

50 YEARS SINCE

Hope, dreams, and grievances of a young Bangladeshi

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As Bangladesh nears its 50th year of independence, it seems befitting that the jubilee is considered to be a golden one. Bangladesh has recently graduated from its LDC status nearly five decades after Henry Kissinger infamously used the term “bottomless basket” to describe our nation. To say that we have smashed that latter label is an understatement. We are not devoid of problems, but we stand today, our territories undisputed, our autonomy untouched, and our sovereignty unquestioned.

As a region, many might say we’ve been highly unfortunate, with our exploitation spanning eras and regimes. The independent country that was born in 1971 was war-ravaged and famished, the bleak picture of the sorrow and misery immortalised in the works of Zainul Abedin and others after him. However, despite the immense challenges and deprivation suffered, we still managed to construct a nation on four pillars which can guide us today and tomorrow.

At the time of writing this, Bangladesh has made strides in the international arena and the domestic sphere. Bangladesh’s name is in the tags of nearly every foreign apparel, our people are spreading out across the globe and making their mark, and the youth are labouring daily to bring about the change they wished they’d seen in the short amount of time they’ve been alive. However, to rejoice uncritically and without acknowledgement of the deep-seated issues that plague us is an injustice to what the nation has achieved since its conception. We ought to celebrate and be concerned simultaneously, for the necessity of both are inseparable to the health of our nation.

Today, even as we rise in world rankings measuring changes deemed positive, lives of countless individuals in the margins and the centre continue to be one filled with avoidable suffering, direly needing assistance to allow a life of dignity.

As young people who have our lives before us, we have wishes. We want to stand for, with, and beside everyone within our territories, whether in the hills and valleys, roads and the roadsides, sites standing for centuries and sites yet to be constructed. We want to be able to hold the past in our hands and see it beyond our screens, with a permanence that transcends generations and fills us with pride for our heritage. In our present, we want simpler wishes like bicycle lanes and breathable air and the more complex needs such as education systems that nurture and value our individuality while teaching us the importance of community. Lastly, we want the chance to dream for a future here without fear, doubt and anxiety while being true to who we are and with the people we love and care about.

It is time we make staying back in Bangladesh a choice where people feel secure that more opportunities await them in their homeland, instead of it being a compromise or a romanticised endeavour of a patriot. We want recreation, but not at the cost of heritage, people, and the environment. We want a redefinition of freedom, and want people in every crevice of the city to let out what is on their minds, practicing caution in speech only when it comes to interpersonal relationships or the spurring of hatred. We want a change in our mindsets, and be more resilient instead of being the kind of fragile that leads to dangerous eruptions. In fact, let us be anti-fragile and fight our urges to snuff out the opinions that diverge, for being anti-fragile isn’t an additional quality for superfluous improvement but a necessity if we are to sustain the progress we’ve made. In this golden jubilee, let us emulate gold, and be open-minded enough to be ductile so as to welcome the possibilities of ideas and processes that differ from what we are used to instead of being painfully brittle and cracking at the slightest pressure or threat.

Bangladesh continues to be a young country with a sizable portion of the population yet to come of age.

They, as I, have hopes invested in the country, a country whose existence is a miracle in itself. But we want more, because more is possible. We want more, because what we have now isn’t enough. We have hopes and dreams for the country, and we hold onto them.

When we stand in the scorching sun holding square papers to create a massive national flag, when we protest on the streets for what we deem are our rights, we are doing so because we believe change is possible, and we’re doing so because we think our nation and its people are worth it.

Our generation has been given the awe-inspiring images of citizens of this nation protesting on the streets for their rights even as they fought resistance we couldn’t imagine. 50 years from now, another group of young Bangladeshis will have pictures from today to look up to.

In the years that have since passed, we have lost figures both famous and little known, figures whose contributions have had an impact on our lives even if we fail to realise it. In the coming days, we shall have more figures who show us better ways of living and make it possible for the masses to thrive.

On the golden jubilee of our independence, we have to look past the glitter and confront the myriad realities of our country. As we proceed holding the threads of our history between our fingers, we must remember the sacrifices the nation is built on, not just to mourn the lives lost and the pain endured, but to remember the duty we owe to each other.

We are sitting at the cusp of immense transformation that if fulfilled might fill the pages of our history books for decades to come. However, it continues to be up to us to see the direction in which the pendulum will swing.

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