

Special Supplement

Independence and National Day of Bangladesh

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Dream of Independence Day

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Independence Day is one of the most joyous and glorious days for a state. All the states of the world have some important days to commemorate their history and traditions, but very few countries have such eventful, varied and emotional days like ours. Independence Day is supposed to be blissful, but the day when the then East Pakistan became an independent state named Bangladesh moments after a proclamation by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not a joyous moment for this country. On that day, the Pakistani military force launched the worst genocide in the history against the people of Bangladesh. A large number of people were shot dead by the Pakistani military in a very short span of time. It is hard to find such an example of brutality in any other country in the world. A handful of the people, who have been bearing the horrific memories of March 25 night for half a century now, will never forget the black night. How many countries in the world have made such a great sacrifice for independence? The London Times aptly said, "If blood is considered as the price of independence, no country in the world paid such a huge price for the independence as Bangladesh did".

After the declaration of independence, began our Liberation War to achieve independence. The history of our liberation is a history of sacrifice, indomitable courage, valor and achievement. On one hand, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was kept confined in a Pakistani jail, waiting for an unforeseen future, his voice, on the other hand, led and inspired the people of Bangladesh to continue the Liberation War. Our Liberation War of 1971 was in true sense a war of mass people with people irrespective of caste and creed and class including farmers, day-laborers, students, police, EPR (East Pakistan Rifles), Ansar and indigenous people spontaneously participating in it. Our women not only helped the freedom fighters taking enormous risks but also took up firearms in their hands and fought on the front line. With no clothes, shoes, even food and modern weapons in their hands, the freedom fighters were just instructed to snatch away arms and ammunition from the Pakistani military and keep on fighting. Even they did not have training for the battle. According to Sector Commander Khaled Musharraf, freedom fighters would have their training on



the battlefield as they moved on with their battle. The teenage boy, who was supposed to go to school, took up arms instead and joined the war against the heinous military force of the world. It may sound unbelievable but it was the deepest love for the country that was the biggest weapon of the freedom fighters. Before going to the battlefield, the freedom fighters used to stand in line together and sing the national anthem 'Amar Sonar Bangla' in unison. But they did not know why tears welled up in their eyes while singing the song. It is not even known to many that the eyes of the freedom fighters, who fought the liberation war over 50 years ago, welled up with tears when they heard that line -- 'Amar Sonar Bangla'.

History acts in mysterious way. Pakistan, the country that carried out the worst genocide in the history and committed the heinous crime of violating women, has now plunged into the deepest crisis of history. Pakistan unleashed its military force in the name of saving its existence in 1971, and that military force has now emerged as a poisonous cancer in the country's politics, misappropriating the country's resources. Faced with a deep economic crisis, the country is seeking alms from one country to another in vain. Is it the inefficiency and failure of the country's leadership that no government could complete its tenure in Pakistan, or is it a curse of millions of Bangladeshi mothers, who lost their children, wives, who lost their husbands, sons who lost their fathers, and women, who were raped, in 1971?

Every moment we realize how lucky we are to have got an undisputed leader of the Bangalees and a towering figure like Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in our land. We could dare to dream for an independent Bangladesh just because of his extraordinary political wisdom. He gave us an independent and sovereign country with the help of his very efficient co-fighters, colleagues, and a huge number of general masses. How many countries exist in the world where a leader and a state are synonymous?

On the eve of Independence Day, if we look back, we don't just see Bangladesh's gradual progress over the last five decades, but also see



conspiracies, brutalities, and change of state power. The history of 21 years after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members is a history of going backward and a history of deviating from ideologies. None could imagine that the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would not just stop after the mindless brutality, they even enacted indemnity law so that they could not be tried, and the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman could be erased from history.

We could see that the perpetrators, who were against the liberation war and killed the freedom fighters by joining hands with Pakistani forces, later assumed state power after assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. We are very lucky that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's daughter Sheikh Hasina has brought an end to the stigmatized history by trying the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the war criminals.

Fifty-two years have already passed since independence and we all wish to know where we have reached in the last 52 years. At the same time, we all wish to know where the world has reached by this time. No matter how hard we try to be ignorant, we all can realize that the world is not in a good state right now. We have witnessed in utter dismay that the top 10 billionaires in the world have doubled their wealth during Covid-19 pandemic while around 99 percent of the world's total population have become even poorer during this period. We don't need to become Einstein to understand that the wealth of such large numbers of poor people have gone to the pockets of a few billionaires. As the people in the world started getting respite from the blow of Covid-19, started the



Russia-Ukraine war. The developing countries like Bangladesh are the worst victims of the war's multifaceted impacts. Both World Wars in the last century began from Europe. But we had to pay for it. Even Winston Churchill stopped food supply to this region during the Second World War, causing an artificial famine and claiming the lives of around 3 million people.

