



# 26 March

## Great Independence and National Day

### Special Supplement

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PRESIDENT  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF  
BANGLADESH

#### Message

On the occasion of our great Independence and National Day, I extend my heartfelt greetings and warm felicitations to my fellow countrymen living at home and abroad.

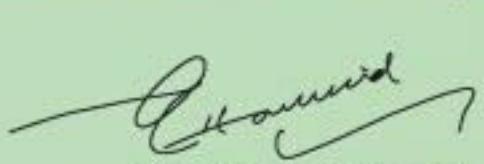
The great Independence Day is a glorious one in our national life. On this historic day, I recall with profound respect Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who proclaimed country's independence on March 26, 1971 after inspiring the whole nation with Bangali nationalism and preparing them for independence. Under his charismatic leadership, we achieved our much awaited independence through a nine-month long armed struggle. Today, I pay my deep tributes to the martyrs and valiant sons of the soil, who made the supreme sacrifices in the war of liberation. I also recall with deep reverence our four National Leaders, valiant freedom-fighters, organizers, supporters and people from all walks of life for their unmatched valour, immense contributions and courageous role that accelerated the achievement of our victory. I remember with deep respect our foreign friends who extended their whole-hearted support directly and indirectly in our war of liberation in 1971. The contributions of all would be written in golden letters in the history of our independence forever.

One of the prime objectives of our hard-earned independence was to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. Keeping that in mind, the present Government has been rendering untiring efforts in materializing the objectives of independence. The growth rate of GDP and per capita income is increasing constantly and the rate of poverty is decreasing. In the meantime, we have achieved some significant progress in the fields of agriculture, education, health, rural infrastructure, communication, energy and power, trade and commerce, ICT, SME etc. It is notable that our country has attained food-sufficiency owing to the huge development in agriculture. We have also been able to export food grains in a small scale. The pace of advancement in the sector of empowerment of women, youth and sports, women and children, social safety net etc. is continuing. The mega project of the Padma Bridge is underway by our own resources. At the same time we have also attained remarkable development in private sector including the area of readymade garments, pharmaceuticals, ceramic and ship-building industry. Country's financial sector along with banks and insurances has been expanded. Bangladesh is now being branded as a role model of development in the outside world. Our achievement in international arena is also commendable. Our expatriate Bangladeshi have also been making significant contributions to our national economy through sending their hard-earned remittances. Nevertheless, we have to go a long way for achieving the desired goals of independence. I believe that sincere and concerted efforts from all strata irrespective of party affiliation are imperative to reach the goals.

The people of our country have a great love for democracy, development and peace. They do not support any sorts of violence including militancy and terrorism. We should keep in mind that the thriving of democracy and its institutionalization is very important for attaining overall development. Therefore, we have to maintain patience, self-restraint and forbearance in our national life along with showing respect to others' opinion in a democratic pluralism. I hope that people from all strata would play their due role from their respective positions to attain the objectives of independence and fulfill the hopes and aspirations of our people. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman dreamt of transforming Bangladesh into 'Sonar Bangla'. The present Government has set 'Vision 2021' and 'Vision 2041' to materialize Bangabandhu's dream into reality. It is my expectation that people from all walks of life would contribute towards building an IT-based happy and prosperous Bangladesh through implementing the Vision by the golden jubilee celebration of our independence.

On this auspicious day of independence, I urge all, living at home and abroad, to work unitedly imbued with the spirit of war of liberation and democratic norms to expedite further progress and democratic advancement of the country.

Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.

  
Md. Abdul Hamid

### 26 March 1971

#### Vibrant Contour of Aspiration

#### R A M Obaidul Muktadir Chowdhury

26 March is our independence day, our day of birth. Even those who were worried about the future of Bangladesh at the time of its birth are now astonished. This country is now a unique example for the new world. Our achievements since independence have indeed been blissful. Although we could not erect a permanent edifice in some basic areas including democracy, we are hopeful that we shall be able to reach our cherished goals in the coming days. But the basis of everything has to be the ideology of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The countrymen passed on to Bangabandhu the power to rule and speak on their behalf by voting for him during the general election of 1970. The proclamation of independence adopted on 10 April 1971 stated as follows: "...Whereas in the facts and circumstances of such treacherous conduct, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of the 75 million people of Bangladesh, in due fulfilment of the legitimate right of self-determination of the people of Bangladesh, duly made a declaration of independence at Dacca on March 26, 1971, and urged the people of Bangladesh to defend the honour and integrity of Bangladesh..."

In fact, the 26 March Declaration of Independence by Bangabandhu was a reflection of the will of the people. The need for forming a constituent assembly and to approve and adopt this declaration arose in order to give it a legal validity in the international arena. The adoption of the proclamation of independence and formation of a revolutionary government undoubtedly played a singular role in providing a legal validity to the history of Bangladesh's liberation war and in bringing the ongoing war under a command structure. M A Hannan had read out the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu in his own voice from the Chittagong (Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra) radio station, and the deputy commander of Bengal Regiment Major Ziaur Rahman also made the declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu from the same station on 27 March. At the same time, military officers like Major Abu Osman Chowdhury joined the liberation war at Kushtia-Chuadanga border,

Major Shafiullah in Mymensingh, Major Khaled Mosharraf in Brahmanbaria and Major Rafiq on the Chittagong border. Resistance was built up throughout the country in the light of the declaration of independence under the leadership of Awami League.

