

## Bangladesh at 50: Some reflections

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For our generation, who grew up when the Bengali nationalist movement was gaining momentum and witnessed the genocide and National Liberation War of 1971, the golden jubilee celebration of Bangladesh is a time for both celebration and reflection. We celebrate our successes and try to identify the reasons behind them. We reflect on our failures and try to understand our mistakes. As we celebrate we need to draw lessons from our achievements as well as

shortfalls so that we are better prepared in charting our future path.

At the time of our independence we were cognizant of the huge challenges we faced in building a new state, consolidating a new nation, rebuilding infrastructure and reviving the economy. But the challenges could not dampen our spirit. After all we had realised an impossible dream; Bangladesh was the first nationalist movement to gain the status of a sovereign independent state in the post-colonial world. We were confident that we would be able to build

*Sonar Bangla* through our own efforts. We were young, our leadership in all sectors were also young.

### Steady path of socio-economic development

At that time our greatest worry was about the prospects of our socio-economic development, how we would feed and educate our people, provide health care and other basic necessities with our limited resources, how we would reduce poverty and prosper economically.

Surprisingly in the last 50 years we have made steady progress in all

key indicators of socio-economic development. Life expectancy which was 46 years in 1971 is now 72 years. Per capita income which was \$120 is now over \$2000. We are self-sufficient in food production and we are no longer dependent on foreign assistance. Our achievements in reducing poverty, improving education and health and closing gender gaps are now being analysed and projected in international media.

There is a general consensus that many actions we took early on and

continued throughout successive regimes bore fruit. From the beginning we focused on reducing poverty, empowering women, reaching social and financial services to people's doorsteps and allowing people to take their own initiatives in improving their conditions. The cooperation and collaboration between state and non-state actors and our home grown solutions to address our own problems played an important role in driving our achievements.

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