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Message

26th March- The great Independence and National Day of Bangladesh. On this auspicious occasion, I extend my heartfelt greetings and warm felicitations to my fellow Bangladeshis living at home and abroad.

On March 26, 1971, through the Declaration of Independence, an independent and sovereign Bangladesh was born. The final victory was achieved through a nine-month-long armed War of Independence. I recall with deep respect the millions of martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the liberation war.

To achieve the desired goal of independence, democracy must be strengthened, and forbearance, human rights, and the rule of law have to be consolidated. Equity, transparency, and accountability must be ensured in all spheres of the state and society. The young generation once again shed their blood in the July mass uprising to realise our unfulfilled dreams of independence. Building a safe, happy, beautiful, developed, and prosperous Bangladesh for the new generation is now our sacred duty.

Let us contribute more from our respective positions to build a society free from all forms of discrimination and exploitation in realising the goal of independence. Let us steer the country and the nation forward on the path of development and prosperity; let a new Bangladesh rise up before the world- this is my expectation on the great Independence Day.

M. Shahabuddin
Mohammed Shahabuddin



Independence Day 2025 : A Different Kind of Feeling

Farida Akhter

Bangladesh is an independent country. The people of this country have never condoned wrongs, injustices, and repression. Following the declaration of independence on 26 March 1971, the country achieved victory on 16 December after waging a 9-month-long blood-drenched liberation war. A long path has been traversed after that; the country has survived in the global arena after crossing half a century despite numerous obstacles. The people of the country have always sought a country that upholds justice and human dignity. Innumerable people have sacrificed their lives during different movements and struggles. However, the citizens celebrate the Independence Day together every year irrespective of their party or opinion with joy and festivity. They wear the red and green dresses. Flags of various sizes are seen flying atop the rickshaws, motor vehicles, and buildings. The flag is a symbol of our independence; therefore, the people harbour a different kind of love towards it.

I have a different kind of feeling this year on the occasion of Independence Day-2025. The July-2024 upsurge of the students and masses has freed the country again. The people of Bangladesh became independent once again on 5 August 2024 after 36 days of blood-drenched movement, because of the self-sacrifices of about 1,500 martyrs and over 23,000 injured activists. This is the view of almost all with the exception of members of ousted regime and its collaborators. Known as the 36-day movement, it was extended up to 5 August after crossing the month of July. It succeeded in bringing down a fascist regime that became entrenched over a period of 15 years. That was not an easy task. Young women and men were at the forefront of this mass upsurge. People were amazed when they saw that a new generation of citizens were spilling blood while protesting against discriminations; many chose a life of suffering when they lost their limbs or eyes while fighting for the country. When we listen to their stories now, we find that they went out of their homes despite the firing of bullets outside. They did not join the struggle out of any whim. Before going out, they said, "Mother, If I don't return..." Through their sacrifices, they saw a new dream – the dream of building a new Bangladesh. They, therefore, had no fear. People were oppressed by the fascist rulers for long 15 years, from which they have now been freed. The youths who belong to the age-group of 20-25 years, have witnessed only fascist rule since their adolescence. They could not see anything else except a particular profile and a specific narrative regarding the history of Bangladesh. We now want to see Bangladesh in a new shape on the occasion of 'Independence Day'-26 March 2025, in the light of the dreams of those youths.

Those of us who witnessed the liberation war in 1971 are getting the taste of becoming independent twice. But for those who have freed themselves on 5 August by waging a relentless

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Independence, Sovereignty, and Freedom

Mohammad Azam

Independence

Independence is a fascinating concept. It undoubtedly involves complexity. It is not at all easy to determine when or at what stage would a person consider himself to be independent, or when would the idea become meaningful. But when a man speaks about independence, he usually does not do that after a thorough review. Whether it is spoken in terms of individuals, groups, or the state, people usually use it in a lax sense. People seek the freedom of speech, liberty of behaviour, and freedom to work; above all, they seek a situation where they are not subjugated by others. There are also variations with regard to expectations based on culture, history, and class. In one situation, some people may feel they are enjoying the sweet nectar of independence; but that same situation may seem like imprisonment to others. For this reason, it is not very easy to arrive at a generalized definition of the term.

Philosophically speaking, the freedom of individuals is a very complex phenomenon. The individual is dependent on the collective for his existence. Humans live in languages, and an infinite web of connected signs and symbols. It can be said that with regard to existence, humans are not at all independent; rather, they are deeply dependent. If we raise the issue of a general reality above its deeper layer, even then we shall see that everything from the production system of man to the varied meshes of his relationships are adversarial to his 'independent' existence. At one time, it was considered that man is born free, but later becomes captive in a huge net. All philosophical schools that flourished during the 19th century tell us conclusively that man not only gets entangled in variegated and deceptive webs after his birth, he also gets covered by the impenetrable biological and cultural nets.

