

The Spirit of the Liberation War

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Over the last year we have been commemorating the 40th year of Bangladesh's independence. In these 40 years Bangladesh has registered many gains for which we should feel proud. We have established a globally competitive garment industry moved ahead of India in particular areas of human development and gender parity, extended micro-credit to 25 million women and drastically reduced aid dependence through an explosive growth in remittances by our hard working migrants. We have furthermore held four reasonably free and fair elections where incumbent regimes have been replaced by opposition parties through the ballot box. These are not inconsiderable achievements for a country once written off as a basket case.

But these achievements also remind us how much more we could have made of ourselves where Bangladesh could have fulfilled the promise which inspired our struggle for nationhood. My presentation addresses the unfulfilled expectation of the generation which shared the privilege of participating in the liberation struggle. Had we been able to live up to these expectations Bangladesh would have been a very different place today. I will therefore explore this chasm which separates the hopes of yesterday from the reality of today and will then move on to offer some suggestions on what we may attempt to do to build a society which restores meaning to the spirit which sustained our struggle for liberation. In looking ahead we will need to recognize that both Bangladesh and the world around us have experienced seismic changes. We will accordingly need to calibrate our dreams of yesteryear to the world we live in today.

Bangladesh was not born because of an historical accident. Nor was it the gift of a departing colonial power grown weary of bearing its imperial burden. Our nationhood emerged out of a long process of struggle which culminated in a bloody war of

liberation. To move large numbers of ordinary people to pledge their lives for a separate existence we needed to inspire them with a vision for a better world than the one they were repudiating. This inspiration was what came to be known as the spirit which inspired the liberation war, what we popularly term Muktijuddher-chetona. This is a phrase which is used so frequently and so casually as to be rendered almost devoid of meaning. We invoke this spirit as a ritual incantation and rarely bother to ask ourselves what this spirit embodies. I would argue that the spirit of the liberation war is adequately captured in the four principles which have guided our constitution: Democracy, Nationalism, Secularism and Socialism (which has later been elaborated to mean social justice). In my presentation before you, I will discuss why these pillars of our constitution capture the spirit of the liberation struggle, how far we have departed from these guiding principles and where we need to travel in order to restore meaning to the spirit of the liberation war.

Our emergence as a separate nation-state was the direct outcome of the persistent denial of democratic rights to the people of Bangladesh by the Pakistani ruling class. In 24 years of shared nationhood never once was central power in Pakistan exercised through the outcome of a free and fair election. The first such election in December 1970, 23 years after the emergence of Pakistan, led to the Awami League, under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, capturing a majority of seats in the National Parliament, with an electoral mandate from the people of Bangladesh to establish self-rule. It was the attempt by the Pakistani military junta to frustrate this democratic mandate, through the instrument of genocide, which inspired the liberation war. The liberation war was, thus, the final phase of our democratic struggle when the Bangali people had to come to terms with the reality that democracy could never be realised within the Pakistani nation state.

It is a tragedy for Bangladesh that our nationhood emerged out of our quest for democracy yet we have spent most of our national existence frustrating its realisation. We have lived through long episodes of martial rule and civilian autocracy. In 1990 when the Ershad autocracy was overthrown through a mass mobilisation the nation experienced the excitement of a second rebirth of democracy. But who would have imagined that within 17 years of this renewal of democracy our confrontational style of politics would have reached a point where the military were once again provided with an opportunity to intervene in the political process through the process of Emergency Rule. The military may have overstayed their welcome and overtaxed their mandate. But, fortunately for democracy and quite exceptionally in our historical context, the military, as promised, returned to the barracks within two years after helping to engineer a universally recognised free and fair election which enabled the incumbent government to return to power with a large plurality of seats in parliament.

There is no evidence that we have learnt the right lessons from our most recent malfunction of the democratic process. The politics of confrontation and intolerance appears to be once again permeating our political culture. The political opposition, over successive regimes, has been marginalised, partly as a result of its own political immaturity in boycotting parliament thereby violating its democratic mandate. As a result of these endemic boycotts four successive parliaments have been rendered virtually dysfunctional in their incapacity to discharge their primary mandate of keeping the executive accountable to the will of the voters.

The malfunctioning of our democratic institutions remains compounded by the continuing inability to strengthen democracy in our principal political parties. The principal political parties, in turn, reflect the gradual ascendance of money and muscle power as the driving force in democratic

politics. Whilst some effort was made by the current ruling alliance to induct some candidates of modest means into parliament, politics in Bangladesh has remained largely a rich man's game where both women and the financially deprived have been effectively disenfranchised.

The proliferation of violence, which becomes more pernicious when it is patronised by the state, continues to be deployed to further political and personal objectives. The purveyors of violence, the mastaans, have served to undermine our public educational institutions, interfere with the working of the administration, challenge the credibility of our institutions of law enforcement and compromise the vitality of our investment climate.

In such a distortion of the democratic process every institution of governance tends to be compromised. Our administration has become ineffective where both recruitment and advancement have been politicised and divorced from performance or norms. As a result virtually all public services as well as law enforcement have become partisanised and commoditised to a point where the machinery of government has lost virtually all capacity for functioning as an instrument of public service. The last remaining bastion of the rule of law, the judiciary, is now under threat. Over the years, the lower judiciary has degenerated into a politicised instrument of the ruling party. The once independent upper judiciary, which served as a bastion of our democratic freedom, is being exposed to a process of creeping politicisation.

The appointments to the Election Commission (EC) had been similarly politicised upto the tenure of the last elected government. It remains to be seen how far the new appointments to the EC, who are expected to preside over the next round of elections to parliament in 2014, will be selected on the basis of merit and consensus. The integrity of the very institutions to safeguard the democratic credentials of our electoral process needs to be protected.

However, the independence and credibility of the EC may not be enough of a guarantor of free and fair elections. Experience over the last three decades has established that prior to a national election all recruitment and postings in the police force, upazilla administration, schools, and now the armed forces, which can in any way influence the direction of the national elections, have tended to be politicised. In such circumstance, the scope for a free and fair election, where the role of money and ruling party patronised mastans could be contained, have compromised the freedom of action of the EC. It was this exposure to the influence exercised by a partisan administration which inspired the Awami League and its allies in 1995 to initiate the campaign for institutionalising the system of holding elections under a non-partisan caretaker government. This system was incorporated in the constitution in 1996 and has, with some limitations, ensured three relatively free and fair elections over the last 15 years. The logic and wisdom of the present government's decision to do away with the very system it had politically sponsored remains questionable and is unlikely to be compensated by a strong EC. The history of electoral politics in Bangladesh, going back to the period of Pakistani rule, indicates that in the absence of a non-partisan caretaker government no incumbent government has ever vacated office through defeat at the polls.

The last recourse of democracy, the free media, is demonstrating considerable resilience. But the security of journalists has been periodically endangered and the independent press itself faces a constant struggle to secure itself from both state pressure and private terror. Here again, people with money and state patronage are making inroads into the media and are investing both in the print and electronic media with the expectation of "managing" the news in the service of partisan and private gain. That our institutions of democracy and governance should have degenerated to a level where the very sustainability of the democratic process is endangered is particularly distressing when we consider our long and painful struggle for democracy.

Nationalism

Nationalism was identified as a pillar of our nationhood because our founding fathers recognised that liberation was tied up with our struggle to establish our national identity as distinct from Pakistan. Our founders were also conscious about asserting our identity vis a vis India, our friend and neighbour, who had played such a critical role through their support of our liberation struggle. However, in the day to day affairs of nation building the issue of nationalism is more concerned with the need to recapture autonomy over our political as well as policy choices. Our founders were aware that their Pakistani rulers had surrendered autonomy over policymaking, in large measure, to international development partners on whom we had become heavily dependent for both military and economic aid. However, in a fast globalising world policy choices available to a least developed country such as Bangladesh are severely constrained. Regrettably, successive regimes in Bangladesh have made little effort to design our policies and restructure our economy so as to enhance our flexibility in coping with the challenges of globalisation.

In the last two decades the maximum influence over Bangladesh's decision making process has vested with our principal aid donors who have attempted to influence the terms on which we globalise ourselves. This leverage was inherited from an era when our aid dependence in the 1980's exceeded 10% of GDP. We were then dependent on aid to finance our entire development budget and part of our current budget. Particular bilateral aid donors and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank used this dependence to influence our policies towards a more market oriented, private sector based, development strategy. Donor pressure has compelled us to liberalise our imports at a faster pace than was even demanded by the WTO. This has threatened the sustainability of a large number of small and medium sized industries serving our domestic market as well as inhibited the growth and diversification of our manufacturing sector.

Today, Bangladesh is much less aid dependent with aid accounting for around 2% of our GDP. However, donors still remain a force in influencing our policy directions, particularly in areas such as infrastructure development where Bangladesh remains seriously deficient. The 3.2 billion dollar of aid committed to finance the Padma Bridge has empowered donors to exercise a high degree of leverage over the governance of this project. In practice, in this day and age our donors simply do not provide enough resources to compel a government to take up positions which are likely to be politically unacceptable. Today, Bangladesh's global trade deficit is largely financed by migrant remittances which contribute six times the foreign exchange provided by aid. If any class of people need to be propitiated it is our migrants whose enormous contribution to keeping our balance of payments healthy remains inadequately recognised.

In the last decade Bangladesh has moved from being an aid dependent to a trade dependent country. At the time of liberation in 1971, Bangladesh's export volume was around 500 million dollar. Today, it is apparently 25 billion dollar, a fifty-fold increase. Whilst we originally remained dependant on export of jute and jute goods, today 80% of our exports are centred around readymade garments (RMG) with over 75% of our exports directed to the markets of North America and the European Union (EU). In recent years the United States and the EU have begun to use political considerations in determining the degree of market access offered to any country. Governments in Bangladesh have thus remained sensitive to these extraneous political influences.

This high trade dependence is fortunately changing as new markets for our RMG exports are being located in Asia and most recently in India. Now that India has provided duty free access to all the major categories of garments where Bangladesh enjoys competitive advantage its large market provides significant opportunities for our exporters. The gradual withdrawal of China, the world's leading

RMG exporter, from the low cost range of products, due to rising wages and high end export opportunities, has established the prospect of unlimited growth for our RMG sector. However, it remains unwise to rely exclusively on RMG exports and we need to aggressively follow up on the diversification of our export base where a range of products from leather exports to shipbuilding and other products provide enormous opportunities of export growth.

Our most proximate neighbour, India, has now emerged as a global economic power with an import market worth 350 billion dollar. It is projected to grow into the world's third largest economy after China and the USA within the next 2 decades. It is now much sought after by all the major economic powers and has been recognised by its East Asia neighbours as a major partner in the emergence of Asia as a dominant player in the global economy over the next 50 years.

India is not only one of our major trading partners but is also an upper riparian to Bangladesh as the source of 58 of our principal rivers. Given Bangladesh's Indian-centric geography, our increasing economic links and the extraordinary economic opportunities becoming available to Bangladesh now that India has, after all these years, finally provided us with duty free access for our exports, we need to develop a strategic vision for defining our relations with India. This relationship is too important to be kept hostage to the shifting sands of our party politics. Designing such a strategy demands a process of public consultation and would eventually need to be backed by all political parties so that India-Bangladesh relations are addressed as a national rather than a party issue.

India apart, Bangladesh is also a neighbour to China which is currently our largest source of imports. China has, today, emerged as the world's largest trading power and is already overtaking the US as the world's largest economy. Over the next two decades, China is projected to emerge as the

leading economic force in the global economy. This provides extraordinary opportunities for Bangladesh which now commands a position of proximity to two of the world's largest and most dynamic economies. Rather than obsess ourselves with apprehensions of domination by our large neighbours we should have enough self-confidence in our competitiveness, professional capacities and negotiating skills to build relationships of mutual benefit with them.

In the prevailing circumstances, Bangladesh's assertion of nationalism must lie in re-establishing our sovereignty over our policy direction. Now that aid accounts for less than 2% of our GDP it should not be too difficult to recapture our policy autonomy. However, influence over public policy is not today just exercised by donors. Powerful domestic corporate players and special interest groups have now begun to exercise their influence over particular areas of policy, as regards such issues as malfeasance in the stock market and condoning debt default. A democratic state needs to insulate itself from such anti-democratic forces.

Such assertion of nationalism, whether in policy making, relations with our neighbours, in exploiting our natural resources, or in challenging special interests at home, demands political maturity and courage backed by a stronger capacity for professional work. Courage and professionalism in policy making can be sustained through a willingness to reach out to as well as motivate Bangladesh's highly skilled indigenous professional community to develop policy alternatives to guide the country and to then explain these policy options to the public. To sustain any such assertion of sovereignty we would also need to build a domestic political consensus which would strengthen the capacity of the government to challenge the tradition of external hegemony over our policy choices.

Secularism

The constitutional commitment to secularism was grounded in our long struggle to rescue

Bangladesh from the abuse of religion for political gain. Throughout the phase of Pakistani rule, greedy, corrupt and immoral political elites quite cynically attempted to use religious slogans to mask their anti-democratic rule. The abuse of religion reached its most degenerate form in 1971 when genocide was committed on large numbers of innocent Bengalis, in the name of religion, by a leader and his forces who were totally irreligious in their personal character and motivations. The founding fathers of Bangladesh were, thus, determined that in an independent Bangladesh no scope should be provided to similarly abuse religion for purposes of political gain. Secularism, as it was interpreted in our constitution, was thus never designed to interfere with the practice of religion by any individual or community or to discourage religious education. Nor did we go so far as to discourage any reference to religion in our public educational institutions or public sphere as is the case in some countries such as France with a strong commitment to secularism.

This attempt to discourage the abuse of religion for political gain did not prevent the post-liberation government from being slandered for discouraging religion, putting locks on the mosques or banning religious education. Even in the election campaigns of the last decade we have heard the slogan that the sound of the azaan will be replaced throughout Bangladesh with the sound of the conch shell.

This deliberate misinterpretation of the approach to secularism as incorporated in our constitution, led to the legal excision of this provision from the constitution by the post-1975 regime and its replacement by the constitutional proclamation under the 8th amendment, emphasising the supremacy of the religion of the majority community. These constitutional assertions of supremacy of one religion may not have derogated from the secular foundations of our constitution or legally arrogated a particular religion into a guiding principal of our jurisprudence but it served to encourage politicians and parties seeking political power and private material gain to abuse religion to

promote their political fortunes and slander their opponents. This same abuse of religion had culminated in the genocide of 1971. Whilst this tendency has not yet led to another genocide in Bangladesh the recent emergence of terrorism has demonstrated that violence in the name of religion has the potential to escalate into a threat to the functioning of a democratic society. Pakistan's experience should have taught us that when ambitious politicians and generals deliberately manipulate religious beliefs to both capture power and perpetuate their anti-democratic rule, sooner or later ideologically motivated fundamentalists will use these same slogans for imposing their beliefs on the people by terror rather than the ballot box.

The recently enacted 15th amendment to the Bangladesh constitution which once again restored secularism as a founding principle of the state, is a positive development even though some of the cosmetic interventions elevating a particular religion remain intact. Perhaps more significant than the amendment to the constitution is the decision of this government to push ahead with the trial for war crimes committed by certain political elements who explicitly collaborated with the Pakistan army in the genocide they inflicted on the people of Bangladesh in 1971. It was an affront to both the rule of law as well as the commitment to the construction of a more secular polity that those political elements who collaborated in genocide at a defining moment in Bangladesh's history, remained unanswerable for their role in 1971. However, if justice is to be done after all these years it had best be done through due legal process so that those who are being made answerable for unspeakable acts against their own people cannot claim political victimisation. It was this willingness by the current Prime Minister, during her first tenure in office, to ensure due process of law in the trial and sentencing of the assassins of Bangabandhu, his family and his close colleagues, which gave credibility to the outcomes of the judicial process and left it above legal or political challenge.

