

**K
A
T
H
A**



Independence Day of Bangladesh 2002

March 30, 2002

কথা

KATHA

Board of Editors

Abul Kalam
Anwar Hossain
Faruk Mansur Mir
Hasan Ahmad
Kabir Newaz
Mohammad Irfan
Syed A. Hoque Asif

Published by

*Bangladeshi
Community in
Colorado on the 31st
Independence Day of
Bangladesh*

*Painting of Zainul
Abedin is used on the
front cover*

সম্পাদকীয়

২৬শে মার্চ বাঙালী জাতির ইতিহাসে এক অবিস্মরণীয় দিন। হাজার বছরের পরাধীনতার শিকল ছিঁড়ে এদিন আমরা আমাদের আত্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের অধিকার পুনঃপ্রতিষ্ঠার সংগ্রামের সূচনা করি। '৫২-র ভাষা আন্দোলন, '৬৯-এর গণ অভ্যুত্থান, আর '৭০ -এর নির্বাচনে জয়লাভের মধ্য দিয়ে চূড়ান্ত পরিণতির নিকটবর্তী বাঙালীর স্বাধিকার আন্দোলনকে অন্যান্য বলপ্রয়োগের মাধ্যমে দমন করার উদ্দেশ্যে পাকিস্তানী সামরিক বাহিনী ২৫শে মার্চের কালোরাতে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়ে যুমন্ত নিরীহ নিরস্ত্র বাংলার জনসাধারণের উপর। কিন্তু ইয়াহিয়া আর ভুট্টো বুঝতে পারেনি বাঙালী - 'জ্বলে-পুড়ে মরে ছারখার, তবু মাথা নোয়াবার নয়।'

২৬শে মার্চ, ১৯৭১ বাঙালী জাতির জনক বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমানের পক্ষে তৎকালীন মেজর পরবর্তীতে বাংলাদেশের রাষ্ট্রপ্রধান জিয়াউর রহমান চট্টগ্রাম কালুরঘাট বেতার কেন্দ্র থেকে বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা ঘোষণা করেন। এরপরই শুরু হয় রক্তক্ষয়ী যুদ্ধ। যুদ্ধে অংশ নেয় কৃষক-শ্রমিক-ছাত্র-পেশাজীবী তথা বাংলার আপামর জনসাধারণ। মুক্তিবাহিনীর দামাল ছেলেরা প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্র ভারতের আন্তরিক সহযোগিতায় মাত্র ন'মাসের মধ্যে বাংলার মাটি শত্রুমুক্ত করে স্বাধীন বাংলাদেশের প্রতিষ্ঠা করে।

দূর প্রবাসে মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের কলোরাডো অঙ্গরাজ্যে বসে আজ আমরা শ্রদ্ধাভরে স্মরণ করছি স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধের সাত বীরশ্রেষ্ঠসহ সকল শহীদ এবং যুদ্ধে প্রত্যক্ষ বা পরোক্ষভাবে অংশ নেয়া সবাইকে। নতুন প্রজন্মের কাছে বাঙালী জাতির পৌরবের 'কথা' তুলে ধরার লক্ষ্যে কলোরাডো প্রবাসী বাংলাদেশীদের এই ক্ষুদ্র প্রয়াস।

Editorial

Tales (কথা - Katha) of the independence of Bangladesh, always fills our heart with a mixture of pride, emotion and sentiment that can never be expressed in words. Putting down these emotions in writing is even more difficult. For those of us, who are residing in countries far away from our motherland and remember the great sacrifice of millions of our people, it is always a continuous struggle against our souls to keep the feelings suppressed. কথা (The Talk), therefore, gives us an opportunity for the first time in Colorado to come out of our emotional hideouts and convey the facts about our independence, ethnic background, heritage and post independence activities in Bangladesh. It also gives our offspring and other members of this community an opportunity to know and research more about Bangladesh and its culture.

The magazine contains articles highlighting the history of our independence together with post independence achievements in various socio-economic sectors. It also contains a section dedicated to the children of our community to encourage them to dig through their roots and get inspiration for future building of the nation. Sincere thanks to all the authors and the reviewers for taking time off from their busy schedule and making this attempt a successful one. Thanks to the sponsors for their generous contributions and the members of the community for their continuous encouragements. Without the support from all sectors, it would have not been possible to bring to you the tales of our native land Bangladesh.

স্বাধীনতার কথা

মোঃ নিজাম উদ্দিন, ডেনভার, কলোরাডো

স্বাধীনতার কথা, সেতো হৃদয়ে পুঞ্জিত তিরিশ বছরের ব্যথা-বেদনা, আশা-আকাঙ্খার কথা। আজকের এই কথা, স্বাধীনতা ও সাবভৌমত্বের কথা, তিরিশ লক্ষ শহীদের কথা, যাদের আত্ম ত্যাগের জন্য আজকের এই স্বাধীনতা-তাদের কথা। কথার এই সূচনা লগ্নে তাই মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি সে সব মহান আত্মার যাদের আত্মত্যাগ আমাদেরকে করেছে গর্বিত। কথা তাই মনের সব অগোছালো বাক্য, যার জন্য প্রথমেই ক্ষমা চাচ্ছি পাঠকের কাছে।

১৯৭১ সালের ২৬ শে মার্চ বাঙ্গালী জাতির জন্য সবচেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ও আত্ম মর্য়াদার দিন, আমাদের স্বাধীনতা দিবস। একাত্তরের ২৫ শে মার্চের গভীর রাতে পাকিস্তানী হানাদার বাহিনী শুরু করে “অপারেশন সার্চ লাইট” তথা বাঙ্গালী খূনের অভিযান।

আর সেই সাথে শুরু হয় আমাদের শত বছরের কাঙ্খিত স্বাধিকার তথা স্বাধীনতার আন্দোলন। দীর্ঘ নয় মাস যুদ্ধের পর অনেক ত্যাগ ও রক্তের বিনিময়ে অর্জিত হয় স্বাধীনতা নামের একটি শব্দ। আত্ম নিয়ন্ত্রনের অধিকারের জন্য বাঙ্গালী জাতিকে যত রক্ত দিতে হয়েছে, নিপীড়ন ও নিগ্রহ সহ্য করতে হয়েছে, পৃথিবীর খুব কম জাতি সত্তাকেই এর সম মূল্য দিতে হয়েছে। স্বাধীনতা নামের এই পাঁচটি বর্ণের জন্য দেশপ্রেমিক বাঙ্গালী যে ত্যাগ স্বীকার করেছে তা ইতিহাসে বিরল। আমাদের এই স্বাধীনতা তিরিশ লক্ষ শহীদের রক্তে রঞ্জিত ফুল, অসংখ্য মা বোনের ইজ্জতের ফসল, অসহায় নিপীড়িত মানুষের অশ্রু বন্যায় ভেসে আসা তরী।

১৯৭১ সালের স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধে আমি হারাই আমার বাবাকে, আমার মত হাজার শিশু সেদিন হারায় তার বাবা, মা, ভাই, বোন তথা প্রিয় জনকে। যে শিশু জন্মের পর কোনোদিন ডাকতে পারেনি বাবা নামের শব্দটি, কোনোদিন উপলব্ধি করতে পারেনি বাবা থাকার আনন্দ, তার কষ্ট কেবল সেদিনের সেই শিশুই বৃঝতে পারে। তাই ‘স্বাধীনতা’ একটি শব্দ হৃদয়ান্তরে প্রতিধ্বনিত হয় বিভিন্ন রূপে। স্বাধীনতা আমার কাছে আমার মায়ের ভয়ঙ্কর কালো স্মৃতি, হৃদয়ে Black Hole এর মত অপরিমেয় ক্ষত।

আজ স্বাধীনতার ৩১তম বছর, যে আদর্শ বুক নিয়ে সেদিন বাঙ্গালী জাতি নিজের জীবনকে

উৎসর্গ করেছিল তার কোন অংশই আজ পূরন হয়নি। আমরা দিতে পারিনি প্রকৃত সন্মান, যাদের জন্য আমরা পেয়েছি আজকের এই স্বাধীনতা। আমরা মিশ্রিত করে ফেলেছি দেশ প্রেমিক ও রাজাকারদের। ফলে স্বাধীনতার পর ও পরাধীনতার নিগড় আমাদের মুক্তির সাধকে বাধাগ্রস্ত করেছে। স্বাধীনতার মূল্যবোধ মুখ খুবড়ে পড়েছে বার বার। সাত্তনা- শুধু আমরা পেয়েছি একটি পতাকা। স্বাধীনতার সূচনা লগ্নে আমাদের ভুল আমাদেরকে নিয়ে এসেছে আজকের এই অবস্হায়। যে সুন্দর ও সুখী সমৃদ্ধ দেশ গড়ার স্বপ্ন নিয়ে যুদ্ধে গিয়েছিল সেদিনের দেশ প্রেমিক, সেই দেশে আজ জীবন নিরাপত্তাহীন, নাগরিক অধিকার হয়েছে খর্বিত, অর্থনৈতিক ভাবে পঙ্গু এবং রাজনৈতিক ভাবে অস্থিতিশীল একটি দেশ। প্রতিনিয়ত চলছে হত্যা, ধর্ষণ ও হানাহানি, যেখানে হারিয়ে গেছে মানবতা। রাজনীতির নামে চলছে শোষণ ও নিপীড়ন। আমরা ভুলে গিয়েছি সে দিনের আত্ম ত্যাগী মানুষের আর্দশের কথা। তারা চেয়েছিল একটি স্বাধীন সুখী সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ।

আমি কষ্ট পাই যখন দেখি আমার বাবার মত লাখে শহীদের রক্ত আজ বৃথা যেতে বসেছে। অসহায় বাঙ্গালী শুধু নিগৃহীতই হচ্ছে। পাচ্ছেনা স্বাধীনতার কোন সূফল। মুষ্টিমেয় কিছু রাজনীতিবিদ এবং তাদের ছত্রছায়ায় বেড়ে উঠা সুবিধাবাদী লোকগুলো গুণে নিচ্ছে এদেশটার প্রাণ। জানি না বাঙ্গালী কবে পাবে তাদের প্রকৃত স্বাধীনতা, মুক্তি পাবে ঐ সুবিধাবাদীদের হাত থেকে। প্রকৃত দেশ প্রেমিক তাই হয় মুখ বুঁজে পড়ে আছে দেশে না হয় পাড়ি দিচ্ছে অন্য দেশে। তবে কি একদিন শূন্য হয়ে যাবে হিতাকাঙ্খী ঐ দেশটির!

আমাদের আর সময় নেই পিছনে তাকানোর, এগিয়ে যেতে হবে সন্মুখ পানে। গড়ে তুলতে হবে একটি দেশ যার জন্য বুকের রক্ত ঝরতেও কার্পণ্য করেনি দেশ প্রেমিক, তবেই শহীদের আত্মা কিছুটা শান্তি পাবে।

তাই স্বাধীনতার এই ৩১ তম বর্ষপূর্তি হোক রাজনীতিবিদদের শুভ বুদ্ধি উদয়ের বর্ষ। হৃদয়ে জাগ্রত হোক ‘মানুষ মানুষের জন্য, রাজনীতি মানুষের মঙ্গলের জন্য’। নতুন দিনে তাই পুরোনো আশা, ‘জাণ্ডক জনতা, মুছে যাক গ্লানি, ঘুচে যাক দারিদ্র’।

স্বাধীন দেশের পরাধীন নাগরিক -আইরীন ফরিদা ইসলাম, ডেনভার, কলোরাডো

আমার জন্ম স্বাধীনতার অল্প আগে। বাংলাদেশের মুক্তিযুদ্ধ, স্বাধীনতা আমি দেখেছি। কিন্তু এতই ছোট ছিলাম যে, মনে নেই কিছুই। তবে সকলের কাছ থেকে, বিশেষ করে বাবা মার কাছ থেকে গল্প শুনে শুনে মুক্তিযুদ্ধের ছবি আমার হৃদয়ে আঁকা হয়ে গেছে। অনুভূতিতে স্বাধীনতা বহু আগে থেকেই। একটি স্বাধীন দেশের নাগরিক হিসেবে আমি গর্বিত। আমার মাটি, আমার বাংলাদেশ আমার অতি প্রিয়। ইমিগ্রেশন পেয়ে দেশকে ছেড়ে সুদূর প্রবাসে চলে আসবার সময় সকলের মত আমারও কষ্ট হয়েছে অসম্ভব। আর এরপর দেশের জন্য ভালোবাসা বেড়েছে শতগুণ। আমরা যারা দেশকে ভালবাসি, সকলেরই দেশের জন্য কিছু করতে ইচ্ছে হয়। কিন্তু কেমন করে? স্বাধীন দেশে আমরা নিজেরাই যে নিজেদের হাতে পায়ে শেকল পরিয়ে রেখেছি। এই শেকল ভাংবে এমন সাধ্য কার?

প্রায় চার বছর আগে যে দিন প্রথম মার্কিন মুল্লুকে পা রাখি, সেদিন থেকে আজ পর্যন্ত, এই ছবির মত সাজানো দেশে কোন কিছুই নিজের মনে হয়না আমার। কেবলই মনে হয় একি ভুল করলাম আমি। আমার দেশ, আমার সংস্কৃতি, আমার খেলার, পড়ার সাথীরা, আত্মীয় পরিজন সর্বোপরি বাবা মা- এতসব ‘আপন’-কে ছেড়ে কেন পরকে আপন করার বৃথা চেষ্টা চালাছি।

বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে বের হবার কিছুদিনের মধ্যেই দেশের একটি স্বনামধন্য কলেজে ‘অর্থনীতি’ বিষয়ে শিক্ষকতা শুরু করি আমি। একটানা পাঁচ বছর একই প্রতিষ্ঠানে কাজ করার ফলে কলেজের অধ্যক্ষ, শিক্ষক অন্যান্য কর্মী এবং ছাত্ররা মিলে আমরা যে ধীরে ধীরে একটি পরিবারের মত হয়ে গিয়েছিলাম, তা বুঝতে পেরেছি অনেকদিন পর প্রবাসী হয়ে। আমার ছাত্র রা ছিল নিজের ছেলের মত, আমার প্রাণ। ওদেরকে হারাবার কষ্ট আমায় এখনো কাঁদায়। কেবলই মনে হয় আমার নিজের মত করে ওদেরকে কিছু শিখাবার সুযোগ থেকে বঞ্চিত করলাম নিজেকে। আমার এতসব কষ্ট বুঝে আমার জীবনের আদর্শ - আমার প্রাণপ্রিয় বাবা তিনিও দিশেহারা, বিচলিত কখনও কখনও। এক বছরের মাথায় বাবার একটি দীর্ঘ চিঠি পেলাম। তাতে লেখা - আমি যদি একবার এখন দেশে যাই, তাহলেই দেশের পরিবর্তন বুঝতে পারবো, আর আফসোস কমে যাবে

অনেকখানি। হয়তো এখন ধানমন্ডি থেকে মোহাম্মদপুর অর্থাৎ বাসা থেকে কলেজে পৌঁছতে লেগে যাবে এক ঘণ্টার উপর। কারণ? ট্রাফিক জ্যাম। কিছুদিন পর পর হরতাল, ছিনতাই আর খুনাখুনিতে জীবন অতীষ্ঠ। সামাজিক অবক্ষয় যে দেশে এতখানি, সে দেশের ছাত্রদের কাছ থেকে শ্রদ্ধা আশা করা কি উচিৎ? তাদের চরিত্র গঠনে এর প্রভাব পড়বে এটাই স্বাভাবিক।

দেশে যাবার জন্য আকুল আমি আড়াই বছর পর দেশের পথে রওয়ানা করলাম।যেদিন পৌঁছলাম তখন হরতাল। ভাড়া করা এ্যাম্বুলেন্সে বাড়ীতে এলাম। সারাটা পথ চিন্তা করলাম, কেন এই হরতাল? এ কিসের প্রতিবাদ? কার সাথে কার লড়াই? নিজের সাথেই নিজের।

অধীর আগ্রহে অপেক্ষার পর যেদিন কলেজে গেলাম, সহকর্মীরা সকলেই অভিভূত, আনন্দিত। অবশ্যই আমিও। কিন্তু দেখলাম সবকিছুই আগের মত। পাঠ্যপুস্তক, শিক্ষাদান পদ্ধতি, সব। ছাত্রদের মুখের দিকে তাকিয়ে কষ্ট হলো। এই ছাত্ররা, যারা কিনা দেশের ভবিষ্যৎ, তারাই অনেকে ইছানুযায়ী ভর্তির সুযোগ পাবে না। কারণ? ‘আসন সীমিত’। নিজের অনিচ্ছায় অন্য বিষয়ে পড়াশুনা শেষ করার পর যোগ্যতা থাকা সত্ত্বেও চাকুরী পাবেনা। কারণ?নো ভ্যাকেনসি? তবে হ্যাঁ সবই সম্ভব যদি থাকে অর্থ। নৈতিকতার একি অবক্ষয়। কারণও অর্থ। অর্থনৈতিকভাবে পরিপূর্ণ নয় বলেই মানুষের চরিত্রের এই অবনতি। চোখের সামনে শত অন্যায় দেখেও প্রতিবাদ করতে পারেনা কেউ। স্বাধীন দেশে সেই স্বাধীনতা কারো নেই। যে দু’একজন সামান্য প্রতিবাদও করে, তাদেরকে প্রাণ দিতে হয় মুহূর্তেই, অতি সহজে। মনে মনে ভাবি স্বাধীনতা মানেতো ‘মুক্তি’। ‘সামাজিক মুক্তি,’ ‘অর্থনৈতিক মুক্তি’। এত রক্ত এই প্রাণের বিনিময়ে স্বাধীনতার যে পতাকা আমরা অর্জন করেছি তাতে বাংলাদেশকে অর্জন। কিন্তু আজকের এই হিংসা, হত্যা, ছিনতাই, ধর্ষণ বাংলাদেশকে ভেঙ্গে টুকরো টুকরো করে দিচ্ছে নাকি? আমাদেরই কষ্টে গড়া দেশকে আমরা কেন বোকার মত ভেঙ্গে চুরমার করছি। আমাদের এই মুক্তিকে ধারণ করা উচিৎ প্রজন্ম থেকে প্রজন্ম।

পাঠক, আপনারা হয়তো ভাবছেন, এ কেমন দেশপ্রেমিক যে কেবল দেশের নেতিবাচক দিকগুলোর কথাই বলছে। তবে কি এই ৩১ বছরে আমাদের কোনই অর্জন নেই? অবশ্যই আছে। এই যে আমি এত কথা বললাম, তা আমার লেখার স্বাধীনতা থেকেই। আর দেশের মন্দ দিকগুলো বলি, দেশকে ভালবাসি তাই কষ্ট পাই বলেই। যা কিছু আমরা দেশের জন্য করতে চাই কিন্তু করতে পারিনা,

তা শেষ করবে আগামী প্রজন্ম। আর তাই সঠিক ইতিহাস জানা তাদের প্রয়োজন। তারা তাদের বুদ্ধি, মেধা এবং শিক্ষা দিয়ে দেশকে এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাবে অনেক দূর। আর তাদের সঠিকভাবে গড়ে তুলতে হবে এই প্রজন্মকে। স্বাধীন দেশে জন্মে স্বাধীনতাকে যেন ধারণ করতে পারে পরাধীনের মত নয়, স্বাধীন নাগরিক হয়ে। এই স্বপ্ন বাস্তবায়নে আমরা ওদের কাছে আশাবাদী।



বাংলাদেশ

কালাম এ মির, অন্তারিও, কানাডা

বাংলাদেশ, ও আমার বাংলাদেশ!
আমার গানের দেশ, আমার প্রাণের দেশ!!

