Excerpts from Reviews of the First Edition

... is an important contribution towards putting in perspective our history and the role of the founding father. The author acknowledges that writing an objective biography of a man larger than life is not easy, and in a society where myths and realities intermingle, and where scribes for hire have done much to distort facts, the task of disentangling the truth from fiction could not have been easy. This is a landmark publication and will long be celebrated as a triumph of scholarship, judicious and even-handed use of evidence, and a compelling narrative that is marked by peaks of human endeavors and sacrifices, and equally deep thoughts of depraved and sacrilegious actions that have stillied the blood of the martyrs. The central thrust of this study is unambiguous? There would have been no Bangladesh without Sheikh Mujib.

*—**Gowher Rizvi**, The Bangladesh Observer, March 24, 2007*

For a nation that owes its birth to the political struggle waged by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the paucity of truly scholarly works on Bangladesh's founding father is certainly surprising, if not exactly shocking. While it is true that a whole genre of literature has developed around the personality of the man who symbolized — and continues to epitomize — the Bengali ethos, the bigger truth is that not many of such works have been made available to readers outside the country. One of the problems here has been the reluctance of Bengali scholars to get down to the business of producing a full-length biography of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It is a job that has now been done by S.A. Karim, to his and the nation's credit.

*—**Syed Badrul Ahsan,** The Daily New Age, March 24, 2006*

There is a lot to be thankful for in Karim's Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy. At the very least, a sensible effort has been made to present the life of a great and generous even if flawed leader; surely others will now follow to give us a more intimate, imaginative, intensely realized and fuller portrait of the father of Bangladesh and the friend of all Bengalis everywhere. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman deserves no less!

*—**Fakrul Alam**, The Daily Star, August 15, 2006*

... the subject matter it deals with, would almost certainly be subject to relatively more dispassionate, probably more objective, treatment in the future, when everyone who even lived through the period from when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the most potent and visible symbol of the nationalist aspirations of the people of East Pakistan.

*—**Shahid Alam**, The Daily Star, June 9, 2007*

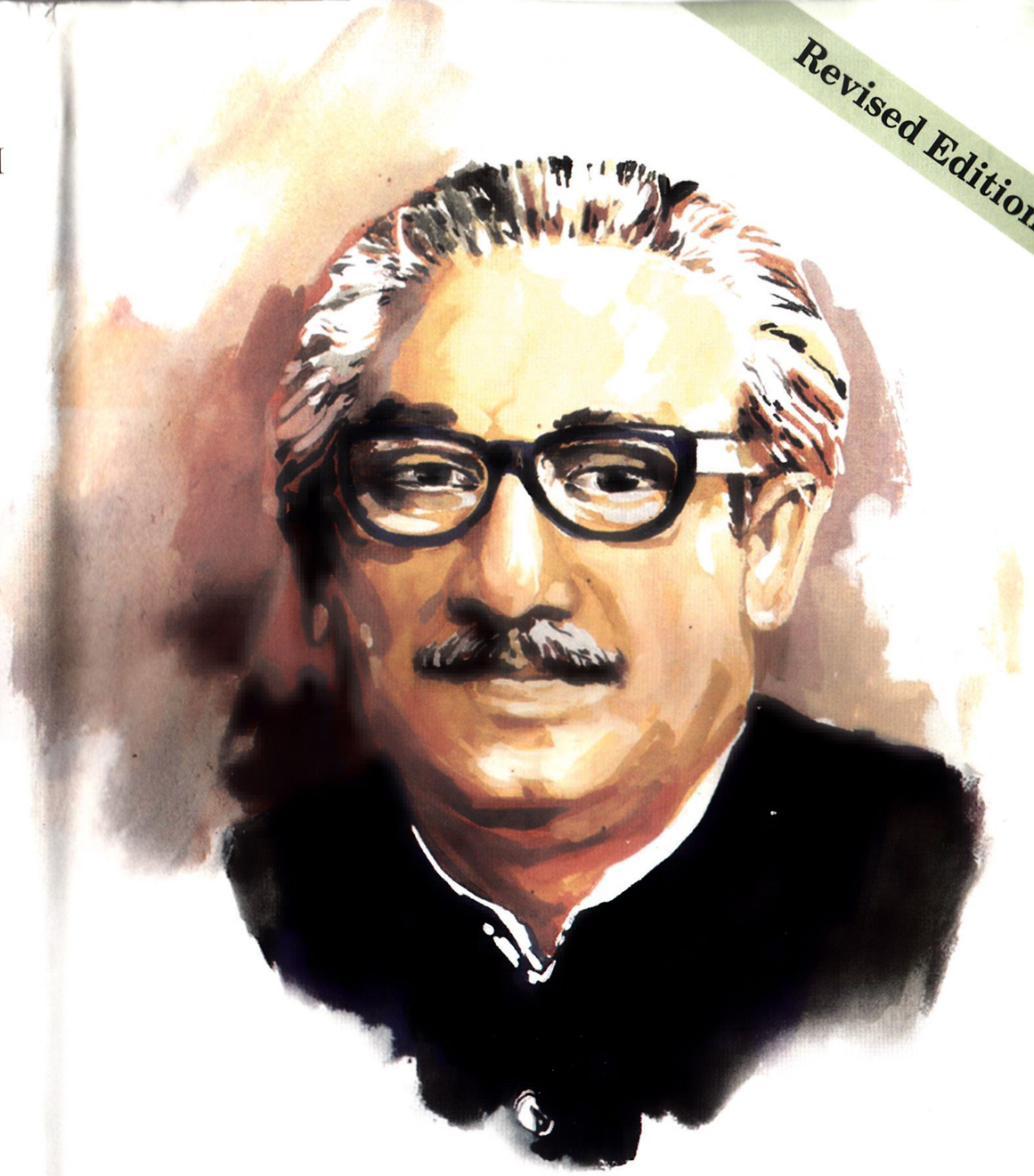
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S. A. KARIM

SHEIKH MUJIB

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

Revised Edition



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Second Edition
Revised and Updated

S. A. KARIM

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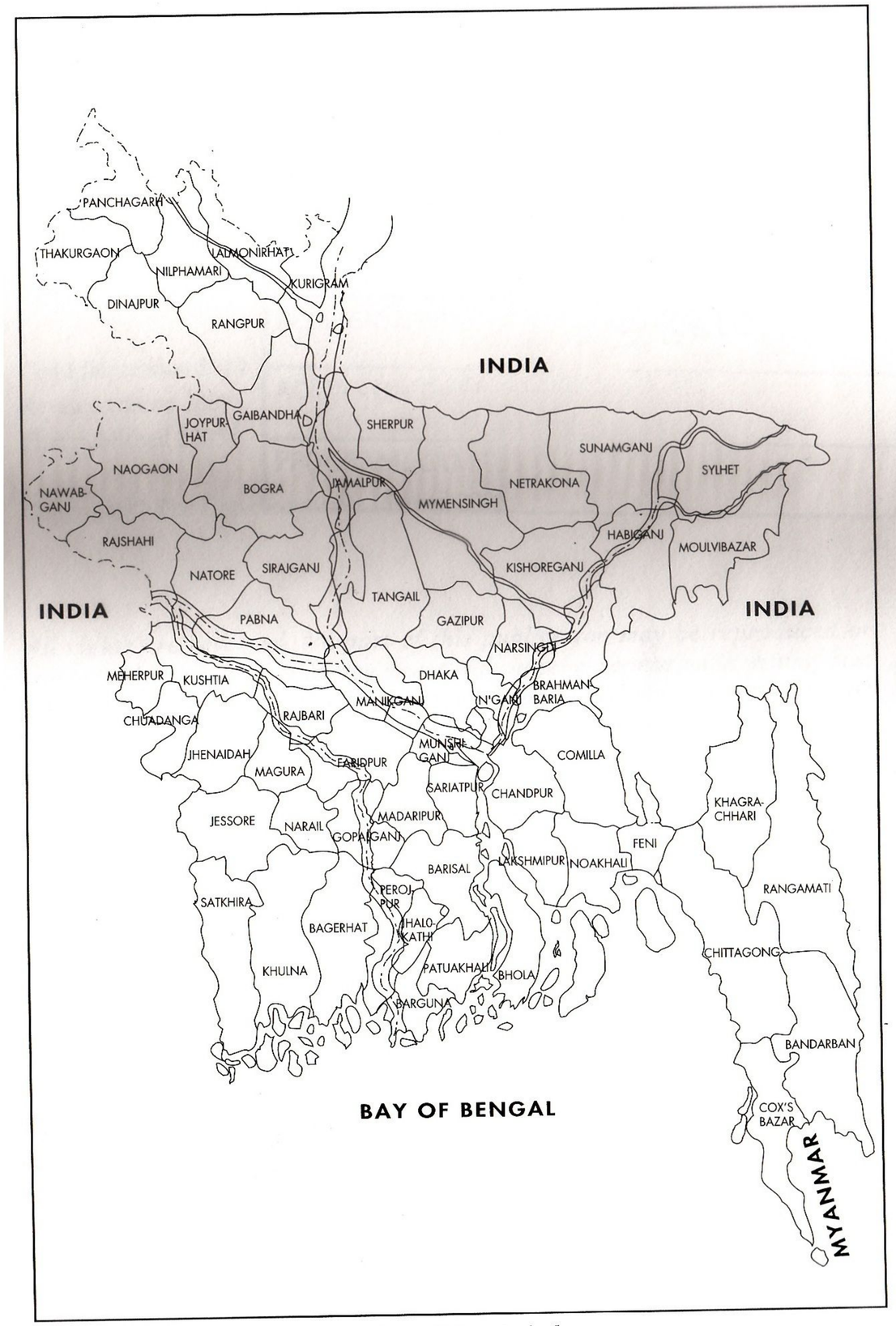
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To my grandchildren
And to the memory of
Mr. Syed Tayyeb Husain
and Begum Asma Husain



Map of Bangladesh

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GLOSSARY

almirah : wardrobe or chest of drawers.

ansar : helpers, Bengali auxiliaries supporting Pakistani Army

badla : vendetta

banya : someone belonging to the Hindu trading community

blitzkrieg : lightning war

crore : 100 lakhs (see lakh)

dak bungalow : rest house for government officials on tour

darwan : doorkeeper

devanagri : script in which Sanskrit is written

ghazi : a victorious Muslim warrior

gherao : to surround; a tactic used by Naxalites in West Bengal

goonda : someone hired to commit violent acts

hartal : strike

haii : a muslim who has made a pilgrimage of holy places in Arabia

jawan : soldier

jumma : muslim congregational prayer on Friday

janaza : prayer for the deceased at grave site

khilafat : an anti-British movement by Indian Muslim against Allied attempts to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and to deprive the Turkish Sultan—Caliph of his control of the Holy Places

lakh : 100,000

lathi : wooden or bamboo stick

lungi : sarong-like dress used in East Bengal by men

matbar : an influential person or boss, especially in a village setting

maulana : a title given to someone known for his learning on religious matters

mela	:	a Hindu festival or fair
mofussil	:	areas outside the main city
muhajir	:	immigrant
naxalite	:	Indian Maoists whose philosophy is more akin to anarchism than marxism. They are named after a place called Naxalbari in West Bengal near the foothills of the Himalayas where they began their movement
paisa	:	Smallest unit of money; 1/64th rupee
pandal	:	tent used for ceremonial or social function
pir	:	holy man belonging to sufi order
sardar	:	leader of a gang of workers
sari	:	a long piece of cotton or silk cloth that is wrapped around the body of a woman as the main garment
seer	:	a unit of weight, equvalent to about one kilogram
sherestedar	:	head clerk in charge of maintaining files for submission to magistrate
sonar bangla	:	golden Bengal
thana	:	police station
ulema	:	a Muslim with great knowledge of Islamic law
zamindar	:	a landlord

PREFACE

No one can deny that Sheikh Mujib was a larger-than-life figure in the political landscape of the subcontinent. Moreover, he was the founding father of a new nation: Bangladesh. A quarter of a century has passed since his death. Yet, strangely enough, no one has written a comprehensive biography of Mujib.

It was to fill this void that I began to think about writing a biography of Mujib almost a decade ago. To write a biography of a man with a mythic aura around him, the primary task of a writer is to separate legends from facts. This means not only wading through printed material like books, newspapers, and official documents, but interviewing Mujib's surviving contemporaries, both admirers and detractors. They include relatives, classmates, politicians, student leaders and journalists. I have also recorded some of my personal experiences with him.

Eighty percent of my time was spent in research, that is, collecting and organizing the materials for his biography and twenty percent in actual writing. When I had finished writing an account of his life it occurred to me that a general reader might also be interested in an evaluation of his achievements and failures. I have therefore added a concluding chapter with a comment of my own: what were the most significant traits of his character? To what extent did they contribute to his meteoric rise in political life and led to his ultimate tragedy? What is his legacy?

I am not a professional historian. Nor have I written this book in the spirit of a doctoral dissertation. Therefore I have not overloaded it with notes and references. Another reason is the difficulty I faced while interviewing hundreds of my fellow-countrymen. Some of them would agree to talk only on the condition that they should not be mentioned as a source. One of them quite frankly told me that while it was all right for me as a non-resident retiree to be outspoken, it was another matter for a person like him who has to deal with touchy people with power and influence in the government of the day. The point was well taken.

In the ten years since I first thought of writing this book, a lot of labour has gone into it. But for me, it was time well spent. It would perhaps have been less burdensome to me if I had received financial assistance from a

foundation or an academic institution. But I had made up my mind quite early not to solicit or receive money from any quarter, if only to maintain my independence.

For editorial assistance I am much indebted to a number of people. I would like to mention in particular Syed Najmuddin Hashem who encouraged me in my undertaking and helped me with correction of facts and advice on style until he succumbed to his terminal illness. Among those who have taken the trouble of reading the manuscript either in whole or in part and given me the benefit of their careful scrutiny are the following: Dr. Firdous Azim, Dr. Nurul Islam, Dr. S. A. Hafiz, Yusuf Buch, Dr. Moni Nag and Mrs. Mary Frances Dunham. I wish to express my sincere thanks to John Green of the UNHCR for his unpublished personal account entitled "Three Days in Dacca: 1971". A particularly useful find were the diaries of late Abdur Rahim, Personal Secretary of Mujib during 1974-75. I am indebted to Mrs. Rahim for letting me use her husband's diaries containing priceless information of an insider. I am grateful to Abdul Matin, an expatriate journalist and publisher now living in London, for his many helpful suggestions over the years. Finally, I wish to thank my wife for patiently putting up with all the clutter on the dining table which served as my desk for at least three years.

Preface to the Revised Edition

In the three years since the publication of this book, some new materials have been published (e.g. The Diaries of Field Marshall Ayub Khan 1966–1972) which I felt should be made use of, wherever appropriate. A member of readers have also prouded me with information not available to me earlier while I was writing this book and I have included some of them in the new edition. I have also taken this opportunity to correct a few typographical errors. I have found no reason, however, to charge my perspective or assessment of Sheikh Mujib as presented in the first edition.

PART I

BRITISH INDIA

England will lose India only if it allows its administrative machinery to be dominated by the Indians or when it will be forced to give up India as a result of attack on India by a more powerful enemy of England.

Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

I have not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.

Winston S. Churchill, 10 November 1942

What we had to agree to, unfortunately—it was not our wish at all—was the division of India. We'd argued on every possible safeguard for the Muslims but they wouldn't do it. By this time they'd become absolutely fixed on a separate Moslem State—Pakistan and we had to agree to it.... We would have preferred a United India. We couldn't get it, though we tried hard. But broadly speaking the thing went off well, I think.

Clement Attlee, 3 January 1959 on BBC TV

1
THE SETTING

Geography has played a prime role in shaping the history of Bengal, that is Bangladesh, as it has been called by its inhabitants for centuries. Bengal lies on the eastern fringe of the South Asian subcontinent. With the snow-clad Himalayas in the north, the high hills of the Garo range in the northeast, the jungle-covered hill tracts in the east and the vast Bay of Bengal to the south, the rain-drenched plains of Bengal form a natural geographical unit. It is only from the west that Bengal is accessible to invasion by land. Bengal was not politically united until Muslim rulers succeeded in incorporating the province of Bengal from their stronghold in Northern India. Located hundreds of miles away from their centre of power in Delhi, "Bengal took the opportunity to deny, defy and disown the central authority, whenever an opportunity was available."[1] No wonder that towns and cities of Bengal acquired the name of "Bulghakpur" (Rebel City) in the court of Delhi. Bengal lived up to its reputation as a rebellious province during the British Raj.

The partition of British India along religious lines into two successor states of India and Pakistan destroyed the political unity of Bengal. Hindu-majority West Bengal joined the Union of India while Muslim majority Bengal formed part of Pakistan. The peculiar geography of Pakistan made it inevitable that its two halves, separated by a thousand miles and united by religion and nothing else, would sooner or later be centrifugally driven apart. It happened in 1971 after a bitter, if short, armed struggle of liberation by Bengalis. In the final analysis history is made by men and it is unlikely that Bangladesh would have won its independence when it did without the leadership of one man, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose single concern during thirty odd years of ceaseless activity, spanning his entire adult life, was the promotion by every means the self-determination of his people.

Bengal is a gift of the rivers flowing down from the mountains in the north. Some of the mightiest rivers of the subcontinent—the Ganges, the Brahmapurta, the Meghna—have deposited their silt for thousands and thousands of years and have created the biggest and the most fertile delta in the world. Water defines the land: water from the rivers crisscrossing

the flat plains, water from the skies during the long monsoon season, water brought in by the tidal wave which periodically devastate the coastline. Water has been the blessing as well as the curse of Bengal. The topography of Bengal and the ravages of its moody rivers seem to have left a permanent mark on the national character of the people. They are emotional, fatalistic, resilient, individualistic.

The people who inhabited Bengal at the dawn of history were mainly a blend of Dravidian and Mongoloid races until the Aryans began to move into the Indo-Gangetic plains two millennia before Christ. The early Aryan society was essentially pastoral. The wetlands of Bengal did not easily provide grazing-lands for their cattle and horses and the iron technology needed for clearing forests and marshland was not known to the early Aryans. Only a few adventurous Aryan tribes probably made their way into the marshy deltaic region. It is thought that one of these tribes, the Vanga (Banga in Bengali) mentioned in the Hindu epic Mahabharata and other non-historical works like the Puranas and Ranghuvansa, gave the name to the low-lying country bordering the sea where they moved. Most Aryan groups settled along the Ganges river, whose main course then flowed in the southerly direction from the present-day Bengal-Bihar border. This section of the Ganges was known as the Bhagirathi.

Hindu sages regarded history as maya—illusion or evanescent appearance. An historic event may make an impact which sets off ripples but they vanish as they spread and in consequence are insubstantial and unimportant. The Greeks, on the other hand, were intensely interested in the methodical recording of public events. So it is not surprising that one of the earliest historical references to Bengal is to be found in the writing of a Greek historian who accompanied Alexander the Great on his march to India. He called it Gangaridae, which was presumed to be located to the east of the Bhagirathi. Gangaridae in all probability represents Vanga (Banga).[2] It was not until the seventh century A.D. that another foreigner, Huyen Sung, a Chinese pilgrim, gave a fairly detailed account of his visit to the land of Samatata, another name for Vanga (Banga). He was impressed by the number of Buddhist monasteries in this land coexisting with Hindu temples.

In the ninth century Sankara, the great Hindu reformer, developed a philosophical doctrine (based on the Upanishads) known as Adyata (monism) which enabled him to fight Buddhism intellectually. Over the centuries Buddhism and Jainism had spread rapidly in the subcontinent to the detriment of Hinduism. During his short life of forty or fifty years he travelled throughout India. Wherever he went he debated Buddhist scholars and persuaded rulers to withdraw their patronage of Buddhist monasteries. He founded an order to continue his work.

Buddhism was in decline by the time Muslim invaders completed their conquest of Gangetic delta by the middle of the 14th century. There is no evidence that they followed a policy of hostility against Buddhists. But one single act during the Muslim period was so horrific that it dealt a mortal blow to Buddhism in the land of its origin. Nalanda University was the largest Buddhist institution in the entire Buddhist world. Turko-Afghan warriors attacked and destroyed it, killing thousands of Buddhist scholars and students living there. It is said that they mistook the vast monastic complex to be a fortress and the saffron-robed Buddhists there to be soldiers in uniform. By the end of the 15th century Buddhism had virtually been wiped out except in the eastern fringes of Bengal and Jainism mainly confined to the desert of Rajasthan.

The heartland of Hinduism is delineated by the great temples and places of pilgrimage. Nowhere are these more numerous than along the course of the Ganges. Indeed, because of its connection with the Hindu faith, the entire length of the Ganges is sacred, from its source in Mount Kailash in the Himalayas to its junction with the sea at Sagar Dweep on the Bay of Bengal.

Hindu mythology has it that it was Bhaghirath who, after years of penance, was able to coax the Ganges to descend from its abode on the Himalayas and take this route to wash the ashes of his forebears, the sons of King Sagar. The holy man, Kapilamuni, had turned them to ashes for rudely disturbing him while he was engaged in deep meditation. Only by bringing the waters of the Ganges to the spot to touch the ashes, could the souls of the departed be saved from eternal damnation. In order to make sure of reaching the spot, the lower Ganges split into a hundred mouths, thus forming the delta. One of the mouths touched the ashes, completing the atonement for the offense of the sons of King Sagar, whose souls were at last admitted to heaven.

But then, five hundred years ago, the main course of the Ganges, named Bhagirathi after the legendary Bhagirath, took an eastward direction, where it became known as the Padma. However, it failed to acquire the special sanctity accorded to *Adi Ganga* (old Ganges), the original course of the river. Here on the old Ganges (Bhagirathi) was founded the celebrated *tol* (centre of religious learning) at Nabadwip. Here too is the temple of Kalighat in the southern part of Calcutta, where, according to legend, a finger of Shiva's wife Sati fell, when her body was cut to pieces by the discus of Vishnu. Farther down the river, where the Ganges meets the sea, is the famous temple dedicated to Kapilamuni, which draws vast crowds during the *mela* in the first day of Magh, when the sun enters Capricorn.

The Bhagirathi, along with its tributaries, thus formed a boundary between Brahminical western Bengal and eastern Bengal where the hold of Brahmins was weak. Traditionally, Brahmins exercised their control over Hindu society by ensuring that the complex rites of their faith were duly observed, and in case of breach, by dealing out suitable penalties to the offenders. But the number of Brahmins to the east of Bhagirathi was relatively small and most of them were not well versed in the Vedic rituals to command high respect. Social ostracism was the most potent weapon used by them against anyone deviating from the strict rules of the caste system. However, the deltaic character of eastern and southern Bengal made it possible for many offenders to evade punishment by setting up homesteads in unoccupied marshland.[3] This created a fertile ground for the propagation of Islam.

Islam spread in Bengal from the eleventh century onwards as a result of contact with Arab traders. During the Abbasid caliphate their presence was felt in the ports of the Indian Ocean rim. The port of Chittagong attracted the Arab traders mainly because of the fine cotton goods produced in the vicinity of Dhaka. With the traders came many Sufi missionaries. They became a powerful force in the tenth century when the world of Islam increasingly absorbed ideas prevalent in the conquered lands of Egypt, Syria, and above all, Persia.[4] Hundreds of Sufi orders were formed and they reached out across the seas to transmit the faith of Islam. To the Sufi mystic, all faiths are valid, which makes him feel at home in any house of worship—a mosque, temple, church—for, as God says in the Koran: "Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah." (2:109)[5] Sufi orders were not averse to making compromises, which made it easy for their teaching to be accepted on the one hand, by scholars and ascetics, and on the other, by simple people like peasants and weavers attached to local customs and traditions.[6]

Not surprisingly, when the Sufis came to Bengal to preach the gospel of the unity of God and equality of all men in His eyes, they found many willing converts. Islam had a special appeal to those Hindus who had suffered under the tyranny of the caste system, which had reached an intolerable level under the Sena kings of Bengal. Many Buddhists also sought refuge in Islam to escape social discrimination to which they were subjected. The Muslim conquest of Bengal began in 1204 by Bakhtiar bin Khilji. It added further momentum to the spread of Islam. Even some higher caste Hindus became converts to Islam during the Turko-Afghan rule, either out of opportunism or conviction. Muslim ranks were further swollen as a result of intermarriages with Hindu women. From the account of Ibn Batuta, the famed Moroccan traveller, who visited Bengal

between 1343 and 1346, it is evident that Bengal was an important centre of Islamic activity by Sufi saints. A fourteenth century saint from Jaunpur, Ashraf Jahangir Simmani, exulted: "Allah be praised, what a good land is that of Bengal, where numerous saints came from different directions and made it their habitation."

Notes

1. Shushila Mandal, *History of Bengal: The Middle Age Part I,* Prakash Mandir Private Limited, Calcutta, 1970, p.4.
2. Mohammed Habibur Rahman, *Gangaridhhi Theke Bangladesh,* Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1986, p.12.
3. Akbar Ali Khan, *Discovery of Bangladesh: Explorations into Dynamics of a Hidden Nation*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1996, pp.114-115.
4. Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*, The Modern Library, New York 2000, p.92. It should be noted that the Koran can be understood by muslims at more than one level. At one extreme are the fundamentalists (like *ulemas*, especially those inspired by Wahhabis) who tend to regard the Koran in a close-minded, dogmatic manner; at the other end are the Sufis who are open-hearted, and believe that the Koran, apart from to literal text, "also contains secrets and silences that nearness to the divine reveals to the humble, pious, contemplative intelligence," in the words of Tariq Ramadan, Professor of Islamic Studies at Oxford.
5. Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam,* Arkana (The Penguin Group), London, 1989, p.5.
6. Francis Robinson, *Atlas of the Islamic World,* Facts on File, Inc., New York, 1982, p.39.

2

ROOTS

Among the Sufis who came to Chittagong was Sheikh Awal. A tradition connects him with the conversion of the people of the district to Islam. There is a popular belief that he was a companion of the legendary Sufi Bayazid Bustami. It was customary among Arabs to confer the title "Sheikh" to religious teachers and preachers and the title was often borne by members of the succeeding generations even after they had given up their family calling as religious guides.

Several generations later, according to some accounts, one of Sheikh Awal's descendants, Sheikh Burhanuddin, who was engaged in trading, came to Gopalganj area in connection with his business activities. He married a local girl from the prominent Kazi family in the nearby village of Tungipara and settled down there.[1] The name Tungipara means the village of tongs. The word "tong", now almost obsolete except in some regional dialects, refers to wooden or bamboo stilts on which houses were then built on marshy land.

During the early days of the British rule in Bengal, the Sheikh family took up residence at Ultadanga near Calcutta, but without severing their links with Tungipara. Their main source of income was from the importation of timber from the Sundarbans, which was more extensive than it is now. The forest growth of the Sundarbans is impaired by its proximity to the Bay of Bengal. Because of the salinity of the streams there are very few species of trees which are of commercial value. The most valuable of them is Garan tree, which is widely used for making poles. It was also burned as fuel in Calcutta before the coal fields of Raniganj were opened up. Timber was carried by boats from the Sundarbans to its destination in Calcutta. The journey to Calcutta was not always uneventful. An English indigo planter near Satkhira would occasionally detain the boatmen in transit to Calcutta and force them to work in his plantation. Exasperated, the head of the family, Sheikh Wasimuddin, took legal action against the planter. The case went all the way up to the Calcutta High Court, which gave a judgment in favour of the plaintiff, although the compensation awarded to him was the nominal



Photo 1: Mujib's ancestral home at Tungipara

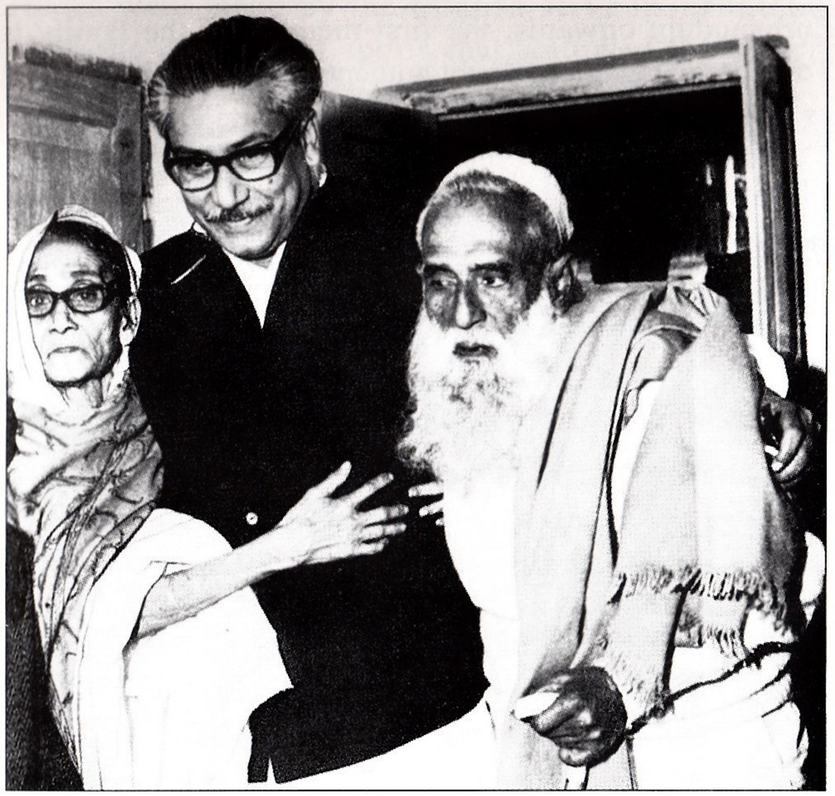


Photo 2: Mujib with his parents

amount of one paisa only. The case created a sensation, as it was not easy for a native to get redress from the legal system in those days if the defendant happened to be an Englishman.[2]

The Sheikh family enjoyed a fair measure of prosperity while they were at Ultadanga, near Calcutta. They also acquired a small zamindari. Reversal of fortune later, probably caused by the development of Raniganj coal fields which reduced the demand for timber in Calcutta, led the family to return to their roots at Tungipara. It was in this village that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the great-grandson of Sheikh Wasimuddin, was born on 17 March 1920. He was the third child of his parents, Sheikh Lutfur Rahman and Mosammat Saira Begum, and their first son. Three other children would follow—a son and two daughters. It was a family of normal size by the standards of the day.

Although members of the Sheikh family are proud of their lineage, it is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty their belief that they are descendants of Sheikh Awal. As the Bengal Census Report of 1901 points out, the designation "Sheikh" has often been assumed by persons when they become well-to-do, although they may belong to a functional group who have no claim to it.[3] The family tree of Sheikh Mujib, from Sheikh Burhanuddin onwards, the first member of the family to strike roots at Tungipara, is without doubt authentic. Since that time, the Sheikh family has maintained its preeminent status in the village community.

Mujib's father was a *sherestadar* in the civil court at Madaripur. He was a petty official with a modest salary, but he enjoyed an additional income from the land he owned in his native village. Still, his total income was probably not adequate for him to bring his large family with him to his place of posting. He would go to his village as often as he could on holidays and on casual leave. Even though he was away from his family a good deal of the time, he was a patriarch in every sense of the word.

Notes

1. M.R. Akhtar Mukul, *Mohapurush,* Sagar Publishers, Dhaka, 1991, p.16.
2. Interview with Sheikh Shahidul Islam, a nephew of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. 14.12.96.
3. *Bengal District Gazetteers: 24 Parganas,* The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1914, p.83.

3

RISE OF THE MUSLIM MIDDLE CLASS

Distinctive traits of Sheikh Mujib's character which shaped his destiny can be understood only in reference to the social milieu from which he sprang. He was born into a Muslim family of modest means at a time when political awakening was taking place among Muslims of Bengal after nearly a century and half of relative passivity under British rule.

It was in 1757 that the British became masters of Bengal after defeating the young Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Dowla, in the decisive Battle of Plassey through a shrewd mixture of daring, deceit and intrigue. Vast fortunes were made by the English servants of the East India Company in the division of spoils that followed the seizure of the Nawab's treasury in Murshidabad and through private trading. As many fortunes, if not more, were made by their native agents or *gumashtas* and other collaborators in private trading, almost all of them Hindus, who grabbed the opportunities offered by the new order in the aftermath of the British victory. The wealth acquired by this Hindu comprador bourgeoisie enabled them to purchase agricultural property on advantageous terms and to transform themselves into zamindars or landed aristocracy when the system of Permanent Settlement was introduced in 1793. Transfer of land ownership on a large scale to Hindus ruined the Muslim gentry, whose dominant position during the Muslim rule had been based on rent-free lands and a system of patronage which gave them high positions in the royal court, the army and in the administration of justice. Peasants, predominantly Muslims of indigenous origin, lost their customary tenancy rights and were soon reduced to the level of agricultural labourers entirely at the mercy of Hindu moneylenders and middlemen. Both Muslim gentry and peasantry slid deeper and deeper into debt with the passage of time.

The Muslim gentry, bewildered by the sudden and unexpected loss of power, became withdrawn from the social, political life of the times and nursed the hope that their salvation in this world and in the hereafter would come if they immersed themselves in the study and practice of Islam. If they avoided the polluting influence of Western education and

culture, they believed, Muslims would not be tempted to stray from the path of Islam and the Almighty would favour them with the restoration of their former glory. Not surprisingly, there were only fifty seven Muslims out of thirty one hundred graduates of the Calcutta University between 1858 and 1878.

While the Muslim gentry sulked in piety, the Muslim peasantry repeatedly rose in revolt against their oppressors in the name of Islam. After the collapse of the Great Mutiny of 1857, which shook the foundation of British rule in India, British hostility against Muslims increased markedly. Muslims had been suspect in the eyes of the British since they had established their supremacy over Bengal: Muslim sympathy for the aim of the mutineers to revive the Mughal empire only served to confirm their worst suspicious about Muslims as being inherently disloyal to the British Raj.

By contrast, Bengali Hindus had remained loyal or neutral during the Mutiny. Caste Hindus had served their Muslim rulers in the past in positions like collectors of revenue and managers of their estates and it was easy for them to accept a change of rulers. As English replaced Persian as the language for the transaction of official business in the 1830's, Hindu students flocked in large numbers to the new educational institutions set up by the British. Proficiency in the English language enabled them to secure jobs in the government and to enter lucrative legal, medical and other professions. Under the impact of Western thought enlightened Bengali Hindus made a conscious effort to come to terms with the modern age and reform Hinduism as practiced by eradicating its social evils. On the other hand, the Muslim mind, which had once been remarkably creative, remained sluggish. The gulf between advancing Hindus and stagnating Muslims became so great that it seemed almost unbridgeable in the foreseeable future.

It was precisely because of the bleak prospects of the Muslim community in post-Mutiny British India that the realisation dawned on some of the more practical and far-seeing Muslim leaders that Muslims would gain nothing by a stance of total rejection of Western civilisation and sterile opposition to British rule. Influential leaders like Syed Ahmed Khan in northern India and Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Amir Ali in Bengal became advocates for promoting loyalty to the British Crown "to redress the balance of state patronage." The British officialdom was also beginning to have doubts about the wisdom of the policy of hostility against Muslims. The publication of a book in 1871 by a British official,

W. W. Hunter, entitled, *The Indian Mussulmans,* had a significant impact on British policy. Hunter had argued that the anti-Muslim bias of the government had alienated the Muslim upper class and that it would be expedient to win their loyalty. The government responded by treating Muslims as "a large and important community" who deserved to be conciliated. Concessions were given to them in the form of scholarships and stipends. Muslim teachers and inspectors were appointed to look after their special needs. The government decided to "redress the inequality of representation of Muslims" in the government service.

Bengal was partitioned in 1905, ostensibly because the province was too large and unwieldy to be governed as a single entity. In the newly-created province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, whose capital was at Dhaka, Muslims constituted two-thirds of the population. The provincial government made an effort to recruit Muslims at a higher rate so that at least one-third of the posts could be filled by them. Even then there were not enough qualified Muslim candidates to fill those posts; Hindus felt that they were being punished for their agitation against the partition. Indeed, the partition had sparked the first outburst of violent nationalist movement in India since the Great Mutiny. It was conducted mainly by Bengali Hindus who suspected that the partition was a plot to enfeeble them. There may have been some grounds for their suspicion. Over the years the British Raj was seen by them as obstructing their advancement to higher positions in the government and limiting their economic opportunities. Unfortunately, some of the symbols and slogans used by them in their agitation against the partition offended many Muslims. The slogan *Bande Mataram,* in particular, caused great resentment among Bengali Muslims, because it was lifted out of a Bengali novel, *Ananda Math,* by Bankim Chatterji, the doyen of Bengali literature in his time, who was perceived as being biased against Muslims.[1] If the partition of Bengal was seen as a curse by Hindus, it was generally welcomed by most Muslims as a blessing. As the rift between Hindus and Muslims widened, Anglo-Muslim rapprochement grew.

