

Special Supplement

The Glorious Victory Day

The Bangali Nation's Identity and Bangabandhu



Freedom of Bangladesh Radiant with Triumph

Aslam Sani

Here I tread over a thousand years –  
Speaking from my heart in mother tongue Bangla,

A thousand rivers flow from the hills and springs  
Joy and sorrow – the rise and fall go on forever,

Heaps of flowers and crops in the field  
Infinitely open is the Bay of Bengal, the Sundarban,

Six seasons glow in forests, the storms surge  
Even then people move ahead with the pledge of dream  
They sing the folk and Bhatiali songs  
Ride on the boats by unfurling the sail.

They snatch the sun by banishing darkness  
Invite death without any fear  
The slogan – ‘Joy Bangla’ – forges harmony in life,

The Great Mujibar – the voice of seventy-five million Bangalis  
Calls at racecourse on the Seventh of March –  
Fighting in the battlefield with red-green flag in hand  
Surya Sen and Preetilata inspire forever,

Look – Rabindranath and Nazrul are awake  
None is aloof – whether peasant, worker, fisherman, weaver –

For expelling the Pakistani aggressors  
For standing atop the peak of Himalayas  
The brave boys knew –  
The Water Lily and Maggie Robin  
Were painted everywhere in the world,

Nation's father –the world-leader Mujibar –  
Immortal in everybody's heart – rich, poor, exploited,  
The Sixteenth of December,Nineteen Seventy-one –  
Radiant with the triumph of Bangladesh's freedom.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed



Usually, the international law does not support the declaration of independence or any movement for the right of self-determination by any section of a country's population; Even then, the aspiration of the majority ultimately triumphs. Today's independent, sovereign, and prosperous Bangladesh was born in 1971. To the outside world, we are known as Bangali as a nation, and Bangladeshi as citizens. But we had no identity as a nation even fifty-three years ago. Before 1971, we were the inhabitants of the province of East Pakistan in a country called Pakistan. Due to exploitations by the rulers, discriminations, and absence of rights, our status was like the shackled population of the colonial era. Before that, the Bangalis were crushed by the subjugations and exploitations at the hands of rulers belonging to numerous nationalities over the ages, including two hundred years of British rule. Ultimately, Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971 after 23 years of systematic struggle and nine months of armed war against the Pakistani rulers. And it was the greatest Bangali of all time, the founder of the country called ‘Bangladesh’ – Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – who had neatly completed the task of engaging all concerned people in this fight by bringing them together.

Some individuals could foresee the dark future of the Bangali nation from the initial stage of governance under the purview of a state called Pakistan founded on religious identity. As time elapsed, their realization became more and more acute. The aspiration for independence started to consolidate in a scattered manner among people belonging to various classes and professions including politicians, students, and armed forces in the public and private arenas. By combining the dreams of all categories of people with his own vision and spirit, Bangabandhu prepared the ladder for independence in a manner that could not be emulated by other contemporary older leaders.

Although many including Master'da Suryasen and Netaji Subhash Chandra Basu initiated the armed struggle against British imperialism, those were untimely, unplanned, and myopic initiatives. Because, the initiators could not involve the general masses belonging to various classes and professions on a massive scale, which was a prerequisite. As a consequence, those struggles were not ultimately successful, although those movements later became sources of inspiration for the subsequent initiators.

A conference of the central committee of East Pakistan Communist Party was held in Kolkata in 1956. There, Comrade Kumar Moitra placed a proposal for independence of East Pakistan. Between 30 to 32 delegates attended that conference. The demand for independence raised by Kumar Moitra at that conference was not finally approved.

From 1962, an organization named ‘Aporbo Sangsad’ tried to motivate the students and masses for independence under the cover of cultural activities and demands of the students in East Pakistan. Abdul Aziz Bagmar was the chief coordinator of Aporbo Sangsad. He was also the general secretary of the All-Party Students’ Organization that was formed in 1962 to raise demand for cancellation of the ‘Hamidur Rahman Education Commission Report’. The alphabets of Aporbo Sangsad actually stood for ‘Interim East Bengal Government’. The first chairperson of that organization was the late professor Aboni Barman.

The leaders and workers of that organization highlighted the need for establishing autonomy alongside educational, social and cultural rights of the Bangalis through distribution of publicity materials, public announcements, etc. The initiators and organizers of the organization used to hold secret meetings even amid the fearful environment of Ayub Khan's martial law. Those who got involved with this organization at various stages included the then general secretary of Eden College Students’ Forum Nazma Rahman, Professor Ahmad Sharif, Professor Mofazzal Haider Chowdhury, Begum Sufia Kamal, Professor Abdul Hai, Shoukat Osman, etc. But their activities could not attract the attention of the wider public.