এই সে দেশ যেখানে জীবন দেয় ভাষার তরে,
এই দেশের মানুষেরা মুক্তিযুদ্ধ করে;
এই সে দেশ, এই সে দেশ।

এই দেশের বাতাসে ভাটিয়ালী সুর,
সবুজ মাঠে ভাসে ভাওয়াইয়া মধুর।
এই দেশের বানী 'যুদ্ধ নয়, শান্তি !
মানুষের জন্য মানুষ, মানবতার জয় হোক-
যুদ্ধে আসুক ক্লান্তি !!'

এই সে দেশ, এই সুন্দর পৃথিবীর অন্যতম,
সবার কাঁধে কাঁধ মিলায়, হাটে সম।
এই দেশ আমার জন্মভূমি, আমার গৌরব,
আমার গভীর মমতা, এই আমার সব !
এই সে দেশ, এই সে দেশ !!

‘ফিরে যেতে চাই স্বর্ণগ্রাম’

-মাকসুদা আইরিন মুকুল, ডেনভার, কলোরাডো

এখন দুপুরবেলা। অনেকদূরে পাহাড়ের মাথায় মাথায়
খাঁজে খাঁজে রূপালি চাঁদের মত বরফ জমে আছে।
মাথার উপর নীল আকাশ। গভীর নীল। মা’র একটা
এমন রংয়ের শাড়ি ছিল। মার কথা মনে হলেই মনে
পড়ে দেশের কথা। প্রিয় দেশ, প্রিয় স্বদেশভূমি।

মাত্র দুবছর হল দেশ ছেড়েছি। সেইসাথে ফেলে
এসেছি আনন্দ-বেদনায় মাখামাখি অজস্র স্মৃতি।
কতদিন রিমঝিম সুরে বৃষ্টির কলতান শুনি না। আর
বৃষ্টিশেষে প্রাণভরে উপভোগ করিনা মাটির সোঁদা
গন্ধ।

এখানকার সবকিছুই কেমন যান্ত্রিক মনে হয়। কোথাও
কোন টান নেই, মায়া নেই। করতে হচ্ছে বলেই
সবকিছু করে যাওয়া। চারপাশের সৌন্দর্য যখন চেয়ে
দেখি তা কেবলই চোখ ছুঁয়ে যায়- মনকে স্পর্শ করে
না। প্রায়ই ভাবি কেন এমন হয়। পরক্ষণেই মনের
ভেতর থেকে কেউ বলে উঠে- ‘এর কোনকিছুই যে
তোমার নয়, এসবের কোনটার ভেতর দিয়েই
তোমার অস্তিত্ব বেড়ে ওঠেনি।’ আর তখনই আমি
দুচোখ বন্ধ করে আমার অস্তিত্বের স্বাদ নেই, আমার
মনভরে বেজে ওঠে সেই চেনাসুর-

‘আমার সোনার বাংলা আমি তোমায় ভালোবাসি
জন্ম দিয়েছো মা তুমি, তাই বড় ভালোবাসি’

আমি যখন গাড়ী করে বাইরে বেরোই আমার চোখের
সামনে ভেসে ওঠে রিকশা করে সাতমসজিদ রোড বা
ধানমন্ডিতে ঘুরে বেড়ানো। চোখ বন্ধ করলেই দেখতে
পাই শ্লোগান মুখর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় চত্বর, টি, এস, সি,
মধুর কেন্দ্রিন আর লাইব্রেরীর সামনের মাঠের
আড্ডা, কোলাহল।

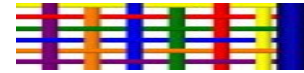
আহা আড্ডা! কতদিন আড্ডা দেইনা। এরচেয়ে
স্বাস্থ্যকর বিষয় আর কি থাকতে পারে। এখানে এর
বড়ই অভাব। পাবলিক লাইব্রেরীতে নাটক দেখা,
নিউমার্কেটের ফুচকা, চটপটির স্বাদ, পহেলা বৈশাখে
নতুন কাপড় পরে কাকডাকা ভোরে রমনার বটমূলে

নতুন বছরকে স্বাগত জানানো, ফেব্রুয়ারীর বইমেলায়
কাব্যমুখর দিনগুলো কিছুতেই ভুলতে পারি না।

একবার আমরা কজন বন্ধু মিলে নৌভ্রমণে মুনসিগঞ্জ
গিয়েছিলাম। সারাদিন আড্ডা, আনন্দ আর নদীতে
চরে বেড়ানো- কী যে আনন্দময় সে স্মৃতি!

জানালায় কাঁচ দিয়ে যখন ইউনিভার্সিটি বুলেভার্ডের
দিকে তাকাই, চোখের সামনে এসে যায় গাড়ীর
বদলে রিক্সা-বেবী ট্যাক্সির জ্যাম, কানে বাজে রিক্সার
টুং-টাং বেল, ভেসে আসে মাইকের আওয়াজ-
‘অমুক ভাইয়ের সমাবেশে যোগ দিন, দিতে হবে।’

আমার নিজের একটি দেশ, নিজস্ব সংস্কৃতির শিকড়
আছে বলেই তৈরি হয়েছে এসব মধুর স্মৃতি- যা আজ
এই সুদূর প্রবাসেও আমাকে বার বার টেনে নিয়ে যায়
আমার ভালবাসার সেই স্বর্ণগ্রামে। আর তাই গভীর
শ্রদ্ধাভরে স্মরণ করি সেইসব বীর জনতাকে যাদের
সংগ্রাম আর আত্মত্যাগে রঙিন আমার স্বর্ণগ্রামের
লাল-সবুজ নিশান।



স্বাধীনতা তুমি
রবিঠাকুরের অজর কবিতা, অবিনাশী গান।

স্বাধীনতা তুমি
কাজী নজরুল, ঝাঁকড়া চুলের বাবরি দোলানো
মহান পুরুষ, সৃষ্টিসুখের উল্লাসে কাঁপা-

-শামসুর রাহমান

অর্থ নেই, ভাষা তবু বেঁচে আছে

-হায়দার আলী খান, ডেনভার, কলোরাডো

অর্থ নাই বা থাকুক ইদানিং
স্বদেশে-বিদেশে প্রত্যাশা-তাড়িত
আমি শস্তা নৈরাশ্যের নৈরাজ্যে
যেতে রাজী নই;

অর্থ নাই বা থাকুক ইদানিং
ভাষা তবু বেঁচে আছে, অজর
না হলেও অমর অবিনাশী বটে -
শীত - গ্রীষ্ম - বসন্তের দিনরাত
যায় - আসে চক্রাকারে
বাংলার নির্জন চরে
এখনও তো কিছু পাখী ওড়ে -
হাওয়ায় হাওয়ায় গ্রাম বাংলার
সুদর্শন হয়তোবা আজও উড়ে
ঘুরে ঘুরে মরে।

হিজল তমাল ঘেরা অশান্ত বাংলার গ্রামে
তামাদি হয়েছে আজ রায়-শর্ষের ক্ষেত
বিদেশী সাহায্যের দায়ভাগী এন,জি,ও,
সরকারী আমলার দায়সারা দর্শন শেষে
এখনও তো নিশ্চয়ই নামে
বাংলার গভীর শান্ত সন্ধ্যা প্রত্যেক ঘরে ও গ্রামে

বাংলার নদী-নারী, নারিকেল বনের সারিতে
জেগে আছে আজও আর এক অতন্দ্র প্রহরায়
যেমন আমরা ছিলাম আর এক তন্দ্রাহীন প্রত্যাশায়
আবেগে-স্বামে-কামে-ভালবাসায়-সংগ্রামে
রুস্তিহীন, নিদ্রাহীন সুকঠিন জাগরীর রাতে

এখনও তো কোনও কোনও
শিরায় ও ধমনীতে
মস্তিষ্কের কিছু রক্তকোষে

আনন্দে-বিষাদে, প্রলাপে বিলাপে
কিছুটা বিনা প্রয়োজনে
সেই সব রাত্রির ভাষার সংকেত
কেন যেন ভাসে কিছু মনে

তরঙ্গিত গভীর মন্দিরা বেজে ওঠে রক্তের কলরোলে

অর্থ নেই বর্তমানে নাই বা থাকুক
ভাষা তবু বেঁচে আছে ভবিষ্যৎ ঘিরে -
মগ্নমৈনাক কিংবা চেতনার গাঢ় হিমবাহ
জনতার মগ্নচেতনের অতল গভীরে।

প্রথম রচনা, ফেব্রুয়ারী, ২০০২
সংশোধন মার্চ, ২০০২

আমরা কি হিপোক্রেট?

-কবির নেওয়াজ, ডেনভার, কলোরাডো

প্রতিটি মানুষেরই শিশুকাল বা শৈশব খুবই প্রিয়। আমিও তার ব্যতিক্রম নই। শিশু কালের বন্ধু 'দিলিপ', খেলার সাথী 'বিদ্যা,' আমার স্মৃতিতে এখনও বর্তমান। ঢাকায় একই পাড়ায় বড় হয়েছি, খেলাধুলা করেছি। এমনকি ওদের পূজায় আমারও আনন্দের সীমা ছিলনা। দিলিপের বাবা অর্থাৎ মনি কাকা ঈদের দিন আমাদের বাসায় আসতেন- বিশেষতঃ বিরিয়ানি তাঁর খুব প্রিয় খাবার ছিল। ১৯৬৫ সালে ভারত-পাকিস্তানের যুদ্ধের পর হঠাৎ করেই ওরা একদিন হাওয়া হয়ে গেল।

আমি একসময় ঢাকা রেডিওতে ছোটদের অনুষ্ঠানে অংশগ্রহণ করতাম। যার ফলে রেডিওর বিভিন্ন ব্যক্তিত্ব যেমন, রণেন কুশারী, বড় জামান খান, ছোট জামান খানের প্রতি এক ধরনের আকর্ষণ জন্মেছিল। তেমনি আকাশবাণীর দেবদুলাল বন্দোপাধ্যায়ের প্রতিও জন্মেছিল এক প্রচণ্ড আগ্রহ।

তরঙ্গ শিল্পের এই সব ব্যক্তিত্বকে মনে হত এক একটা ফলক।

স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রামের সময় এই সব তরঙ্গ শিল্পের বেশ কিছু ব্যক্তিত্ব- তাদের চরিত্র বদল করে খানসেনাদের স্বপক্ষে কণ্ঠ মেলাতে থাকেন। ফলে আবার জন্ম নেয় নতুন ব্যক্তিত্বের, তৈরী হয় স্বাধীন বাংলা বেতার।

মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় যখন আমি ট্রেনিং-য়ের জন্য ভারত যাই- তখন অনেক খুঁজেছি আমি দিলিপকে, বিদ্যাকে- কিন্তু পাইনি। যাদের পেয়েছি বা দেখেছি তারা কেউই দিলিপ নয়, বিদ্যা নয়। তারা শুধু হিপোক্রেট - শুধুই হিপোক্রেট। তারা শুধু বংশ বদলের চেষ্টায় রত। কেউ কেউ গলায় পইতা বুলিয়ে ব্রাহ্মণ সেজে বসে আছেন। যেমন দেখছি এই প্রবাসেও- অনেককেই বলতে শুনি জমিদারের বংশের দাবিদার।

মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় বেতারে দেবদুলালের কণ্ঠ শুনেছি। দেখা হয়নি সেই নয়মাসে। ১৯৭২ সালের ১০ই জানুয়ারী পাকিস্তান থেকে মুক্তি পেয়ে যখন শেখ মুজিব আসেন- সেই দিনই দেবদুলাল ঢাকা আসেন। মুজিবের স্বদেশ প্রত্যাবর্তনের ধারাবর্ণনা সরাসরি বেতারে প্রচারের উদ্দেশ্যে। আমি দেবদুলালকে প্রথম দেখি ঢাকা তেঁজগা বিমান বন্দরে। পরিচয় হয়েছিল কয়েকদিন পর ঢাকার পূর্বাণী হোটেলে।

আমার কেন জানি মনে হয় সময় এগিয়ে যাচ্ছে - আমরা দিনে দিনে পিছিয়ে যাচ্ছি শুধুমাত্র এই হিপোক্রেসীর কারণে। সমস্ত পৃথিবী আজ স্বাধীনতার হুমকির সম্মুখীন। সাব-কালচারে পৃথিবী ভরে গেছে।

আমাদের দেশ করাপশনের শেষ সীমায়। রাজনীতির কোন ভারসাম্য নেই। অপর দিকে চলছে ধর্ম ধর্ম কর্ম, মানে হিপোক্রেসি। হিপোক্রেসির ঠেলায়- আজ মুক্তিযুদ্ধের ধ্বজাধারী আর রাজাকাররা একই সঙ্গে রাজনৈতিক সংসার পেতেছে। যখনই রাজনৈতিক বুদ্ধির অভাব দেখা দেয় তখনই গুরু হয় হিন্দু মুসলমানের রায়ট।

আজ বহুদিন পর কেন জানি মনে হয় দেবদুলালরাও হিপোক্রেট ছিলেন। তা না হলে- আজ ওদেশেও কথায় কথায় হিন্দু মুসলমান দাঙ্গা হয় কেন?

মাঝে মাঝে নিজেকেই জিজ্ঞাসা করি - আমি কি হিপোক্রেট? আমরা কি হিপোক্রেট? আর কতকাল আমরা ধর্মের নামে নিজেদেরকে বারবার হত্যা করবো?

‘হিন্দু না ওরা মুসলিম?’ ওই জিজ্ঞাসে কোন্ জন?
কাভারী! বল, ডুবিছে মানুষ, সন্তান মোর মার
- কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম

স্বাধীনতাঃ তোমায় যেথায় যেমন দেখেছি
মোঃ লুৎফর রহমান খন্দকার, ডেনভার, কলোরাডো

(আমার মছয়াকে)

স্বাধীনতা - আমার স্বাধীনতাঃ

তোমায় দেখেছি গ্রীষ্মে -

ঘামঝড়া দুপুরে ক্লান্ত পথিকের দৃষ্টিতে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি বর্ষায় -

উপচে পড়া পদ্মা, মেঘনার স্রোতের কলতানে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি শরতে-

শিশির ভেজা সিন্ধু শিউলি দলে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি হেমন্তে -

কৃষানের দাওয়ায় নবান্নের গানে গানে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি শীতে -

সতেজ সোনালী সূর্যালোকে ।

স্বাধীনতা - আমার স্বাধীনতাঃ

তোমায় দেখেছি শাপলা ফুটা ঝিলের জলে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি সরিষা ফুলে উড়ে বেড়ানো মৌ-গুঞ্জে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি আম বাগানের মাতাল করা গন্ধে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি রজনীগন্ধার শিশির সিন্ধু ডগায় ।

স্বাধীনতা - আমার স্বাধীনতাঃ

তোমায় দেখেছি দিশেহারা নাবিকের তীরে ফেরার স্বপ্নের মাঝে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি রাতের শেষ প্রহরের নিস্তর ক্রতায় ।

তোমায় দেখেছি তমাল তলায় বিরহিনী চখার প্রতিখায় ।

তোমায় দেখেছি তন্দ্রাহীন রাত্রির নিঃসীম নিঃসংগুতায় ।

তোমায় দেখেছি বৃষ্টি ভেজা মাটির গন্ধে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি জেলেদের জালে আটকেপড়া ইলিশের ঝাকে ।

স্বাধীনতা - আমার স্বাধীনতাঃ

তোমায় দেখেছি খেটে খাওয়া মানুষের জীর্ণদেহে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি পুষ্টিহীনতায় বেড়ে উঠা

কিশোরীর ভাবনাহীন দৃষ্টিতে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি জীবনের কত প্রতিঘাতে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি রাজপথে গণ মানুষের মিছিলে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি শিশুর পবিত্র হাসিতে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি নব বধুর লাজনন্দ ঘোমটার আড়ালে ।

তোমায় দেখেছি মায়ের প্রতিদিনের প্রার্থনার মাঝে ।

পরাজিততার জিঞ্জীর ভেঙ্গে আশ্রয়গিরির লাভার মত

বেরিয়ে আসা -----

হে স্বাধীনতা - তোমায় যেথায় যেমন দেখেছি ।

০৩- ২১- ১৯৯৮

ডাল পুরাণ

-মোহাম্মদ ইরফান, ডেনভার, কলোরাডো

ডাল ছাড়া আমার ভাত রোচে না। মশুর, মুগ কিংবা কপাল ভাল হলে মাসকলাই- ডালমাখা ভাতে কাঁচামরিচ টিপে খাবার মজাটাই আলাদা। আমি কবির ভাইয়ের কাজটা পেলে 'চুন ছাড়া পান খাওয়া কী করে চলে' গানটার একটা প্যারডি আমাদের শিল্পীদের গাইতে দিতাম -

‘ডাল ছাড়া ভাত খাওয়া কী করে হবে?’