The partition of Bengal politicised Bengali Muslims by making them aware that they had interests which concerned them alone. It was clear to their leaders that for the furtherance of these interests they needed to associate with their co-religionists in the subcontinent in a common political organisation. The All-India Muslim League was founded in Dhaka in 1906 with the dual objectives of promoting loyalty to the British Raj and advancing Muslim interests in India.

Alarmed by the rising tide of terrorism unleashed by the anti-partition movement the British government annulled the partition in 1911, but Bengali Hindus emerged in the long run as losers. The reunited Bengal was a shadow of its former self and reduced to linguistic Bengal only. And with the transfer of the imperial capital to Delhi, Bengali Hindus forfeited many advantages they used to enjoy from proximity to the seat of power. Muslims also were disappointed that they no longer had a province where they were in a clear majority, but they were able at least to extract one concession: the establishment of a university in Dhaka.

Muslim politics in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, was dominated by the upper class who claimed descent from Muslim immigrants of Turki, Persian, Afghan or Arab background. The Urdu-speaking Ashrafs, as they called themselves, were the natural leaders of the community, because Muslim masses in Bengal were backward and poor. By the end of the century economic changes were beginning to bring a modicum of prosperity to a section of farmers, due to an increase of commercial demand for some agricultural commodities in the world market. Jute had previously been grown for limited domestic use. But it steadily acquired importance in external markets in the closing decades of the nineteenth century and with the outbreak of the First World War, the demand for jute soared. The export of another commodity, tea, increased with the establishment of a railway line between Chittagong and Assam in 1905. The expanding volume of export of these commercial crops led to the emergence of a new middle class of surplus farmers called jotedars. They understood the value of education and could afford to send their children to Western-type schools and colleges. Between 1882 and 1913 the share of Muslim students in all educational institutions increased from 27.6 per cent to 40.5 per cent.[2]

With the death of Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka in 1915, the prime mover in the founding of the Muslim League, this new group of Western-educated professional men of middle-class background gained control of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League, with A.K. Fazlul Huq as its Secretary. He made his mark in politics by sheer personal ability. He was "a worthy representative of the newly-emergent vernacular Muslim middle class" who were not content with petitioning the government for small favours, but were willing to unite with Hindus in a nationalist struggle with the aim of wresting power from the British, provided Muslim special interests were protected. The time was ripe for such an

alliance after the severe bloodletting of the First World War which had exhausted the British and weakened their hold on India.

For a time it seemed that an era of goodwill between Hindus and Muslims was at hand. In 1923, Chittaranjan Das, the outstanding Bengali leader in the Indian National Congress, formed the Swaraj Party after differences with M.K. Gandhi over political strategy. That same year Das entered into a political agreement with Bengali Muslims. The Bengal Pact stipulated equal representation with Hindus in all elective bodies and assured generous job opportunities for Muslims. Here at last was a Hindu leader whom the Bengali Muslims could trust implicitly, for no other leader before him had demonstrated such empathy for them. When he was elected Mayor of Calcutta the post of Deputy Mayor was held for the first time by a Muslim: Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. He would play an important role in the politics of Bengal and Pakistan and serve as mentor to Sheikh Mujib. Tragically, C.R. Das died only two years after the Bengal Pact in the prime of his life. Although the Bengal Pact was renewed by Suhrawardy and Subhas Chandra Bose, both protégés of Das, the spirit behind it could not be rekindled and it remained a dead letter. To the end of his life, Suhrawardy believed that had Das lived longer he "would have eliminated the causes of Hindu-Muslim conflict."[3]

Notes

1. The plot of Bankim Chatterji's novel *Ananda Math* is set against the background of the Sanyasi rebellion against the Muslim rule in the eighteenth century. The text of *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother) in it is not in Bengali, but in Sanskrit. It was used both as a national song and as a slogan against the British during the anti-partition Swadeshi movement. Apologists for the author maintain that his latent message was anti-British, but as he was in the government service at the time the book was written, he could not give vent to his real feelings. Because of the novel's apparent anti-Muslim message, Muslims could not accept *Bande Mataram* as an inspirational song or slogan. The Indian National Congress failed to understand the depth of feeling among Muslims about it and in 1937, the singing of the song was introduced in the schools of the provinces where the Congress had formed ministries. In the controversy that ensued, Rabindranath Tagore was the only prominent non-Muslim to argue that a song that celebrates the image of the goddess Durga should not be "thrust down the throats" of Muslims to whom idolatry is abhorrent. See Kankar Sinha, *Samprodayikata ebong Sankhalaghu Sonkot*, Ananya, Dhaka, 1997, pp.20-23.

2. The vast majority of Muslim students, however, were in primary or secondary schools. The proportion of Muslim students to Hindus was very small in colleges and universities, but rose in the following decades.
3. Gandhi, too, tried to enlist the support of Muslims by giving his blessing to the Khilafat movement with its battle-cry "Islam in danger." Unlike Das, however, he was unable to win the trust of Muslims, who tended to regard him as an orthodox Hindu at heart; his caste background as a banya made him especially suspect in their eyes. It was only after the independence of India when Gandhi put his own life in jeopardy to check the spread of communal violence directed against them that they began to appreciate him as a benefactor of the Muslim minority in India.

4

SCHOOL YEARS

As the oldest son in a patriarchal family Mujib was showered with love and affection, but at the same time, much was expected of him. He had to act as a role model for other children in the family. Middle class Muslims had long realised that education was the key to success, whether in the government service or in professions like law or medicine. Sheikh Lutfur Rahman was eager to give his son the best possible education within his means. He was at first given private tuition at home. When he was ready for school his father had him brought to Madaripur where he was posted, since his native village lacked a suitable school. He was admitted to Class IV in the Islamia High School there. In 1931, when Mujib was eleven years old, his father was transferred to Gopalganj. Next year he secured admission to the Mission School, the better of the two schools in the sub-divisional town. As he was several years older than his classmates, they called him Mujibbhai. He became a spokesman for them in all school functions.

He was tall for his age but was prone to childhood illnesses. While in school, he was afflicted with beriberi, which is linked to Vitamin B deficiency and generally affects people who subsist on a diet of rice from which vitamin-rich husks have been removed. He also developed a serious eye problem which necessitated a visit to Calcutta where an eminent eye specialist, Dr. T. Ahmed, performed a surgery. Although the operation was a success, his eyesight had already been affected and he had to wear corrective lenses for the rest of his life. There is a popular belief that his eye disorder was caused by beriberi, but this is not correct, because eye disorder is not one of the symptoms of the disease. However, beriberi causes inflammation of nerves and an emaciated appearance and it would take Mujib a number of years to get over his lean, undernourished appearance. Childhood illnesses made him drop out of school for several years, so that by the time he took his school-leaving Matriculation Examination in 1942, he was twenty-two years old, by far the oldest student in his class.

He did not excel in his studies. Sitting still in the class and memorising his lessons—rote learning was the norm then—did not suit him. He was

more interested in outdoor activities like sports, especially volleyball, where his height gave him an advantage over others. Even in school his leadership potential was evident: whenever there was a school function or ceremony to be organised, he was in the forefront.

The head master of the Mission School, Girish Babu, understood child psychology and could appreciate why Mujib, hyperactive and restless by nature, was unable to concentrate on his studies and was indulgent towards him. Naren Babu, who took over as head master later, was dour and stern and Mujib had trouble with him. Fortunately, he was replaced not long after by Bilash Babu, to Mujib's satisfaction.

At the age of eighteen Mujib was married to a first cousin, Fazilatunnisa, a child-bride. In the Sheikh clan marriage between first cousins was the rule, rather than the exception. However, the marriage that took place was a mere formality, since there was no question of any co-habitation until the bride had reached puberty.

Mujib had, as yet, no central goal in his life. He was always interested in connecting with people and the urge to do things for them was strong in him. He was drawn to the Muslim League branch at Gopalganj which was looking for volunteers to do odd jobs for the party. His energy and hard work brought him to the attention of local party leaders who selected him for the position of Secretary to the Muslim League Defence Committee in Gopalganj. He served in that capacity until he left school. His future career as a politician was launched as much by chance as by his personality traits.

The Muslim League, after a long period of somnolence, was then beginning to make its influence felt among Muslims of India. The credit for the revival of the Muslim League must be given, more than any other person, to Mohammed Ali Jinnah. In many ways he was an unlikely leader of a communal organisation. He had begun his political career in Bombay, where he had a thriving law practice, as an "ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity". He was a secular politician who believed in constitutional means to secure self-government for India. M.K. Gandhi sought to win mass support for Indian independence after the First World War by resorting to religious rhetoric and gave his backing for the Khilafat movement. Jinnah was outraged and warned Gandhi "not to encourage fanaticism of Muslim religious leaders and their followers".[1] He was so disillusioned with the intertwining of religion and politics that he gave up political activity and in 1932 left India to practice law in England. In 1935, he was persuaded by Liaquat Ali Khan to return to India to lead the Muslim League. By this time Jinnah had come around to

the view that with people like Gandhi dominating the Congress, there was no scope for secular politics in India: Muslims must therefore try to secure a fair deal for themselves through their own political organisation, the Muslim League. He was determined to bring within its fold all Muslim provincial leaders and their parties. The task was not easy. But when the Congress High Command, at the behest of Nehru, reneged on an agreement to share power with the Muslim League after the 1937 provincial elections, many Muslims were incensed and the popularity of the League grew. The performance of the Muslim League in the elections was impressive in Bengal, where it emerged as the leading Muslim party with 39 seats.[2] Astutely Jinnah turned his attention to Bengal to demonstrate the importance of the League. He made a "very strategic move" by offering Muslim League's cooperation in a coalition government headed by Fazlul Huq, whose Krishak Praja Party (KPP) had captured a greater percentage of total Muslim vote, but three seats fewer than the League.[3] Fazlul Huq became the Chief Minister but the League got four out of six Muslim posts in the Cabinet.

Meanwhile, Jinnah had been searching for a formula which would rally the masses behind the Muslim League. After 1937 he embraced the theory that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations.[4] To Fazlul Huq fell the honour of moving the historic resolution at the 1940 Lahore session of the Muslim League demanding that the Muslim-majority areas in the northwestern and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute "independent states."[5]

There is a story that it was in 1939 that Mujib had his first encounter with Fazlul Huq, then Chief Minister of Bengal and Shahid Suhrawardy, Minister of Commerce. They had come to Gopalganj on a tour of inspection and attended a function held in their honour at the Mission School. As they were returning to the Dak Bungalow, accompanied by the head master and the Sub-Divisional Officer, they found their narrow path blocked by a group of students led by Mujib. The S.D.O. was furious and the head master rebuked Mujib for his insolent conduct. Unperturbed, Mujib said that they would not move until their complaint had been heard. Fazlul Huq was curious to learn about their complaint. Mujib said that the roof of the school hostel had developed cracks with the result that rooms had become unlivable during the rainy season and nothing was being done to repair it. The head master apologetically explained that there was not enough money in the current budget for repairs which could cost as much as twelve hundred rupees. Fazlul Huq was so impressed by the forthright



Photo 3: Mujib as teenager (1940)

manner in which Mujib had put forward his complaint that he agreed to provide the required money. The story has a ring of truth, for throughout his life his personal and political conduct was courageous to the point of rashness when he was acting in a cause he believed in.

Notes

1. H.M. Sreevai, *Partition of India: Legend and Reality,* Emmenem Publishers, Bombay, 1956.
2. Even in provinces with substantial Muslim population, other than Bengal, Muslim League's performance was very poor. In the Punjab, the League won only one seat in the Legislative Assembly; none in Sind and the N.W.F.P.
3. Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh,* Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. Dhaka, 1987, p.89.
4. It was the poet-philosopher Mohammed Iqbal, elected President of the Muslim League in 1930, who first put forward the idea of a separate Muslim state as "the final destiny of Muslims, at least of North West India", in his inaugural address in Allahabad. A few months later Rahmat Ali, a Muslim student in Cambridge University, coined the word "Pakistan" for this state. Iqbal persisted in his efforts and as late as 1937, the year before he died, he wrote to Jinnah: "Don't you think the time for such a demand has already arrived?" But Jinnah was not yet convinced. See Richard V. Weeks, *Pakistan*, Van Norstrand, Princeton, 1964, p.84.
5. The Lahore Resolution of 1940 is popularly known as the "Pakistan" Resolution, although the name of Pakistan is absent in it. Since two Muslim states were envisaged in the resolution, it was left to the states to devise their nomenclature.

5

ISLAMIA COLLEGE

Now that it was time for Mujib to go to a college to pursue higher studies, he wanted to go to Calcutta, not because his forefathers had connection with the city, but because it offered a wider world after his schooldays in a sub-divisional town. In the autumn of 1942, he entered the Islamia College and enrolled for the Intermediate of Arts course. Islamia College had been established for the specific purpose of educating male Muslim students. In keeping with its Muslim character, students had to wear sherwani, the formal dress worn by Muslims. As there was a dearth of Muslim lecturers, Hindu lecturers were also on the teaching staff.

Before the war, Calcutta was second only to London in size and population in the British Empire. But when Mujib arrived in the city it had a semi-deserted appearance. Many residents had left it for their home districts for fear that it might become a battle zone if the Japanese army made a push for India from Burma. Mujib had a choice of staying at the Baker Hostel or at the Carmichael Hostel, both of which were available to Muslim students. He opted for the Baker Hostel, which was within easy walking distance from the Islamia College. Besides, only one student was allotted to a room there, so that students could have privacy and study without being disturbed. But Mujib's real interest lay not in studies, but politics.

Islamia College was a hotbed of Muslim politics. Many of the politically involved students in the Muslim League were residents of the Baker Hostel. So it was natural that Mujib would become exposed to them within weeks of his arrival in Calcutta. Among them were Nuruddin and Nurul Huda, who was honorary Political Secretary of Suhrawardy. It was Nurul Huda who introduced Mujib to Suhrawardy as a promising political worker for his camp.[1]

Suhrawardy needed all the help he could get from these Muslim student activists. In late 1941, Fazlul Huq fell out with Jinnah and resigned from the Muslim League which he had joined to form his first coalition. Fazlul Huq then formed a second coalition ministry in which

Shyama Prasad Mukherji, leader of the Hindu Mahasabha became his deputy. By making an alliance with the Hindu Mahasabha, the most rabid communalist organisation in Bengal, Fazlul Huq became a target of attack by Muslim League as an "enemy of Islam." Student activists made an important contribution to the popularity of Muslim League by vilifying Huq throughout Bengal and isolating him from the Muslim masses. The Muslim League could now rightfully claim that it alone represented Muslims of Bengal.

However, the Muslim League itself was a house divided.[2] On the one hand, there was a conservative group led by Khwaja Nazimuddin of the Dhaka Nawab family and their allies, Muslim business magnates of Calcutta like Ispahani and Adamjee: on the other, a progressive group was led by Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim, based on the workers and small businessmen of Calcutta. The division was reflected within the student body of the party, the All-Bengal Muslim Students League. Clashes between the two groups of students were not always at the verbal level; sometimes they became physical. There were reports that at least on one occasion Sheikh Mujib and Shah Azizur Rahman, belonging to the conservative faction, exchanged blows at a Muslim League meeting in Kusthia.

As a matter of practical politics, Suhrawardy personally did his best to remain on good terms with members of the Dhaka Nawab family and its allies. Suhrawardy became a Minister in charge of civil supplies at a very difficult time. The Cabinet post of civil supplies was created because of the exigencies of the war. The loss of Burma, the principal exporter of rice to Bengal in peacetime, caused a severe food shortage. The destruction of country boats by the British to "deny" their use by any Japanese invading force aggravated the food crisis by hampering movement of goods, especially foodstuffs, by water transport. By the beginning of 1943, the fear of invasion had receded and thousands of people started coming to Calcutta from surrounding areas to fill the jobs created by wartime needs. Newly-arrived British and American troops were also making demands on the scarce resources of the front-line province. Food surplus provinces were reluctant to send food to Bengal. United States was the only possible external source of food in this emergency; an appeal was made to the Roosevelt administration for help, but no reply was received.[3] Famine raged in the interior and thousands of starving peasants poured into Calcutta from the countryside. The efforts of the Government to feed them fell far short of requirements and at least two million lives were lost.

Stung by the criticism that Muslim League ministers must bear responsibility for this catastrophe, the League set up a Famine Relief Committee in November. Money was collected to help the victims of the famine and gruel kitchens were set up by party volunteers. Mujib's work in this connection was appreciated even by government officials.

Students, too, felt the effects of the food shortage in Calcutta. Sayeedur Rahman was made the superintendent of Baker Hosted in the spring of 1943 just before famine reached its peak. He introduced a new system so that the students could have good meals cheaply. He got the students involved in the purchase of foodstuffs needed for the dining hall to prevent pilferage by the kitchen staff.

In his memoir Rahman mentions the following episode:

> The dining hall system was set up for the convenience of the hostel students. Each student was entitled to one dish: on some days, meat was served; on others fish. Sometimes, the dish was topped with an egg to fill up the plate. No one could have more than one dish. One day it was reported to me that Mujib was helping himself to an additional dish. After having heard this complaint a few more times, I asked him, "Is it true that you eat two portions of food?"
>
> He replied, "Yes, Sir."
>
> I said, "Don't you know that it is an offense? You shouldn't do it."
>
> After a moment of silence, he said, "Sir, I know this is not right. But what can I do when one plate does not satisfy my appetite?" When I heard his forthright but polite reply, a thought flashed through my mind: George Washington, the first president of the United States, too, had admitted his wrongdoing to his father after cutting down the cherry tree. Although Mujib was guilty of taking double his share of food in the dining hall, I knew that he was basically a decent person. Whether he was doing voluntary social work or organising students, he performed his task with utmost sincerity and honesty. I was fully aware of the obstinate streak in his character. When his requirements were two dishes he would not be deterred by fine alone.[4]

Syedur Rahman had an experience of how stubborn Mujib could be from a previous encounter with him. Students in Baker Hostel were expected to be in the hostel premises by nine o'clock in the evening, but Mujib consistently violated the curfew. Rahman warned him that if he persisted in his behaviour, he would be fined. Mujib replied, "You may fine me if you like, but it is not possible for me to return to the hostel so early. I have work to do outside." Rahman knew that his 'work' was political, which he did not altogether disapprove of and suggested a way

out: "Why don't you simply enter 9 p.m. in the register of the *darwan* (door keeper). He is an illiterate man and has no way of knowing what you have written."[5] The arrangement worked to the satisfaction of both parties.