Now, the issue of climate change has become the major cause for concern for all the countries in the world. We don't need to go through scientific data and statistics to understand that the world is getting warmer; everyone is already feeling it. The world's temperature is rising due to excessive emission of Carbon dioxide because of the luxurious lifestyle of the people of so-called developed nations. Ice in the world's polar region is melting gradually due to global warming, causing sea level rise. Bangladesh is one of the few countries that remains under the risk of getting submerged by sea water due to the impact of climate change.

The Western countries have wreaked havoc on the Middle Eastern countries. As a result of which, thousands of refugees are heading towards Europe for shelter. Many European countries have set up barbed wire fences to prevent refugees from entering. Right at that time, Bangladesh did a great humanitarian job by giving shelters to some 1.3 million Rohingya people, who fled from neighboring country Myanmar in the face of military crackdown. Has any country in the world done anything except for showing sympathy?

It is at this juncture we are hearing about the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In the past, many criticized us for joining the First Industrial Revolution that mainly focused on shifting from an agrarian economy to a manufacturing economy. But does everybody know the fact that Britain took away the money for the First



Industrial Revolution from this region by making us its colony. Even so, it took around 100 years for the industrial revolution's impact to spread beyond Britain. The Second Industrial Revolution's main focus was to use electricity. But it is a matter of concern that around 20 percent of the world's total population are still out of electricity coverage. We can consider the use of the Internet as the major feature of the Third Industrial Revolution. Unfortunately, around half of the world's total population still don't have access to the internet.

On one hand, the industrial revolution caused significant advancement of technology. But it also created discrimination among people. Will the upcoming Fourth Industrial Revolution be like its predecessors? Is it a matter of hope or concern for us? The main pillar of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is Artificial Intelligence (AI). A large amount of data and computing power are required for making Artificial Intelligence effective, but we have none of the capacities right now. So, the question arises whether we will become puppets at the hands of giant ICT companies. Will we just keep seeing that the giant ICT companies are taking away our talents?

None will disagree with the fact that the current world is cruel and selfish. We will have to survive; we will have to move forward as well. So, what will we do?

All of us know the answer of how we will survive in this world: we will have to gradually turn Bangladesh into a knowledge-based country. But it is really challenging for us because Bangladesh now ranks the 120th position among 145 knowledge-based countries. We rank below the average position. Our main weakness is in the research sector. In order to make a knowledge-based country, putting utmost importance on science education is a must. However, we are still lagging far behind in the science area and we are ranking 61th position. It is a matter of utter regret that we spend only 2 percent of our total GDP in education, although 6 percent of the GDP was supposed to be spent on education. Another problem is that our meritorious students leave the country after completing their education with government expenses without any repentance.



Therefore, we can take the challenge of building a knowledge-based country. We have some exceptional characteristics that are unavailable in many other countries. For example, we have a huge number of students. The total number of students at all levels including schools, colleges, universities and madrasas would be around 50 million, a feat that fewer countries in the word can meet. Around half of them in our country are female.

Those who mostly study at different reputed universities tend to migrate abroad. But a large number of students are studying at different educational institutions under the National University. They want to live in Bangladesh. So, more emphasis should be given on them. If they can be provided with more quality education, they will be turned into a huge human resource pool.

We have sufficient numbers of universities. So, without building new universities, we need to set up more technical education institutions. Many of us know that the technical education institutions significantly contribute to the country's development. Modernization of school-level education was essential in our country. Private coaching centers are running businesses taking the chance of a memory-based education system. But it does not bring any good for students. Now, we are seeing new initiatives being taken to bring fundamental changes in our education system. We hope that students will learn with joy, if the new system is introduced.

The most important step for building a knowledge-based society is research. But we are still lagging behind in the area of research. There is no shortcut way for development in this sector. We can follow examples of the countries that are well ahead in the area of research. Then many of our brilliant researchers, who are now living abroad, will return to home and engage themselves in research. Our GDP growth is higher than neighboring country India. In many cases, our brilliant students are doing better than Indian students in different international Olympiads. We had to buy a rocket from SpaceX to send the Bangabandhu Satellite to space. But India can send a spaceship to Mars at a lower cost than the expenses they bear for making a film in Hollywood. Are we not still capable enough to achieve such capacity?

Our government has now aimed to establish a 'Smart Bangladesh' after achieving the plans laid out for making 'Digital Bangladesh'. I would like to think it one step further. Only the use of smart technologies will not solve all the problems and improve quality of lives. Rather, all the children must be grown as Smart Citizens with proper knowledge on science and research for leading the country in future. Smart Bangladesh will be the country of Smart People. On Independence Day, this is the dream for Bangladesh. □

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