লিখতে বসে এহেন প্রিয় ডালের কথা মনে পড়ে যাওয়ায় খুব একটা বিস্মিত হইনি, তবে একটা সমস্যায় পড়ে গেছি। প্রকাশনার বিষয়বস্তু স্বাধীনতা- আর আমার পছন্দ ডাল। কি করে এ দুয়ের মাঝে যোগসূত্র খুঁজে পাই। অনেক ভেবেও যখন কোন কিছু পাওয়া যাচ্ছে না তখন নিজেকে সেই হতভাগ্য পরীক্ষার্থীর মত মনে হল- যে শিখে গিয়েছে ‘নৌকা ভ্রমণ’ আর পরীক্ষায় এসেছে ‘গরু’ রচনা। প্রত্যুৎপন্নমতি পরীক্ষার্থী ত্বরিত গতিতে তার রচনা-র গরুকে কিঞ্চিৎ ঘাস খাইয়ে গোসলের জন্য নদীতে নামিয়ে দেয়। নদী দিয়ে ঠিক তখনই যাচ্ছিল একটা ছই দেয়া নৌকা। তার পরের বর্ণনা নিশ্চয়ই পাঠকের জানা।

প্রিয় পাঠক আমার আন্তরিক ইচ্ছা ‘বাঙ্গালীর জীবনে ডালের প্রভাব’ নিয়ে গবেষণা (গো তুমি এসোনা)- ধর্মী কিছু লিখি। এ লেখাটিকে যদি কারও গরুর পিঠে চড়ে নৌকা ভ্রমণ মনে হয়ে থাকে তবে নিজ গুনে এ অধমকে ক্ষমা করবেন।

প্রথমেই কিছু 'Literature Review' করা যাক। বাংলা সাহিত্যে ডালের ব্যবহার নিয়ে কোন অনুসন্ধান ধর্মী

প্রতিবেদন এ পর্যন্ত আমার চোখে পড়েনি। তবে কবি এ,জেড,এম, ওবায়দুল্লা খানের কবিতায় খোকার জন্য মায়ের ডালের বড়ি শুকিয়ে রাখার সেই বিখ্যাত লাইন আমার মত নিশ্চয়ই আপনাদের সবারও প্রিয়। বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় জীবনে আর একটি গান আমার মত গরীব ছাত্রদের কাছে খুবই জনপ্রিয় ছিল-

‘হায় নিঠুর পরিবেশ

হলের ডাইলে জীবন শেষ’

এবারে আসা যাক ডালের রাজনৈতিক ব্যবহারে। দেশের বর্তমান প্রধানমন্ত্রির প্রাক্তন রাজত্বকালের ‘ডাল-ভাত’ নীতির পুনরাবৃত্তি এবারে এখনও শোনা যায়নি। তবে ঢাকা শহরের বিভিন্ন গলি-ঘুপচির ‘ডাইল’ ব্যবসায়ীদের বিরুদ্ধে সরকারের স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রির জেহাদ ঘোষণায় ‘ডু-পুত্র’দের বাবা-মায়েরা খুবই আশাবাদী।

ডালের পুষ্টিগুণ নিয়ে দুটো কথা লিখে এবেলা বিদায় নিতে চাই। ছোটকালে স্বাস্থ্যশিক্ষায় পড়েছিলাম ডাল গরীবের প্রোটিন। আমাদের দেশে ধনী-গরীব নির্বিশেষে (ডাইল কিংবা) ডালের গুরুত্ব ও ব্যবহার অপরিসীম। সবশেষে - ডাল-ভাত যে রুটি-মাংসের চেয়েও অনেক বেশি শক্তি দেয় তার সবচেয়ে বড় প্রমাণ বোধ করি একাত্তরের যুদ্ধ। পাঠক, গরু কি পানিতে নেমেছে, কিংবা নদীর কিনারায়?

“বাংলাদেশের কোনো Data-য় আমার খুব একটা বিশ্বাস নেই”

নিয়াম খান, বোল্ডার, কলোরাডো

মি. ক: আপনার সাথে মনে হয় আমার আগে দেখা হয়নি। আমি ‘ক’।

মি. খ: আমি ‘খ’।

ক: আপনি এখানে কোথায় কাজ করেন।

খ: University of Colorado-Boulder এ Bangladesh Research Group নামে একটা Research Group আছে। আমি সে Group এর একজন member হিসাবে কাজ করি। আমরা মূলত বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যা সমস্যা, স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যা এবং মেয়েদের আর্থ-সামাজিক অবস্থা ইত্যাদি নিয়ে কাজ করি।

ক: ভালই হল আপনার সাথে পরিচয় হয়ে। আচ্ছা আমাকে বলেন তো, গত ২০ বছরে বাংলাদেশের জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রনের জন্য সরকার এবং NGO যে এত টাকা পয়সা খরচ করেছে এবং শ্রম দিয়েছে এতে কি কোন লাভ হয়েছে? জনসংখ্যা তো সমানেই বেড়ে চলেছে। আজকাল তো ঢাকায় রাস্তা-ঘাটে মানুষের ভীড়ে হটাই যায় না।

খ: দেখেন, স্বাধীনতার পর বাংলাদেশ যে সব বিষয়ে বিশেষ সাফল্য অর্জন করেছে, জন্ম হার হ্রাস তার মধ্যে অন্যতম। ১৯৭০ সালের দিকে এদেশে মহিলা (১৫-৪৫ বয়সী) প্রতি গড় সন্তানের সংখ্যা ছিল ৭। ১৯৯৬ এর দিকে তা কমে দাড়িয়েছে ৩.২। বলা হয় এত অল্প সময়ে বিশ্বের খুব কম দেশই এই সাফল্য অর্জন করতে পেরেছে। বিশেষ করে এ পর্যন্ত কোন মুসলিম দেশ এত সাফল্য দেখাতে পারেনি। বিশ্বের এমন কোন university নেই যেখানে জনসংখ্যা সমস্যার উপর course পড়ানো হয়, অথচ বাংলাদেশের এই সাফল্যের উপর লিখিত গবেষণা পত্র পড়ানো হয় না।

ভারত ১৯৫৬ সালে তার পরিবার পরিকল্পনা program শুরু করে, আর বাংলাদেশ শুরু করে ৮০ দশকের প্রথম দিকে। কিন্তু এব্যাপারে আমাদের সাফল্য কোন কোন ক্ষেত্রে ভারতের চেয়ে বেশি। বাংলাদেশ যেমন ‘micro credit’ এর মডেল বিভিন্ন দেশে রপ্তানী করে, ঠিক তেমনি জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রনের ক্ষেত্রে বাংলাদেশের মডেল বিভিন্ন উন্নয়নশীল দেশে adopt করা হচ্ছে।

ক: দেখেন আমি বাংলাদেশের কোন data বিশ্বাস করিনা। ওগুলো সব বানানো।

খ: আমি অস্বীকার করিনা আমাদের দেশের data উন্নত দেশগুলোর তুলনায় ভাল না। বাংলাদেশে যে জন্মহার কমেছে তা বুঝার জন্য কিন্তু data র দরকার হয় না। আমাকে দুটি প্রশ্নের জবাব দেন: আপনারা ক’জন ভাইবোন এবং আপনার ছেলেমেয়ে ক’জন।

ক: আমরা সব ভাইবোন মিলে ৯ জন। আর আমার বাচ্চা ৩ জন।

খ: আপনার মায়ের ছেলেমেয়ের সংখ্যা হচ্ছে ৯ আর আপনার ছেলেমেয়ের সংখ্যা হচ্ছে ৩। একটু চিন্তা করেন এর মানে কি দাড়াচ্ছে। জন্মহার হ্রাস।

ক: বুঝলাম, কিন্তু আমাদের দেশে শুধুমাত্র শিক্ষিত লোকেরাই জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রন করে এবং তাদের সংখ্যা খুবই নগণ্য।

খ: আপনি তো আবার data বিশ্বাস করেননা। সব গবেষণার একই মতামত: বাংলাদেশে আর্থ-সামাজিক অবস্থা নির্বিশেষে সবাই জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রন করছে, যদিও বিভিন্ন কারণে।

ক: OK, আপাতত আপনার যুক্তি মেনে নিলাম, বাংলাদেশ-এ জন্মহার কমেছে। কিন্তু মানুষ যে দিন দিন বাড়ছে তার ব্যাখ্যা কি?

খ: আপনি যখন ৭০ মাইল speed এ গাড়ি চালান এবং হঠাৎ brake করেন তখন গাড়ি সংগে সংগে থামে না, বেশ কিছুদূর সামনে গিয়ে তারপর থামে। একই ব্যপার জনসংখ্যার ক্ষেত্রেও প্রযোজ্য-যদিও এক্ষেত্রে ব্যপারটা আরও complicated। জনসংখ্যার ক্ষেত্রে, ব্যাপক জন্মহার নিয়ন্ত্রন শুরু করার কত বছর পর কোন দেশের জনসংখ্যা আর বাড়বে না, সেটা মূলত দুটো বিষয়ের উপর নির্ভর করে: ঐ দেশের জনসংখ্যার বয়স কাঠামো (অর্থাৎ ০-১৪, ১৫-২৯ ইত্যাদি বয়সী লোকের percentage কত) এবং মৃত্যু হারের (বিশেষত: শিশু মৃত্যু হারের) উপর। তুলনামূলকভাবে বিভিন্ন দেশের জনসংখ্যার বয়স কাঠামো এবং মৃত্যু হারের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে যে দেশে কমবয়সী লোকের percentage বেশি এবং/অথবা মৃত্যু হার কম সে দেশে জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধি বন্ধ হতে বেশি সময় লাগবে।

আমাদের দেশে ব্যাপকভাবে জন্মহার কমার পরও কেন জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধি অচিরে রোধ হবে না তার কারণ হিসাবে মোটামুটিভাবে দু’টা বিষয় উল্লেখ করা যায়:

১। মৃত্যুহার হ্রাস, বিশেষ করে ৫ বছরের কম বয়েসি বাচ্চাদের মৃত্যু হার গত ২০ বছরে উল্লেখযোগ্যভাবে কমেছে। ১৯৭০ সালে যত শিশু জন্ম (জীবিত জন্ম) নিয়েছে তার মধ্যে প্রতি হাজারে ১৪০ জন এক বছর বয়স পুরো হবার আগেই মারা গেছে। বর্তমানে এই হার হচ্ছে ৮০। একইভাবে ১৯৭০ সালে যে সমস্ত শিশু ১ বছর পর্যন্ত বেচেছে, তাদের মধ্যে প্রতি হাজারে ২৬ জন ৫ বছর বয়স পুরো হবার আগেই মারা গেছে।

কিন্তু বর্তমানে এক্ষেত্রে মৃত্যু হার হচ্ছে ১২। গত ৩০ বছরে সব বয়স মিলে মোট মৃত্যু হার কমেছে প্রায় ৫০%। ২০/৩০/৪০ শতকের দিকে আমাদের দেশে উচ্চ জন্মহার সত্ত্বেও জনসংখ্যা না বাড়ার প্রধান কারণ হচ্ছে সে সময় মহামারি/দূর্ভিক্ষ/প্রাকৃতিক দুর্যোগ ইত্যাদির কারণে প্রতিবছর লাখ লাখ মানুষ মারা যেত।

২। দীর্ঘকাল যাবত উচ্চ জন্মহার এবং ঞ্ফমহ্রাসমান মৃত্যুহারের কারণে আমাদের দেশে কম বয়েসি জনসংখ্যার পরিমান অনেক বেশি হয়ে গেছে। এর মানে হচ্ছে সন্তান জন্মদানে সক্ষম দম্পতির সংখ্যা ঞ্ফমশ বেড়েছে এবং বাড়বে। বাংলাদেশের জনসংখ্যার বর্তমান ও ভবিষ্যত পরিমান নির্ধারনে এর তাৎপর্য সুদূর প্রসারী।

একটা সহজ উদাহরন দিলে এর ভূমিকা ও গুরুত্ব কিছুটা বুঝা যাবে। ধরা যাক ১৯৫০ সালে ১০০০ মেয়ে শিশু জন্ম নিল। তার মধ্যে ১৮০ জন (১৮%) মারা গেল ১৫ বছর বয়স পুরো হবার আগে (ঐ সময়ের বয়স অনুযায়ী মৃত্যু হারের ভিত্তিতে)। বাকি ৮২০ জনের সবাই ১৯৬৫ সালে বিয়ে করলো এবং গড়ে ৭ জন সন্তান জন্ম দিল (ঐ সময়ের মহিলা প্রতি গড় সন্তানের ভিত্তিতে)। তাদের মোট সন্তানের সংখ্যা দাড়াচ্ছে (৮২০*৭=) ৫৭৪০ জন। এর মধ্যে ২৮০০ জন হচ্ছে মেয়ে সন্তান। এই ২৮০০ জনের মধ্যে ২৫২ জন (৯%) ১৫ বছর বয়স পুরো হবার আগে মারা যায় (ঐ সময়ের বয়স অনুযায়ী মৃত্যু হারের ভিত্তিতে)। বাকি ২৫৪৮ জনের সবাই ১৯৮০ সালে বিয়ে করলো এবং বর্তমান জন্মহারের ধারানুযায়ী আশা করা যায় এই মহিলারা গড়ে ৩.২ জন সন্তানের জন্ম দিবে। তাদের মোট সন্তানের সংখ্যা তাইলে হচ্ছে (২৫৪৮*৩.২=) ৮১৫৪ জন। এই ব্যাখ্যা থেকে মোটামুটি ধারণা করা যায় কিভাবে এবং কেন জন্মহার কমার পরও আমাদের জনসংখ্যা বেড়ে চলেছে।

ক: Huh! জনসংখ্যার মারপ্যাচ দেখছি বেশ

complicated। তাইলে আপনি কি বলতে চাচ্ছেন এত কিছু পরও আমাদের জনসংখ্যা বাড়তেই থাকবে?

খ: জি। আমাদের জনসংখ্যা আর বাড়তো না যদি প্রতি বছর যত শিশু জন্ম নিচ্ছে তার সংখ্যা আর যত লোক মারা যাচ্ছে তার সংখ্যা সমান হত। কিন্তু বর্তমানে আমাদের দেশে প্রতি বছর প্রতিহাজারে জন্ম নিচ্ছে ৩০ জন আর মারা যাচ্ছে ৯ জন। এই জন্মহার কমাতে হলে একজন মহিলার গড় সন্তানের সংখ্যা অবশ্যই ৩.২ এর নীচে নামাতে হবে। কিন্তু মুশকিল হলো, মহিলা প্রতি গড় সন্তানের সংখ্যা ১৯৭০ থেকে ১৯৯৬ সালে ৭ থেকে ৩.২ এ নামার পর স্থির হয়ে আছে। এখন সংশ্লিষ্ট সকল মহলের প্রচেষ্টা হচ্ছে কিভাবে দম্পতিদের আরও কম সন্তান গ্রহনের জন্য উদ্বুদ্ধ করা যায়।

ক: আমাদের দেশের জন্ম এবং মৃত্যু হার যদি বর্তমান পর্যায়ে থেমে থাকে তাইলে আপনাদের হিসাব অনুযায়ী আমাদের দেশের জনসংখ্যা ২০৫০ সালে কততে গিয়ে দাড়াবে।

খ: আমাদের দেশের বর্তমান জনসংখ্যা প্রায় ১৩১ মিলিয়ন। জাতিসংঘের হিসাব অনুযায়ী বর্তমান জন্ম এবং মৃত্যু হার বজায় থাকলে আমাদের জনসংখ্যা ২০৫০ সালে দাড়াবে ৩৫৩ মিলিয়নে এবং ২০৩০ সালে হবে ২৪০ মিলিয়ন। আর যদি কয়েক বছরের মধ্যে আমরা মহিলা প্রতি গড় সন্তানের সংখ্যা ১.৫ এ নিয়ে আসতে পারি তবে ২০৩০ সালে আমাদের জনসংখ্যা দাড়াবে ১৬৭ মিলিয়নে, ২০৪০ সালে ১৭১ মিলিয়নে এবং ২০৫০ সালে কিছুটা কমে ১৭০ মিলিয়নে। এর পর থেকে জনসংখ্যা কমা শুরু করবে। বিপর্যয় এড়াতে হলে আমাদের আরো ব্যপকভাবে জন্মহার কমানো ছাড়া আর গতি নাই।

ক: দেখেন কিছু মনে করবেন না, আপনাদের এসব research এর সাথে আমাদের বাস্তবতার প্রায়শই তেমন মিল থাকে না। তা ছাড়া বাংলাদেশের কোনো data-য় আমার খুব একটা বিশ্বাস নাই।

খ: তাইলে এ বিষয় বাদ দেন। বলেন বাংলাদেশের সার্বিক পরিস্থিতি আপনার কাছে কি মনে হয়।

ক: খুবই খারাপ। আজকের ইত্তেফাকে দেখলাম দেশে crime rate অণেক বেড়ে গেছে।

খ: একটু আগে না বলেন আপনি বাংলাদেশের কোন data-য় বিশ্বাস করেন না.....

Bangladesh: A Case For Secularism

Abul Kalam, Denver, Colorado

Creation of Bangladesh confirms, in general, my belief that nationhood cannot be affirmed based on religion alone. There are factors that become just as relevant, such as, cultural and linguistic affinity, economic and social justice, and ideals of democracy. Those were the reasons that had initiated the Bangladesh independence movement and after much bloody struggle and enormous sacrifice, Bangladesh won her independence. The flag of the new nation clearly indicates its break away from the crescent and the star, the traditional symbol that was also predominantly a religious symbol, perhaps, a leftover legacy from the former Turkish Empire. Clearly, it indicates a shift in national policy, one from religious to secular.

The subcontinent of India where Bangladesh is located had the legacy of inheriting the British system of jurisprudence that included some of the precious legal gems upheld by the foremost democratic nations of the world, such as the Great Britain or the United States of America. Bengalis have traditionally upheld these nations as models of democracy with guarantees of “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness”; in these democracies, a person is presumed innocent until found guilty with a right to a due process of the law; individuals are endowed with many inalienable rights irrespective of religious or political affiliations, gender, or race. These rights include: freedom of speech, freedom of press, religious freedom, and right to assembly. These rights have led to an increased need for diversity in work places, pluralism in political and social expressions, and most important of all, it established a clear separation of church and state. It is true that the

religious right in the United States had attempted to enforce their personal religious beliefs such as the public prayer onto populace, but it had generally failed. Many public watchdogs in America, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), have made sure that this could not happen.