Later in his life, Mujib was known to be a careful eater. His food intake was modest: He liked simple Bengali food and avoided rich food. One explanation for his voracity during hostel residency could be that his body needed more nourishment after his illnesses like beriberi.

The long-simmering struggle for political supremacy between Suhrawardy and Khwaja Nazimuddin could no longer be kept under the lid and surfaced during the provincial League's 1943 session. Suhrawardy came out as the victor when his nominees secured the posts of the Vice Presidents and Assistant Secretaries as well as in the Bengal delegation to the All-India Muslim League Council. Even in Dhaka, where the Nawab family was in absolute control of the Dhaka League, the Nazimuddin group suffered a serious reverse. When the Dhaka League was obliged to hold its first-ever elections in September 1944, all the candidates nominated by Khwaja Shahabuddin, Nazimuddin's brother and political adviser, were defeated. The victory of the Suhrawardy group was made possible by Abul Hashim's indefatigable campaign to enroll new members and to democratise the Muslim League which eroded the influence of the Nawab family in their home base.[6] Student leaders like Mujib in Calcutta and Tajuddin in Dhaka played an important role in the rout of the conservatives.

Suhrawardy had won a local victory over the conservative old guard in Bengal, but he still lacked a voice in the centre. Suhrawardy personally respected Jinnah for his ability and integrity, but he was disappointed that he was not made a member of the Muslim League Central Working Committee. It was Nazimuddin and Hasan Ispahani who were nominated to represent Bengal in the centre. The central leadership of the Muslim League was dominated by the powerful landowners and the moneyed businessmen, who were not in sympathy with the process of democratisation of the Muslim League in Bengal through mass enrolment. Jinnah understood the significance of mass enrollment, which undercut the Congress propaganda that the Muslim League was a party of reactionary Muslim upper class. But his ears were poisoned by conservative leaders from Bengal, who resorted to innuendoes to the effect that the chief proponent of a mass party in Bengal, Abul Hashim, was preaching communism under the cover of Islam.[7]

Since Suhrawardy was busy with his ministerial duties, Mujib was working closely with Abul Hashim in his enrolment campaign. At his behest, Mujib undertook the task of organising a leftist group among the Muslim League members of his home district in Faridpur in the summer of 1944. The conservative group was quite strong there. Yusuf Ali Choudhury, Abdus Salam Khan and Wahiduzzaman formed the core of this group and they were in the habit of resorting to strong-arm methods against their adversaries. On occasions Mujib had to counter them by equally forceful measures.

Mujib went back to Faridpur again the next year to organise a public meeting for Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim at Gopalganj, his home town. There was an attempt to break up the meeting by opponents. After an exchange of words and a scuffle, the meeting was held peacefully. Sheikh Mujib had the pleasure of inviting both the leaders to his house for tea.

The conservatives were not sitting idle while their adversaries in the provincial Muslim League were gaining in strength in the districts. In Calcutta, Nazimuddin sought to control the damage by a procedural maneuver. He persuaded Maulana Akram Khan, the League President, to propose the cancellation of the impending Bengal Council meeting where the Nazimuddin faction was outnumbered. The Maulana's "cynical maneuver" failed. The Council meeting was held at the Muslim Institute on 29 September. Some of the young supporters of the Conservative group became rowdy and disruptive. Yusuf Ali Choudhury, Mujib's nemesis in Faridpur, went so far as to kick Shamsuddin Ahmed of Munshiganj in the stomach so hard that he fell down unconscious on the floor. In an instant Mujib grabbed Yusuf Ali by the throat and threw him on to the floor. The meeting had to be postponed to the following day.[8]

Action is what Mujib always longed for; theoretical or ideological issues did not interest him. But when Abul Hashim organised a study circle in his house in 1945 for student activists and party workers, Mujib joined it as a matter of duty. There were discussions there not only on party programme but on such subjects as fundamentals of Islam, principles of political organisation and tactics to be employed to garner support for the party. Mujib paid very little attention to these discussions. He would frequently doze off and in the morning would ask whether there was any task for him to perform.[9]

Naturally, he had little time for attending classes or reading serious books. His teachers in Islamia College were well aware that Mujib and other student leaders were ill-prepared to face the Intermediate of Arts

Examination in the spring of 1945. With the knowledge that the Second World War would soon be over and the fate of the subcontinent would be decided in the months to come, nearly all Muslim members of the teaching staff were in sympathy with the activities of the Muslim League. The Principal of Islamia College, Dr. I.H. Zuberi, was persuaded by Syedur Rahman, Superintendent of the Baker Hostel, to allow them to sit for the examination without passing a test. Mujib was one of the forty students in the Baker Hostel to be given this unusual exemption.[10]

In the latter half of 1945, followers of Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy were engaged in a scramble for League seats for the provincial elections to be held in the early part of the next year. This trial of strength would decide who would become the Chief Minister after the general election. In the end, the Suhrawardy faction prevailed and their supporters gained more League tickets. Student activists fanned out across the province to mobilise support for Muslim League candidates. Mujib was in charge of ensuring material and human support for the Muslim League candidates in Faridpur. Yusuf Ali Choudhury, alias Mohan Mian, was among the candidates. Mohan Mian complained in writing that Mujib had failed to send any volunteers to work for him; nor had he been provided by Mujib with cycles, microphone or posters. Mujib replied that Mohan Mian was a zamindar and did not lack money or other resources for his election campaign.[11] Mujib must have derived considerable satisfaction from the final results: out of 117 Muslim seats in the provincial assembly, the Muslim League secured 110 seats and Mohan Mian was one of the seven who failed to win.

In the other Muslim majority provinces claimed by the Muslim League for Pakistan—Punjab, Sind, North West Frontier Province—the performance of the League was very good compared with its poor showing in the 1937 election, but not as overwhelming as that in Bengal. The Muslim League had fought the election on the issue of Pakistan and had been vindicated by the results: the League had won all the Muslim seats in the central legislature and 439 out of 494 in the provincial assemblies.[12]

A three-day convention of Muslim League members elected to the central and provincial legislatures was held in Delhi from 7–9 April. Jinnah wanted the convention to discuss the future shape of Pakistan. He was not satisfied with the formulation of the 1940 Lahore Resolution; he wanted Pakistan to be a single unit. He persuaded Suhrawardy to make a motion to amend the Lahore Resolution by substituting the word "state"

for "states", on the excuse that there had been a typographical error in the 1940 text. The only important participant in the convention to object to the move was Abul Hashim of Bengal, on procedural grounds.

Suhrawardy's motive for agreeing to the revision of the 1940 Lahore Resolution is not entirely clear. If he was only eager to gain the favour of Jinnah, as some suggest, he was certainly disappointed. Not only Suhrawardy continued to be excluded from the central leadership of the League, Jinnah remained more cordial to Naimuddin on a personal level. More likely, defence and strategic considerations influenced Suhrawardy to support the idea of unitary Pakistan.

As the Chief Minister of Bengal, the most populous of all Muslim-majority provinces, Suhrawardy was eager to implement in an impressive way the Direct Action Day on 16 August 1946. Jinnah had called upon Muslims to observe this day to show their allegiance to the concept of Pakistan. It had been left to the local Muslim League governments and organisations to work out the details of the observance. Suhrawardy declared the Direct Action Day as a public holiday to make sure that there would be a huge crowd to listen to him at the Maidan. The declaration of public holiday was regarded as a provocation by many Hindus. As Muslim processionists were converging on the meeting place, clashes took place between Hindus and Muslims. The situation rapidly went out of control and in four days of rioting at least four thousand people were killed. The communual riots did not remain limited to Calcutta: they spread first to Noakhali in East Bengal and then to Bihar, where many more were killed in the carnage.

It will always be debated as to who was primarily responsible for the outbreak of the riots in Calcutta—Hindus or Muslims.[13] As a loyal worker in the Suhrawardy camp, Mujib was convinced that Hindus had initiated them. Syed Najmuddin Hashem, a contemporary of Mujib, was one of the volunteers at the Lady Brabourne College at Park Circus to provide relief to riot-affected Muslim families. He recalls that within a few days, Mujib arrived there at the head of Muslim Students League workers from the Baker Hostel and virtually ousted others who were already there. "From now on, we will do what needs to be done," Mujib declared.[14] When thousands of Muslim refugees came to Calcutta later in the year from Bihar, where riots had spread, Mujib busied himself in the refugee camps administering aid as a volunteer, with his characteristic energy and selfless dedication.[15]

"The Great Calcutta Killing" no doubt played an important role in the creation of Pakistan by demonstrating that the two major communities of India were unable to live together peaceably in a single polity. Lord Louis Mountbatten, who arrived in Delhi in March 1947 as the last Viceroy with the mission of transferring power, if possible, to a united India, soon recognised that a partition of India was inevitable. After intensive consultations with the parties concerned, he produced a plan. Its essence was that Muslim League could have its Pakistan but without the Hindu areas of Bengal, Punjab and Assam. Reluctantly, Jinnah agreed to have a "truncated and moth-eaten" Pakistan, rather than have no Pakistan at all. On 3 June, Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced the plan to transfer power to the Dominions of India and Pakistan.

Even before the British decision to partition Bengal became public, Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim made a last-ditch attempt to preserve the unity of Bengal. Both of them were from West Bengal and they realised that without Calcutta, East Bengal could "end up as a rural slum", in the words of Frederick Burrows, the Governor of Bengal. Jinnah had no objection but he doubted whether the Congress High Command would be favourable. The two Muslim League leaders met with the Congress parliamentary leader Kiron Shankar Roy and Sarat Chandra Bose, elder brother of Subhas Chandra Bose, and secured their approval for a scheme envisaging a Sovereign United Bengal. When Gandhi was approached he initially saw some merit in the proposal but changed his mind after talking with Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel. We have a glimpse of the mindset of the Congress High Command at this time from Mountbatten's Personal Report No.7 to his government: "Nehru ... felt that a partition now would anyhow bring East Bengal into Hindustan in a few years."[16] Supporters of Sovereign United Bengal at this time did not know that the Congress High Command had come to the conclusion that East Bengal would not be of long duration, since it was viewed by them to be neither economically viable nor geo-politically tenable.

Apart from the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, the Suhrawardy-Hashim group had to contend with the conservative elements in the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, whose mouthpiece, the daily *Azad*, described the Greater Bengal proposal in an editorial as "a death warrant for Muslims." Mujib and his associates had to work very hard throughout the month of May to rally the Muslim students behind their scheme which was being criticised by Shah Azizur Rahman and his followers. Salahuddin Ahmed, an apolitical classfellow of Mujib, remembers that

one day he stopped by to join a group of students who had gathered around Mujib in a semi circle for a discussion of the United Bengal scheme. While Mujib was trying to explain how an Independent United Bengal would be of advantage to Hindus and Muslim alike, someone remarked that without the annual subsidy of 64 crore rupees from the Central Government, an independent Bengal would be in dire straits financially. Mujib was momentarily at a loss for reply, whereupon Salahuddin, a student of economics, pointed out that the annual grant received from New Delhi was considerably less than the contribution Bengal made to the central revenues in the form of income tax and customs receipts. Long afterwards Salahuddin, by then a member of the Pakistan Police Service, happened to travel in the same First Class compartment as Mujib and Suhrawardy. It was characteristic of Mujib that he not only remembered Salahuddin after a gap of more than a decade, but introduced him to his leader as the young economist who had come to his assistance with facts and figures in justification of an Independent United Bengal.[17]

Even after the 3 June 1947 plan, Suhrawardy continued to express his unhappiness that "the march of events has divided the Bangalee people." Mujib shared Suhrawardy's feelings in this regard. In a speech at a student meeting on 12 June in Calcutta, he said that he was not satisfied about the partition plan and urged the Bengali youth to dedicate themselves to prevent the division of Bengal.[18]

When the partition of Bengal became a certainty, the balance of power within the Bengal Muslim League shifted to the conservative group. The prospect of the loss of West Bengal, the stronghold of both Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim, weakened their position. Suhrawardy was now vulnerable and Liaquat Ali Khan, the General Secretary of the All India Muslim League, who regarded him as a political rival, saw an opportunity to enfeeble him further. He declared a new election for the leadership of the provincial League in Bengal, but not in the Punjab, which had also been partitioned. The rationale for election in Bengal was that seventeen members from Sylhet had joined the parliamentary group in Bengal following a referendum there in June and they must have a voice in the selection of their parliamentary leader. Khwaja Nazimuddin won their support by promising them posts of three ministers and three parliamentary secretaries. With their support Nazimuddin was elected as the leader of the parliamentary party and became the Chief Minister-designate for East Bengal.

Suhrawardy decided to stay on in Calcutta for the time being and joined Gandhi in his peace mission to restore communal harmony there. Abul Hashim also decided to remain in India; his eyesight had been failing because of an incurable eye disorder and his political future in East Bengal was uncertain. But he advised his left-leaning followers to organise a united front for their self-defense against an emerging "fascistic and reactionary Muslim League" in East Bengal. Returning to Dhaka, some of these young leftists banded together and formed, the *Gono Azadi League* (People's Freedom League) in July. The organisation was short-lived and had practically no impact, but its leading members were destined to play significant roles in the future politics of East Bengal in a variety of ways. Among them were: Kamruddin Ahmed, Tajuddin Ahmed, Mohammed Toaha and Oli Ahad.

Two centuries of British rule came to an end on the stroke of midnight on 15 August 1947, only two years after the conclusion of the Second World War. The destruction of the British Empire had never been among Hitler's war aims; that of Churchill was its preservation for generations to come. Yet, the unintended consequence of the war was its dissolution, starting with India, the brightest Jewel of the British Crown. The British government did its best to maintain the unity of India achieved under its aegis. But it failed and two sovereign states—India and Pakistan—appeared on the world map. Mujib was proud of his work as an humble foot soldier in the fight for Pakistan. Little did he know then that for the next twenty five years he would have to fight for other causes that would lead step by step to the break-up of Pakistan.

Notes

1. Interview with Nurul Huda, 17.1.95.
2. Abul Hashim, *Amar Jibon o Bibhagpurbo Bangladesher Rajniti,* Nauroze Kitabistan, Dhaka, 1987, pp.86-87.
3. James McGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1970, p.381.
4. Syedur Rahman, *Satabdir Smriti*, Jai Jai Din Prakashani, Dhaka, 1995, pp.28-29.
5. Syedur Rahman, op. cit., p.23.
6. Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1988, p.70.

7. Abul Hashim, op. cit., p.59. Maulana Raghib Ahsan, in a letter to Jinnah, on 15 November 1944 assured him that "Hashim was a Rabbani" or a Muslim believing in the ideology and social economy of Islam as preached by "Quran and the Sunnah." But this did not prevent Nazimuddin's supporters from spreading the propaganda that Hashim and his student followers were communists.
8. Abul Hashim, op. cit., pp.106-107.
9. Syedur Rahman, op. cit., p.27.
10. Abul Hashim, op. cit., p.92.
11. Kamruddin Ahmed, *Banglar Moddhobitter Atmobikash*, *Part 2*, Inside Library, Dhaka, 1977, p.65.
12. Ian Talbot, op. cit., p.68.
13. Since it was not possible for the Enquiry Commission to conclude its findings in the waning days of the British Raj, it is difficult to establish the time-line of clashes in various parts of Calcutta and to determine circumstances of the communal riots with any degree of objectivity. However, there is little doubt that the Muslim League in Calcutta bears some responsibility for creating a climate hostile to communal peace. Kamruddin Ahmed, op. cit., p.65.
    On the other hand, the Hindu Mahasabha, along with the Congress, were determined to foil the observance of the *hartal* (strike) on Direct Action Day. As soon as riots broke out, Suhrawardy did his best to control the carnage. He took charge of the Police Control Room but failed to get the cooperation of European and Hindu senior police officers. Finally, after four days of communal riots the situation was brought under control when the provincial government of Punjab sent armed constables to Calcutta at the request of Suhrawardy.
14. Syed Najmuddin Hashem, *Oshleshar Rakhashi Belay: Smritipote Sheikh Mujib O Annanyo*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 1996, p.96. Despite this unpleasant experience, Hashem became a great admirer of Sheikh Mujib in later years, as he watched him mature into a national leader of great integrity, courage and political skill.
15. Interview with Syed Ali Kabir, whose father was an official in charge of relief operations, 28.11.98.
16. Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1987. p.317.
17. Interview with Salahuddin Ahmed, 8 December, 1995.
18. Harun-or Rashid, op. cit., p.323.

PART II

PAKISTAN 1947-1971

Eagle has two wings. If the two wings cannot flutter together with equal strength, eagle will fall.

General Azam Khan, while bidding farewell as Governor of East Pakistan, May 1962

You see, as far we leaders of the past generation are concerned we can only act constitutionally, and we have failed. The trouble is that an unconstitutional regime will arise, which may destroy the country, and also sweep us away in the process.

H. S. Suhrawardy, in a letter to his son-in-law shortly before his death in December 1963.

6

DHAKA UNIVERSITY

Mujib arrived in Dhaka in early September 1947 from Calcutta to take a law course in Dhaka University. Between 1906 and 1912, Dhaka had been the capital of the short-lived province of Eastern Bengal and Assam and buildings had been constructed for government offices and officials in an area called Ramna just outside the historic town. After the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911, many of these buildings had been put at the disposal of the University of Dhaka established in 1921. Unlike Calcutta University, Dhaka University was primarily designed as a residential university. In 1947, at the time of independence, Salimullah Hall and Fazlul Huq Hall were the principal residential hostels for male Muslim students. But it did not suit Mujib to stay in one of the halls. He found an accommodation in the old Dhaka so that his wife could join him there. As it turned out, she preferred to live in her native village rather than in Dhaka where she hardly knew anybody. Mujib was obliged to divide his time between Dhaka and Tungipara. In order to pass the law examination students were required to attend a certain number of classes. Because of his frequent absence from Dhaka and extra-curricular activities, Mujib had to get other students to shout "present" when his name was called by the lecturer before the commencement of the class.[1] Since law classes had many students, the lecturer probably had no reasons to be suspicious, and even if he was, he chose to ignore it.

Politically, Dhaka was an inhospitable place after independence for student activists who had been the followers of the Suhrawardy group. It was their indefatigable work for the Muslim League, especially in the election of 1946 and the Sylhet referendum in 1947, that had resulted in the establishment of a homeland for Muslims. Now they were leaderless and forlorn in the very land for whose independence they had worked day and night.