The leader of the toiling masses in East Bengal Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani had uttered the words ‘Assalamu Alaikum’ in protest against the discriminatory policies of the Pakistani ruling coterie in 1957. Some had viewed it as a demand for autonomy. Some others viewed it as a warning for secession by East Bengal from Pakistan. But it was not clear to all classes of people. Although the leftist Communist Party undertook various programs for freeing the people



from exploitation as well as attaining political independence, it did not clarify the word ‘independence’, which was done by Sheikh Mujib during a secret meeting of the Communist Party at the start of 1960s.

Sheikh Mujib was the spiritual disciple of leaders like the towering democratic politician Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and the grassroots leader of toiling masses Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. It can be said that the leadership of Sheikh Mujib had flourished in their hands. But during his youthful journey of successes, Mujib's views and ideas were more progressive, more modern, and clearer compared to those two leaders – especially on the question of autonomy-independence of Bangladesh. Because of his relations with China, Bhashani was double-minded about the divisibility of Pakistan; and under changed circumstances, Suhrawardy was in favour of Pakistan's unity. It could be gathered that when Sheikh Mujib told Suhrawardy at a London hotel in 1961 that ‘East Pakistan should become independent’, Suhrawardy became angry. Many leaders and workers who were linked to the Pakistan Movement and did politics under the umbrella of Muslim League before joining the Awami League also could not accept the idea of breaking Pakistan. By paying attention to these issues, Mujib proved his acceptability among all while remaining under the shadow of veteran leaders.

In his report as the general secretary of the party during the party conference held on 21, 22, and 23 October 1955, he took the initiative to transform the Awami League into a non-communal people's organization by deleting the word ‘Muslim’ from the Awami Muslim League. His proposal was accepted during that conference.

The Pakistan Government proposed to change the name of East Bengal to East Pakistan at a session of the legislative assembly in 1956. Before that, the name of the province was East Bengal. During his speech delivered at the legislative assembly at that juncture, Bangabandhu opposed this changing of name and instead proposed the name ‘Bengal’ for adoption. During that very session, he warned the Pakistani regime that the people would be compelled to adopt unconstitutional methods if the repression and exploitations of the Bangalis were not halted.

At the start of the decade of 1960s (1961), Sheikh Mujib openly urged Comrade Monty Singh to incorporate the demand for independence in the upcoming program for movements during a secret joint meeting of the Awami League and the Communist Party. He said on that day, ‘I want to say one thing openly, we believe the Punjabis will accept none of our demands for democracy and autonomy. Therefore, there can be no freedom for the Bangalis without gaining independence.’

In February 1966, when Bangabandhu declared the 6-points as a charter of freedom for the Bangalis, the Pakistani government publicised it as a conspiracy to separate East Bengal from Pakistan. After seeing the huge public support during Bangabandhu's country-wide tours and the campaign for the realization of 6-points, the government took recourse to mass arrests of the party's leaders and workers including Bangabandhu, as well as tortures and repressions for suppressing the movement.

A principal component of his evolving revolutionary ethos was to advance the independence struggle by assimilating the outlook of the ignored and deprived Bangali soldiers who were then serving with the Pakistan Army. Naturally, this movement was secret and sensitive. There was hundred percent chance of putting his life at risk if this kind of activity was exposed. That risk materialised through the so-called Agartala Conspiracy Case. However, because of the faith the people reposed on Mujib and the intensification of the movement based on the 6-points and 11-points of the Students’ Action Council, the military regime was forced to withdraw that case on 22 February 1969, and all the accused including Bangabandhu was released. He was conferred the title ‘Bangabandhu’ during the reception organized by the students and masses at the Paltan Maidan on 23 February 1969. Bangabandhu became the undisputed leader of the Bangalis when the Agartala case proved to be a false one publicly. At the same time, the ground was created for putting forward the demand for independence. During a meeting held in Dhaka on the occasion of Huseyn Shaheed

A Cascade Of Aspirations On The Victory Day



Bangabandhu's murder was completed, and the verdict was executed. The ongoing effort to trace absconded persons and return them to the country is in progress. It was also Bangabandhu's daughter who initiated the trial of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in 1971. This process is ongoing. We have also witnessed the execution of some top war criminals. Even in the pursuit of our basic human right to seek justice, she had to confront numerous obstacles and conspiracies, both domestically and internationally. She had to risk her life in the process. Today's generation must have kept that memory in their mind.