Bangladesh has embraced these secular ideals of a democracy. By accepting these ideals, Bengalis have agreed that they are not just one ethnic or religious group but also all people who are citizens of Bangladesh. It should be the goal of all Bengalis to see that social justice is served by providing equal opportunity to all people irrespective of race, gender, or creed. With this promise, the society opens doors to personal freedom such that opinions are voiced and people have freedom of choices. It also creates a society where the worth of every individual is recognized. In such a society, free enterprise and fair competition can only thrive for the greater good of all people.

I shall argue that in nationhood, secular values are a greater value, since it gives recognition to the self-worth of every individual and since it endows every individual with inalienable civil rights. In today’s world, we have become a global village. The ideal of globalization is only a doorstep away. We must think of ourselves as a world community, opening our doors to all people. With such ideals, Bangladesh cannot be a weak nation but only a stronger nation, whose strength will come from its recognition of values that are greater and universal, values that are more in tune with our times.

Birth of a Nation

Hasan Ahmad, Longmont, Colorado

Bangladesh is one of the world's youngest nations and perhaps the first country following World War II to achieve its independence as a consequence of a civil war. Born in the fire of a continuous struggle to establish national identity, language and culture, it opted for a secular national state that permitted its population to fully express a significantly ethnic and cultural homogeneity. As the name Bangladesh implies, the country is a land of the Bengali speaking people where the language itself created the community, gave it aspects of solidarity and uniqueness, and focused the sentiment of the people. The culture and heritage of the people of the country are also very rich and unique, and quite a few of its children achieved wide acclaim, particularly in the realms of literature, poetry, science, social science and technology. However, the country, as it stands now, is overpopulated and impoverished, and the journey to economic stability has been slowed again and again by political turmoil. Natural calamities, including cyclones and torrential floods, and occasional sporadic disruption of law and order in some isolated incidents also contribute to the political and economic instability of the country. Nevertheless, the people of Bangladesh are enormously proud of their heritage, and the struggles have not dampened their spirits at all. Instead they have worked hard to enrich their culture and to instill a strong national identity.

Today, Bangladesh and its people across the world are celebrating the 31st anniversary of its independence. Although very young as a free nation, its culture and civilization go much further back in history, spanning over 3000 years. Archeological findings suggest that settlement and urban life in this neighborhood started in Mohenjodaro and Harappa in the Western and Central regions of India during or before the time of Gautama Buddha in the 6th century B.C., and later spread to Bengal. This is

what one would expect, as the low-lying plains of Bengal with their high rainfall and great fertility must originally have consisted of forests and marshes. However, evidence for the extension of Harappan culture into the western Ganges basin is only now beginning to emerge. According to the recorded history though, an Austro-Asian race of people, including the Veddas, was the first inhabitants of the region in the prehistoric times. Then came settlements by the Dravidians, Aryans, and Mongolians. The earliest reference to the areas in Bangladesh can be found in the ancient texts of the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. These references are, however, mythological rather than historical and reliable accounts became available only early in the fourth century B.C. It was around that time that the historians of Alexander the Great recorded accounts of a powerful civilization inhabiting the lower Ganges region, the Gandaridai. Alexander supposedly decided not to undertake an expedition against the Gandaridai after being deterred by the multitude of their elephants. From the fourth century to the second century B.C., the region was ruled by the Maruyan dynasty, the most renowned king being their last emperor Ashoka, who embraced a Buddhist doctrine of non-violence. The next recorded historic event for this region is probably the rise of the Gupta Empire in the fourth century A.D. During this period, the Bengal region was renowned for its artistic developments that influenced the people of the whole Southeast Asia. The Guptas ruled the region until their collapse in the seventh century and the rise of the first independent king of Bengal, Shashanka. Historians refer to this seventh century as the time when the Bengali language started to assume a distinct form. This is also the time when Buddhism started flourishing in Bengal.

In the eighth century, following a century of chaos in Bengal, a warrior named Gopala was elected to the throne in an attempt to

impose some semblance of order. Gopala reigned from 750 to 770 and began the Pala dynasty that remained in power for over four centuries. This dynasty brought a long period of prosperity and political stability to this region. Its patronage nurtured the arts and sheltered the remnants of Buddhists in the Indian subcontinent where Hinduism was becoming a powerful force. The Palas were thus the last powerful Buddhist monarchs on the subcontinent. They also established diplomatic relations with the kingdom of Srivijaya, which controlled much of the Indonesian archipelago. The Palas were succeeded by the Sena dynasty during which Hinduism supplanted Buddhism. The Senas did not reign for long, however, as in the 13th century Muslim invaders from Central Asia overthrew the Sena dynasty and converted most of the population to Islam. Waves of Turks, Arabs, Afghans, Persians and other Muslims began migrating to Bengal, and during this period, architecture achieved its golden age. With the exception of a few independent rulers like the Hussain Shahi and the Ilyas Shahi dynasties, most of the time, the region was ruled on behalf of the Imperial seat in other parts of India, primarily Delhi. In 1556, Akbar acceded to the throne of the Moghul Empire and began enlarging its border making Bengal a province of the empire in 1576. During this Moghul period, the European traders – first the Portuguese, later the Dutch and British – began arriving in this region. By 1616 the Portuguese established a post in Dhaka. After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, the dynasty of the Moghul Empire started to decline and the leadership of the entire region went through a serious turmoil. In the chaos that followed, British traders began to take over the region and the Indian subcontinent. Between 1703 and 1757, the people of Bengal, however, witnessed some great rulers like Murshid Quli Khan, Shuja Uddin, Sarfaraz Khan, Alivardi Khan and Siraj-ud-Dowla. In 1757, the British Force defeated the last independent Muslim ruler of Bengal, Nawab Siraj-ud-Dowla, in the battle of Plassey

and eventually took control of the overall region. Although they allowed a few rulers like Mir Jafar, Mir Qasim, Najim ud-Dowla and Saif Ud-Dowla, to rule Bengal on their behalf between the periods of 1757 to 1770, the British colonialists continually strengthened their administrative control over East India, absorbing the remaining portion of Bengal and the Ganges River Valley. By 1859 the British had domination of India from the Indus in the west to Bengal in the east. In 1905, Bengal was divided into two separate provinces, West and East Bengal. However, vociferous protests among the population of the region eventually led to its reunification. Afterwards, the Muslim and Hindu factions of India, weary of being subordinate to the British, began to press greater independence from the British government.

The Hindu Indian National Congress primarily led the movement for independence. The Muslim faction, however, became concerned about Hindu domination and in 1906 they formed the All-India Muslim League. The next two decades were fraught with bitter conflicts between the Hindu and Muslim communities. In the 1930s the idea of a separate Muslim state arose as the solution to the conflict. Finally, after several years of debate, in 1947 India was given independence and Pakistan was created as a country specifically dedicated to the religious ideals of Islam. Bengal was divided into West Bengal and East Bengal, where West Bengal became part of the new India and East Bengal was aligned with Pakistan. However, almost from the moment Pakistan was formed, people in the East realized that the nationalistic forces are stronger than those promoting Islamic ideology. This feeling and the fact that the structure of Pakistan left its political center, and thus its ruling elite, in the West, while the majority of the population lived in the East, led to continuous conflicts and eventually gave birth to Bangladesh.

The first major difficulty between the two regions of Pakistan began over the issue of language, when it was declared in 1948 that

Urdu must become the official language of Pakistan. Although only little over 3% of the population spoke Urdu, as opposed to over 56% who spoke Bengali, the choice of Urdu as the national language was explained by suggesting that it had a closer affinity to Arabic and Persian. Since Pakistan existed to accommodate Muslims, Urdu was considered to be the appropriate choice of language. Coincidentally, Urdu was spoken by most of the politicians at the time of its independence from the British rule and was regarded as the elite language of Pakistan. On the other hand, there was also a strong feeling, particularly in the East, that the politicians were not satisfactorily representing all of Pakistan, but were only protecting their own interests. The common people of the East thus started expressing their sentiments through the Bangla Language Movement. The first wave of the movement started with the publication of the booklet titled *State Language of Pakistan: Bengali or Urdu*, by the Tamuddin Majlish on September 15, 1947. The book demanded that Bengali be one of the state languages of Pakistan. Later the Majlish convened a meeting to discuss the State Language issue and the supporters and sympathizers formed a political party, the Khilafate-Rabbani. In November 1947, representatives from the East attending an educational conference in Karachi, opposed Urdu as being the only National Language. On February 23, 1948, the Bengali opposition member Dharendra Nath Dutta moved a resolution in the Assembly to recognize Bengali as a state language along with Urdu and English. The resolution was, however, opposed by Prime Minister Liakat Ali together with the non-Bengali members and unfortunately also by Khawaja Nazimuddin, who was representing the interests of people from the-then East Pakistan. Later, D. N. Dutta tried with a few amendments to the original proposal, but all of his efforts proved futile. Nevertheless, the demand gathered spontaneous support of the Bengali speaking community, especially the East Pakistan Student League, who became the forerunner of several

street agitations and demonstration. In March of 1948, the movement gained considerable momentum with the formation of the Students Committee of Action which negotiated a deal with the provincial government to adopt a resolution for making Bengali the official language of East Pakistan and also to recommend to the Central government that Bengali be made one of the state languages. However, on March 21, the founder and the Governor General of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared that while Bengali could be the Provincial Language, Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan. This remark evoked an angry protest from the Bengali youth who raised protest slogans and many students of Dhaka University, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was placed under detention. Jinnah tried to persuade the student representatives of the Committee of Action to accept the concept of one National language, but failed to convince them.

The second wave of the Bengali Language Movement sparked off on January 26, 1952 as a result of the recommendation of the Basic Principles Committee of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan that Urdu should be the only state Language. Later in a public meeting at the Dhaka Paltan Maidan, Prime Minister Nazimuddin declared that Urdu alone would be the state language of Pakistan. These events raised serious protests from the students of Dhaka University and on January 28, 1952, they labeled the Prime Minister and the Provincial Ministers as the stooges of West Pakistan. On the 30th of January, Mowlana Bhashani and other leaders of the Awami League met secretly with the leaders of a number of Communist Front and other organizations, and agreed that the students alone couldn't successfully carry out by Language Movement. To mobilize full political and student support, they decided that Awami League should take the leadership of the movement. Based on this decision, an all-party convention was organized in Dhaka on January 31, 1952 and was attended by a number of

prominent leaders. As a result of the convention, a broad based All Party Committee of Action (APCA) was constituted with Kazi Golam Mahboob as the Convener and Moulana Bhashani as the Chairman. APCA also included two representatives from each of the Awami League, Students League, Youth League, Khilafate-Rabbani Party and the Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action. The Committee organized its first protest meeting in Dhaka on February 3, 1952 and called a general strike on February 21, when the East Bengal Assembly was due to meet for its budget session. In order to resist the movement, on the eve of the general strike, the government promulgated an order under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code prohibiting processions and meetings in Dhaka City. Despite the warning, the Committee went ahead with their program and held a meeting at noon of February 21, 1952 at Dhaka University campus. The students then brought out a procession and decided to stage a demonstration in front of the Provincial Assembly. At about 4 PM, while the students were struggling against the tear gas shells from the police, the police opened fire in front of the Medical College Hostels killing five persons – Mohammad Salauddin, Abdul Jabbar, Abul Barkat, Rafiquddin Ahmed and Abdus Salam. The news of the killing spread like wildfire throughout the city and people rushed in thousands towards the Medical College premises. Inside the Assembly, six opposition members pressed for the adjournment of the house and demanded an inquiry into the incidents. But the Chief Minister Nurul Amin urged the house to proceed with the planned agenda and the opposition members of the Assembly walked out in protest.

The very next day was marked by angry protests and processions by people from all works of life. Police again opened fire killing four people as the angry mob burnt the offices of a pro-government newspaper. As the situation deteriorated, the government also called in the Army. At the same time, the Chief Minister

moved a motion recommending to the Constituent Assembly that Bengali should be one of the state languages of Pakistan. For the first time a number of Muslim members voted in favor of the amendments moved by the opposition and the motion was passed unanimously. On the other hand, a complete general strike was observed on February 23, 1952, despite the resolution by the Provincial Assembly. To commemorate the supreme sacrifice of the students and the general population, the students of Medical College erected a Shahid Minar overnight at the place where Barkat was shot. On February 24, with an order from the government to bring the situation under control within 48 hours, the police and the army arrested almost all the student and political leaders associated with the Language Movement. As a result, Dhaka University was closed sine die on February 25, 1952. The ultimate prize of the movement came on May 7, 1954 when the Government of Pakistan recognized Bangla as a state language. However, the people of Bangladesh didn't stop there. At their persistence, on November 19, 1999, UNESCO declared 21st February as the International Mother Language Day to be celebrated throughout the world.

The Language Movement indeed added a new dimension to politics in Pakistan. It left deep impression on the minds of the younger generation of Bangladesh and imbued them with the spirit of Bengali nationalism. It is quite obvious that the bloodshed in 1952 ultimately bleed Pakistan to death. As an immediate affect, however, it prepared the ground for the complete routing of the Muslim League in the 1954 elections by a United Front of opposition political parties, on a nationalistic spirit of cultural, political and economic autonomy for East Bengal. The government of United Front was, however, dismissed by the central government on May 30, 1954. Thus, the ethnic and racial discrimination against Bangalees went along with the limitation of their political rights. In fact, the East region was exploited and

colonized from the very beginning; the Bangali bourgeoisie was the smaller shareholder of the Pakistani ruling structure. Its role was much weaker than the West Pakistani sections of industrial, mercantile, military and civilian bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the West Pakistani ruling elites continued the economic colonization and the expropriation of wealth of East Bengal. While East Bengal was earning a larger share of Pakistan's exports, West Pakistan had the greater share in imports of consumer goods, industrial machineries and raw materials. The inter-wing trade policy was designed to allow the West Pakistani manufacturing sector to dispose its commodities in East Bengal at a price higher than the world market. In spite of the rhetoric of the National Unity, the export earnings of East Bengal were being used to finance the development of the commercial city Karachi and dominant province Punjab.

The nationalist struggle for Bagalees climaxed following the 1970 election, when the Awami League with their leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a triumphant electoral victory because the party reflected the nationalist inspiration. But the election result, which gave Awami League the reign of the central government, was ignored and on the 26th of March 1971, Pakistani soldiers attacked the civilians of Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh causing the greatest massacre in modern history. The crackdown was intended to demolish Bangalee nationalism by inflicting cruelty and to prevent the Bangalees to exercise their right of self-determination. The military attack, however, transformed the movement for attaining political self-rule into a national struggle for independence, and millions of Bangladeshis, irrespective of their political affiliation, religious preference or class background, joined the struggle. Nearly 3 million people lost their lives in this War of Independence and over 10 million people crossed over the border to neighboring India to save their lives. With considerable help from India, the people of Bangladesh mounted one of the most effective guerrilla wars of

modern times and finally the nine-month long War of Independence came to an end on 16th December 1971. The stamp of Pakistan was thus erased from this region and the new nation Bangladesh was born with a renewed national identity, yet with a very deep-rooted heritage.

It is quite obvious from the above that the history of Bangladesh portrays a picture of continuous struggle for its people. Although the region has been very rich in its cultural identity and the citizens have a very high nationalistic feeling, the search for its political and economic stability seems to be not over yet. Within the last 31 years of independence, the country has quite often demonstrated that the politics revolves around personalities, not ideas or institution. We can only hope that the people can overcome these adversities and raise the interests of the common people above their own. Fortunately, there have been a great deal of technological and infra-structural developments lately and democracy has been prevailing for quite a while. Recent socio-economic data also indicates that the overall condition of the general mass is improving. If Bangladesh continues to progress at least at the current rate, then it won't be very long before we can proudly say that the dreams of our ancestors have been fulfilled.

Information for this article has been collected mostly from the Internet. Some of the sites include: Virtual Bangladesh (www.virtualbangladesh.com), Geocities (www.geocities.com/bcahoon.geo/Bangladesh.html), www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2999/history.html), Meet Bangladesh (www.bol-online.com), and Sankalpa (sankalpa.tripod.com/roots/s1bengal.html).

My Memory of the Events Leading to Our War of Independence in 1971

M. A. Salam, Erie, Colorado

It was the end of February 1971. For those of us who were studying at Dhaka University and appearing at B.Sc (Hons.) final examination, it felt like we were almost at the end of the tunnel and about to see the daylight. In other words, our exam was almost over. All of us in the Chemistry Department were extremely pleased that all of our exams, both theoretical and practical, were over. In other departments, students were able to finish the theoretical exam(s) but not the practical ones.

Why were these exams so important? To give you the background, the then Pakistan, under the military leadership of General Yahia Khan held a general election based on the adult franchise just few months ago, and Awami League under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won absolute majority in that election. Since Awami League was fighting for Bangalees with Six-Point Plan for some time with the Pakistani military rulers, they could not accept the victory of the Awami League. Therefore, they resorted to delaying tactics to strengthen their military deployment. As I said earlier, Awami League got absolute majority over all political parties of Pakistan; and Sheikh Saheb's main rival was Zulfikur Ali Bhutto from the Peoples Party of mainly West Pakistan. Bhutto never wanted Sheikh Saheb to be the Prime Minister of Pakistan. So the military rulers in conjunction with Bhutto called a round table conference in West Pakistan while they unleashed their military on unarmed demonstrations throughout East Pakistan. Obviously, Sheikh Saheb could not agree to go to the round table conference in West Pakistan. Then they declared that the National Assembly session would be in West Pakistan. Sheikh Saheb as usual decided not to go to West Pakistan (why he and all other Bangalee elected MP's as the majority block, would go all the way to West Pakistan?).