Khwaja Nazimuddin was now firmly in power as the Chief Minister of East Bengal with the support of the overwhelming number of legislators. No less important, he enjoyed the confidence of the Central Government in Karachi where his brother Khwaja Shahabuddin and his supporters like

Fazlur Rahman were members of the Cabinet. Nazimuddin had chosen Aziz Ahmed, an ICS officer of Punjabi origin, for the key post of Chief Secretary in preference to Gholam Murshed, the only Bengali ICS officer who had opted for Pakistan. Murshed, who was senior to Aziz Ahmed in service, felt so humiliated that he not only resigned but left the country to settle in England. The roly-poly Chief Minister Nazimuddin was basically an easygoing person and had little interest in the details of the administration. Aziz Ahmed, with his coterie of senior non-Bengali officers, became the real wielder of power in East Bengal. Nazimuddin found himself reduced to a mere politician, whose main task was to keep the majority of parliamentarians behind him by judicious distribution of patronage. In this task he relied on fellow-politicians like Nurul Amin and Hamidul Huq Chowdhury for advice and guidance.

Only two years ago Nazimuddin had been so disheartened by his stinging defeat in the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Board that he had considered giving up politics altogether.[2] Now at last he could look forward to a long trouble-free inning as the Chief Minister of East Bengal. No one could foresee-least of all Nazimuddin—that he would be beset by a major crisis within a few months of his assumption of office. His first taste of trouble came from a totally unexpected quarter: controversy over the national language.

English continued to be the official working language in both wings of Pakistan after independence until a decision could be made on the state language. Towards the end of November 1947, the Pakistan Educational Conference was convened in Karachi by the Bengali Minister of Education, Fazlur Rahman, with a view to reforming the educational system in line with "Islamic ideology." On 5 December, the Conference recommended that Urdu should be accepted as the *lingua franca* of Pakistan and that the Constituent Assembly should declare it as the state language. The Conference chose to ignore a salient fact: Bengal was the only region in the subcontinent where Urdu was not used as a first language or as *lingua franca* by most Muslims.

Hitherto, the demand for Bengali to be recognised as a national language had been confined to a handful of intellectuals belonging to *Tamaddun Majlis*, a cultural organisation, and a small number of left-wing politicians. Among the populace, some ordinary people in roadside tea shops grumbled that money order forms and coins issued by the Pakistan Government contained English and Urdu scripts only, which they did not understand, whereas during the British rule Bengali was one of the four major Indian

languages in which coins were denominated. The student community became agitated mainly after November when a circular was sent by the Pakistan Public Service Commission in Karachi to all universities notifying them about the subjects in which candidates for the forthcoming competitive examinations for the central services in the government would be tested. Urdu, Hindi, Arabic and Persian were among the optional subjects in the language category, but not Bengali. Since most students wanted to join the government service after their studies, they felt that Urdu-speaking candidates would have an unfair advantage over Bengali candidates.

By the end of the first week of December 1947, all the ingredients for a major language movement were in place. The remarkable feature of the language movement was that it transcended the traditional fault lines of Bengali politics. Maulana Akram Khan, a rightist and a staunch political ally of Nazimuddin, chaired a protest meeting of students at Salimullah Hall on 7 December where he declared that "Urdu can never be the official language in East Bengal where over ninety per cent people speak Bengali". Although his statement was carefully worded to avoid any mention of Bengali as a national language, it represented nevertheless a break with Nazimuddin, however limited. Some Islamists like Farid Ahmed and Gholam Azam who later played a negative role during the struggle for the Bangladesh independence, actively participated in the language movement at this time.

The overwhelming majority of Urdu-speaking people, especially those who had migrated to East Bengal from India at the time of partition had no sympathy for the language movement. With some notable exceptions, like Dr. Mahmud Hussain of Dhaka University, they tended to view the movement as inspired by Hindus at the instigation of India. Clashes between Bengali and non-Bengali clerical staff took place at Palashi Barracks Housing Colony, the first of the many incidents involving the two communities which would punctuate the political life of East Bengal throughout the Pakistan period.

Mujib did not take much interest in the language question during the early days. Unlike Tajuddin and Kamruddin Ahmed, Mujib was not a member of the *Tamaddun Majlis*; unlike Oli Ahad and Mohammed Toaha, he was not active in organising meetings among students around this issue.

Mujib's primary concern in the last quarter of 1947 was to give shape to an organisation that would serve as a forum for the student community to air their grievances and to mobilise growing anti-government feeling.

Mujib never had much faith in spontaneous revolutionary action: political agitation could bear fruit only if it was guided and channeled in the desired direction by an effective organisation. He did not believe that the existing student bodies were adequate for the requirements of the moment. Student activists belonging to the Suhrawardy-Hashim group had formed an organisation called the Democratic Youth League in Dhaka barely a few weeks after the partition but it lacked vitality and had failed to attract a mass following. There was another student body, the Students Federation, but it too had little appeal for the majority of students, who were conservative and religious, because it was known to be a front organisation of the Communist Party. Muslim League had its own organisation among students, the All East Pakistan Muslim Students League, led by Shah Azizur Rahman. It soon distinguished itself by engaging in the intimidation of leftist students and the breaking up of meetings held by oppositionists by strong-arm methods including the unabashed use of hired *goondas*.

The impulse for the creation of a new student body came primarily from Mujib, but only after he had failed to persuade Shah Azizur Rahman to convene a council meeting of the All East Pakistan Muslim Students League. Shah Aziz rejected Mujib's proposal for fear that he might lose control of this organisation if a general meeting was held. At the urging of Mujib, it was then decided to set up a rival body with an almost identical name, the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. On 4 January 1948, Mujib became one of the fourteen members of its Organising Committee. Abdul Matin, one of the founding members of the new organisation, recalls that Oli Ahad and Mohammed Toaha wanted to remove the word "Muslim" from the name of the organisation. But Mujib argued that if the word "Muslim" was deleted, it would give the government an excuse to misrepresent their aims; he was not opposed to the idea as such, but he believed that it should be considered at the appropriate time, not now. Matin supported Mujib and the idea was dropped for the time being.[3] Students League, as the new body came to be known in its abbreviated form, was destined to play a significant role in the language movement.

Four days after the Students League came into being its convener Nazimuddin Ahmed, accompanied by Abdul Matin, Oli Ahad, Mohammed Toaha and several other student leaders—Mujib was not among them—called on Chief Minister Nazimuddin to discuss the language issue. At this meeting, Shafiul Azam, then Vice President of the Salimullah Hall, made a spirited presentation in support of the Bengali language. Nazimuddin

assured the student delegation that Bengali would be the official language of East Pakistan as well as its language of instruction. Nazimuddin made no mention about his position on the status of Bengali as a national language and oddly enough, the student leaders did not press him in this regard.

The dereliction of the student delegation in their failure to raise the matter of recognition of Bengali at the national level was rectified a thousand mile away in the capital city of Karachi by Dhirendranath Dutta, a Bengali Hindu member of the Pakistan Legislative Assembly. On the opening day of its first session on 23 February, he moved an amendment to the effect that Bengali be used in the deliberations of the Assembly along with Urdu and English. The motion was immediately opposed by Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan as well as by Chief Minister Nazimuddin. Tamizuddin Khan, the Bengali Vice President of the Assembly, also voiced his opposition to the proposal. Mujib would later lament that had a single Bengali Muslim legislator echoed the sentiments of Dutta, the ruling circle in Pakistan would have had second thought about the wisdom of imposing "One Nation, One Language" policy in a country as diverse as Pakistan.

On his return to Dhaka, Dutta was greeted with garlands and was publicly praised for his bold stand on the language question at a large meeting of students inside the Dhaka University campus on 26 February. His championing of the Bengali language at the national level energised the language movement and led to the formation of a Committee of Action for State Language.

The Action Committee called for a province-wide strike on 11 March to demand the recognition of Bengali as a state language. Mujib was at Gopalgonj at this time. When he received word of the upcoming strike he hurried back to Dhaka and swung into action. He arrived in time to attend the meeting of the Action Committee held on 10 March to size up the situation and to plan the programme of the strike activities for the following day. Mujib volunteered to picket the Secretariat, the hub of the provincial administration, with his followers. Kamruddin Ahmed suggested that it would be preferable for Mujib to stay in the background, where his organisational skills would be useful. But Mujib, who tended to regard Kamruddin as an "armchair politician," said that unless he—Mujib was in the forefront of the struggle, his followers might lose heart and not perform to the best of their abilities.[4]

On the morning of the following day Mujib was up early and along with some other student leaders stationed himself in front of the Secretariat

gates an hour before the office hours. Inevitably, police lathi-charged them as they tried to prevent office workers from entering the Secretariat. Mujib was among the first students to be arrested. After a routine interrogation at the local thana, they were taken to the Dhaka Central Jail. By the evening of 11 March, more than 200 students were in jail.

Under prison regulations, a head count is taken of the inmates before they are escorted to their ward for the night. Instead of standing in a row, as requested, they were chatting and milling around with the result that the Bihari guard on duty was unable to get the correct figure of student inmates. Irritated by their undisciplined behaviour, he sternly ordered them to stand still and remain silent until the counting was over. Some students resented his order given in Urdu as well as his tone of voice. Enraged, Mujib went up to the guard and gave him a resounding slap on the face. The guard ran outside and set off the alarm bell. Since this signified a prison revolt, there was a real danger that other guards would rush in to quell the disturbance, perhaps with deadly force. Fortunately, a Bengali guard, who happened to be in the vicinity, had the presence of mind to lock the inner door, preventing entry from outside, until the prison superintendent arrived and the situation calmed down.[5]

As students outside the jail continued their protests on the following day, the Muslim League Parliamentary Party held an urgent meeting with Nazimuddin to discuss the recent events and their possible consequences. Jinnah was scheduled to visit Dhaka in the coming week and Muslim Leaguers were worried that unless something was done to check the student unrest, he would not get a fitting reception on his first trip to the capital of the eastern wing of Pakistan. Mohammed Ali Bogra, who had been a Cabinet Minister in Suhrawardy's pre-partition government in Calcutta and was now out of power, was persuaded to intercede with Kamruddin Ahmed, the leader of the Action Committee, with a view to reaching some sort of an agreement with students. As a result an agreement was negotiated on the following day, 15 March, between Nazimuddin and the student leaders. It provided, among other things, that all persons associated with the language movement would be released forthwith. It became effective after Kamruddin Ahmed went to the jail to meet Mujib and other activists in jail and got their consent.

In the late afternoon of that day, the jailed students were informed that with the exception of four communists among them, they were all free to leave the prison and that no action would be taken against them for their participation in the language movement. Mujib and some left-leaning

students refused to leave the jail without those four communists. Mujib, acting in effect as their spokesman, insisted that the agreement be implemented in it entirety without any ifs and buts. The authorities were anxious not to exacerbate an already heated atmosphere and gave in.

After leaving the prison Mujib went directly to the Workers' Camp (of the supporters of the Suhrawardy-Hashim Group) at 150 Mughaltuli and spent the night there. Very early in the next morning he arrived at the Fazlul Huq Hall to make arrangement for a student meeting at the university campus that afternoon. In his book, *Purbo Banglar Bhasha Andolon o Totkhalin Rajniti*, Badruddin Umar has given a colourful account of what happened at this meeting on 16 March:

> At around 1:30 in the afternoon shortly before the announced time of the student meeting, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, wearing a black sherwani and Jinnah cap, occupied the armless chair meant for the president (source: Toaha and Tajuddin). He was not supposed to preside at the meeting for the simple reason that his role in the language movement was negligible. Nonetheless, he took upon himself the decision to chair the meeting and sat down in the president's chair before the start of the meeting.
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> Soon afterwards the following resolutions were adopted:
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> 1. An Enquiry Commission should look into police excesses in Dhaka and other districts;
> 2. The East Bengal Legislative Assembly must decide to recommend Bengali as one of the national languages.
> 3. Should the Assembly fail to act upon the above resolutions its members as well as the Cabinet Ministers of the East Bengal Government must resign.
>
> These resolutions were communicated to the Chief Minister Nazimuddin by Oli Ahad (source: Tajuddin's Diary, 16.3.1948). Without giving anyone an opportunity to speak, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman began to address the gathering. His speech had neither focus nor substance. After speaking in this vein for a while and without giving anybody a chance to speak, he uttered the slogan "On to Assembly" and called upon those present to march to the Assembly Building in a procession. After this sudden and unexpected development, it was not possible to prevent the students from marching to the Assembly Building, shouting anti-government and pro-Bengali language slogans.
>
> Police stopped them from proceeding further at the junction of the Engineering College, the Medical College and the Assembly Building. After this, students clambered over the wire fence of the Engineering College, from where they began to shout slogans denouncing police oppression and demanding resignation of the Nazimuddin Cabinet.[6]

As an author of a major work on the history of the language movement, Badruddin Umar would appear to have been careless in his search for facts. Clearly, he was not an eyewitness to the events of 16 March. His version of events depends on two sources, Toaha and Tajuddin, both of whom are dead at the time of this writing. Toaha's testimony is in the form of an interview; that of Tajuddin is his diary, written contemporaneously and for that reason, more reliable. Tajuddin's diary entry of 16 March 1948, reproduced in Umar's book (p.81), merely states factually that "Mujibur Rahman presided" at this meeting. Toaha's allegation that in disregard of a previous agreement to let him preside at the meeting, Mujib preempted Toaha by sitting down on the chair can neither be proved or disproved.

Badruddin Umar also seems to have missed the point when he blames Mujib for inciting on his own initiative a procession to the Assembly. It is true that the procession was not authorised by the Action Committee nor was it in conformity with the spirit of the agreement. Ever the man of action, Mujib grasped instinctively that a general meeting of the students within the safety of the university premises and consisting of nothing more than fiery speeches to those already converted to the cause would not serve any practical purpose. By leading the march to the Assembly Mujib provided the mob-thrust needed to prod the provincial legislators to stand firm on the language issue on the eve of Jinnah's visit to East Bengal. Student demonstrators clashing with the police and shouting slogans obliged the Assembly to adopt a resolution unanimously in favour of recognition of Bengali as the official language of East Bengal and an equal status with Urdu as a national language. Rather than confront the students, Nazimuddin chose to escape the Assembly Building through a kitchen door, with the assistance of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Pakistan Army in East Bengal, Ayub Khan, the future military ruler of Pakistan.[7]

Jinnah arrived in Dhaka on 19 March and received a rousing welcome. He knew that he was suffering from a terminal illness and had only a few months to live. His consuming passion in the remaining days of his life was to consolidate the nation-state he had helped to create. We now know from the stray notes jotted down in Jinnah's notebook that high officials and Muslim League leaders had portrayed the language movement to him as "a conspiracy of disgruntled League leaders, the Hindus, the Communists and anti-Pakistan elements in Calcutta."[8] He was also briefed as to how Nazimuddin was forced to sign the agreement of 15 March by student leaders who did not even allow the Chief Secretary Aziz Ahmed to be

present at the meeting for advice and back-up support to the Chief Minister. Jinnah thereupon came to the judgment that the agreement had been concluded under duress and in consequence, legally invalid.

Not surprisingly, when Jinnah addressed a mass meeting on 21 March at the Race Course Maidan, his speech showed a complete lack of sympathy for the aims of the language movement. The theme of his speech was national consolidation. It may be summed up as follows: Pakistan had come to stay and would play its great role for which it was destined. The enemies of Pakistan, however, having failed to prevent its establishment "have now turned their attention to disrupt the state by creating the split amongst Muslims of Pakistan" by encouraging provincialism. Their agents were spreading the falsehood that the "Pakistan government and the East Bengal government are out to destroy your language." Ultimately, people living here would decide what should be the language of the province. "But let me make it very clear to you that the state language is going to be Urdu and no other language. Anyone who is trying to mislead you is really the enemy of Pakistan. Without one state language no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function."

Jinnah's speech was delivered in English, since his knowledge of idiomatic Urdu was poor. Many in the audience did not understand his speech and were respectfully silent; students who were there listened to it in stunned but respectful silence.

But three days later (24 March), when Jinnah reiterated his views on the language question in his Convocation Address at the Curzon Hall of the Dhaka University, some of the students in the audience expressed their disagreement aloud by saying 'no' 'no'. This was the only time that anyone had dared to contradict him publicly in Pakistan.[9]

During the late afternoon, Jinnah had a pre-arranged meeting with a group of university students. Among them were Shamsul Huq, Toaha, Oli Ahad and Syed Nazrul Islam. Mujib was not in the delegation probably because it was composed mainly of the elected office-bearers of the university hostels and Mujib was a non-residential student.

At this face-to-face meeting with the Bengali students, Jinnah tried once again to make them understand that without a single state language, the component parts of Pakistan would be driven apart, given the geographical configuration of the country. But the students had come well prepared. Some of them ventured to point out that although the white Commonwealth countries and the United States shared the same language, they had expressed no desire to merge their identity into a single state. On

the other hand, multi-lingual Canada and Switzerland were stable democratic states with two or more state languages. Jinnah was not convinced by the logic of their arguments. He asserted that the need of the moment was to strengthen the unity of Pakistan and this would be promoted by a common language, Urdu, even if this meant that many Bengalis would have to learn it. Soon, discussions became unpleasant and Jinnah terminated the meeting. It must have hurt his ego that he had failed in his power of persuasion, which, for him, was an essential attribute of a national leader. Never again would he mention the language issue, either publicly or privately.

Behind the language movement Nazimuddin had suspected the invisible hand of Suhrawardy. In order to neutralise his influence, Nazimuddin had advised Jinnah to co-opt several former associates of Suhrawardy into the system by offering them posts in the government. Jinnah took the advice before he left for Karachi and made Mohammed Ali Bogra ambassador and Dr. Abdul Motalib Malik and Tofazzal Ali ministers in the provincial government. With the loss of these important politicians close to the Suhrawardy group, the language movement gradually lost momentum. The movement lay dormant for four years.

Even before the language movement had subsided, Mujib became embroiled in other student activities against the university authorities. On behalf of the Students League, he joined other student leaders to demand better pay scale for lecturers and equal treatment for non-Muslim teachers in matters of appointment and promotion. And in March 1949, he was among the student leaders who started an agitation in support of Class IV employees of the university demanding higher pay and better working conditions. But this did not receive general support from the bulk of the student community who were anxious to continue their studies without disturbance. Sensing the mood of the mass of students, the Executive Committee of the Dhaka University felt emboldened to take disciplinary action against those who were considered troublemakers. Some were expelled from the university and some were expelled from their halls or hostels. Mujib was one of the six students who were given the lesser penalty of fine.