Even then, man seeks freedom. It can be said that the reason why this conscious or unconscious desire for freedom among people is so strong is because absolute freedom is an impossibility. It also has another practical aspect that should not be neglected. The web or framework that proposes a limit to people's possibilities is deterministic on the one hand, and remains captive to the immutability of habits on the other hand. This kind of situation opposes new ideas and initiatives. The main mantra of human development is the aspiration to surmount the present condition and status. New realizations and demands emerge from these aspirations. Therefore, in a deeper sense, the desire for individual freedom is the principal driving force for the advancement of civilization.

However, among the people who raise the demand for independence, even a quarter of them cannot attain the realization of this new aspiration. I have said earlier, the complexity of individual freedom is the main reason for this. Man, therefore, seeks freedom in the collective existence. Man seeks his country's independence; he satisfies his unmet desire for freedom by considering the country as sovereign.

Sovereignty

We generally apply the term sovereignty in case of the state. There is an implicit hint of 'final authority' in the word. This meaning is very important for the workings of the state. If the state authority cannot take decisions and implement those without remaining free from internal and external prescriptions, then its workings are hampered. We tag a symbolic value to the head of state for evading that obstacle. In the past, people used to define kings and emperors in this way. The king was then viewed as a representative of the creator, or at least His nominated person. The king used to rule the kingdom by upholding the concept of sovereignty. Although the circumstances have changed completely, the idea has remained almost the same. Only the system of nominating individuals has changed.

Governance has to be conducted by at least maintaining the symbolic meaning of sovereignty and authority of the state. It is true inside the state as well. But we generally consider the word sovereignty in relation to another state. We assume that other states will not interfere in the internal affairs of a state; the authorities of a state



shall be able to take decisions and implement those on behalf of its people. But in reality, this kind of sovereignty exists nowhere. The ruling coterie has to run the country in the face of considerable opposition. And huge lists of prescriptions are sent from outside to the comparatively poorer and weaker states. In many cases, these countries have to carry out many tasks even by sidestepping their own wishes, or by harming themselves. It is not that this kind of happening does not occur in large and powerful countries. That definitely happens. The people of the world are so inter-connected with each other and their common interests are so intertwined, that the powerful countries also have to take many decisions by taking other countries into consideration.

Despite knowing all these, man aspires for sovereignty; he wants to imagine that his state is sovereign. This is important for mental peace. Man tries to compensate for the absence of individual freedom by imagining state sovereignty. However, this concept is important for good governance. Again, the mutual agreements and exchanges between the states are transacted mainly based on the concept of sovereignty. It can be

said, it is an urgent, but in real sense a non-existing concept. This concept can be explained only by accepting the importance of signs and symbols in people's lives.

Freedom

It is clear from our short discussion on independence and sovereignty that these concepts are heavily abstract. The place of abstraction is very high in man's lives. But abstraction is not enough. It is necessary to comprehend the concepts in terms of relative manifestations and practical shapes. In that respect, the idea of 'freedom' or liberation is much clearer. It is easy to comprehend it as within our reach. For example, humans are freed from captivity and indebtedness. When there is specificity about getting freed from a particular condition, it becomes comparatively easy to bring the concept under comprehension.

The word 'freedom' is much more related to the general public for this reason. Or we can say, it becomes possible to consider it through inter-linkages and implement it with some clarity. But whether independence or sovereignty, the words do not mean much if those are not linked to the lives of the common people. It can be stated in another way. Man has identified some basic needs based on his experience of thousands of years. He needs food, clothing, housing. During comparatively modern times, healthcare and education have been added to this list. The issue of security is also spoken of now-a-days. The most significant aspect of these definitions is that they are all linked to the biological existence of man – and are minimum preconditions for his survival.

The truth is, humans possess sufficient resources today due to the progression of global production system through some astonishing phases, which are sufficient now to meet the biological needs of mankind. In the history of the world, human beings have achieved this success in production only during recent times. But it is also true that the fruits of these resources have remained outside the reach of a large segment of mankind because of distribution-related inequalities. Many people cannot cater to their minimum and urgent needs for survival even today.

It is in this context that the concept of freedom has assumed greater significance. Independence and sovereignty are no doubt important concepts. But they, on the one hand, entail the problem of additional abstraction; on the other hand, there is a deficit in their universality as they lack application in the lives of a majority of the population. The word 'freedom' is much more visible and universal. It is not that there is any essential conflict between the previous two concepts and 'freedom'. But there is a risk if attempt is made to arrive at the other two concepts without incorporating the concept of freedom. The risk is ethical or moral as well. Question must be urgently raised: can the abstraction of independence-sovereignty create an ethical condition without the pledge for meeting the basic needs of people? It is not very easy to provide an assured answer to this question.

Our Independence

The people of Bangladesh sought independence. They snatched the crown of an independent country by fighting with all their might. They also played a valiant role in the fight for becoming the citizens of an

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