At this decision, Bhutto started threatening elected members from West Pakistan, specially

the members from the minority parties like Wali-NAP, Muslim League and others, saying if they go to East Pakistan and return, it will be a slaughterhouse. On the other hand, throughout East Pakistan everybody started some sort of non-cooperation movement with the military government. General Yahia Khan delivered a nationwide speech blaming Sheikh Mujib and his Awami League for the chaos. The military rulers started changing the administration of East Pakistan with more aggressive administrators. East Pakistan Governor Vice Admiral S. M. Ahsan was replaced with Lt. General Shahibzada Yakub Khan and later with Lt. General Tikka Khan. Admiral Ahsan was a very likable person; once our Vice Chancellor Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury invited him at the Dhaka University Convocation and he made a comment saying, "I am just a sailor, I really don't fit at this distinguished gathering. In the mean time, Moulana Bhasani called a meeting at the Paltan Maidan on March 3, 1971. That was a well-attended meeting (for some reason I tried to attend most of Moulana's meeting specially for his humor), and he called Yahia Khan to give independence to East Pakistan. He accused him as a liar and claimed that even a street person ("Paner Dokandar") has better character than him. Although Bhashani did not used to speak with lot of weight, everybody respected him. But the military rulers did not take him seriously.

The Awami League also called an important meeting on March 7, 1971 at the Race Course Maidan, currently known as the Sohrawardy Uddan. There was no tree in the Maidan, only green grass and was particularly used for horse races. The Awami League prepared a podium at the northeast corner of the Race Course right across Ramna Park. The military rulers in East Pakistan started raiding the University halls to arrest student leaders who were energizing the student movement. One can say Dhaka University was the center of all movements,

especially when Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury was the Vice Chancellor. The student movement was spearheaded by Rob and Quddus from DUCSU, Nur-e-alam Siddiqui and Shahjahan Siraj from Student League, and Tofail and Razzaque from senior student leaguers. Most of them were not regular students; they had affiliation with the University Law school.

One evening, we got the message that the army killed Dr. Shamsuzzoha, a provost and Professor of Chemistry at Rajshahi University. I knew Dr. Zoha personally - while I was a student of Rajshahi College, he used to go there to play cricket. Outraged by this news, we brought out a procession in Curzon Hall with our provost Dr. Mir Fakruzzaman as the leader, even though the city was under curfew. I was staying at Fazlul Haq Hall, which was frequented by few well-known student leaders at that time, viz., Abdul Quddus Makhan and Anower Hossain Monju. I still remember watching the student leaders escaping the hall in the darkness of the night. One day I asked one of my friends, where are you going? He replied, if everyone gets arrested who would run the movement.

As the March 7 meeting was drawing closer, everything seemed to be running in higher frequency, as if everybody's blood pressure was running high. As I mentioned earlier, unofficially non-cooperation movement had already been started, every mechanism of the provincial government seemed to be running at the order of the Awami League-student front. One day, a few ultra-conservative members from both the Student League and the Awami League hoisted the flag of Bangladesh at Sheikh Saheb's Dhanmondi residence. At that time, the Bihari dominated places like Mirpur, Syedpur etc., became the places for murdering Bangalee people. I remember one of my classmates, who migrated from India, could not believe that the Pak army or the Biharis would kill fellow Bangalees. I requested him seriously not go to the Mirpur area. He used to have few relatives there. One day he went there in spite of my request and never came back. He was brutally

murdered by the Biharis.

On March 7, it was a bright day with spring-like weather; we went to the Race Course by 3 PM just to have a good view of the leaders. We were all eagerly waiting for the arrival of Sheikh Mujib's entourage (Senior Awami League leaders). There were rumblings even from the early morning that the military rulers were trying to deny broad casting of the speech through radio and TV. Finally, they gave permission (when threatened with closure of the TV station by the employees) to broadcast the speech without editing. The entourage came half an hour late as the motorcade was detained by the military for no obvious reason. Then Sheikh Saheb delivered his famous speech of March 7, 1971. I was impressed, and I am sure everybody else will testify to that statement. One of his directives was for us to go to our respective hometowns and organize the movement. Per his directives all University, Colleges, Courts and Offices would not operate from March 8.

I left for my hometown Bogra on March 15 and joined the resistance movement. Bogra town is divided into north and south by a railway track. We blocked the track with goods train compartment, so that the army from one side cannot cross to the other. Simultaneously, the Awami League and the military leaders, including Bhutto, were deciding our destiny in Dhaka. They continued negotiations until March 23, as I remember Sheikh Saheb mentioning in response to a reporter's question: "If there is no progress in the meeting what is the point of continuing discussion with them". In radio, everyday there were non-stop revolutionary programs: Bengali music and talk about this important meeting.

But March 24 was different, all of a sudden the patriotic music from the radio station stopped and instead they started playing Naath, Gajal and Pakistani propaganda. I sensed that something vicious must have been taking place but nobody knew what it was. I had a four-band radio, on which I was frantically dialing the knob through all Indian stations without any success. For a few days we were completely in the dark.

Then, perhaps fortunately, one day in the afternoon, possibly on March 27, I with all of my fellow resistance fighters listened to the speech given by Major Zia. He essentially cleared everything saying, “We all Bangalees in the Bengal Regiment (Khaled Mussharraf; Shafiullah, Jalil and Taher among others) have started Independence Movement for Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman”. He also asked all of us to “participate wholeheartedly to this cause”. He gave a little description of what happened in Dhaka. This was like an electric shock just passed through our bodies. We were absolutely clear about our mission. Before this inhuman crack down of the military junta on the unarmed Bangalees, some of us were of the opinion that may be the politicians would find a way to live under one Pakistan. I can speak for almost all of us that after 25th of March, no one believed that we would be able to live under the Pakistani administration. We could not stay in the town any longer, because the army moved into Bogra soon. We all moved to the western part of Bogra (near Dupchachia Thana). We used to spend our nights either in paddy fields or in bamboo bushes, because there were few informants everywhere who were against the creation of Bangladesh. Our group had the dubious responsibility of disrupting road communication of the Pakistani army. All I can say, we were pretty successful in accomplishing our objective. During this period of our independence movement, I used to see everyday rows of people - Hindu (for religion) and Moslem (for political affiliation) - were moving towards Indian border with whatever they could carry on their head. Witnessing burning villages was a part of our daily routine. Since I had the radio, we always listened to BBC, Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra and its programs. Charampatra was the most popular program organized by M.R. Akhter Mukul (whom I met as a neighbor in London when I was completing my higher studies in the post-independence period). We used to keep track of what success the fellow “Muktifowz” were achieving at various fronts. In the mean time the military junta under the leadership of A.M. Malik (Bangalee collaborator) started the administration of

their so-called East Pakistan. We did not pay any attention to what they were doing; they were just trying to show the rest of the world that everything was normal. All of a sudden, one day I received a post card (it is hard to believe postal system used to work at that period) from one of my friends (Humayun Ahmed). He wrote, “Salam, why are you not joining the Chemistry Dept., Prof. M. H. Khundker told us that you did very good in your Hons. Final Exam.” It was very uncharacteristic of Prof. Khundker to say something like that, since he was a very conservative teacher. I was able to write Humayun back saying, “I will return only to independent Bangladesh”. Only few of us stayed back to participate actively in the independence movement that included my younger brother, who was a student of the Agricultural University and my nephew, who was an Engineering student. It was a gutsy move, because independence movement could have taken longer. However, not even for a second, I felt that our cause was not right. I think it will be incomplete if I do not mention who helped our cause during that period. I must say India was our best friend (they might have vested interest, but they were at the forefront to expedite our cause) followed by USSR. British people and media were also in favor of our movement (just like to recall few British reporters like Mark Tally and Anthony Maskarenhas).

Soon after the military crackdown, almost all of Awami League MP’s crossed to India. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Dr. Kamal Hossain were arrested and moved to West Pakistan (Ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was living in Germany where her husband, Dr. Wazed was working as a Post-Doc). Under the leadership of Syed Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed, a provisional government was formed at a small border town of Kushtia district in Bangladesh with Syed Nazrul as the President and Tajuddin,

the Prime Minister. Khondoker Mustaq got the foreign ministry. Ret. colonel Osmani became the defense minister. Bangalee foreign service officers started defecting from their posts at respective Pakistani embassies around the world. To name a few: Hussain Ali from Calcutta Pakistani Consulate (as deputy high commissioner), Humayun Rashid Chowdhury (from Delhi embassy); Abdul Mal Muhit; Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, who was attending a meeting in Paris. Later, Justice Chowdhury became the main spokesman for the government abroad. There were quite a few vocal foreign supporters for our cause: Senators Kennedy, McGovern and few British MP's. Mrs. Indira Gandhi played a vital role in bringing a quick end to the crisis. She was smart enough to provoke Pakistan to attack India first. At this juncture, USSR used its vital veto power in the Security Council to continue the war until the whole of Bangladesh is liberated. This war ended with the surrender of Pakistan army (Gen. Niazi) to Gen. Aurora and freedom fighters of Bangladesh on December the 16, 1971.

Soon after the surrender, most of the UN countries recognized the newly liberated Bangladesh. Then there was the release of Sheikh Mujib from Pakistani internment. At the time of his release, Bhutto requested him to see if somehow East and West Pakistan could still live as a federation. Pakistan released him to Britain. The British Prime Minister Edward Heath warmly welcomed him and sent him back to Bangladesh in a British plane. On his way to Bangladesh, he stopped at Delhi and delivered a speech before a large crowd. He eventually landed in Dhaka at Tejgaon airport and took over the leadership of the Bangladeshi nation. When he took over the nation, it hardly had any infrastructure, any airlines or agencies, because the Pakistani rulers had all the central

government apparatuses in West Pakistan. One of the first things, he had to deal with is to get back all the Bangladeshi armed force personnels in the Pakistani army stranded in West Pakistan (just happens that Col. Ershad and Lt. Gen. Khawaja Wasiuddin were among them) and they were repatriated.

I returned to Dhaka by road on January 15, 1972. On my way back from Bogra to Dhaka, I noticed that all the bridges were destroyed by the retreating Pakistani army. Since it was a dry season, the coach somehow managed to reach Dhaka. To my surprise, my room # 326 of Fazlul Haq Hall was empty, as it was looted, and I remember I had a small Koran Sharif that was also gone.

Justice Sayeed Chowdhury became the President of the new republic. Dr. Abdul Matin Chowdhury became the vice chancellor of Dhaka University. I still remember his first speech at the Dhaka University Teachers Students Center (TSC). He started by saying "History of Dhaka University is the history of the whole of Bangladesh". To me it was a very moving statement. It broke my heart when I came to know that my good friend Chisti Helalur Rahman and Dr. Kutubuddin (Doctor at Dhaka University Medical Center) were among those "Bhuddijibis" who could not get to see the free country. It is a new nation, and everybody started everything all over with lots of enthusiasm. I went on to complete my Master of Science degree in Chemistry and became a lecturer at the Department of Chemistry, Dhaka University (at that time it was a very honorable position). Soon (in 1974) I went to England with a British Government scholarship (Commonwealth) to complete my doctoral degree. It is hard to imagine that I passed another 28 years abroad since. I would like to conclude by saying a prayer for those departed souls who gave their lives for liberating our homeland called Bangladesh, a place where I freely speak Bengali and feel proud to be a citizen of.

Bangladesh Economy: Its Performance since 1991 and A Few More Questions

Mahmood Hussain, Boulder, Colorado

Bangladesh: a name resplendent in beauty

When I left home in 1992, the country had just been recovering from the shambles left by the military junta. Over the past 10 years, whenever and wherever we (the Bangladeshis living in the US) got together to celebrate Eid, Independence Day or simply a birthday, the plight of Bangladesh has been an incessant source of our discussions. Despite the fact that most of us will never return to Bangladesh, something in our heart craves for it and persistently takes us on vicarious trips to our “homeland” through numerous discussions and “adda”. Apart from these vicarious trips quite a few of us are seriously interested to know more about Bangladesh on a regular basis. While we may spend the rest of our lives in a foreign country (our adopted homeland), a lot of us are interested to know about ways to contribute to Bangladesh economy.

I have always thought of putting facts before emotion in our informal discussions but never had the patience to delve into data sources to organize facts. Shame on me! Being an economist, I haven't written anything specifically on Bangladesh since 1990! The celebration of the Independence Day by the Bangladeshi Community in Colorado offered me an opportunity to shrug off my laziness and write briefly on our economy. It is a great pleasure. I most genuinely thank the organizers for bringing out this special issue on this auspicious occasion. Here is what I plan to do in this paper. First, using data from Table 1, I discuss performance of Bangladesh economy during the past decade. Then I discuss certain issues that some Bangladeshis have asked me to address.

Macroeconomic indicators and sources of growth: 1991-2001

I will start with good news – the gross domestic product (GDP), which is a measure of national income, has grown by almost 72% between 1991 and 2001. So has our population! The growth rate of the GDP, however, exceeded the growth rate of population, which has increased by almost 30%. This data indicates that there has been a gradual increase in GDP per capita, which is approximately 30% over this 10-year period. Well, does that mean the purchasing power of an average citizen of Bangladesh has also risen? To find an answer we need to look at the inflation rates (an index to measure change in the price level of commonly consumed goods and services). The price level in 2000/01 measured as a percentage of that in 1991/92 rose by almost 54%. That means a certain commodity that would cost me \$1 in 1990/91, would cost me roughly \$1.54 in 2000/01 and I would need to earn at least 54% more than what I used to in 1991/92 to keep my buying power constant. Well, here also we have good news because growth rate of per capita income far exceeds inflation rate meaning that real income in Bangladesh rose between 1991 and 2001. The average inflation rate during this period was about 5%, which is high but still much favorable than those in many other developing and emerging economies (like Russia, Brazil or Argentina). The reason for a high inflation rates in developing countries is straightforward. The governments in these countries have a very narrow tax base (because a large part of the economy is from informal sector which is beyond monitoring). Also, governments in these countries cannot restrain their expenditures. As a result, these governments resort to printing more money, which eventually leads to inflation. Anyway, lets get back to the GDP growth question. Where did this growth in real income come from? In general, it came from an increase

in productive capacity – that is, from an increase in the amount and efficiency of physical capital (plants and equipments) and human capital (an increase in education). Table 1 shows that both import and export grew during this period. However export grew relatively faster than import although the absolute value of trade deficit was at its highest level in 1995/96. Export contributes positively to GDP in two ways. Therefore, it is no surprise that GDP received much needed help from increased export – directly because the export figure directly enter the calculation of GDP and indirectly because export generated employment which subsequently resulted in increased demand for the production of various domestic goods. Then one may ask: how did import help us? That was because a big chunk of import was spent in acquiring capital goods and raw materials, as seen from Table 1.

Table 1: Bangladesh Economy at a Glance – 1990-2001

Item	1991/92	1995/96	2000/01*
Pop (million)	107	122	138
GDP (at current prices million US\$)	29615	40726	51012
GDP/capita (Taka)	10650	13620	19630
GDP/capita (US\$)	279	333	367
GDP Growth Rate	5.04	4.62	6.04
Inflation Rate (% relative to 1991/92)	-	23.00	54.00
Sectoral Composition of GDP (%):			
Agriculture	28.70	25.68	25.32
Industry	21.55	24.87	26.34
Services	49.74	49.45	48.34

Item	1991/92	1995/96	2000/01*
Foreign Trade:			
Import (in million US\$)	3526.00	6947.00	5447.00 ¹
Import/GDP (%)	11.22	16.90	18.00
Export (in million US\$)	1994.00	3884.00	5281.00 ¹
Export/GDP (%)	6.37	9.55	13.08
Trade deficit (in million US\$)	-1532.00	-3063.00	-1188.00*
Import (as % of total import):			
Capital Goods	36.5	27.6	25.0
Textile & Textile Articles	14.5	15.0	14.8
Iron & Steel	2.9	4.7	4.6
Export (as % of total export):			
Raw Jute & Jute Goods	19.4	10.8	5.5
Tea	1.6	0.8	0.4
Leather	7.2	5.5	3.7
Frozen Shrimp	6.6	8.1	5.7
Readymade Garments and Hosiery	59.3	65.6	85.4

¹ July-Jan and July-Apr. * Projected.

Primary Source: Various tables of the report titled, "Performance of Bangladesh Economy, 1991-2001," published by General Economic Division, Planning Commission, Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, 2001

Export-driven economy

Focusing exclusively on export sector, we see that export volume of readymade garments went sky-high from \$1.2 billion in 1991/92 to \$4.5 billion in 2002/01. This meteoric expansion of garments sector indicates that Bangladesh has morphed from a multi-good exporting economy into single-good exporting economy by the end of the past millennium. Not only did we rely too much on one sector, we also relied on one single buyer – the US. The US is the largest export partner of Bangladesh, accounting for almost one third of the total export. That is both a good news and bad news. On the one hand, such a concentration facilitated an opportunity to make the best use of our competitive advantage. Bangladesh was able to enjoy economies of scale (i.e., the more you produce the less it costs on average) and compete successfully in the world market. On the other hand, such a concentration made us susceptible to losses resulting from a single negative shock. That is exactly what happened after "911" terrorist attacks on the US soil. According to a

recent International Monetary Fund report, Bangladesh failed to achieve its target of \$1,833 million by \$560million, which is a deficit of almost 31% (The Daily Inquilab, February 12, 2002). As a result of such a disaster, almost 500,000 poor garments workers lost their jobs – a massive loss in the current fiscal year that still awaits quantification.

Just a small note on what is new on the export horizon for Bangladesh – in the near future we may see Bangladesh exporting gas-generated electricity to India. Currently, India has an electricity shortage of 100,000-mega watt. Bangladesh can concurrently earn valuable foreign currency and generate employment within the country (The Daily Ittefaq, Internet edition, March 15, 2002).

A few questions from Bangladeshis in Denver

I have selected only three questions that can be answered briefly. Most of the other issues were already addressed.

Income disparity, poverty, and education

Although Table 1 provides an optimistic picture, all is not that well. There is more than one area we still need to sweat on to improve the condition of the majority of Bangladesh. These areas include, but are not limited to, income disparity, poverty, and education. While making an attempt to answer these issues, in order to maintain brevity I will only use a few figures from Table 2. I will also not belabor on the definition of terms used in the table. It is clear from Table 2 that Bangladesh ranks fairly low in human development index (HDI). While the average income is rising (as seen from Table 1), the income disparity is still mind-boggling – almost 26.4 % (2nd highest among SAARC countries) of our population is not expected to survive up to age of 40. The overall education picture is quite grim too – more than half the children population (53% - highest among SAARC countries) will never reach grade 5. I have not presented any data on child labor in Bangladesh. However, this figure can be used as a proxy to draw a broad picture of child labor in Bangladesh. If you focus on

the last four columns of Table 2, you can easily see the ugly face of income disparity in Bangladesh and other SAARC countries.