The stern action taken by the university against students who had taken up cudgels on behalf of the striking Class IV employees had a demoralising effect. Some of the student leaders apologised to the authorities by signing a bond of good behaviour in exchange for being allowed to continue their studies. Mujib refused to pay the fine and sign a bond, which automatically led to his expulsion from the university.

Despite the capitulation of some of the leading student leaders, Mujib, Oli Ahad and some others decided to carry their campaign outside the campus. The police authorities were well-informed and Mujib was arrested on 19 April, the day before the start of protest meetings and demonstrations. But these did not find much resonance among the townspeople, Mujib was joined by several other strike leaders in the next few days in the Dhaka Central Jail.

Mujib's career as a student leader was over. His vocation as a full-time politician was about to begin.

Notes

1. Ahmed Jamal, a fellow-student in the law class and several others who prefer to be anonymous.
2. Nazimuddin desired to be considered for the prospectively vacant post of President of the Executive Council of Hyderabad and sought the help of Governor Casey in this connection. Haroon-or-Rashid, op. cit., p. 204.
3. Abdul Matin, *Ekusher Smriticharon, Ekusher Grantha Shatashi,* Bangla Academy, 1987, p.6.
4. Kamruddin Ahmed, op. cit., pp.112-113.
5. Interview with Flt. Lt. (Rtd.) A. F. L. Rahim who was present as a fellow-prisoner. There is also a detailed account of the incident in Syed Nazmuddin Hashem's book, op. cit.
6. Quoted in Mazharul Islam, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib.* Agami Prokasoni, Dhaka, 1993, p.117-118.
7. Mohammad Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1967, p.29.
8. Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2001, p.22.
9. Jinnah's address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in Karachi on 11 August 1947, which envisioned Pakistan as a constitutional democracy where "we are all citizens and equal citizens" irrespective of "any religion, caste or creed" was slated by Pakistani religious divines and right-wing political elements. But the criticism was usually in private, because Jinnah was above public criticism. See Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive?* Penguin Books, London, 1983, p.42.

7

THE YOUNG POLITICIAN

Mujib had been arrested on 10 April 1949; he was not released until 29 July. Between those two dates there occurred an event that would forever change the political landscape of Pakistan politics. This was the formation of the East Pakistan Awami (People's) Muslim League as a political party in opposition to the ruling Muslim League.

The Muslim League had long ceased to articulate the aspirations of the Bengalis. Under the conservative leadership of Khwaja Nazimuddin and Maulana Akram Khan, the provincial Muslim League was mainly interested in the spoils of power. When, in the immediate aftermath of independence, young student leaders had approached Akram Khan, President of the provincial Muslim League, for receipt books to enroll more members by contributing a nominal fee, he refused because he feared that democratisation of the organisation would inevitably lead to its loss of control by the conservatives. Since then, the language movement had further alienated the student community and many others from the League. A widely publicised by-election at Tangail while Mujib was in jail demonstrated vividly how much ground Muslim League had lost among the masses. Its nominee Khurram Khan Panni, a rich zamindar, was defeated by a student leader, Shamsul Huq. When the election result was declared invalid on a concocted legal technicality, people were outraged. More than anything else, this incident gave impetus to the founding of the Awami Muslim League, with Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani as its president. A populist with only religious education, he had made a name for himself by championing the struggle of Bengali settlers in Assam for their rights. The choice of Bhashani for the position was logical in the absence of Suhrawardy, who had finally ended his residence in India in 1949 to settle in West Pakistan and was more interested in national, rather than provincial politics.

From afar, Suhrawardy had nonetheless encouraged his erstwhile young workers from pre-independence days to take an active part in its formation. In recognition of their work, Shamsul Huq became General Secretary, while Mujib and Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed were named

Joint Secretaries. Today, hardly anyone remembers Shamsul Huq but at that time he was more well-known than Mujib; his life, so full of promise, would end tragically in penurious obscurity within a decade as he gradually lost his mental equilibrium, precipitated probably by an unhappy marriage and daily privations. Mushtaque, envious of Mujib's later rise to power and fame, would conspire with a group of ambitious young military officers to assassinate him.

Mujib was released within a week of the formation of the Awami Muslim League. The party's middle name "Muslim" was dropped in 1955, but from the outset it behaved as a non-communal organisation, which endeared itself to the minorities.

Still, the newly formed political party could not expect to carry its message to the people in the absence of a newspaper supporting its aims. Newspapers in Dhaka were not in sympathy with the reformist ideas of the new party, which threatened to upset the status quo. Fortunately, this void was soon filled. Tofazzal Hussain, alias Manik Mian, was one of Suhrawardy's protégés in Calcutta. Thanks to Suhrawardy, Manik Mian had been given a government job while in Calcutta and in 1949 he was ready to go to Karachi to accept an offer of a post of Deputy Secretary in the Information Ministry. It was an attractive prospect for someone like him who did not have the means to raise a growing family without a steady employment. He would almost certainly have gone to Karachi but for an encounter with Mujib. He pleaded with Manik Mian to stay in Dhaka because without him "our work will be hampered."[1] The newspaper "*Ittefaq*" was established soon afterwards in August, with Manik Mian as its editor. Between 1945 and 1948, Manik Mian was associated with the newspaper "*Ittehad*" in Calcutta, founded by Suhrawardy, so that he had not only acquired journalistic experience but became well-conversant with Suhrawardy's political thinking. This would serve him well in his new position in Dhaka. "*Ittefaq*" was at first published weekly; it became a daily newspaper in 1954.

Manik Mian was some ten years older than Mujib. But they shared the same political convictions and a bond grew between them. They complemented each other marvelously. Mujib sometimes tended to act too hastily; Manik Mian, the older man, was generally calm and thoughtful. By seeking counsel with Manik Mian, Mujib felt assured that he was taking considered, rather than impulsive, action.

During this period Nurul Amin was the Chief Minister. He had replaced Nazimuddin when the latter assumed the post of Governor General following

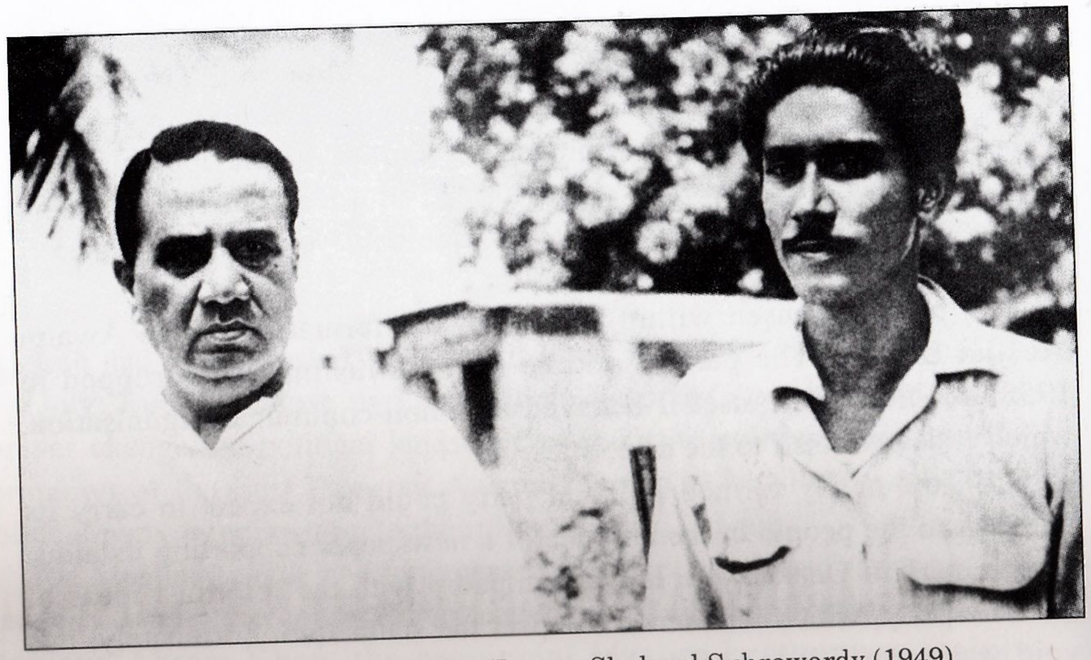


Photo 4: With his mentor Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (1949)

the death of Jinnah in September 1948. He was unable to improve the food situation, which was causing extreme distress and strikes. The unpopularity of the government made the task of the Awami Muslim League to propagate its message easy. Its party workers were sent to various districts to set up branches; Mujib did his part in his home district of Faridpur.

On 11 October 1949, a mass meeting was held by the Awami Muslim League at Armanitola Maidan in Old Dhaka to protest against the high price of foodstuffs. After inflammatory speeches, including one by Mujib, Maulana Bhashani led a procession toward the Government House where the visiting Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was staying. At the railway crossing, police intercepted the procession and used sticks and tear gas to prevent the crowd from proceeding farther. Bhashani, Shamsul Huq and several others were arrested on the spot. Mujib, however, evaded arrest and went into hiding when he found that an arrest warrant had been issued. After consultations with other party people, he then flew to Lahore for talks with Suhrawardy. Mujib's stay of several weeks there was fruitful not only because of the opportunity to discuss matters with his mentor and leader but because it gave him an idea of the political climate in West Pakistan. Mujib had gone to West Pakistan unhindered because he had booked his seat under an assumed name; he was also able to return unmolested in the month of December. He kept a low profile but the

police was more diligent this time and uncovered his hiding place. He was arrested on the New Year of 1950; he would remain in prison for more than two years.

Mujib was at first committed to Dhaka Central Jail on security grounds. On 12 September he was convicted under Section 147 of the Pakistan Penal Code and sentenced to three months of rigorous imprisonment. Towards the end of October, however, he was transferred to Gopalganj Sub-jail to answer another charge and then sent to Faridpur Jail. In the district jails there was no facility to isolate Communists from other political prisoners. At some point the government became concerned that Communists might infect other political prisoners with their radical ideas and it was decided to transfer non-Communists from district jails to Dhaka Central Jail. Accordingly, Mujib was readmitted to the jail in Dhaka on 1 March 1951.

His prison cell-mate Mohiuddin Ahmed had been transferred earlier from Barisal Jail for the same reason. They were old acquaintances from the Muslim League days in Calcutta. They reminisced about old times and talked about the present political situation. Neither of them were avid readers and therefore missed all the more taking part in action outside the confines of the prison. Mohiuddin recalls:

> Our whole way of life was based on struggle. Towards the end of 1951 we began to suffer more intensely the pain [of enforced idleness]. For it was around this time that we began to hear slogans of demonstrators outside in our Ward No. 5. What should we do to be useful to the growing movement? What could we do to guide the movement or influence its direction from inside the prison? These were the questions that we used to discuss continually. After much reflection we came to the conclusion that somehow Mujib would have to be taken out of the prison. We had of course to keep our intention totally secret from the authorities. We decided to try to get Mujib admitted to the Medical College Hospital by feigning illness. We managed to do that with the willing help of the medical doctor.[2]

By the time Mujib was transferred to the Medical College Hospital, the language movement had become active after a lull of almost four years. For four long years there had been little activity on the language issue beyond the routine observance of 11 March as the National Language Day. What caused the language movement to revive so suddenly? After the tumultuous events of March 1948, the policymakers of the central government drew the lesson that it would be inexpedient to impose Urdu on an unwilling population deeply attached to the Bengali language and culture. So they decided to fall back on other possible

alternatives to promote Islamisation of the language: one was to change the script of Bengali, derived from Devanagari, to the Arabic script and the other was to make Arabic itself the state language of Pakistan. Both of these schemes were so hare-brained that no one took them seriously and nothing came of them.

The language movement would have probably remained in somnolence but for Nazimuddin who became Prime Minister of Pakistan after the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in October 1951. At the end of January 1952, Nazimuddin came to Dhaka for the annual session of the All Pakistan Muslim League. On 27 January, he addressed a public meeting at Paltan Maidan. He provided the spark for the language movement to re-ignite by declaring that "the state language of Pakistan shall be Urdu and no other language", almost the exact words uttered by Jinnah four years earlier. There were immediate protests by students. On 30 January, the Awami Muslim League and other political parties met to discuss the matter. It was decided that the lead role in the language movement to be launched anew would be played by the Awami Muslim League under Bhashani. Accordingly, the Committee of Action was reconstituted to give it a broader basis. The Committee decided on 3 February to call a province-wide strike on 21 February.

Out of touch with the mood of the people, the government treated the strike call as a simple law-and-order issue and imposed Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, prohibiting the assembly of more than four persons. Bhashani was designated to provide the leadership for the language movement. But he left Dhaka supposedly for organisational work outside precisely at the moment when his presence was most needed; Ataur Rahman Khan, another senior leader, was also out of town conducting a legal case in Mymensingh. So Abul Hashim, the veteran politician who had recently come to Dhaka from West Bengal, presided over the All Party Language Action Committee meeting of 20 February. The main subject of discussion was whether to defy Section 144. A majority of members favoured peaceful agitation within the bounds of the law. They were of the view that if the government order prohibiting assembly of more than four persons were defied, it would lead to uncontrolled violence and disruption of normal life. This could provide the government with the legitimate ground to postpone indefinitely the provincial general elections. However, a minority of militant student leaders like Abdul Matin and Oli Ahad argued that the acceptance of Section 144 without protest would be regarded by the people as surrender to the government and the language

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movement would end ignominiously. While this debate was taking place at the Awami Muslim League office, the National Language Committee of the Dhaka University was meeting separately to consider the same matter and decided to defy the government order. In the end they prevailed and the leadership of the language movement reverted to the student leaders.

In his prison cell Mujib was able to keep himself abreast generally of developments in the language movement but it was difficult for him to communicate to his supporters outside. Mujib went on hunger strike not only as a gesture of support for the growing language movement but as part of his plan to get into the Medical College Hospital. When he was able to secure his admission there on the recommendation of the friendly prison doctor, it gave him the opportunity to smuggle out slips of paper to his party people with his views on the developing situation. The authorities became aware of this and two days later ordered his transfer to Faridpur Jail by steamer via Narayanganj. The claim made by some of his adulators that it was Mujib's views communicated through the lavatory window of the hospital with slips of paper which tipped the scales in favour of the decision to disregard Section 144 does not make sense. He was either in transit to or already in Faridpur, when the critical debate on whether to violate Section 144 was taking place in Dhaka and it was not physically possible for him to get in touch with the other student leaders from where he was.

On 21 February, small groups of students from the University campus began moving in the direction of the Legislative Assembly Building. The police attempted at first to disperse them by lathi-charging and firing warning shots. When these failed to produce the desired effect and students began to throw brickbats at them, the police, not equipped with steel helmets, panicked. They responded by firing several rounds of bullets, resulting in three deaths and scores of injured.[3] The language movement had its first martyrs, but Nurul Amin was unrepentant. The Legislative Assembly, however, in an emotionally charged atmosphere adopted a resolution that evening calling on the central government to recognise Bengali as a state language. In the next few days there were more demonstrations and arrests of leaders.

Mujib continued his hunger strike in Faridpur Jail and was growing weaker every day. Still, he ignored an appeal by Bhashani to give up his hunger strike. The authorities had no desire to add another martyr to the cause of the language movement, especially in Faridpur, where Mujib had



Photo 5: At the *Ekushe Pravat Ferry* with Maulana Bhashani (1953)

a considerable following. On 27 February, he was released. He was taken in a stretcher to the prison gate where his relatives took charge of him. He went back to Dhaka after a rest of four weeks in his village home.

On 27 April, five hundred delegates from various districts assembled at the Dhaka Bar Library for a conference on the language issue. Mujib was an active participant in it. One of the outcomes of the conference was the decision taken in the following year to observe the Martyrs' Day annually on 21 February. When it was observed for the first time after independence in 1972, Mujib described it as "the fountainhead of Bangalee nationalism".

Suhrawardy was somewhat out of touch in Karachi with these momentous events in East Bengal. After the police firings on 21 February, he issued a statement condemning the police excesses, adding at the same time that Urdu, in his opinion, should be the state language. His statement was so much out of tune with the sentiments of the people in East Bengal that even Akram Khan's daily *Azad* criticised him. So Mujib flew to Karachi to apprise Suhrawardy about the situation in East Bengal. Suhrawardy then issued another statement expressing his full support for Bengali as a stage language.[4]

Soon afterwards, a pamphlet was brought out in Dhaka listing various prominent people who had supported the cause of the Bengali language. Suhrawardy's name was in it as was that of Fazlul Huq. Huq however blamed his unnamed opponents for trying to create a rift between himself and Nurul Amin and publicly dissociated himself from the language movement, probably because he did not want to jeopardise his lucrative position as Advocate General. But soon he realised that he had nothing to gain in the long run from hanging on to the coattails of Nurul Amin and resurrected his old party under the new name of Krishak Shramik Party (KSP), in order to contest in the forthcoming provincial elections. It was another manifestation of erratic behaviour of this mercurial politician.

Later in the year, at the biennial conference of the Awami Muslim League, held in Mymensingh, Mujib was named General Secretary in place of Shamsul Huq, whose mental balance had deteriorated. The most important decision taken at the conference was to contest in the 1954 elections not as a separate party but in an electoral alliance with the other political parties opposed to the ruling Muslim League.

In the first four years of Pakistan, its political life had been controlled by the Urdu speaking Muhajir politicians from the Ganges basin in northern India. But after the assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan under mysterious circumstances in October 1951, political power shifted to the Punjabi-speaking "sons of the soil" from the Indus basin who dominated the higher echelons of the civil service and constituted the core of the armed forces of Pakistan. Pious and gentle Khwaja Nazimuddin,

the new Prime Minister, was no match for the wily Punjabi bureaucrat, Ghulam Mohammed, the Governor General, and found himself booted out of power after less than two years in office. Ghulam Mohammed had calculated that without him, Muslim League would fare better in the upcoming general election in East Bengal. The choice fell upon Mohammed Ali Bogra, a defector from the Suhrawardy camp, who had just arrived in Karachi from his post of ambassador in Washington to report on the progress of negotiations for long-term military and economic assistance from the United States.

The need for such an alliance with the United States had become acute toward the conclusion of the Korean War. So long as that war had continued, Pakistan had enjoyed a boom because of the insatiable wartime demand for jute. The lion's share of the foreign exchange earned from the sale of East Bengal's "golden fibre" and other resources had been siphoned off to West Pakistan for its economic development and to support the armed forces, which devoured the bulk of the national budget. With mounting economic problems, the power elite of Pakistan could not resist the temptation of accepting financial incentives offered by the United States as the reward for joining a US sponsored military alliance. This, then, was the background against which the 1954 elections were held in East Bengal.

