

Victory Day today

Live up to the Spirit of 1971

As we step into the 45th year of independence, it is a time to pay homage to the three million of known and unknown heroes of the Liberation War who laid down their lives so that we may taste the fruits of liberty. It is time to remember the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu, and the four national leaders who, inspired by Bangabandhu, led the nation to victory. On this day, we also remember our foreign friends, particularly India, for their unflinching support during the crucial nine months of the war.

The country has come far from the days of injustice and persecution suffered under the hands of Pakistanis during the 24 years under Pakistan and the harrowing nine months of war. However, it is also a time for stocktaking to see whether we have lived up to the dreams of our martyrs.

Despite problems of governance, the country has achieved much since 1971. The economy has progressed well regardless of natural adversities like floods and cyclones. We have achieved self-sufficiency in food, and more and more children are going to school and receiving immunisation from diseases. Bangladesh has clinched the second spot after China in the global readymade apparels scene and we have diversified our exports to other emerging markets and products.

Yet, we have also suffered from the unfettered rise of corruption and a constant shrinking of space where free thinking is becoming an increasingly precious commodity. Democracy, for which the nation was united under Bangabandhu, is today increasingly under duress and parliamentary democracy looking more and more like a monolithic dispensation.

Our future goal would be to address the pitfalls that hamper our progress as a people and that means establishing a truly healthy democratic political culture that conforms to the Spirit of 1971.

A welcome HC directive

Police should conduct its own probe too

We welcome the High Court directive to the chief judicial magistrate in Gaibandha, to find out through inquiry whether any policemen were involved in setting fire to Santal houses during an eviction drive. The order was in response to a petition after footage showing, apparently, a policeman joining others in torching a Santal shanty surfaced on social and international media. Santals had alleged throughout that policemen were indeed responsible for setting fire to their houses.

The allegations are quite serious. And one does not expect those responsible for protecting citizens to be involved in such a heinous crime. Yet, after the Santals had made such an allegation, we are forced to ask why did the Police Headquarters not investigate its veracity more proactively, especially given that the allegation, if true, is a blemish on its own reputation?

It is a fact that every agency has some rogue elements within its ranks. Is it not possible then that some police personnel may have been enticed to carry out such acts given that the incident involved huge amounts of land? At the same time, why has the home ministry remained silent over such a serious matter? Is it not the responsibility of the state to deliver justice to the Santals who have been so grievously harmed?

We hope that the judicial inquiry will reveal the truth. We suggest that the Police Headquarters hold its own departmental inquiry also, into the allegations and take appropriate measures based on the findings.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

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Happy Birthday,
Bangladesh!

After 200 years under the British and 23 years under Pakistani governance, Bangladesh turned over a new leaf 45 years ago today. The price was paid by educationists, physicians, literateurs, journalists, philosophers, farmers, students, and children – people from all walks of life who sacrificed their lives for our victory.

We pay homage to those 30 lakh dauntless martyrs and commemorate this day with joy. May Bangladesh defend its sovereignty forever, and continue working tirelessly to eliminate chaos and bigotry, and ascertain peace, people's security and rights.

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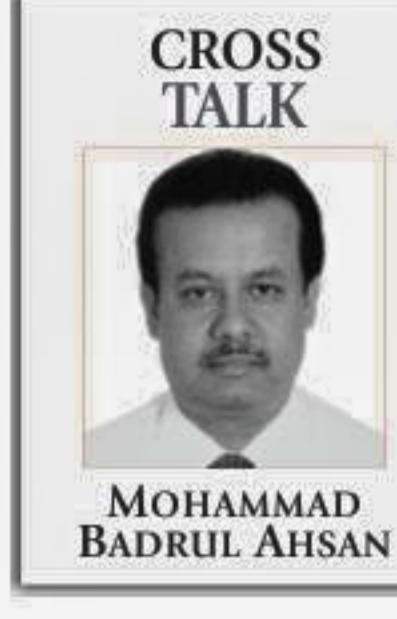
Remembering our martyrs

Victory Day has arrived at a time of great sadness and tension in our country. Each day brings news of unnatural deaths, disappearances and assault cases.

I am reminded of the families who were left waiting for their loved ones during the liberation war. The sad song often comes to my mind – "Khoka phirbe, ghorey phirbe, kobi phirbe, naaki phirbe na."