It appears that poverty and illiteracy are intertwined in a strange way. A viscous feedback loop exists between them. How to alleviate poverty? In a nutshell, we need a multi-pronged attack on poverty – something that increases education as well as enhances job opportunity and access to credit for the poor. Various NGOs like Grameen Bank, BRAC have been working toward this objective. For more information, readers may visit websites of these NGOs. You may also visit the World Bank site to know more about their project titled, “Post-Literacy and Continuing Education for Human Development Project.” They have aimed at achieving 84% adult literacy by the end of 2002.

Foreign Direct Investment

The total amount of investment between 1990 and 2000 in our economy is approximately US\$19 billion. Almost 59% of this amount (\$11.3 billion) comes from foreign direct investment (FDI). Not surprisingly, the US is the largest investing country in Bangladesh, accounting for 30% for FDI, followed by the UK, which invested about \$1.1 billion. Half of the total FDI went to service sector, which includes energy sector, foreign banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, consultancy companies etc. The next sector that enjoys substantial amount of FDI is the chemical industry sector. It seems quite surprising that the garments sector, the largest sector in Bangladesh, has thrived without any help from FDI. This is indicative of certain sector-specific risks that are observed in small or medium scale industries in Bangladesh. It is noteworthy that the amount of FDI has shrunk in recent years. For example, FDI in 1997-98 was \$321 million compared to \$158 million in 2000-2001 (The Daily Ittefaq Internet edition, February 2002).

SAARC Free Trade Zone

SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) first floated the idea for a free trade zone (FTZ) among SAARC countries in Lahore in April 2001. This FTZ is just a form of preferential trade cooperation among neighboring countries. The primary motive behind the formation of a SAARC FTZ is to incorporate stability, and is based on the theory

that a FTZ can make each SAARC member economically better off. The performance of SAARC has, however, been dissatisfactory for political reasons. SAARC wanted to follow the experience of European Union (EU) and draw inspiration from the fact that the situation in SAARC is not much different than that in post world war Europe. Assuming SAARC countries can remove the stumbling blocks and build confidence, what would this FTZ look like? Once realized, the FTZ will have uniformly lower tariff barriers for the members. Such removal of tariff barriers is likely to promote enhanced movement of goods and services for these poor economies and eventually promote relatively free movement of capital and other factors of production among SAARC members. The critical question is: how will the formation of such an FTZ benefit the members? Since I don't have any empirical data to back my answer, I will answer it analytically.

An FTZ represents movement toward free trade. However, such a partial movement to free trade can be welfare worsening, if it does not correct pre-existing inefficiencies in an economy (like domestic labor tax or imperfect capital market, or consumption subsidy or tax for certain goods). Also,

whether Bangladesh will benefit from SAARC FTZ will depend on the amount of *trade diversion* (in which imports from non-member countries are replaced with imports from members) and trade creation (in which import from member countries replace inefficient domestic production). The cost-benefit analysis of such issues can get quite technical and thus is skipped here. The bottom line is, Bangladesh can gain from SAARC FTZ in more than one way. First, domestic firms can enjoy economies of scale (i.e. lower average costs for higher production) because of opening up of market. Second, such opening up may benefit the consumers because increased competition can weed out inefficient domestic firms. And third, the establishments of a FTZ may provide more certainty to local firms about the permanence of tariff reductions and might lead to efficient long-term adjustment on the part of local firms.

In conclusion, we should not be too thrilled after seeing only a handful of successful people in our familiar circles. There exist thousands of deprived individuals for each privileged individual we see in Dhaka. Nor should we be too pessimistic. Although the glass may be half empty, we should recognize that the glass is always expanding. That means it is holding more water now than before. Bangladesh is also growing in possibly the same manner.

Table 2: Profile of Human Poverty (SAARC Countries)

Country	Survival				Education		Income			
	HDI Rank	People not expected to survive to age 40 (as % of total 1990 population)	Population with access to health services (1990-96 %)	Population with access to safe water (1990-96 %)	Adult Illiteracy rate (1990-95 %)	Children not reaching grade 5 (1990-96 %)*	Poorest 20% (1980-94)	Richest 20% (1980-94)	\$1 a day (PPP\$) 1989-94	National Poverty line 1989-94
Sri Lanka	91	7.9	..	43.0	9.8	8	1,348	5,954	4	22
Maldives	111	18.0	..	..	6.8	7	..	..	..	..
India	138	19.4	15.0	19.0	48.0	38	527	2,641	53	..
Pakistan	139	22.6	45.0	26.0	62.2	52	907	4,288	12	34
Bangladesh	144	26.4	55.0	3.0	61.9	53	606	2,445	29	48
Nepal	154	19.9	..	37.0	72.5	48	455	1,975	53	..
Bhutan	155	33.2	35.0	42.0	57.8	18	..	..	..	..

source: <http://www.undp.org.in/Reports/HDR97/HDRFACE.HTM>

It is Happening

Mohammad Saif Islam, Parker, Colorado

This is the year, 1971. For all people December 16th marked the Victory Day of Bangladesh. It is the day when the “nine month” war against Pakistan ended with the surrender of the Pakistani Army. Victory had been achieved, celebrations ongoing. The ravaged country had just been liberated and the scars left by Pakistan would take time to heal.

Most countries take time to heal from the war of Independence. The case of Bangladesh was no different. It faced a famine in 1974, followed by the bloody coup in 1975, the assassination of another president in 1981, and extreme corruption that has spread to all levels.

The downfall of most Republic or Empire has been PRIDE. Not so for the Bangladeshis. Our enemy has been EMOTION, illiteracy and total abstinence of social and moral values. However, the country survives on. To my wife, it is a miracle that our country still displays a GDP growth of more than zero percent.

What is wrong with our country? It's a bad and an irrelevant question. It is a question, the answer to which is a waste of time. Hounded by most people in most social gatherings the answer is infinite. I guess for me the constructive way to look at our country's situation is to ask, what is right with our country? The answer is again one word: Emotion. We are very emotional people. We are willing to sacrifice anything for the well being of our family. All of us want peace and happiness, but it is the definition of happiness that differentiates each and every class of Bangladeshis. The lower class, just wants to survive, the middle just wants to attain the basic needs, while the people of the higher class are busy maintaining the wealth in their account.

The fact is that most of us cannot help our country because of our economic conditions. We do not have anyone to fall back on, if we loose our jobs or our health. Most of us are dedicated in maintaining our homes, our parents and our children. To many of us, the above is a lost cause for our country, which cannot be attained by an individual effort.

I totally disagree. The stability of our country can be attained. However, what we have to sacrifice is bigger than our mere effort and talks about our country. We need to involve our children and our family. We over here, away from home, have to educate our children about the history and culture of our country. Our children will have their own dreams to fulfill, but if a child in this country grows up with the aim to improve the condition of Bangladesh, that will be an achievement. We can be their pillars of support so that they can fall back on us when in need. Or they could be our pillars of support if we need some ray of hope to help in this cause.

It will need time but more than that it will need EFFORT and coordination. The people of Bangladesh need to realize the importance of moral and social values. There will be a LOT of Opposition. But we have to succeed in all departments of life, especially in the economic sector.

This is the year 2002. For some, the war is still going on. Today the enemies are not the Pakistanis, nor the Indians, or anybody else. The enemies are among us, they are Bangladeshis, they live in our country, they socialize with us and some of them could be our friends. However, the agenda remains the same – Independence from all sorts of inhuman acts.

A Study of Affordable Urban Housing in Bangladesh

Mrs. Nasima Matin, Denver, Colorado

Bangladesh* is one of the most densely populated countries in South Asia. It has a population currently exceeding 130 million in a relatively small area of 55,598 square miles. It goes without saying that the country is facing an immense problem in housing its rapidly increasing population. It is a problem that is more acute in urban areas because a large number of people migrate from the rural to the urban areas every year in an attempt to improve their socio-economic condition. They perceive the city life as being an opportunity for them to earn more income, gain access to more facilities of the so-called urban society and even survive from the dire consequences of natural disasters. Dhaka, being the capital of Bangladesh, naturally provides a greater opportunity and, therefore, attracts a large number of people from all over the country. As a result, its population is increasing at an alarming rate creating a serious concern for the involved authorities. A study in 1981 showed that about 56% of the total population of the capital city, are migrants coming from different parts of Bangladesh. In 1991, the housing shortage was estimated to be about 3.10 million units – 2.15 million being in rural areas and the rest 0.95 million units in the urban areas. By the start of this century, the housing shortage is supposed to exceed 5 million units. Unfortunately, government measures in this respect are very slow and quite insufficient, and the facilities available are far from being adequate.

In recent years, however, the ever-increasing pressure of population and limited land supply, have accelerated the growing demand for privately supplied flats in Bangladesh. In urban areas, the pattern of tenure is changing rapidly. According to the Housing

Sector Institutional Strengthening Project in 1993, out of a total of 3.3 million dwellings, 60% were owner occupied (1.98 million dwellings) and the rest 40% (1.32 million) were rented. In Dhaka, however, the tenure pattern is quite different than other cities in Bangladesh. The same project estimated that 70% of the total housing stocks in Dhaka are rented indicating that the percentage of renters outnumbers the percentage of owners by a big margin. Traditionally, the government had been the main supplier of ready-made flats in the city for the state and semi-government employees. At the same time, there are Sites and Services schemes run by the Housing and Settlement Development (HSD) in urban areas for higher, middle and low-income groups, but these developed plots are very limited in number. As a consequence, the government has recently turned its attention to the private developers and gave them more opportunities by enacting the National Housing Policy in 1993. The policy allowed for easier processes for ownership, registration and transfer of plots that conform to non-exploitative practices in the private sectors. The policy also protected the interests of the consumers against dishonest and fraudulent practices of developers, allowed increased supply of developed lands for low and middle income groups, made the National Housing Authority an autonomous organization, and modified the tax structure to reduce the cost of purchase and transfer of lands. The new policy thus brought forth a new trend in private housing and introduced the concept of community living in Bangladesh. Private Housing Estate developers, owned by an individual or a group, started buying large plots of land, erecting multi-storied buildings with self-contained flats and selling them to individuals. Today, people have accepted this concept of community living and are buying high-rise flats, which was quite unheard of just about a decade ago. Needless to say that the

* The research was conducted by the author and submitted in June 1999 as a part of her thesis for the Master of Philosophy (M. Phil) degree in England, UK.

construction of high-rise flats in the over-populated urban areas goes to a great extent is solving the problem of scarcity of land.

Although the concept of urban community living by erecting high-rise flats, sounds like a brilliant idea, the question that arises in everybody's mind, does it really serve the purpose for the majority of the city dwellers – the middle and the low income groups. Obviously, the target groups for the policy makers in Bangladesh should be to provide housing for the lower to middle income groups whose income levels fall within the range of salaries provided by the government for its gazetted employees. At present, there is no specific government policy, which would restrict the type, quality and locality of the high-rise flats. Although the freedom for the private investors resulted in a tremendous increase in the non-government business and service sector of the city, it allowed the private developers to build multi-storied apartments in high cost areas, making it completely out of reach for the targeted middle-income groups. Putting simply, larger and better quality flats sell more easily and with a quicker turnaround, while the smaller flats remain unsold for a longer period of time, because the price does not match the existing market demand. Furthermore, the high cost of the land makes low cost housing quite uneconomic. Concentrating only on Dhaka, the total land supply appropriate for building high-rise flat is limited because of the peculiar geography of the city. The city is situated on a tract of tongue shaped Pleistocene upland that abruptly rises from the recent flood plain beneath. The expanse of the east and west upland is not very long, and the southern land is also limited because of the river Buriganga. The land is predominantly available only in the north. This has created a tremendous pressure of developing housing communities in the central area of the city. On the other hand, more than one third of the feasible land is held by the public and semi-public agencies. At the same time, the emergence of a group of newly rich people, the flow of

foreign aid money through international agencies and black money have contributed considerably to the inflammatory and speculative land price situation. All these factors contributed considerably to the recent price hike of lands in Dhaka that has grown up to 60 to 90% per year.

Analysis of a set of sample data collected by the author indicates that only 12.4% of flat owners are from the middle income group while 15.7% of the households are rented to mostly middle-middle and upper-middle income families. In general, the flat price to household income ratio for this group is approximately 125:1 making it quite impossible for them to purchase the flats with their income alone. The study shows that about 15.7% of the households are very keen to buy apartments in installments, but could not do so due to the lack of available credits. Purchasing a flat normally requires an initial deposit in the range of Tk. 50,000 to 500,000 before the start of the construction and the rest of the money is due all at once or in installment before the completion or handing it over. About 8% of the households pay in full, 22.67% pay in installments with mortgage and 69.33% pay in installments without mortgage. The study also suggests that the location of flats is very much related to the income groups' affordability. Among the people willing but do not own apartments, 21.82% are due to the lack of affordable dwellings, 29.09% are due to the lack of access to loans and the rest are related to lack of affordability, such as mode of payment or the repayment of the loans. On the other hand, among the flat owners, only 6.66% of the middle-income groups obtained loans for their purchase, while 18.67% of the upper-income groups purchased apartment through loans.

It is quite apparent that the different loan programs have not achieved their task of increasing flat purchases among the general mass. One of the main reasons for this failure was found to be the structural deficiencies in policies, mainly amount needed, loan targeting and restriction on requirements. Loans are available from House Building Finance

Corporation (HBFC) and some selected banks. However, the HBFC does not grant loans to individuals for the purchase of flat, unless the property is already under mortgage to the Corporation. On the other hand, the developer can apply for a multi-story loan from the HBFC, but the process of transferring the loan to the individual owner is quite complicated making it virtually impossible to do so. Loans from the Commercial Banks for housing finances are available to a limited degree to their depositors. However, the amount that can be borrowed from the bank is less than 30 percent of the flat prices and in most cases only a few of the upper-middle classes have access to credit. As an example, Uttara Bank has been operating housing loans to flat buyers from the real estate company, Eastern Housing Limited. The maximum amount of loan available by the bank is Tk. 400,000 at an interest rate of 15% and is payable within 15 years with one year grace period.

The above analysis leads one to believe that the number of apartment owners among the middle-income group of people is quite low, primarily due to the lack of affordable flats and the lack of access to credits. As a result, the upper income households predominate, leading to a considerable disparity in the ratio (1:0.17) of flat ownership between the upper-income and the middle-income classes. In spite of the governments' effort to make housing accessible to all strata of society and to accelerate housing production in urban and rural areas on low and middle-income groups, the private developers failed to take account of this mandate and indeed have actually exaggerated the situation. At the same time, very few attempts have been made to look beyond the housing cost and income analyses for the target group. In the public sector, housing areas for developed land by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakha (RAJUK) are very limited compared to the increasing demands in Dhaka. RAJUK developed land areas in Banani, Gulshan, Uttara and Baridhara, where the plots are allocated mainly to the upper-middle and higher income groups. The Uttara Model Town

was primarily designed for the middle-income group, but in reality it has become an upper-income group housing development. Genuine middle-income groups have been effectively priced out of the area.

In order to improve the socio-economic structure of our society, attempts must be made to raise the percentage of middle and low-income households in the urban areas. As pointed out earlier, financing is a major concern and at present there is no policy of providing finances for direct flat purchases. Both the House building Finance Corporation (HBFC) and the commercial banks can improve this situation by providing greater access to the middle-income groups, and introducing longer term loans with easy payment plans. At the same time, the government can create Home Loan Bank Systems, directed at flat purchase and providing easier credit access to the target group. Yet another option would be to introduce the "rents to mortgage" scheme, which would allow the tenants to turn their rent payments into mortgage. This scheme would be more affordable to middle-income groups and highly attractive to those buyers who cannot afford a loan.

From a policy point of view, the government should create new land rules to identify and develop affordable land and supply sites and serviced plots to developers for building multi-storied buildings. Since low-rise walk up multistoried flats are cheaper than high-rise flats because of the low cost of design, construction and providing functional utilities, the Housing and Settlement Directorates and the private sectors should be encouraged to build these units. It is also necessary to build multi-storied buildings in areas where the price of the land is comparatively cheaper, so that the ultimate price of the flats could be less than others built in expensive residential areas. The quality of the flats is also a major concern among the middle-income groups in their decision to acquire a flat. Owing to the lack of policies for money back guarantees, or ensuring appropriate match between promised quality and that of the

delivered units, the middle-income groups are hesitant to get into a contract with the developers. Time of delivery of the units also play an important role for the middle-income families to purchase apartments. It is often observed that the actual handover time takes two

to four years more than the promised one causing waste of funds and spending on alternative accommodation. The government, therefore, must take appropriate initiatives to improve the confidence of the middle-income group in their pursuance for becoming household owners.

The Nation Is In Spirit

Sarfaraz Khan, Denver, Colorado

Virtues never abrogate by dread
As they tried to diminish our rights.
At past that has been forced to us,
But the right strokes always through the God's will.
With His all sinew, we passed the inconformity.

Meaningful years ran away, still we are waiting
For an eventful stupefaction?
Questions pound through the sixth sense,
Surely we are waiting for the genie or contemplating
For the bottle to drop.

God esteems us with wisdom and cognizance!

Show us the path of pundits!

Feasible Policy Choices to Attack Motorized Air Pollution: A Case Study of Dhaka

Anwar Hossain, Denver, Colorado

Air pollution at Dhaka is so high that choking smells and irritation of eyes will shake you up at your immediate return to Dhaka after staying abroad for a while. A study done by the World Bank revealed that Dhaka encounters 3,580 premature deaths. The economic loss associated with these health problems could range from a low estimate of US\$ 60 million to a high estimate of US\$ 270 million, equivalent to 1.7% to 7.5% of the city's economy. It is not only the health cost that is going to be enormous and burdensome on the national exchequer, but the loss of potential working ability of the people due to poor health conditions.

There are two broad sources of motorized air pollution at Dhaka: i) air pollution originating from congestion causing high emission ii) high level of emission due to very low level of technology used in the transport industry. High number of aged vehicles, absence of catalytic converters with low lead gasoline, impure diesel with high sulfur, inaccurate forecast of air pollution and overall inefficient traffic management, two-stroke engine vehicles (TSEV) are the some dominating factors of Dhaka's air pollution. The heterogeneous flow of traffic inadequate infrastructure to meet the ever-growing demand for public transportation, unplanned urbanization, lack of coordination are some major contributing factors to Dhaka's horrifying congestion that reinforce the air pollution by higher emission.