Notes

1. Moinul Hasan (ed.), *Obishmoronio Manik Mian,* The New Nation Printing Press, Dhaka, 1995, p.46.
2. *Bhasha Andolon O Bangabandhu*, Bangabandhu Gabeshona Kendro, Dhaka, 1994. p.48.
3. The Inquiry Commission headed by Chief Justice Ellis concluded that under the circumstances, police firing was justified, See Serajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh, 1704-1971, Vol. I,* Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1992, p.461.
4. Mohammed Hannan, *Bangladesher Chatro Andoloner Itihash, Vol. I,* Granthaloke, Dhaka. 1993, p.155.

8

THE UNITED FRONT

The United Front, the electoral alliance of political parties to fight the ruling Muslim League, was composed of four main opposition parties: the Awami Muslim League, the Krishak Shramik Party, the religious Nizam-e-Islam and leftist Ganatantri Dal. It adopted a 21-point Manifesto demanding recognition of Bengali as a state language, full regional autonomy, release of political prisoners and nationalisation of the jute industry, among other things. It was to remind the electorate of the significance of the Martyrs' Day, 21 February, that Abul Mansur Ahmed, the author of the Manifesto, limited it to 21-points. The United Front adopted "boat" as its electoral emblem, a powerful symbol in a land abounding in rivers.

The United Front campaign against the Muslim League was led by three of the most prominent Bengali political figures—Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardy and Bhashani. Their speeches in support of the 21-points resonated powerfully with the masses. The Muslim League, on the other hand, was unable to present the voters with any coherent programme relevant to their needs. They harped on slogans like "Islam in danger" and "Pakistan in danger," while the people wanted to hear about what was being done to solve their problems. The Muslim League was also unable to match the kind of vigorous door-to-door campaigning mounted by student leaders and volunteers of the United Front.

Mujib was a candidate in a constituency in Faridpur where his opponent was a prosperous Muslim Leaguer, Wahiduzzaman. The District Magistrate of Faridpur at that time was a Punjabi, Altaf Gauhar, and he has described his first meeting with Mujib as follows:

> In one of his speeches he (Mujib) threatened to peel off the skin of the Chief Minister, Nurul Amin, and turn it into a pair of slippers. 'That was most vulgar,' thought the Home Secretary and asked me to arrest the butcher. When Sheikh Mujib was brought to my office he denounced Punjabi bureaucrats and threatened to bring down the government. But why did he want to peel off the Chief Minister's skin? Because it is so

thick,' was his spontaneous response. I agreed with him that he had not committed any offence and he immediately softened. A highly emotional person Mujib could be disarmed with a gesture of affection.[1]

The electorate, highly disaffected with the rule of the Muslim League, virtually wiped it out, once and for all, from the political scene in East Bengal. Out of 237 Muslim seats in the legislature, Muslim League secured only 9 seats.

All the Mulsim League ministers of the provincial government, including Nurul Amin, the Chief Minister, failed to get elected; some of them secured so few votes that they lost their deposit. The United Front as a whole won 223 seats out of 309 in the provincial Assembly. Eight Independents later joined the United Front.

Not surprisingly, Mujib won an overwhelming victory over his Muslim League rival from his constituency in Faridpur. A couple of days

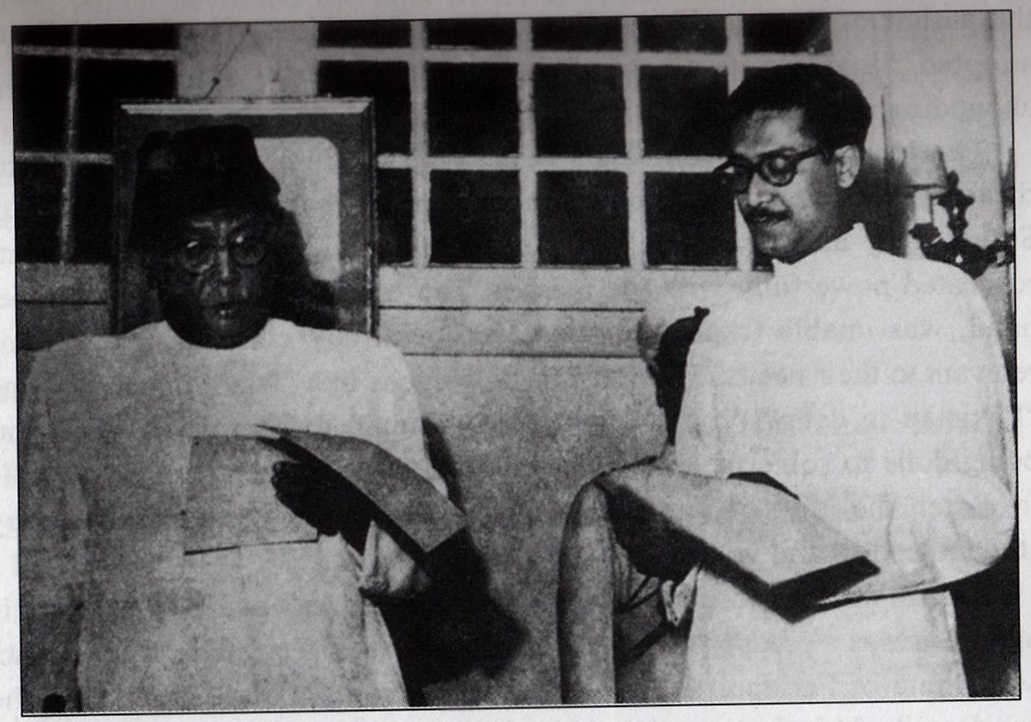


Photo 6: Mujib takes oath of office as Agriculture, Forest and Cooperative Minister in the United Front Cabinet before the Chief Minister A.K. Fazlul Huq on 15th May, 1954

after the announcement of the election results, Mujib arrived in Dhaka. That evening he came to the *Ittefaq* office for an urgent meeting with Manik Mian. In his words:

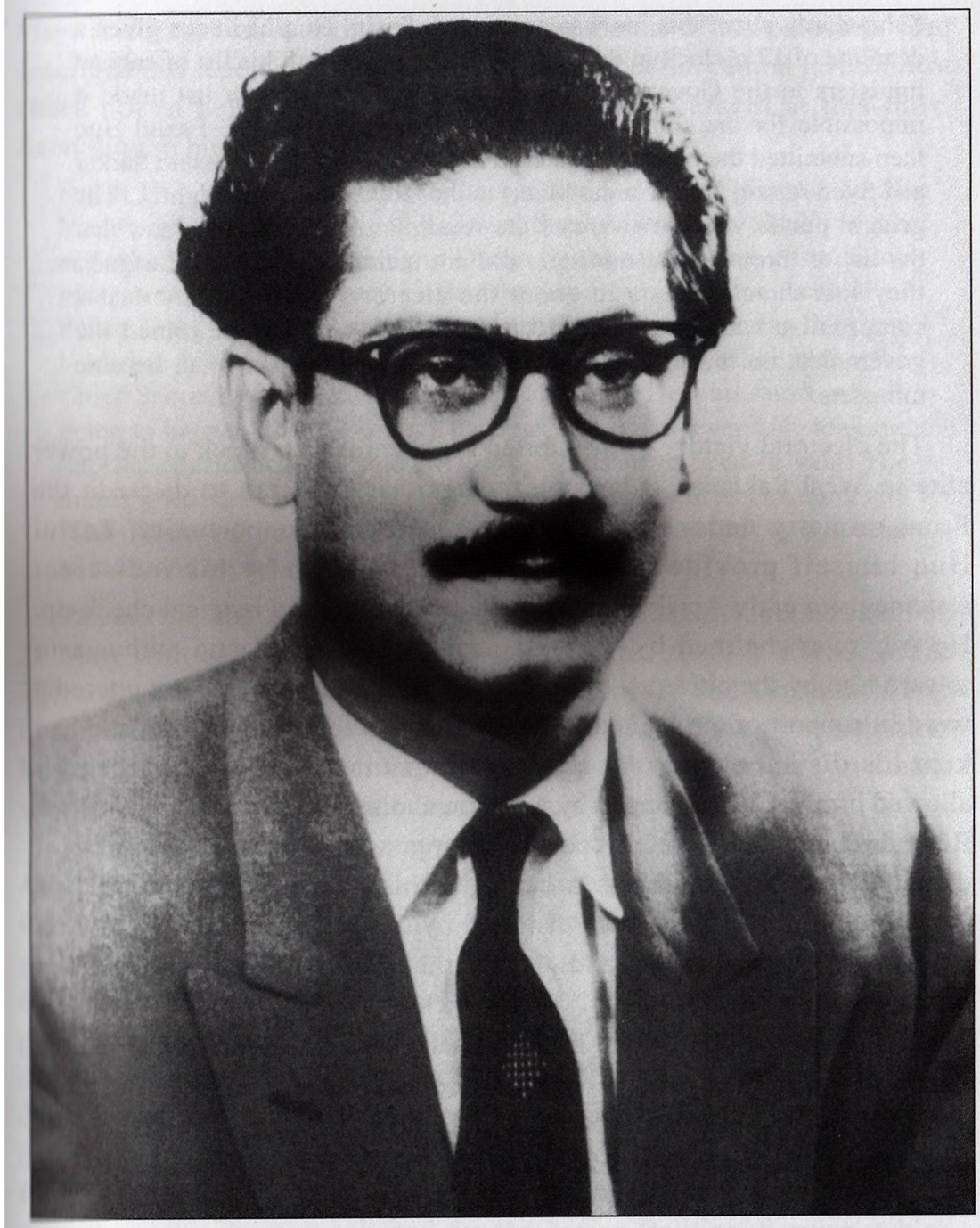


Photo 7: Sheikh Mujib, the rising young political leader in the 1950's.

He (Mujib) informed me that in Faridpur Mohan Mian and Abdus Salam had been reported as saying that on no account would Mujib be allowed to become a minister in the government and that they would ensure his exclusion from it. Mujib said that he was not interested in becoming a minister but now it had become a matter of prestige with him. He requested me to have a word with Shaheed Suhrawardy. When I told

> Suhrawardy about this, he was astounded. Fazlul Huq had been given a deadline of 12 o'clock in the night of 3 April to submit his list of cabinet ministers to the Governor. The bitter wrangling over the list made it impossible for the complete list to be prepared in time ... Fazlul Huq then submitted the names of Ashraf Ali Choudhury, Abu Hossain Sarkar and Syed Azizul Huq (Nanna Mian) to the Governor by midnight ... The general public was not aware of the wrangling and when they saw that the list of three cabinet ministers did not include any Awami Leaguer, they lost their enthusiasm about the electoral victory ... At last a compromise was reached on 15 May and Awami League joined the government on that day. Both Sheikh Mujib and Mohan Mian became ministers.[2]

The electoral victory of the United Front came as a shock to the power elite in West Pakistan. It became their primary concern to discredit the Front ministry under Fazlul Huq at the earliest opportunity. Fazlul Huq himself provided the ammunition to them by his indiscreet statements in early April when he visited Calcutta for a medical check-up. He was overwhelmed by the outpouring of goodwill and enthusiasm toward him by the citizenry of Calcutta. Fazlul Huq who had not uttered a word in support of the United Bengal scheme before the partition and had kept his distance from the language movement until very recently, allowed himself to be swayed by emotion and said that "the people of two Bengals, bound together by common language, should forget political divisions and feel themselves to be one." This statement and similar ones made by him in Calcutta were distorted by the Pakistan press to build up public opinion against him and prepare the ground for his removal from office.

On 15 May, as the United Front ministry was expanded to include the Awami League and other Front members, pre-planned riots between Bengali and non-Bengali workers broke out at the Adamjee Jute Mills near Dhaka. Bengalis who had voted for the Front suffered most of the casualties. Huq was summoned to Karachi by the central government on the very day, 19 May, Pakistan—United States Mutual Aid and Security Agreement was signed in Karachi.

Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Bogra was quick to make the accusation that Fazlul Huq was an incompetent Chief Minister who was unable to contain communist infiltration and maintain law and order. Bogra also denounced Huq as a "traitor" after the publication of a report in the *New York Times*, by its correspondent, John P. Callahan, on 23

May, that Huq was working for the independence of his province. Huq described this report as "a perversion of truth", but the central government chose not to believe him. Manik Mian was in Karachi at this time. According to him:

> Fazlul Huq was so annoyed that he boarded the BOAC aircraft on 28 May to return to Dhaka. Ataur Rahman, Syed Azizul Huq, Sheikh Mujib and others were also returning to Dhaka by the same plane. Also on the plane were Chief Secretary Hafiz Ishaq and the Inspector General of Police, Doha. I too was in the same plane. Early in the morning the plane landed at the Palam Airport in Delhi. After we got out of the plane, the Chief Secretary took me aside and asked me, 'Do you know what's going to happen now?' I said, 'I have no idea whatsoever.' He took me into his confidence and said, 'All my efforts have been in vain. The ministry will be dismissed. Iskander Mirza is being sent as Governor and N.M. Khan will be named Chief Secretary. They have left by a special aircraft, and probably will arrive in Dhaka ahead of us.'[3]

Fazlul Huq and his party reached Dhaka via Calcutta around noon on 29 May, with dark foreboding of things to come. At four o'clock in the afternoon, the United Front Ministry was dismissed and Governor's rule imposed on East Bengal under Section 92-A of the interim constitution. Major General Iskander Mirza, the Defence Secretary arrived in Dhaka with emergency powers to rule East Bengal as the new Governor.

Iskander Mirza was the very model of a Pakistani Major General. After the First World War, when the British began cautiously to Indianise the British-officered Indian Army, Mirza became the first Indian cadet to graduate from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in 1919. Under the British Raj, the Indian Army was organised more for a mission of police functions than national defence. In the recruitment to the officer corps preference was usually given to members of loyalist families. As a collateral relative of the Nawab of Murshidabad, Mirza was a natural choice for the King's Commission. Assigned to the North West Frontier Province, he was slightly wounded in a skirmish with Pathan tribals and soon thereafter, he was selected for the Indian Political Service, which was comprised of picked men from the Indian Army and the Indian Civil Service. His entire career before the partition was spent in the Frontier where he acquired the reputation as a *bon viveur* who "enjoyed getting the better of a man by a cunning trick."[4]

Mirza lost no time in exercising his authority. Under the Public Safety Act, which allowed preventive detention and arrest of people without trial, more than 1600 people were rounded up within the first twenty four

hours. Most of them belonged to the Awami Muslim League, the largest component of the United Front. Among those arrested were Mujib and forty other legislators. Fazlul Huq was interned in his home. Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, prohibiting assembly of more than four persons, was imposed throughout the province. Pro-Awami League *Ittefaq* was subjected to pre-censorship. Mirza even threatened to have Bhashani shot if he returned to East Bengal. Bhashani was in Europe at this time, having gone there to attend a Peace Conference in Stockholm. While abroad he had criticised the US-Pakistan Pact as a "slave pact". His companions took the threat of Iskander Mirza so seriously that they advised him not to return. Bhashani, with much reluctance accepted their advice and decided to go as far as Calcutta and await developments. It did not occur to them to call the bluff of Mirza, who had no legal authority to take any action beyond arrest. The time had not come for the civil-military bureaucrats to assume and exercise unfettered powers and they had to maintain a posture of legality.

Fearful of being charged of treason in a court of law unless he apologised, a penitent Fazlul Huq issued a statement on 30 May ending with these lines: "I sincerely regret having made utterances which reflected on my loyalty to Pakistan. On account of my old age, I am retiring from public life."[5] But in Karachi, Ghulam Mohammed, partly paralysed and barely able to make himself understood, with his active mind still capable of weaving complicated conspiracies, had other plans for Fazlul Huq. Ghulam Mohammed had realised that if Fazlul Huq were allowed to depart from the political scene in East Bengal, the only major player left in the field would be the Awami Muslim League, a far greater menace to the power structure in Pakistan. So a game plan was devised by him to keep Bengali leaders disunited and to make them work at cross-purposes with each other.

Before he could carry out his long-range plan, Ghulam Mohammed had to take care of an urgent business. A plot had been hatched against him by some politicians, including Prime Minister Bogra, who wanted to curb the arbitrary powers of the Governor General. An amendment to the Government of India Act, 1935, the interim constitution, was introduced in the Assembly which would provide that, "the Governor General shall be bound by the advice of the Prime Minister". Ghulam Mohammed, who was on vacation in Abbotabad at this time, returned immediately to Karachi and struck a devastating counter-stroke against the plotters. On 24 October, the Governor General declared a state of emergency and dissolved the Constituent Assembly on the ground that it, "as at present constituted, has lost the confidence of the people."

Ghulam Mohammed knew that his action, although highly controversial, would be greeted with satisfaction by certain political circles who had long criticised the Assembly as ineffective either as a constitution-making or as a legislative body. They now saw prospects opening out for them in any new Assembly, which, under the interim constitution bequeathed by the British, would be elected indirectly by the provincial legislators elected after the partition. The big losers in the new set-up would be the Muslim League and its allies like the Jamaat-e-Islam and they complained bitterly about this "mischievous" move.

To forestall an inevitable confrontation with the foul-tempered Governor General, Bogra had left Karachi, accompanied by General Ayub Khan, for Washington for negotiations with the Americans on military aid. Bogra and Ayub Khan were ordered to cut short their trip and return to Karachi, Bogra was panic-stricken but after Ayub Khan reassured him about his personal safety, they left for Pakistan via London in a chartered plane. Ghulam Mohammed needed the support of the military to face the crisis that had arisen. He slyly offered Ayub Khan the post of Prime Minister when they were alone. Aware of the risk that without the command of the Army he would be in a vulnerable position and could be dismissed at the whim of the Governor General, he declined the offer. Bogra, who had abased himself sufficiently before Ghulam Mohammed by professions of loyalty to him, then "graciously accepted" his invitation to re-form the Cabinet as a "Ministry of Talents." This meant that the Cabinet members would serve in their personal capacity because of their special skills, rather than because of their party affiliation. The key members were personally chosen by Ghulam Mohammed. Ayub Khan became the Defence Minister and Mirza relinquished his post as Governor of East Bengal to assume his new function as the Minister of Interior.

