

Armed Forces Day: Some Reflections



THE magnificent origin of Bangladesh's Armed Forces Day goes back to 1971 in the battlefields of the war of independence. November 21 is a significant day in the victory saga of patriotism. On this day, the army, the navy and the air force united with the Mukti Bahini, freedom fighters — and led the joint offensive against the occupation forces, the Pakistan army. Many brave warriors who shaped the national history celebrated the final victory on December 16, 1971 with joy, emotion and excitement. Still, many more brave freedom fighters were martyred.

The celebration of Armed Forces Day this year carries more significance in the changed political context. The country gratefully acknowledges the supreme sacrifice of countless people and salutes the army, the navy and the air force for extending exemplary support for the mass that acted as a bulwark. For their self-sacrifice, our motherland was free from occupation forces 53 years ago and by displaying their best example again in July–August, the next generation is likely to be inspired. All the citizens should be contemplating that our heroes live forever and our admiration for them should not be confined or limited to only celebrating one day of the year.

Brief celebrations history

AFTER World War II, almost every country in the modern world commemorates the sacrifices and contributions of each member of their armed forces individually or collectively as army, navy, or air force day. After independence of Bangladesh, Navy Day was selected for observance on December 10, 1971, commemorating the commencement of the final operation to the victory of gunboats Padma and Palash in the River Passur. Air Force Day was selected for September 28 as the Bangladesh Air Force came into being at

Dimapur, India, on September 28, 1971. But later, through the maturing of the joint warfare concept, various steps were taken to bring the three forces closer. As a result, November 21 has been recognised as Armed Forces Day for Bangladesh.

Armed Forces Day Programme

Each year, the celebration of Armed Forces Day begins on November 21 with special prayers at mosques in all military installations. In the morning, the president, the prime minister, and the chiefs of the three services lay wreaths at Shikha Anirban. In the auditoriums of the cantonments and naval and air bases, arrangements are made to display films and documentaries on the war of independence. The prime minister arranges the official reception at Senakunja in the Dhaka cantonment. Receptions are also organised in cantonments and naval bases across the country. The defence wings in of our foreign missions also arrange receptions. The Bangladesh navy organises a program where the warships are open to visitors in Chittagong, Khulna, Barishal, Narayanganj and Dhaka. The Armed Forces Division publishes journals and periodicals. The prime minister and chiefs of three services pay tributes to the families of martyrs, veterans and freedom fighters.

Importance of the day

WE DISPLAY bravery and remember the memory of our great souls. The day also marks the immense importance of solidifying national security through national unity. Our country has set an unparalleled example of communal harmony among a population of around 180 million. Our armed forces have been hailed as a professional and disciplined force in the international arena.

Some reflections

THE winds of change in every aspect of life are almost overwhelming today. In this context of change, in addition to the organised programmes to celebrate Armed Forces Day, innovative ideas and constructive thoughts can be given about the following measures:

- Public or private organisations or celebrities can publish open letters to armed forces members acknowledging their sacrifice, patriotism and service to the nation.
- All events organised on Armed Forces Day can be arranged for citizens living in the country and abroad to watch or enjoy online.
- To honour retired disabled or terminally ill members of the armed forces and to recognise their sacrifice, programmes can be initiated by the civilian elite, interested wealthy individuals, or charitable organisations to collect donations to support their treatment and rehabilitation.
- Encouraging economic and social rehabilitation of the families of members of the armed forces killed in the line of duty.
- Motivating future generations to join the armed forces by creating informative blogs, etc, on the necessity of the armed forces to consolidate the future of a prosperous and secure motherland.

- Writing ‘inspiring stories of service to our country’ by eminent writers.
- Creating public awareness to work with the armed forces in humanitarian assistance and disaster response.
- Taking measures to present a balance and audit sheet to the public on how, in the current socio-economic context, members of the armed forces sustain themselves in society by betting their life on a limited salary and allowance vis-à-vis supreme sacrifice and how the country and the people should evaluate such priceless service.
- Determine the theme for each year. The armed forces may decide on the theme for November 21 every year to inspire the country and the nation to unite and move towards social harmony and prosperity.
- November 21 may be declared a public holiday following the US practice.
- Local public representatives/public administration can join in organising the Armed Forces Day celebrations or reception in association with the armed forces.

In the celebrations of Armed Forces Day, if the spontaneous participation of people from all walks of life is ensured and efforts are made to bolster national unity, we as a nation can claim to have succeeded. If the general public and the members of the armed forces and their mutual trust and respect create an atmosphere of patriotism, we can stand together like a bulwark in war and peace for the just cause of prosperity.

Writer: Commodore Syed Misbah Uddin Ahmad, (C), NUP, ndc, afwc, psc, BN (retired),
Director General, Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development
(BIMRAD). Email: misbah28686@gmail.com

The article was published in [New Age](#) newspaper on 21 November 2024