In the final analysis we cannot expect to construct a secular society out of a few amendments to the constitution. The substance of a secular society demands that we not only tolerate the practice of all faiths but do not discriminate against minorities in the distribution of political and economic opportunities. If Bangladesh is to avoid Pakistan's exposure to ideologically inspired terror the mainstream political parties will collectively need to decide that religion should not be exploited for partisan gain. Whilst all people should be free to pursue their religious beliefs religion cannot be manipulated to divide the country into political categories of believers and unbelievers. Once we introduce such variables into political life then those who are obsessed with the conviction that they are the truest believers will feel encouraged to assert their right to annihilate not just minorities but, as we are witnessing in Pakistan today, even those of common faith who they feel do not share their interpretation of the religion.

Moving Forward

The introduction of socialism as a pillar of the constitution was intended as a metaphor for social justice. The struggle for social justice was central to every democratic struggle which inspired the politics of the people of Bangladesh from the peasant uprisings of Titumir and Nureldin, to the 6-point/11-point movement led by Bangabandhu which drove the election campaign of 1970. The dispossessed peasantry of Bengal, which constituted the numerical majority of the population, provided the support base of every major democratic struggle. It was this same class of peasants, now joined by a nascent working class and the students of Bangladesh, who provided the vanguard for the liberation struggle. It was this class which gave the Awami League its overwhelming electoral victory in 1970 and uncompromising support to the non-cooperation movement which culminated in the genocide unleashed by the Pakistan army on March 26, 1971. It was again this same subaltern class which provided the foot-soldiers for the liberation war and

bore the brunt of the casualties. It was their families which were the principal victims of the genocide, their wives and daughters who were raped and their homes which were burnt by the Pakistani army.

The incorporation of socialism into the constitution was, thus, a recognition of the debt of honour owed to the deprived majority of Bangladesh who bore a disproportionate share of the heavy price we paid for liberating Bangladesh. It was expected that post-liberation Bangladesh would put the deprived majority at the forefront of our concerns. We never aspired to build a society which recreated a privileged elite, presiding over an inequitable social order, which had characterised Pakistan. Contrary to our aspirations, mass poverty has been perpetuated at an unacceptably high level over the 40 years since our liberation even though its percentage level has been reduced. Over the same period our development strategies have recreated a highly inequitable, deeply unjust, society which has graduated from the two economies which characterised Pakistan, into two societies which characterise contemporary Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's two societies are characterised by the emergence of an elite which is becoming increasingly differentiated from the mass of society. This elevation of a group of people who, a little over three decades ago, were part of a shared fabric of middle class society in Bangladesh, into a far more exclusive elite, integrated into the process of globalisation and operating in a policy environment which makes it possible to perpetuate themselves, has far reaching implications for the people of Bangladesh. Such an emergent elite, it is argued, goes in the face of Bangladesh's history, repudiates not just the spirit of the Liberation War but the two-century old democratic struggle of the people of this country also.

The sustainability of a social order depends on its legitimacy in the eyes of society. Those who exercise political and economic power should be

deemed to do so on the basis of a freely given electoral mandate and through demonstrable enterprise, efficiency and competitiveness. Social disparities originating from such legitimised political and economic disparities enjoy a greater degree of acceptance by society. If such social power is deemed to be illegitimately acquired it remains exposed to instability because it will remain under constant question and hence challenge which can only be contained by a monopoly of force, violence and money in the hands of the elite. Such societies, founded on weak social legitimacy, tend to be more prone to crime, violence and possible social breakdown. The weak legitimacy of Bangladesh's social order derives from the questionable ways in which both political and economic power has been attained in Bangladesh.

The manifestations of injustice in our political system itself originates in the injustices in the economic order, which have been accentuated by the policy regimes put in place over the last two decades. A policy agenda based on an indiscriminate belief in the allocative efficiency of the market place, notwithstanding the structural features of an economy, or the institutional arrangements which determine the working of markets, is likely to malfunction with serious implications for social justice in any country.