I express my deep gratitude to the martyrs whose dreams we have failed to fulfill in many ways.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

INDUSTRY standards dictate that a flaw in the mirror is acceptable if you can't see it from a distance of ten feet. What's that significant distance for our history? How far back should we

stand so that we don't see those flaws, which have divided this nation? At what distance could we tell if the distortions we see in the mirror are nothing but deformities of our own? How many more years should it take before we know which to blame between history and our very own histrionics?

On this Victory Day, we stand defeated in many ways because we're now our worst enemies. Never before has division run so deep. Never before has hatred run so high. Never before has fear run in such full freshet. What do we celebrate on this special day? Do we celebrate the war that we won forty-five years ago? Or, do we celebrate the war that has been winning us over for as many years?

If the law of mirror prevails anywhere, it's in the dark recesses of our hypocritical minds. Every year we move further away from the mirror, and every year we become more flawed not to see the flaws that make us so flawed. Once a nation of freedom fighters, we're now worried about losing our freedom much like a family living on food ration.

We still celebrate the special days of our history comparable to the marriage anniversary of an unhappy couple. We still illuminate our streets and buildings, hold many events, make fiery speeches,

How long can we ignore bank frauds, forget rapes, overlook murders, and disregard disappearances before their combined impact, sooner or later, runs us down?

and blast out patriotic songs. At the end of the day, we return to the lingering gloom in our hearts akin to carnivals after lights go out.

How victorious should we feel on this Victory Day? The answer depends. It depends on who's in power and who isn't. It depends on who has got second homes abroad and who doesn't have a roof over his head. It depends on who's driving fancy cars and who's standing in long queues every morning and evening

we're celebrating its dreams. We have an independent country. Its economy may be doing well. Hunger is gone. We are almost a middle-income country on the way to achieving all its sustainable development goals. All the indicators may be looking arguably good, yet this nation suffers from an inexplicable ailment that can't be diagnosed by a battery of tests.

The symptoms don't go away despite many assurances from the physicians.

where it started like the proverbial boat rowed all night tied to a pier post. The notorious "twenty-two families" of Pakistan have multiplied in this country in forty-five years. Politics is still troubled. Economy is still lopsided. Inequalities institutionalised and discrimination universalised, the fate of people has undergone an existential inflation. The quantity has expanded, but the value is lost.

The martyrs must be turning over in



PHOTO: STAR

waiting for a bus. It depends on who's raping the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of other men and who's seeking elusive justice for wrongs done to their women.

Anything that doesn't touch our lives runs the risk of either being erased from memory or etched as a myth. That three million ancestors once shed their blood can't be appreciated by future generations if victory rings hollow in their hearts. The Americans proudly remember their founding fathers because the Constitution framed by those men still protects rights, freedom and dignity of every American citizen. Marx and Lenin are forgotten since their ideology failed to transform lives in the Soviet Union, much less anywhere else.

So celebrating the day doesn't mean

Education is failing. Politics is rotting. Morality is missing. Laws are lagging. Instead, greed is gaining and crime is reigning. Sycophancy thrives, intimidation works, prevarication rules, and money is god. Many small steps of defeat are subsumed within one giant leap of victory.

How long do we suppose the vigour of this victory will carry this nation crumbling from inside? How long can we ignore bank frauds, forget rapes, overlook murders, and disregard disappearances before their combined impact, sooner or later, runs us down? The signs are already there. Our minds are subservient. Our thoughts are convenient. Our beliefs are deficient, and our actions are inefficient.

In one sense, this country is stuck

their graves. What they died for remains unattained, if not gotten worse than before. Exploitation persists. Disparity exists. Deprivation perpetuates. The farce continues long after the faces have changed.

The People's Republic is a raucous spectacle in the name of the people. It's the same Armageddon chess where the black always wins. If this is any consolation, king, queen, rooks, bishops, knights and pawns for the first time speak the same language in this country. All the more reason why oppression hurts more: the oppressed understands every word that the oppressor means.

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Half-truths and agendas

KNOT SO
TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

I get apprehensive every time I discover a questionnaire on my table. Each questionnaire seems to be arriving with a specific agenda. Since I am a born sceptic, when I answer questions, I keep asking myself a ton of silly questions in return, so that my curiosity is handled and at the same time, I do justice to the 3-4 pages that await a response. If it's a perception survey, the ranges kill me. For example, how do I answer a question like this: On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate corruption in your country? The answer would of course depend on the respondent's ideological or political leanings. Therefore, neither do these surveys reflect the full or the bigger truth, nor do they serve any favours to the credibility of the research organisation.