Congestion and air pollution are inter-twined problem and therefore both have to be addressed simultaneously. Resource constraint is the major impediment for selecting feasible policy options for Bangladesh. There is ample room for improvement of traffic management by ensuring enforcement and developing personnel skill. Developing accountability in the traffic management personnel will improve the congestion problem significantly. Law

enforcement is critical in this regard. Therefore, we suggest reforms in administrative and judiciary system as short and medium term policy objective.

A well-coordinated information system about traffic situation and ensuring flows of information through media is an important initiative in the medium term. Organized urban planning and coordination among the development agencies will help in reducing migration problem and will encourage emigration in the other cities. The planning should be started as a medium term goal and it will encompass long-term objective. Investing in the distribution of CNG as alternative to gasoline would definitely pay off to Bangladesh and government has to encourage private participation in this area.

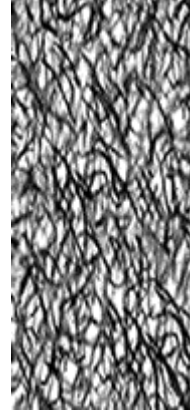
Technology improvement for two-stroke engines and development of infrastructure like building highways, HOVs (High Occupancy Vehicles) lanes, developing modality by introducing feasible urban light weight train or monorail- are the major steps in the long term. These initiatives require huge investment for which long term financing from both private and international development agencies could be sought. Adequate legislation and protection of private investment can encourage private sector investment in building highways under Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) mode. BOT mode has been found successful in implementing infrastructure program in many countries.

Only formulation of good policies and strategies cannot ensure improvement of air pollution problem. Public participation in policy formulation will make easier to implement. Therefore, more active role of NGOs and professional groups in identifying problems and building consensus among citizens are demanded, which is a precondition to revise priority lists of the political agenda.

Independence of Bangladesh

Maisha Mir, 6th Grade Student, Denver, Colorado

Before Bangladesh got its independence, it was part of Pakistan. Pakistan had all the communication and the government in West Pakistan and had nothing in the East. They even went as far as to ban East Pakistan from speaking their own language. It was very frustrating for the east. East Pakistan decided that they would be better off being independent. West Pakistan heard this and knew they had to do something. Then on March 25th 1971, an unexpected attack had occurred in Dhaka. Thousands of people died that night, but the spirit of Bangladesh lived on. Bangladesh declared their independence the next day.



With the help of the country's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the people of Bangladesh fought through the nine-month war. Hundreds of people left to safer places in India. The war went on until all the hard work and lives lost had paid off. On December 16th 1971, Bangladesh had survived the bitter war and won over Pakistan. Since Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had done such a good job, he became a respected Prime Minister after the war. His first order was to rebuild the country.

Bangladesh was the first country to fight for a language. No country had ever done that before. February 21st is known all over the world as National Mother Language Day. Bangladesh is a pretty remarkable country.

আমি ঝঞ্জা, আমি ঘূর্ণি,
আমি পথ-সমুখে যাহা পাই যাই চূর্ণি।
আমি নৃত্য পাগল ছন্দ,
আমি আপনার তালে নেচে যাই, আমি
মুক্ত জীবনানন্দ।

- কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম

We As The Descendents of Bangladeshis Should Know...

Nafisa Matin, 8th Grade, Denver, Colorado

The war of 1971 in Bangladesh was the most terrifying and gruesome war in its history. Thirty one years ago, the people of Bangladesh fought for their independence. With inspiration from their leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the people of the country started fighting for their freedom immediately after the declaration of its independence on March 26th, 1971. But the Pakistani government was unwilling to let Bangladesh become it's own nation. The struggle continued for nine more months until December 16th, 1971 when India helped Bangladesh overcome the Pakistani government. That day is known as the Victory Day. A complete history is needed for the present generation of Bangladeshis to fully realize what was happening at that time.

In 1947, when the British left India, Pakistan and India emerged. Pakistan had two parts, West Pakistan-now known as Pakistan and East Pakistan-now known as Bangladesh. The people of East Pakistan wanted to be an independent nation although the government of Pakistan refused to let that happen. Many fights were fought trying to achieve the goal of the East Pakistanis. There was the language movement that saw quite a few students gave up their lives on February 21st, 1952 to make Bangla as one of the official languages of Pakistan.

In early 1969, Pakistan's president, Ayub Khan resigned and the first election in 22 years was held in Pakistan on December 7th, 1970. The East Pakistan-based party, the Awami League, of which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the leader, won a majority by getting 167 out of 313 seats in the National Assembly and 298 out of 310 seats in the East Pakistan Assembly. The people of East Pakistan were hopeful that the government would now have an equal representation and that their voices would be

heard. That did not happen. The new military ruler, Yahya Khan, postponed the meeting of the National Assembly on March 1st, 1971. The people in East Pakistan were enraged. That same day, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a speech saying that the people in Dhaka should go on strike the next day and on a province-wide strike on March 3rd to show their rage. The government made curfews trying to prevent the strikes but people marched through out the streets anyway. The police opened fire into the crowds killing 9 people. That day, Yahya Khan asked all of the parties in East Pakistan to meet with him since he was trying to prevent the strike. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman replied by saying that he would not meet the other party's interests and the strike went on. On March 6th, Yahya Khan said that the National Assembly meeting would be held on March 25th.

On the afternoon of March 7th, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a historic speech at the Ramna Race Course grounds. Almost 1 million Bangladeshis attended the speech. Everyone hoped that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would declare independence that day but Sheikh Mujibur Rahman stopped short of declaring independence, because he was told that if he made such a declaration, the police would open fire into the crowds. He, however, did make many references. He also called for civil non-cooperation and as a result, offices were closed for most of March, and the province's civil administration collapsed. Incidentally, the live broadcast of the speech was also initially cancelled by the government, but was later aired when many people protested the cancellation. A few days later Sheikh Mujibur Rahman warned the United Nations that there would be a huge genocide and that many innocent people of Bangladesh would die.

Later that month, Yahya Khan came to East Pakistan to try to solve the problem but he and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman could not come to an agreement. On March 25th, Yahya Khan left the province secretly, leaving behind orders for the Army to unleash an unprecedented attack on the people of Bangladesh in a ruthless effort to suppress their move for independence. In the early hours of March 26th, the world watched in horror as the genocide that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had earlier warned against began. Hundreds and hundreds of Men, women and children were killed no matter who they were. Many citizens fled in terror across the Indian border, to seek safety there, and India became highly involved in the war. That same day, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested by the army and put in jail for being a traitor to Pakistan.

On the March 26th, Major Ziaur Rahman read the declaration of independence on the makeshift Shwadhin Bangla Radio Station. The declaration, as translated, is:

“The Government of the Sovereign State of Bangladesh on behalf of our Great Leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, We hereby proclaim the independence of Bangladesh, and that the Government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has already been formed. It is further proclaimed that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the sole leader and the elected representatives of Seventy five million People of Bangladesh and the Government headed by him is only legitimate Government of the people of the Independent Sovereign state of Bangladesh, which is legally and constitutionally formed, and is worthy of being recognized by all the governments of the world. I therefore, appeal on behalf of our Great Leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the Governments of all the democratic countries of the world, especially the Big Powers and

the neighboring countries to recognize the legal government of Bangladesh and take effective steps to stop immediately the awful genocide that has been carried on by the army of occupation from Pakistan. The guiding principle of a new state will be first neutrality, second peace and third friendship to all and enmity to none. May Allah help us. Joy Bangla.”

For nine more months, the people of Bangladesh suffered from the aggression of the Pakistani government, which was still unwilling to let “East Pakistan” become Bangladesh. Many neighboring countries helped Bangladesh in the “fight for freedom”.

The struggle for liberation is something many people, whether they live in Bangladesh, Canada, the U.S. or anywhere else in the world, will never forget. It became an integral part of our heritage. We as the descendents of the “freedom fighters” should honor and recognize everything that was achieved by them especially our language, culture and traditions. The sacrifices of the “freedom fighters” will not go in vain if we, as the descendents of Bangladesh, living all over the world represent Bangladesh as ambassadors of the country.

Bangladesh: Its Independence and More

Shamsi Ahmed, 7th Grade Student, Aurora, Colorado

The independence of Bangladesh! What was it like? What kind of things happened during the independence? What were the results? When did it happen? These are the questions that come to the mind of young people when they are told about the independence of Bangladesh. Actually, Bangladesh has a very interesting past. Yet, many people in this country have not even heard of Bangladesh. Why? Because, it is quite new and very small. It isn't even two centimeters on a World map. People can barely even see it on an atlas. Well, I'll just save you some time and energy and tell you where it is. It is in Southeast Asia, directly beside India.

Before 1947, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan were all together as a single colony of the British Empire. Following the independence and partition of India in 1947, the area of Bangladesh became a province of Pakistan, initially known as East Bengal, and then, from 1955, as East Pakistan. The people of East Pakistan declared their independence as the nation of Bangladesh on March 26, 1971 and fought a savage war against the central Pakistani government. The final separation from Pakistan, however, took place on December 16, 1971 at the end of the third Indo-Pakistan War. Bangladesh was admitted to the United Nations in 1974.

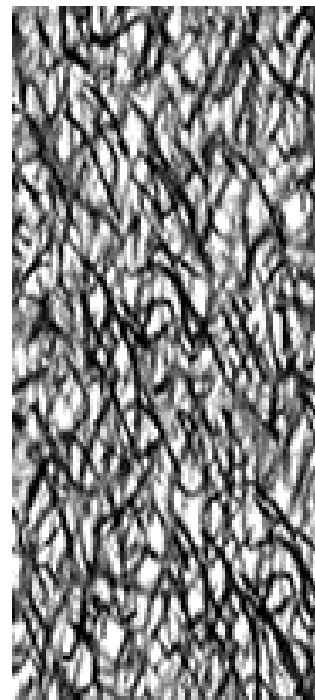
The country's initial government was formed in January 1972 under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, known as Mujib, who became

the prime minister. In the first years of independence, Bangladesh received considerable aid from abroad, and Mujib nationalized major industries. He had little success though, in improving the condition of the people of the country. In early 1975 Mujib became president under a remodeled constitution that granted him dictatorial power. However, he was unable to stabilize the political situation and was killed in a military coup on August 15, 1975. The nation made moderate economic progress between 1980 and 1981. In 1981 Ziaur Rahman, the President at that time, was killed by the army and later in 1982 General Ershad took charge as the Chief Martial Law Administrator. A proposal by Ershad to require all schools to teach Arabic and the Quran sparked vigorous protests and demonstrations in February 1983. In December Ershad assumed the presidency. He lifted martial law and reinstated the constitution. Ershad resigned in December 1990, and was convicted and imprisoned on charges of corruption and illegal weapons possession. By 1993 the Bangladeshi economy was recovering, despite continuing problems with flooding and other crisis. In May 1994 opposition parties began a series of boycotts from the parliament, amid a deepening political feud between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the opposition Awami League leader, Sheikh Hasina Wazed. President Abdur Rahman Biswas formally dissolved parliament in November to make room for a general election,

but opposing parties refused to participate without the appointment of an impartial caretaker government. The general election went ahead in February 1996, but the opposition boycotted, undermining the landslide victory of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist party. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia finally made constitutional amendments in March 1996 to have elections under a neutral caretaker government and tendered her resignation. Since then, elections in Bangladesh are being conducted under caretaker governments. In the first one under such an administration, Sheikh Hasina Wazed and her party came to power in June 1996, while Khaleda Zia and her party became victorious in the next election in October 2001.

Since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the country went through a series of turmoil, political chaos and corruptions at all levels. More importantly, law and order situation deteriorated so much that the security of personal life is not always guaranteed. There had been consistent reports of inhuman tortures and murders all across the country. Amnesty International in a report said, "for too long torture has been accepted as normal behavior by governments. Anyone can be tortured and it is usually only the politically well connected who get any protection. The government should take determined action to protect everyone—not just a select few". Custodial rape has also been a serious problem in Bangladesh since the independence. Victims have to rely on the support and resilience of their family and influential people in the government to seek justice. It is common for

police not to take action against alleged perpetrators on payment of a bribe. In other cases, police officers may be involved in criminal activities such as trading in drugs. Police may also torture for personal gratification. All of these continue because successive governments allow them to happen. We sincerely hope that all these elements of lawlessness would be completely eliminated from the country so that we can proudly point Bangladesh out to everyone not only in the World Atlas of Geography but also on the Atlas of Dreamlands.



Specialty of Bangladesh

Ridwan Ahmad, 5th Grade Student, Longmont Colorado

Bangladesh is a very young country and is different from other countries in many different ways. The people of Bangladesh, commonly known as Bangladeshis, fought in many wars throughout its history to gain their independence as a nation, or more importantly to establish their independent feelings. In the last century, Bangladesh fought against the British and Pakistan governments just to become a sovereign state. Thus the country has been reborn twice, once as Pakistan to establish its religious identity and the second time as Bangladesh to establish its cultural and ethnic identity. Before Pakistan was born, the British government had complete control over most of the subcontinent. The British Empire also included the regions of Bangladesh as a part of their territory, and the whole region, including Calcutta and its neighboring regions was called Bengal. At one point, they divided Bangladesh into two parts: East Bengal and West Bengal, but later in 1905 combined them again into Bengal. The Muslim and Hindu religions in India began to press for greater independence from the British rule, which afterwards surrendered to their demands and went back to their own country. Bangladesh still struggles everyday to keep its independence alive and running.

Bangladesh is located in Southeastern Asia and is bordered by India to the west and north. On the east side, Bangladesh shares its border mostly with India and a little with Burma. It is bordered by the Bay of Bengal in the south. Most of the lands of Bangladesh are fertile, producing supplies of crops. A large group of rivers lie in many parts of the country, making it a country full of water bodies. The country covers 55,598 square miles, an area a little bit

smaller than Wisconsin. The country's weather is sometimes very rough, with very warm and humid conditions coupled with rains and cyclones. There are six seasons in a year. During the monsoon that blows through each year, it brings heavy rain and keeps portion of the country under water for quite a while. The winter in Bangladesh is quite mild though.

The economy of the country is not very good although it has a lot of different sectors to earn its income. One of them is fishing. Fishing is very common in Bangladesh, and fish is a major part of the Bangladeshi diet. The generally poor fishermen of the country catch more than a million fishes every day, even though over-fishing has decreased the fullness of stocks. The fishes are caught in the rivers, lakes and the Bay of Bengal. Bangladeshis also provide large supplies of shrimp and export them to earn foreign exchanges. The country has many inland shrimp farms. However, the most important economic sector in the country is its agriculture. Agriculture provides employment to the 2/3rd of the working population. Large farms benefit from the use of technology and fertilizers and produce a surplus that is sold in the markets. The owners of the markets manage the farms and are considered to be the elites of the rural society.

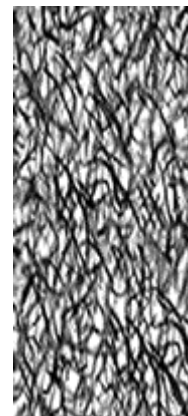
The transportation system in Bangladesh is quite unique. Bangladeshis use numerous

kinds of transportation, including rickshaws, bicycles, motorcycles, auto-rickshaws, private cars and buses. Bangladeshis own more motorcycles than cars, unlike the United States, which owns more cars than motorcycles. However, most people use public transportation or the slower rickshaws for their commute. Bangladesh has a very extensive road system as well. Trains are also a popular mode of transportation in the country. There are many railway lines running through Bangladesh. One of the most commonly used kinds of transportation is by water. In this country, you can travel between towns on boats, launches, steamers and ferries that operate along the numerous waterways.

Bangladesh has a lot of its own special things. The country has its own official language. Bengali, the name of the language, is the seventh most widely spoken language in the world. Bengali developed from the Aryan, or Indo-Iranian, branch of the Indo-European language family. It is derived from Prakrit (Middle Indo-Aryan), which itself was derived from Sanskrit. Bengali or Bangla, as the Bangladeshis call it, was identified from about 1000 A.D. A collection of Buddhist texts, found in Nepal, are the oldest known written records of Bengali. Another of Bangladesh's special things is the Bengali New Year. This special year starts on April 14th. Bangladesh also has its own Independence Day. This event celebrates the day

when Bangladesh declared its independence from Pakistan.

Bangladeshi people celebrate many dissimilar and special festivals. Probably the most special events on the Islamic calendar are the Eids, one after the period of fasting and the other during Hazz. Bangladesh, like the United States, celebrates the days of Christmas too. Even though mostly Muslim, Bangladeshis also celebrate festivals for Hindus, Buddhists and Christians as well, making it a purely secular state.



BANGLADESH – FACTS AND FIGURES

Compiled by: Faruk Mansur Mir, Denver, Colorado

Official Name: The Peoples' Republic Of Bangladesh

Capital: Dhaka (Area 414 sq. km. Master plan 777 sq.km.)

Location: Lat. 20 deg. 34' - 26 deg. 38' north. Long. 88 deg. 01' - 92 deg. 41' east.

Area : 144,000 sq km

Physical Overview: Most of the areas of Bangladesh lies within the broad delta formed by the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. Lands are exceedingly flat (other than some scattered hilly areas in the eastern part of the country), low-lying, and subject to annual flooding. Much fertile, alluvial soil is deposited by the floodwaters.

Boundary: Bounded by India from the north, east and west, Myanmar from the south-east and the Bay of Bengal from the south.

Currency: Currency unit is Taka. (100 Poisha = 1 Taka)

Language: Bangla is the state language. English is widely spoken and understood.

Literacy: 48.3% male: 70.7% female: 59.2% total (World Bank, 1999 Data)

Universities. There are 11 government universities and approximately 20 private universities in Bangladesh.

Population: 127,117,967 (July 1999 est.) **Population growth rate:** 1.59% (1999 est.)

Birth rate: 25.2 births/1,000 population (1999 est.) **Death rate:** 8.5 deaths/1,000 population (1999 est.) **Net migration rate:** -0.79 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1999 est.)

Age structure: 0-14 years- 38%, 15-64 years 59%, 65 years and over: 3% (1999 est.)

Sex ratio: 1.06 male(s)/female

Infant mortality rate: 69.68 deaths/1,000 live births (1999 est.)

Life Expectancy: 55.86 years (male 56.02 years, female 55.69 years) (1996 est.)

Total fertility rate: 3.57 children born/woman (1996 est.)

Religions: Muslim 88.3%, Hindu 10.5%, Christian , Buddhist and others 1.2%

Climate: Tropical; cool, dry winter (October to March); hot, humid summer (March to June); cool, rainy monsoon (June to October)

Major Cities: Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet

Principal Rivers: Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, Brahmaputra, Madhumati, Surma and Kushiara

Principal Crops: Rice, jute, tobacco, tea, sugarcane, vegetables, potato, pulses, etc.

Fruits : Mango, banana, pineapple, jack-fruit, water-melon, green coconut, guava, etc.

Major Industries : Readymade Garments, Jute, sugar, paper, textiles, fertilizers, cement, steel, natural gas, oil-refinery, newsprint, power generation.

GDP Per Capita: \$350 (1998 est.)

GDP Per Capita (purchasing power parity): \$1,380 (1998 est.)

GDP Growth Rate: 4% (1998 est.)

GDP Composition by sector: *Agriculture* 30%, *industry* 17% , *services* 53% (1997)

Population below poverty line: 35.6% (1995-96 est.)

Income Distribution: *lowest 10%:* 4.1% , *highest 10%:* 23.7% (1992)

Inflation rate (consumer prices): 7% (1998)

Airports : Dhaka International Airport, Chittagong Int'l Airport, Sylhet Int'll Airport

Sea Ports: Chittagong , Mongla

PLACES OF INTEREST

Cox's Bazar: Located to the south of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar is the tourist capital of Bangladesh. Having the world's longest unbroken (120 km.) beach sloping gently down to the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal against the picturesque background of a chain of hill covered with deep green forests, Cox's Bazar is one of the most attractive tourist spots in the world.

Sundarbans: Located at about 320km. West of Dhaka. Here in the south, spread over an area of about 6000 sq. km. of delta swamps along the coastal belt of Khulna is the biggest mangrove forest, Sundarbans (beautiful forest) - the home of the Royal Bengal Tiger.

Paharpur: In Paharpur, a small village 5 km. west of Jamalganj railway station in the greater Rajshahi district, the remains of the most important and the largest known monastery south of the Himalayas has been excavated. This 8th century A.D. archaeological find covers approximately an area of 27 acres of land. It has been declared as a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

Personal Information of the Bangladeshi Community in Colorado

<p>Name: Hasan Ahmad Spouse: Rabeya Ahmad Wedding Anniversary: June 2 Kid 1: Ridwan R. Ahmad; June 11, 1991 Kid 2: Maimuna S. Ahmad; January 16, 1995 Phone : (303) 772 – 1647 Hasan.ahmad@planetchat</p>	<p>Name: Syed Mahfuz Ahmed Phone : 970-491-0777 mahfuz@holly.colostate.edu Other Info: Doing BS in Computer Science at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Co. Major concentration, Networking, Operating Systems & Parallel/Distributed Systems.</p>	<p>Name: Tauz Ahmed Spouse: Sultana Ahmed (Ruma) Wedding Anniversary: January 12 Kid 1: Efoma (9/26/88) Kid 2: Labeeb (3/7/2000) Kid 3: Tabeena (10/24/2001) Phone : 303-750-7018 tauz3@attbi.com; sahmed2000@hotmail.com; soha652@hotmail.com Other Info: Adamjee Cantonment College</p>
<p>Name: Mohamed Alamgir Spouse: Sanjida Alamgir Wedding Anniversary: 20 September Kid 1: Ismat Alamgir (25 December) Kid 2: Shishu Alamgir(28 June) Phone : 719-487-7418 ismat88@cs.com</p>	<p>Name: M Afsar Ali (April 9) Spouse: Meherun Ali (Jan 1) Wedding Anniversary: 16 Feb 1974 Kid 1: M. Albiruni Ali (Aug 16) Kid 2: Sohel Ali (Oct 20) Kid 3: M Javed Ali (Nov 4) Phone : 303-798-7293 Other Info: Prembag, Chengutia, Jessore</p>	<p>Name: Ansar Ali Spouse: Nasima Ali Wedding Anniversary: March 4 Kid 1: Lavina Nesa Ali (May 4) Kid 2: Ishmam Mehedi Ali (Dec 6) Phone : 303-716-0544 lavina272@hotmail.com Other Info: Real estate and motel owner</p>
<p>Name: Shahriar Ali Spouse: Phone : 720-273-0586 shahriar_ali@hotmail.com</p>	<p>Name: M. Bashir ALi Spouse: Noor Jahan Ali Wedding Anniversary: Kid 1: Ruma Khatun Kid 2: Salma Khatun Kid 3: Asma Khatun Kid 4: Khadija Khatun Phone : 303-799-7592 Other Info: Prembag, Chengutia, Jessore</p>	<p>Name: Syed Ahsanul Hoque Asif Spouse: Irine F. Islam Wedding Anniversary: March 22 Kid 1: Syed M. Ahsan Adit (Dec 19, 1995) Phone : 303-337-7684 Other Info: love all sorts of sports, specially cricket</p>
<p>Name: Abul Khayer Chowdhury Spouse: Ferdous Ara Chowdhury Wedding Anniversary: 23 June Kid 1: Shayer A. Chowdhury Kid 2: Julia F. Chowdhury Phone : 303-346-4867 sjchowdhury@aol.com Other Info: Shayer is 9-1/2 and Julia is 5-1/2 yrs old. Shayer attends 4th grade and Julia attends Kindergarten at St. Mary's Academy. Shayer and Julia have many hobbies but they like violin and tennis the most.</p>	<p>Name: Fahim Hyder (B+) Spouse: unmarried Phone : 720-962-9290 Other Info: I am from Kishorganj; studied at Dhaka University</p>	<p>Name: Anwar Hossain (5 January; A+) Spouse: Rumana Rahman (6 June; A+) Wedding Anniversary: 15 January Kid 1: Afrida Anwar Sara (31 March) Kid 2: Abrar Faiyaz Khan Samin (9 August) Phone : 303-744-7408 hmanwar2000@yahoo.com; hmanwar@hotmail.com Other Info: Love to watch cricket</p>
<p>Name: Mohommod Hossain Spouse: Mukta Sultana Wedding Anniversary: Kid 1: Mohommod T. Hossain Kid 2: Mahfuza Sultana Phone :</p>	<p>Name: Nannu Howlader Spouse: Perveen Howlader (Maya) Wedding Anniversary: Nov 05 Phone : 720-529-0307</p>	<p>Name: Mohammad Irfan Spouse: Maksuda Irin Mukul Wedding Anniversary: Jan 19 Kid 1: Tanzilla Purnota (Feb 22, 1999) Phone : 303-765-5431 mtirfan@yahoo.com Other Info: Big fan of Abahani</p>

<p>Name: Islam, Saif M. Spouse: Khan, Sharmin H. Wedding Anniversary: 21st July, 2000 Kid: Nott applicable Phone : 303-840-1669 saif_jde@yahoo.com Other info: CSU - 1998, NSU - 1994, Maple Leaf 1992</p>	<p>Name: Abul Kalam Spouse: Marilyn Rehman Wedding Anniversary: Kid 1: Daniel Kalam (July 19, 1993) Phone : 303-979-0481 abul.kalam@ccd.ccooes.edu Other Info: Daniel likes drawing; Abul is from Patiya, Chittagong</p>	<p>Name: Farid U. Khan Spouse: Mahzabeen M. Khan Wedding Anniversary: 1st Augusta Kid 1: Kashfi Q. Khan Kid 2: Omnia N. Khan Phone : 720-870-0505 (H) 720-732-5871 (Cell) faridukhan@hotmail.com Other Info: Abahani supporter, like Tennis, play Guitar</p>
<p>Name: Nizam Khan Spouse: Nusrat Rashhed Wedding Anniversary: Feb 12 Kid 1: Sakif Khan (10) Kid 2: Nazif Khan (6) Kid 3: coming soon or later Phone : 303 786 1830 khanm@colorado.edu Other Info:Chittagong Collegiate(1974), Chittagong Govt College (1976), Chittagong University (1985), University of Pennsylvania (1993)</p>	<p>Name:Muhammad Ashif Jahan Spouse: Fahmida Jahan Wedding Anniversary: Dec 18 Kid 1: Jawad Jahan (May 2, 1998) Kid 2: Zaina Jahan (Oct. 23, 1999) Phone :720-283-6492 ma_jahan@yahoo.com</p>	<p>Name: Mahbub Chowdhury Spouse: Shaila Chowdhury Wedding Anniversary: Aug 17 Kid 1: Safwan Chowdhury Phone : (303) 574-0590 mahbub_chowdhury@netzero.com</p>
<p>Name: Haider A. Khan Spouse: Izumi Otomo Wedding Anniversary: April 21 Phone : hkhan@du.edu</p>	<p>Name: Md. Sarfaraz Ali Khan Spouse: N.A. Phone : 303-669-0259 sarfaraz047@yahoo.com Other Info: I am from Dhanmondi, Dhaka. Big fan of Mohammedan S.C. Did my HSC in Dhaka College and an admirer of Rabindranath Tagore and Shakespeare.</p>	<p>Name: M. A. Matin Spouse: Mrs. Nasima Matin Wedding Anniversary: Kid 1: Nafisa Matin Kid 2: Nadira Matin Kid 3: Samiha Matin Kid 4: Mubeen Hamidul Matin Phone : 720-748-3160 mmatin@du.edu Other Info: Home Address 1865 S. Ulster St., Denver, CO 80231</p>
<p>Name: Faruk Mansur Mir Spouse: Khadiza Faruk Wedding Anniversary: October 5 Kid 1: Mansur Aleem Mir (August 28) Kid 2: Maisha Mir (March 23) Phone : 303-873-0425 (H) 720-301-4323 (Cell) faruk_mir@yahoo.com Other Info: 11th Batch MBA and active sportsman</p>	<p>Name: Firoze Shams (Mithu) Spouse: Shahina Akter (Riva) Wedding Anniversary: 14th April (1st Baishakh) Kid 1:Cynthia Sroubonti Shams (Sroubonti) Phone : (303) 487-9488 firozes@hotmail.com</p>	<p>Name: Mir Dost Mohammad Khan Other Info: 1116 Wabash St, Denver Colorado 80220</p>

<p>Name: Mohammed Abdul Moktader Spouse: Arifa Jahan Wedding Anniversary: August 10 Kid 1: Arif Moktader Kid 2: Raaisa Lami Moktader Phone : 303-753-2368 (Res); 303-624-2985 (bus) mmoktad@qwest.com, mithu_m@hotmail.com, mithu_m@ju.com Other Info:BUET 89 batch (graduation). Former Lecturer at BIT Chittagong. A fan of sports.</p>	<p>Name: Kabir Newaz Jun/30/1951 (O Negative) Spouse: Jahanara Newaz (Bakul) Jun/30/1962 (O+) Wedding Anniversary: Oct 15 Kid 1: Tanvir Newaz 07/14/1984 (O+) Kid 2: Takbir Newaz 03/26/1989 (O+) Phone :(303) 280-6080 knewaz@msn.com Other Info: born at Bagerhat, (Jahngirnagar University 1970 1st Batch); Wish I could be a father of daughter;</p>	<p>Name: Mamun Shahrier Spouse:Jarin Sultana Shahrier Wedding Anniversary: 27 February Kid 1:Aniqa Zahin Shahrier(Swarna) Kid 2:Farhan Wahed Shahrier (Showmik) Phone :(303) 762 1783 mshahrier@cs.com Other Info:Govt. Laboratory High School SSC 1976, Dhaka College 1978, Dhaka Medical College 1984. VIRULENTLY ANTI-PAKISTANI</p>
<p>Name: AlHelal M. Moshaddeq Spouse: Kazi Mahamoda Wedding Anniversary: 01/10/93 Kid 1: Mohammad Mushfique Kid 2: Maliha Zavín Phone : 303-369-4383 alhelal91@msn.com</p>	<p>Name: Mehedi Sardar Spouse: Fowzia Begum Wedding Anniversary: 01/12/96 Phone :(303) 287 - 6989 mehedi.sardar@mcdata.co</p>	<p>Name: Azad M. Hossain Spouse: Tania Aktar Wedding Anniversary: 22nd June Kid 1: Tanzim Afsan Phone : 303-778-6309 azad_hossain@yahoo.com azadh@engineer.com</p>
<p>Name: Taufiq Raihan Spouse: Shamin. A. Raihan. Wedding Anniversary: Kid 1: Raja Wahidur Raihan Kid 2: Tasfiq Khan Raihan Phone : 720-271-2546 traihan@hotmail.com Other Info: Member Colo Muslim Society & Denver Islamic Society Active Worker In "Dawwa" To Remind Every Muslim Umma About The Benefit Of "Kalima" La-Ila-Ha-Ilal-La Hu-Mhd(Pbuh)-Ur -Rasulullah</p>	<p>Name: Monjur Rahim (July 7th) Spouse:Sabrina Rahim (RAIN) (Jun 26th) Wedding Anniversary:Augast 25th Kid 1:Ryan Binn Rahim (August 21st) Phone :303-680-2356 mrahim@qwest.com Other Info:X-PAB CADET 4th Batch</p>	<p>Name: Yousuf Khan Russell Spouse: Siffat H. Khan (Sara) Wedding Anniversary: August 10 Phone : 303-635-1910 russ101@hotmail.com; siffat_khan@hotmail.com Other Info: Adamjee Cantonment College</p>
<p>Name: Taimur Siddik Spouse: Not married Phone : 720-529-0307 tsiddik@hotmail.com</p>		

Note 1: We are sorry that we could not collect or get the information from everybody within the short timeframe available. We are providing brief information of the rest of the community that is available with us below.

Note 2:Both lists are sorted alphabetically with last name.

Name	Telephone	Email
Ahmad , Nur	970-898-7882-W	
Ahmed, Bashiruddin	303-797-7592-H	

Ahmed, Dabir	303-795-1052-H	
Ahmed, Iqbal	720-873-8801-H	monzur01@hotmail.com
Ahmed, Jamal U	970-493-1357-H	jua@fc.hp.com
Ahmed, Shamsuddin	303-632-6329-H	-
Name	Telephone	Email
Ahmed, Syed	303-841-9840-H	
Ahmed, Wasi U	720-733-7893-H 303-334-1338-W	wasi_ahmed@jdedwards.com
Akhter, Shuja	303-617-7488-H	
Alam, Mahbub	720-535-1019-H	-
Alam, Nayeem	303-439-0461-H	nayeem_alam@hotmail.com
Alam, Nurul	303-699-8498-H 303-757-9432-W	Nurul.Alam@dot.state.co.us
Alam, SM Mahabubul	303-671-6098-H 303-333-1105-W 303-246-6008-C	smalam75@hotmail.com
Ashraful, Aman	970-377-3484-H 970-898-0643-W	aas@fc.hp.com
Babu, Shafiul Azam	303-660-0104-H	msazam@netzero.net
Chowdhury, Sham	303-791-9107-H	chowdhurys@aol.com
Chowdhury, Zahid	303-485-0546-H	-
Farhana, Mrs.	303-632-0126-H	rumaleo@hotmail.com
Faruque, Golam	303-743-8769-H	gfaruqu@hotmail.com
Hasasn, Rabiul	303-443-0876-H 303-571-3361-C	ra_hasan@yahoo.com
Hossain, Mozammel	970-377-3928-H 970-898-0287-W	kmh@fc.hp.com
Hossain, Delwar	970-472-0374-H	dhussain@atrixlab.com
Hossain, Elias	303-365-9733-H	
Hossain, Iftekhar	970-377-1480-H 970-898-0406-W	
Hossain, Mohommad	303-743-8922-H	runjumiha@hotmail.com
Howlader, Abdul Khaleq	303-750-2581-H	-
Islam, M. Shariful	303-337-4258-H	
Jahan, Muhammad Asif	720-283-6492-H	ma_jahan@yahoo.com
Jewel, Rafiqul Islam	303-375-9077-H 303-624-6704-W	rislam@qwest.com , zjahan@uswest.net
Karim, Nazmul	970-204-9684-H	
Khan , M. Nusrat	303-615-5343-H	
Khan, Rabeya Akhter/A. Shahid	970-224-2175-H	
Khan, Zunaid	303-439-7384-H 303-427-4340-W	-
Khandaker, Lutfur Rahman	303-791-6294-H	lutfur@juno.com
Mackey, Shibrin	303-306-1377-H	
Masud, Abdullah		aam1135@netscape.net

Maznu, AKM Mazibul Islam	720-857-8284-H	maznu2000@aol.com
Mithu, Mr.		dip_bangla@hotmail.com
Mohakim/Sabrina	303-695-0372-H	-
Name	Telephone	Email
Mohammad, Nur	970-282-9274-W	
Momen, Ashik	303-635-1361-H 303-661-6647-W	MomenA@LOUISVILLE.STORTEK.COM
Morshed, ASM		asm_m_morshed@hotmail.com
Mustafiz , Imran	303-694-5745-H	imran_mustafiz@jdedwards.com
Naser, Hasan	970-377-1055-H	-
Nizamuddind, Mohammed	303-671-6098-H 720-339-5904-C	colin090@hotmail.com
Nuruzamman, Mohammad	303-776-7867-H	zaman85@hotmail.com
Rafik, Maruf	303-770-7338-H 303-334-8362-W	maruf_rafik@yahoo.com
Rahman, Mamunur	303-703-8162-H	
Rahman, ATM Shahnoor	303-337-8191-H	shahnoor_r@hotmail.com
Rahman, Bazlur/Aminur	303-778-9328/106-W	
Razzak, Naim	303-635-2964-H	mrazzak@hotmail.com
Russell, Yousuf Khan	303-635-1910-H	khany@us.ibm.com
Salam, M. A.	303-541-3597-W	salamm@baxter.com
Saleheen, Serajus	303-774-0638-H	saleheen@us.ibm.com
Samad, Abdus	303-797-7110-H	msamad1@aol.com
Sardar, Mahbub	307-766-4784-H	msardar@uwyo.com
Sharifur/Prince/Masud/Shahid	720-941-2840-H	sharif111@hotmail.com
Sunny, Asad Jamal	719-548-8215-H	asad_jamal@yahoo.com
Swapon, Mohammad Islam	303-361-9570-H	
Uddin, Ashraf	303-920-4055-H	Ashraf_uddin@msn.com
Ula, Sadrul	307-721-3065-H 307-766-6268-W	ulas@uwyo.edu