In such a system where markets either do not function or malfunction due to the capacity of those with power and access to resources to manipulate these markets, justice emerges as the first casualty. Thus, those who are honest and competent have little reason to expect that either the government or even the market will reward them. The reward systems of our society, in its present configuration, depend on access to power and influence, the capacity to manipulate the system for personal or sectoral gain and to escape from accountability either in the market place or through exposure to popular or legal institutions. Where power, access and immunity from the law are distributed very inequitably, the values of a

market driven system tend to aggravate inequalities and injustice.

Those who remain without land, access to adequate education and health care, cannot expect to avail of the opportunities offered by the open market. Where access to work is a privilege which lies within the patronage of those with privileged access to knowledge and resources, the system itself becomes whimsical since no competitive norms guide access to administrative decisions or economic opportunities. In such an environment those who produce outputs do so in an unprotected and uncertain environment where price behaviour and foreign competition make an already unpredictable environment even more erratic. In such a system access to capital is not based on market principles but on access, and the cost of capital itself varies from person to person depending on their power to perpetuate their defaults. Law enforcement remains a hazard rather than a source of security where access to the law is determined by who you are and what you are willing to pay so that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor. Within the rich there is one law for those with political access and another for those who compete in the market for purchasing law enforcement. The system of justice at the lower levels remains negotiable and encourages contempt for the rule of law.

Illegitimately acquired wealth and misgovernance percolate down to private crime. Defaulters in Motijheel and political leaders patronising these defaulters finance mastaans who help them to contest elections. These mastaans use their political access to buy immunity from the law to extract tolls and use crime as an instrument of private enterprise. Many of these criminals graduate into politicians and eventually into elected representatives. In such a milieu crime becomes another form of entrepreneurship as well as an entry point into politics. Such a process perpetuates the injustices of a system where the dividing line between the law enforcer and the law breaker is increasingly becoming invisible.

Are we in a position to give meaning to the dreams which sustained our liberation struggle? Can we build a democratic order which responds to the needs of the people rather than the greed of the powerful? Can we recapture autonomy over our policymaking process? Can we build a tolerant, plural society where all faiths are respected and minorities, including both religious and indigenous communities, enjoy equal opportunities? Is there any escape from the growth and perpetuation of injustice ?

In this quest for recapturing the dreams which motivated our liberation struggle we should recognise that in 40 years much has changed not just in Bangladesh but in the world and our position within the world. This does not mean that the foundational principles which underwrote the liberation struggle should be compromised in the quest for introducing contemporary relevance into our policy agendas. There are certain truths which remain immutable and this includes the commitment of our founding fathers to build a society based on democracy, national self belief, tolerance and social justice. The critical challenge is to calibrate our foundational beliefs to the realities of the 21st century.

The search for answers lies in our ability to build a democratic order where each citizen assumes responsibility, individually and collectively, to question those in authority above them and to eventually demand accountability from their political leaders and elected representatives. If we wait upon our leaders to voluntarily make themselves more accountable we may wait for ever. Thus the building of a democratically accountable society becomes our personal responsibility and more so for those with some education and political consciousness. Many more citizens must seek this accountability more directly by joining political parties and participating in the struggle to democratise our political parties.

This, assertion of individual responsibility must translate into collective action by a civil society

which need to remain committed for 365 days in the year to recapturing the spirit of the liberation war rather than just limit themselves to ritual observances on February 21, March 26 and December 16. Civil society should not be seen as a part-time task left to NGOs. In the vacuum left by a non-performing parliament and a casualised civil society full time terrorists and commercialised mastaans will continue to undermine the sustainability of the democratic process.

A more accountable system may minimise the injustices of the existing system. But it will do little to moderate the injustices created by the policies and institutions which create and perpetuate such injustice. We thus need to rethink our policy agendas and to restructure the institutions which perpetuate such injustice. Policy and allocative regimes have to be put in place which prioritise the ending of hunger and poverty by emphasising justice and giving a stake to the less privileged in Bangladesh's development process. Such an agenda, whilst establishing the right to education and health care, must also ensure more equitable access to educational opportunities and health care so that the children of the deprived face the same opportunities in life as those of the elite. The digitisation of Bangladesh must begin with empowering the less educated through access to knowledge and information available to our urban elites.