A report titled "Child Labour and Education: A Survey of Slum Settlements in Dhaka" published by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), has surveyed 2,700 slum households and has found that 15 percent of children aged 6-14 were out of school and engaged in work. It has also revealed catchy infographics where 2 out of 3 girls reportedly work for the garment sector. In the graphics, the word "SALE" is tagged in red, indicating that the western brands are still sourcing apparel from Bangladesh, without doing due diligence.

My very first reaction to that report was simple; I wished they had done detailed homework with their text rather than focusing on presenting eye-catching one-liners. For a report that makes serious accusations about child labour persisting in the readymade garment sector, it actually seems to be underestimating the natural intelligence of the readers.

But I also must say that the report balances quite a few truths. On one hand, it talks about how much progress Bangladesh has made with human development factors, and on the other it

also mentions that the children who are engaged in workplaces stand for resilience and that there is "something profoundly humbling about engaging with children on the wrong side of the opportunity divide."

This week, out of that full report, I am only highlighting the specific places that actually refer to the children being employed in the RMG factories.

- The report claims that there is "a high work incidence among children aged 6-14, with an average rate of 15 percent reported across" their survey sites.
- The report claims, "The readymade garment sector appears to be a major employer of children, accounting for two-thirds of female child labour."
- The report recommends "reviewing inspection arrangements for the

another 10 percent working in sewing or handicrafts. For girls, the RMG sector was by far the largest reported source of employment, whereas just 13 percent of the boys were working in the formal garment sector, and the rest were engaged in other activities like street vending, work in shops, employment by workshops, day labour, etc.

- The report acknowledges that there is an absence of "enterprise information." How can a report be released with such a major lacking? If the purpose of the survey was to expose the bad practice of employing child labour in the RMG industry, then it should have had detailed information of the factories, and it should have revealed the total list of the factories surveyed, where 15 percent of the slum households are

The report should have investigated fully into the factories' profiles before drawing such a big conclusion about child labour in the RMG sector. What kinds of factories engage children? What are their sizes? Do they export at all?

garment sector to ensure that factories comply with national laws."

- The report refers to the "high levels of child labour in the formal garment sector." For girls, the sector is supposedly the largest employer.
- The report shares how the interviewers have extracted information from the children. Apparently, the respondents were given a choice between 'sewing clothes' (informal sector) versus 'garment worker' (formal sector). Apparently, there were also respondents who did not fully understand the distinction, the report duly notes. Without even the girls themselves understanding the difference, the report further claims that around two-thirds of girls report working in garment factories, with

employed.

- The report admits that they had also not carried out a "detailed review of individual factories" which is also shocking. How can a report accuse a full sector of employing child labour and then again not review the enterprises with caution?
- The report assumes that the "the sheer scale of child employment in the sector and the links between small-scale factories and large-scale exporters make it highly probable that children in Dhaka are involved in export production." As a manufacturer myself, I find it totally unacceptable that the report has actually, in absence of proper evidence, referred to a study by Stern, which was itself flawed as even the number of factories in that report

was incorrect. We do not have 7000 factories. The report of Stern not only carried mistakes in their interactive maps, it also confused many stakeholders. I am also not sure whether the authors of the report are themselves clear about the "links" between the large- and the small-scale suppliers. In today's day and time, post-2013, unauthorised subcontracting is suicidal for any manufacturer. And let me reiterate that days of irresponsible manufacturing are over.

- The report has also published one interview of a factory manager. One interview of just one factory manager (of who knows what kind of a factory) is totally unacceptable. No formal factory which exports will allow a child to operate. The report should have investigated fully into the factories' profiles before drawing such a big conclusion about child labour in the RMG sector. What kinds of factories engage children? What are their sizes? Do they export at all? Instead of being careful with details, the report also irresponsibly presents graphics that circle factories under Accord, Alliance or National Action Plan, clearly trying to insinuate that these platforms also lack critical eye. This is definitely not the case. The report becomes particularly wounding when it states, "it stretches credibility to assume that supply chains for these brands do not include significant employment of child labourers." Now, that indeed is an expensive assumption.

In all honesty, the report reads like a judgment and conveys its perception, without much data or original arguments. True, child labour persists, but to assume that the majority of them work in RMG factories, exporting to reputable brands, is stretching the activism agenda a bit too far. The sector is under critical review from many quarters anyway. Half-truths like this report can only bring it to the global map of shame, yet once again. And this is certainly neither desirable nor acceptable to stakeholders who care and invest in real lives and real people.

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