On 4 April 1971, a meeting of the military commanders participating in the eastern zone of the war was held under the leadership of Colonel M A G Osmany (retired) and Lt. Colonel M A Rab (retired). Here, the liberation army (Mukti-Fouj) was constituted with Osmany and Rab as the chief and the deputy chief. On the other hand, the political leaders assembled at Agartala and Kolkata, and set up communication links between each other. Political leaders stationed in these two places consulted among themselves to form a single command for running the government as well as directing the war and coordinate efforts to provide support to the military.

As the Proclamation of Independence has now been made a part of our Constitution (Article 150), the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu on 26 March has been recognized constitutionally. As Article 150 cannot be amended, the matter can be considered to have been constitutionally resolved. But history does not move forward by obeying the dictates of law or the Constitution. It has its own flows and dynamics. This is true for our national history as well. The paths that the Bangalis treaded before reaching 26 March 1971 should also be kept in mind. Around 1 million people had died on 12 November 1970 in the southern region of the country due to a devastating cyclone and tidal surge immediately before the general election. After visiting the affected areas, Bangabandhu said at a crowded press conference on 26 November at the then Hotel Shahbag, 'For discharging the responsibility vested

on us by the 1 million people who died in the cyclone and tidal surge, if needed another 1 million Bangalis will give up their lives so that we can control our own destiny.'

On the occasion of the death anniversary of Suhrawardy on 5 December 1969, Bangabandhu declared: 'From today, the name of this country is Bangladesh.' On 21 February 1971, he said at the Shaheed Minar (Martyrs' Monument): 'Be ready in your houses to shed blood for the movement to realize the self-determination of the Bangalis. ...Today I call upon the people of Bangladesh from the altar of the martyrs, prepare yourself, if needed we shall shed more blood. ... We seek self-determination. ...I do not know when I shall be able to stand before you next. I therefore call upon you and the people of whole Bangla, get ready for the ultimate sacrifice.' At a meeting of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry on 28 February 1971, he declared: 'Joy Bangla is not merely a political slogan. It is a symbol of the political, economic and cultural rights of Bangla.'

Bangabandhu urged preparations for Bangladesh's independence in numerous speeches throughout March 1971. He put forward the strategy for a movement and struggle in his historic 7 March speech. He said, 'Let me then tell you that the Prime Ministership is not what I seek. What I want is justice, the rights of the people of this land. ...I now declare in clear terms the closure of all the courts, offices and educational institutions for an indefinite period of time. ... So that the poor are not inconvenienced, rickshaws, trains and other transports will ply normally.... The Secretariat, Supreme Court, High Court, Judges Courts and government and semi-government offices shall remain shut. ...All employees will collect their salaries on 28 February. If the salaries are held up, if a single bullet is fired upon us henceforth, if the murder of my people does not cease, I call upon you to turn every home into a fortress against their onslaught.'

Bangabandhu gave a clear directive about what the struggling people should do. He said, 'Use whatever you can put your hands on to confront this enemy.' He also said (hinting about his absence in the upcoming war), 'Every last road must be blocked. We will deprive them of food, we will deprive them of water (i.e. supply lines to cantonments should be blocked). Even if I am not around to give you the orders, and if my associates are also not to be found, I ask you to continue your movement unabated.'

Bangabandhu presented the strategy for an all-out war on that day. He was a leader of struggles that conformed to democratic practices. His experience with armed wars was limited to merely reading books. But he suddenly faced a reality that there was no alternative to an armed war if the country was to be liberated. He therefore gave an outline of a guerrilla war in his speech. He declared, '...I say that my directives must be followed. ...From today, until this land is freed, no taxes will be paid to the government any more...' He also declared, 'No money shall be transmitted from East to West Pakistan.' ... 'The people of this land are facing elimination, so be on guard.' ... 'I ask my people to immediately set up committees under the leadership of the Awami League to carry on our struggle in every neighbourhood, village, union and subdivision of this land. You must prepare yourselves now with whatever little you have for the struggle ahead.'

Tajuddin Ahmad continued to issue directives on behalf of Bangabandhu in March 1971 for carrying forward the non-cooperation movement through a specific path. He issued a total of 35 directives and this resulted in the emergence of a parallel government. Through this, Bangabandhu and his party the Awami League enforced their legal and moral right to declare independence, in the backdrop of an electoral verdict received earlier.

26 March was not a sudden day or a sudden event. 26 March was really the vibrant expression of the Bangalis' carefully nurtured aspiration for independence. There is no scope to consider 26 March separately by treating it as something outside the course of history, because confusions may crop up in that case. Not only that, it would deny the fact that the independence of Bangladesh was the result of a sequence of political events from 1947 to 1971, where the politicians were at the forefront and Bangabandhu had played the central role. A web of confusion is woven and an absurd debate is created through a vile attempt to embellish Bangladesh in the light of the Pakistani ideology of militarism as against that of politics. We, therefore, should look at 26 March – the Independence Day – in the light of historical progression. Only then can we move forward towards a developed Bangladesh. □

Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed

