretary of Awami Muslim League after its founding on 23 June 1949 while he was still in jail. After coming out of prison, he transformed Awami League into a powerful organization after assuming the responsibility of its acting general-secretary. In 1954, the Jukto Front (United Front) achieved unprecedented success in the election under the leadership of Haque-Bhassani-Suhrawardy and the youthful leader Sheikh Mujib. But section 92(a) was clamped very soon by instigating a riot between the Bangalis and Biharis at Adamji Jute Mills of Narayanganj. Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haque was removed from the position of Chief Minister and Bangabandhu was arrested from his residence and taken to jail. Bangabandhu repeatedly warned the Pakistanis through his speeches in the Pakistan National Assembly during 1956-58 and vehemently protested the tortures, exploitations and discriminations against the Bangalis in a firm voice. He also noted in the Pakistan Assembly that the Bangalis would be forced to think and decide otherwise if the exploitations and discriminations were not stopped.

The Pakistanis vested coteries foresaw the possibility of Awami League's victory and the defeat of Muslim League in the general election of Pakistan in 1958. They therefore made arrangement for silencing the voice of the Bangalis for good by imposing martial law and imprisoned many political leaders including Bangabandhu after arresting them.

After coming out of jail in 1962, Bangabandhu started to rebuild the banned Awami League. He began to execute a plan to make Bangladesh independent through an armed war by forming a nucleus for independence via the Chhatra League. With that same goal, he started to motivate the Bangalis towards freedom by announcing the 6-points for survival of the Bangalis in 1966. Following 3 years of his arrest in 1966, the Pakistanis made final arrangement for silencing him for good by hanging him in the gallows through filing the so-called 'Agartala Conspiracy Case'. After freeing him from jail, the then convener of students' action council Tofail Ahmed decorated him with the title 'Bangabandhu' on behalf of the council in presence of over 1 million people at Suhrawardy Udayn. The Pakistani army chief General Yahya Khan seized power at that time and declared Martial Law following the ouster of the so-called ironman of Pakistan Field Marshal Ayub Khan through the backdoor. Yahya Khan announced the holding of national election of Pakistan in 1970 with the precondition of accepting a Legal Framework Order (LFO). Bangabandhu gave his consent to participate in the election.

When we, a majority of the Chhatra League leadership, vehemently opposed

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