We need to democratise economic opportunities by providing resources to the deprived to acquire productive assets in the way of land, water, and technology so as to enable them to compete more equitably in the market place. 5 million acres of khas assets, mostly under illicit occupation, need to be recovered and distributed to the land poor. Access to assets should include opportunities to the resource poor to own corporate assets through access to credit from the banking system and the building of institutions which can help them to acquire and manage such assets.

I would hope to live long enough to see a Bangladesh where the deprived majority own a

significant part of the shares in our corporate sector whilst the women whose labour sustains 80% of our exports eventually own at least a third of the shares in the enterprises where they work. I would like to see bustee dwellers own apartments in multistoried buildings built for them in Dhaka and Chittagong and the landless own homesteads throughout Bangladesh. I would like tobacco, jute and sugarcane growers to own shares in the factories which process their produce, tea garden workers to own shares in the tea companies where they work, whilst fruit and vegetable growers should own shares in agro-processing and cold storage enterprises which buy their produce. I would hope to witness the emergence of large labour service exporting enterprises owned by migrant workers whose remittances can transform them into major investors in the corporate sector of Bangladesh.

We will need to develop a system which rewards work, skills and production rather than rent seeking intermediation. We will need to build a system which not only guarantees the right to work but puts employment generation at the centre of our policy agendas rather than as an afterthought of our development plans. We will need to invest in upgrading the skills and productivity of our farmers, artisans, our rural industries, our garment workers. We will need to give the deprived majority an investment stake and price regime which enables them to capture more of the gains from their labours and improved productivity. We need to develop a system which directs resources and rewards to those who use this competitively whilst sanctioning those who misuse these resources and default on their fiscal and financial obligations.

Above all, we need to rediscover a sense of community where we not only make ourselves more accountable but also fulfill our social contract with the less privileged segments of society, whose labour and sacrifice have underwritten our elite status. We will accordingly have to restructure our

political and development institutions to accommodate this more inclusive policy agenda where the stake of the deprived classes is institutionalised by law rather than left to the political whims and changing allocative priorities of our policymakers.

This rediscovery of a sense of community will hopefully move Bangladesh towards a search for more indigenous solutions, where externally driven policy agendas will be superseded by policies which originate from our domestic felt needs, expressed through a more democratic consultation process articulated by our indigenous expertise and underwritten by a democratic political consensus.

To operationalise such an inclusive agenda for change will require the emergence of drivers of change. In a democratic society the lead drivers must be the elected political leadership. Our incumbent prime Minister had, in her victorious election campaign, committed herself to realising a *din bodol* for Bangladesh. In her recent address to the international community at the UN she has proclaimed her belief in justice and empowerment of the poor as instruments of change. Dare we hope that she devote the remaining two years of her tenure in office to giving substance to the realisation of *din bodol* through empowerment by carrying forward some of the ideas spelt out above which seek to promote societal change through collective action by the disempowered? In moving towards realizing *din bodol* our political leadership will need to conscientise their political workers to the concept and need for change rather than personal accumulation, and reconstruct their political parties to serve as instruments of change.

Whilst we may continue to place our faith in the political process we must keep in mind that the state is not the only driver of change. A new class of entrepreneur, both big and small, who are not debt

defaulters or market manipulators but genuine entrepreneurs, would also support change and should be incentivised to support such a process. Our vibrant voluntary sector, hard working farmers, creditworthy rural women and an enterprising, hard working, increasingly feminised labour force also remain critical agents of change. Above all a new generation of youth, tired of corruption, political partisanisation and lack of vision need to be mobilised and empowered to promote and operationalise change.

In conclusion it must be stated that the emergence of two societies remains in violation of the social contract which has underwritten Bangladesh's struggle for liberation. When the common people of Bangladesh were mobilised behind the liberation struggle they did not expect that their rulers would preside over the emergence of an unjust social order as well as a malfunctioning system of governance. The sense of anger and frustration which permeates our society originates in this sense of disappointed expectations that we have failed to honour the hopes and spirit of the Liberation War. Bangladesh, thus, owes a blood debt to those who fought for our liberation to build a more just, inclusive and genuinely democratic society which enables us to live with dignity, as a sovereign nation, in the global community.

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