Her most evident contribution, and one I recognize as immensely significant for the younger generation, is the economic development of the country. Her astute leadership has not only maintained the country's economic stability but has also steered the economy on a growth trajectory, despite the challenges posed by the global situation marked by COVID and war. As the implementation of visible mega projects fills us with pride, while her ‘ASHIRAYAN’ project for the most impoverished and homeless touches our hearts. The enhanced lifestyle of the people – it is our lifelong desire.

Growing up in this optimistic environment, the current generation is more self-assured and proud than we were. I personally believe that Bangabandhu's daughter's self-confident announcement to fund the construction of the Padma Bridge from our own budget has fundamentally shifted the mindset of the nation. After the assassination of her father in '75, it appeared as if the shattered backbone has been mended. Our next generation is not as fragile-minded as we are. They are confident in themselves, proud of their country, and highly ambitious about their country. I firmly believe that the upcoming prideful Bangali generation will propel this country far into the future – if we can protect them today from the threats of the old anti-national hyenas. If we can afford them today the opportunity to construct their own lives in a stable Bangladesh, the nation will advance significantly with their contributions.

Hence, today we have to make the right decision. The new generation must be protected from the anti-national politics of this malevolent force. The defeated force of the liberation war, identified as anti-national, is still present in this country. The bloodstain of Bangabandhu and his family caused by their communal politics is akin to the bloodstain of the 30 lakh martyrs. They are also responsible for the bloodshed of the free people of independent Bangladesh. The heinous killing of four national leaders in a supposedly secure prison in '75, the murder of freedom fighters who fought for the liberation of the country, repeated attempts to disrupt the communal harmony of their nation, the grenade attack on Bangabandhu's daughter on August 21st, the bombing of Ramna Batamul, the bomb blast during Udichi's program, a series of bombing incidents across the entire country – how many instances should I enumerate? The list is too long.

These are the evil forces that have been identified and defeated by us. Even today, they pounce on people at any given opportunity. People are being burnt to death through an act of terrorism by setting the bus on fire. This is another manifestation of that murderous apathy. An undemocratic murderous force cannot be permitted to politicize under the guise of democracy. They opposed the independence of Bangladesh and preyed on the people like hyenas, committing acts of rape and torture. They have no right to engage in politics in independent Bangladesh, just as Hitler's Nazi forces have no right to partake in politics in the West. We hope the international community can easily understand this, drawing upon their own experiences.

Unfortunately, this is the truth; having been in power for an extended period, a significant amount of wealth and influence is now in the hands of this evil force. For the same reason, they have more international connections. Furthermore, the assessment of our historical wartime enemy-ally relations, the current geopolitical realities, tensions among great powers, and the ambitions of international interest groups pose risks for a small but strategically significant country like ours. Moreover, when these threats against the interests of the country conspire with self-interested groups at home and abroad, it poses threats for a government dedicated to the well-being of the people.

So, we always have to be cautious. We must uphold the esteemed position, earned in the hearts of the people by the forces in favour of the liberation war who worked tirelessly for the people. Let none of our actions tarnish our significant accomplishments. We must remember that we are the legacy of Bangabandhu, the successors of the martyrs, the descendants of the four national leaders, and the followers of the freedom fighters.

As we have more achievements, we have more responsibilities too. People expect more from us. We must embrace this illuminated and proud historical responsibility, and we can fulfill it – as we embody the spirit of the ideals of the Liberation War.

At the moment, our most significant task is to shape the next generation into that heroic generation of the Liberation War. They should be instilled with a strong sense of Bangali identity. Their mind must be developed with a focus on culture and history. They will practice the thousand-year-old Bangali art and literature in the present context. They will read and understand the thousand-year-old history of Bengal candidly. If they lack self-awareness, how can they stand tall on the earth like a banyan tree? Otherwise, they will drift away like a water hyacinth. They have to understand this. Established on the solid ground of history, one can reach for the sky of dreams. They will discern the difference between piety and bigotry and will be tolerant and humane to all, irrespective of religion, caste, or creed. They will genuinely construct a non-communal, just, and humane society. Their love for the country will inspire them to work selflessly for the nation, elevating the country to unique heights. On this Victory Day, at the break of dawn, with a cascade of aspirations, I am looking forward to the smart citizens of a smart Bangladesh. We are certain of this victory too.

Joi Bangla!

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