Ghulam Mohammed had set a dangerous precedent by asking soldiers, serving and retired, to participate in the government. It merely whetted their appetite for absolute power that would eventually overwhelm the capacity of Ghulam Mohammed to remain in control of Pakistan politics. But for the time being he remained confident of his ability to manipulate squabbling politicians and ambitious generals.

In his first broadcast to the nation, Prime Minister Bogra justified the introduction of a civilian-military government in Pakistan by saying that "constitution-making is important but more important by far is the security and stability of the country." However, there was no denying that unless a constitution was framed in a short span of time, there would be

no end to the prevailing malaise in the country. So, another person that Ghulam Mohammed was keen on having in the so-called "Ministry of Talents' was Suhrawardy as the Law Minister to handle the constitutional crisis. Suhrawardy was well-known for his legal acumen and the fact that he was a Bengali would be a great help in pulling the country out of the constitutional morass in which it found itself. Knowing that Mohammed Ali Bogra had served under Suhrawardy in pre-partition Bengal in the Muslim League ministry and might therefore be reluctant to join a cabinet headed by Bogra, Suhrawardy was assured by a special emissary of Ghulam Mohammed, Z.A. Suleri, editor of *The Pakistan Times*, that he would in effect be treated as the *de facto* Prime Minister and after his job was done, he would be named as the Prime Minister. Suhrawardy returned thereupon to Karachi from Zurich where he was undergoing medical treatment. Following face-to-face talks with Ghulam Mohammed, lasting several days, Suhrawardy accepted the offer only after Ghulam Mohammed swore on the Holy Koran that promises made to him would be kept. Still, Suhrawardy wanted to go to Dhaka for consultations with his colleagues before joining the Cabinet. Ghulam Mohammed requested him not to do so because it could complicate matters if he insisted on going to East Bengal. Suhrawardy gave in. On 21 December he became the Law Minister in this "Ministry of Talents."

Before joining the Cabinet, Suhrawardy used his influence to secure the release of Mujib from prison on "compassionate grounds," because his father was ill. Five days later Mujib was on his way to Karachi for talks with his leader. On 4 January 1955 Abu Hossain Sarkar of the KSP was appointed Health Minister in the Cabinet without the knowledge, much less than the consent of Suhrawardy, in clear violation of the solemn promise made to him. Before leaving Dhaka Mujib had heard rumours that some sort of an understanding had been reached between Ghulam Mohammed and Fazlul Huq during the latter's visit to Dhaka in mid-November, while Mujib was in jail, that Huq would be rehabilitated politically provided he co-operated with the power structure in West Pakistan and their Bengali henchmen like the Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Bogra. In fact, Bogra had secretly made a deal with Fazlul Huq to make his nominee Chief Minister of East Bengal "in exchange for Huq's promise to challenge Suhrawardy's credentials to represent the people of East Bengal."[6] The appointment of Abu Hossain Sarkar as Health Minister was in clear violation of the promise made to Suhrawardy by Ghulam Mohammed that no decision would be made in the Cabinet without his

consent. Nevertheless, Suhrawardy decided to ignore this incident and carried on with the task of framing the constitution which would prepare the ground for parliamentary democracy in the country.

Mujib, however, was so angry at this deliberate insult to his leader that he left Karachi on 5 January, the day after the announcement of Sarkar's induction into the Cabinet. On arrival at Tejgaon Airport in Dhaka, Mujib accused Fazlul Huq of challenging the leadership of Suhrawardy. He proposed to the Awami Leaguers that Fazlul Huq should be removed from his position of leader of the Parliamentary Party of the United Front. Mujib's proposal of moving a no-confidence motion against Huq was considered unwise by his senior colleagues, Manik Mian and Abul Mansur Ahmed. They took the view that Huq's activities, however nefarious, were known only to a handful of people. To launch a crusade in this situation would be widely misunderstood and fail to garner sufficient support for it among the United Front legislators. But Mujib was so bent upon exposing the perfidy of Huq that he paid scant heed to their advice. Although Mujib did not get a wholehearted endorsement from Awami Muslim League legislators for his motion, he was hopeful of picking up support of a number of dissident KSP and Nizam-e-Islam legislators. This did not take place. On the other hand, as many as thirty five members of the Awami League, led by Abdus Salam Khan of Faridpur, did not vote in support of the no-confidence motion; worse still, some of them, enticed by various inducements deserted the party to join the KSP. Mujib did not despair.[7] To him the defection of a few self-seeking opportunists would not amount to any tangible loss for the Awami Muslim League. Quite the contrary, he argued, the party would emerge out of this seemingly disheartening experience as a more determined, ideologically cohesive body. The rift in the United Front was now complete and the Awami Muslim League formally quit the United Front in early 1955.

Notes

1. Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1993, p.xxviii.
2. Moinul Hasan (ed.), *Obishmoronio Manik Mian,* pp.112-113.
3. *Ibid*, p.116.
4. Philip Woodruff, *The Men Who Ruled India: The Guardians*, Saint Martin's Press, New York, 1994, p.295.

5. Sirajuddin Ahmed, *Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq*, Bhashkar Prokashoni, Dhaka, 1993, p.197.
6. H. R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shahid Suhrawardy*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1987, p.47.
7. It should be noted that the Awami League legislators were allowed to vote their conscience. This explains why so many chose to vote as they did, resulting in a apparent setback to the party. The KSP members on the other voted as a bloc, contrary to Mujib's expectation.

9

FRAMING OF THE CONSTITUTION

Suhrawardy had characterised the Constituent Assembly as a "Long Parliament" in need of purging by a Cromwell. Now that the Constituent Assembly had been dissolved by the autocratic action of Ghulam Mohammed, the Governor General, it fell upon Suhrawardy as the Law Minister in the "Ministry of Talents" to find a way out of the constitutional quagmire.

The constitutional crisis became more complicated after Tamizuddin Khan, the President of the dismissed Constituent Assembly, filed a petition on 9 November 1954 contesting the Governor General's action in the Sind High Court and which, on 9 February 1955, held that the dissolution of the Assembly was "nullity in law." Suhrawardy, by then the Law Minister, appealed to the Supreme Court, which, in mid-May gave the ruling that the lower court had no jurisdiction in the matter, but without going into the merits of the case. Encouraged by this judgement, the Governor General promulgated the Emergency Powers Ordinance empowering him to make provisions for the framing of a constitution. This attempt to assume supra-legal powers by the Governor General, however, was foiled by the Supreme Court by another judgement which invalidated the Ordinance.

Ghulam Mohammed had no choice but to bow before the law. In late April it was decided to call a new Constituent Assembly of 80 members with a parity of representation between the two wings of Pakistan. The quilt-work of the provinces and the princely states was in the process of being welded together to form a single province of West Pakistan, ostensibly because this would lead to administrative efficiency before Suhrawardy had joined the Cabinet. He felt he had to go along with the idea of One Unit, if by doing so, he could obtain concessions in respect of legitimate demands of the Bengalis.

In the summer of 1955, the provincial legislatures elected members to the new Constituent Assembly. In the new Assembly, the Muslim League, although much reduced in strength, still won the largest number of seats, 26 in all, but with one exception (Mohammed Ali Bogra), they were all from West Pakistan. Out of the 40 seats allotted to East Bengal under the

system of separate representation of religious communities, 31 seats were for Muslims. Of these, United Front got 16 seats, Awami Muslim League 12, Communist Party 1, Muslim League 1, and Independent 1.

Mujib was now a member of both the East Bengal Assembly and the Constituent Assembly. Working as a parliamentarian at both provincial and national assemblies was a novel experience for him and he was quick to learn the rules and conventions of the parliamentary system. His long association with Suhrawardy was no doubt of great help to him in his new role.

Suhrawardy was nurtured in the British tradition of constitutional government in which decisions are arrived at on the basis of give-and-take. Politics for him was an art of the possible. He was willing to compromise if it led to better understanding between the peoples of the two wings of Pakistan, provided of course, that the basic interests of Bengalis were protected and promoted. As Law Minister, he was responsible for working out the state principles for the framing of the constitution. It was an uphill task to find a formula that would balance the various divergent interests in an equitable manner. Nevertheless, after difficult negotiations on the controversial issues, agreement was finally reached on the following five points:

1. West Pakistan was to be integrated into One Unit.
2. There would be regional autonomy for each wing.
3. There would be parity between the two wings in all respects e.g. foreign aid, services, allocation of development expenditure.
4. Elections would be held through joint electorate.
5. Both Bengali and Urdu would be state languages.

The agreement was signed by the leaders of various parties in mid-July. Ataur Rahman Khan and Abul Mansur Ahmed signed it on behalf of East Pakistan. Fazlul Huq appended his signature later.

In East Bengal, however, many people were unhappy about signing away their most significant leverage: the fact that East Bengal with 56 per cent of the total population would enjoy a dominant position in the political life of the country if the voting was to take place on the principle of one-man, one-vote. Bhashani, the avid agitator, was unwilling to see that the other side of the parity, namely, allocation of resources, recruitment to the services, and in matters of defence, would bring in more tangible benefits to Bengalis.

Mujib, with his ears close to the ground in his home province, had his own misgivings about certain aspects of the agreement. Whereas Suhrawardy was willing to give West Pakistan leaders a chance to prove their sincerity, Mujib entertained a healthy scepticism about their bona fides.

In early August Ghulam Mohammed fell victim to the kind of conspiratorial politics in which he had hitherto excelled. Iskander Mirza, the Interior Minister and Ayub Khan, the Defence Minister suggested to the Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali Bogra, that Gholam Mohammed should be persuaded to resign the office of Governor General because of his health problems. It was made clear to him that if he declined to resign, a Medical Board would be appointed to report on his health, including his sanity. Since there was no doubt as to the outcome of the report, Ghulam Mohammed resigned, "with much weeping and wailing and bitterness."[1]

Suhrawardy was supposed to become the next Prime Minister but in the jockeying for positions that followed, he found himself in a difficult situation. Ayub Khan, who bore a grudge against Suhrawardy for having defended those involved in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, was instrumental in swinging the election in the Cabinet in favour of Chowdhury Mohammed Ali, a former civil servant with a finance background, as Prime Minister.[2] Iskander Mirza inherited the mantle of Ghulam Mohammed as Acting Governor General and Fazlul Huq was brought in to fill the post vacated by him as Interior Minister. Why Huq was chosen for this important post soon became clear.

Ever since Jinnah had adorned the post of Governor General, it had become the pivotal point in the governmental system in Pakistan. Ghulam Mohammed had shown how that position could be used to manipulate the lust and greed of politicians. Now that Iskander Mirza had succeeded to this vital position, he wanted not only to strengthen his own commanding authority, but to make sure that he would retain his position as President when the new constitution was enacted. Since the Prime Minister was from West Pakistan, his chances of being confirmed as President under the new constitution would be far greater if he could be shown as a person of Bengali origin, as there was a strong feeling, if not a convention, that if the Prime Minister was a West Pakistani, the Governor General should be a Bengali, and vice versa. So, within days of his assumption of office as Interior Minister, Fazlul Huq obliged Iskander Mirza by giving him a certificate stating that Mirza was a Bengali of "royal blood." It is true that Mirza was a direct descendant of Mir Jafar, who had been made Nawab Nazim (ruler) by Lord Clive as a reward for his act of treachery against

his sovereign, Siraj-ud-Dowla, which assured the British victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. But Iskander Mirza had been born, raised and educated outside Bengal and could neither speak nor understand Bengali. Furthermore, until this time he had never claimed to be a Bengali. Had he done so, he would never have been an officer in the British Indian Army, which excluded Bengalis as a "non-martial" race until the Second World War.

Mujib had never much regard for Fazlul Huq since he had deserted the Muslim League at a crucial time during the Pakistan movement and formed a coalition ministry with the communalist Hindu Mahasabha. Mujib was among those student leaders who had travelled throughout Bengal during the 1946 electoral campaign reviling Huq, the man who was once known as the "Sher-e-Bangla" (Lion of Bengal), as "Ghaddar-e-Bangla" (Traitor of Bengal) in his new incarnation. Only for a brief while, during and after the 1954 electoral campaign, Mujib had entertained the hope that Fazlul Huq was not irredeemable. But when Huq dubbed Mirza as a Bengali, Mujib lost any shred of respect for him.

Since Suhrawardy was no longer in the government, Awami League parliamentarians like Mujib who had not been a party to the five-point agreement could feel free to express their disquiet over unpopular constitutional measures like the One Unit and the question of parity. As Suhrawardy had agreed to them in the interest of consensus and in his capacity as Law Minister had even had a hand in the drafting of the One Unit bill, it would have appeared unseemly if he were to oppose them openly in the Constituent Assembly so soon.

So it was Mujib who opened the first salvo against the One Unit proposal in the Assembly in his maiden speech on 25 August 1955:

> Sir, you will see that they want to place the word "East Pakistan" instead of "East Bengal"... The word Bengal has a history, has a tradition of its own. You can change it only after the people have been consulted. If you want to change it then you will have to go back to Bengal and ask them whether they accept it. So far as the question of One Unit is concerned it can come into the constitution. Why do you want it to be taken up just now? What about the state language, Bengali? What about joint electorate? What about autonomy? The people of East Bengal will be prepared to consider One Unit with all these things. So, I appeal to my friends on that side to allow the people to give their verdict in any way, in the form of referendum or in the form of plebiscite. Let the people of Frontier say that they want One Unit. At the moment they say they are against it ... If the people of Frontier say that they are in favour of One Unit we have no objection to that. Similarly in Sind ... If you will force it upon us, then we will have to adopt unconstitutional means. You must proceed constitutionally.

It was actually Suhrawardy's idea to place squarely the responsibility of unification on the people of Pakistan themselves. For there were good reasons to believe that most Pathans, Baluchis, Sindhis, Mohajirs, as well as the inhabitants of princely states were concerned about the inevitable Punjabi domination in a unified West Pakistan. Mujib, on behalf of the Awami League, put forward conditions that would make it difficult to unify West Pakistan as a single province. There could have been no illusions that this argument, however reasonable, would sway the judgement of the Assembly, where the votes were already there in favour of the unification of West Pakistan. For Mujib personally it was a good thing that he was able to articulate the popular Bengali sentiment in the National Assembly. The left wing of the Awami League personified by Bhashani was dead set against the idea of One Unit and Mujib's speech restored his standing with them to a great extent.

The question of parity, the status of the national capital, national language, regional autonomy, the right of trade unions, privileges of parliamentarians—there was no issue on which he was not prepared to express his opinion in the National Assembly. If he did not speak on foreign policy it was largely because it was a subject that was rarely discussed in the Assembly. He saw all issues through the prism of Bengali public opinion and took every opportunity to project the Bengali point of view. For a freshman parliamentarian he was unusually expressive even though his command of English was rather limited.

After three months of stay in West Pakistan, Mujib returned to Dhaka for the three-day biennial conference of the Awami Muslim League, held in Dhaka from 21-23 October 1955. For well over a year he had been talking to his colleagues in the party about the advantages of making the party secular. His experience as a member of the Constituent Assembly had confirmed his belief that if all Bengalis stood together on a single platform, it would help them immensely in confronting the power structure in West Pakistan. He was determined, if possible, to bring it about during this conference. Bhashani, who was under the influence of left-leaning advisers like Oli Ahad at this time, was in favour of the idea. Mujib now persuaded Suhrawardy to move the amendment to the party's constitution to make it formally a secular organisation. On 22 October, this was approved by acclamation amid slogans like "Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai" (Hindus and

Muslims are brothers). The party would henceforth be known as the Awami League. Although there was no overt opposition to the secularisation of the party, there was some unhappiness among more communally-minded party members. Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed was among them. At a meeting of Awami League workers in Dhaka on 3 November, he expressed his apprehension that the party was being led to a wrong path by dropping the word "Muslim" from its name.

Abu Hossain Sarkar was made the Chief Minister of East Bengal soon after Chowdhury Mohammed Ali became the Prime Minister. This was the price he had to pay to get the support of Fazlul Huq. On 21 November, the Sarkar Ministry faced a serious crisis when the special armed police at Rajarbagh, joined by some policemen in the city and at Narayanganj, "refused to perform their duty" unless their demands were met. Sarkar's knee-jerk reaction was to blame the Communists for the police strike. In fact, it was a spontaneous strike and the Communist Party itself was caught completely unawares by this event.[3] Nevertheless, hundreds of Communists and fellow-travelers as well as some Awami Leaguers were rounded up and arrested. Sardar Fazlul Karim, the only Communist member of the Constituent Assembly, was arrested on 25 November at the Tejgaon Airport after he was offloaded from the plane that was carrying a number of parliamentarians to attend the Karachi session of the Assembly. As Fazlul Karim was being led away Mujib shouted to him that he would take up the matter at the Assembly.[4] On 29 November, he took the floor to remind Speaker of the Assembly that when Suhrawardy was the Law Minister it had been agreed that members of the Assembly would enjoy the same rights and privileges as members of the House of Commons where there was a convention that no MP would be arrested before the Speaker of the House was informed. Mujib pointed out that in the case of Fazlul Karim as well as that of Mahmud Ali (then a leftist married to a card-carrying Communist), who was arrested in Karachi, the Speaker was "ignorant of the arrests." Mahmud Ali was released shortly afterwards, but Fazlul Karim remained in jail until May 1956.

In February 1956, the Constitution Bill was pushed through in the Constituent Assembly, ignoring many of the legitimate Bengali demands. The Awami League walked out of the House before the final voting; so did most of the Hindu members who objected to the designation of Pakistan as an Islamic Republic.

Fazlul Huq, who had cooperated with the power brokers in Pakistan during the constitution-making process, was duly rewarded with the post

of Governor of East Bengal. It would soon be called East Pakistan as the new Constitution came into effect on 25 March. A big celebration was held in the Governor's House on that day, but the Awami League boycotted it.

It had taken India two years and a half to frame its Constitution. It has served India, the world's biggest democracy, well into the new millenium. Pakistan had to wait eight and a half years to get its first Constitution, only to be discarded within three years by President Iskander Mirza who had sworn the solemn oath to uphold and protect it.

Notes

1. Mohammed H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, p.89
2. In 1951, an amateurish plot to overthrow the civilian government was hatched by General Akbar Khan, Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army. The Communist Party of Pakistan became peripherally involved in this so-called "Rawalpindi Conspiracy" when its General Secretary, Sajjad Zaheer, casually agreed to write manifestoes to justify the coup attempt. Alerted by one of the plotters who got cold feet, the authorities arrested them and put them on trial. Suhrawardy defended them and they got off with light sentences. Ayub Khan, who was on the hit list of the conspirators, was unhappy with the verdict and their early release through Suhrawardy's efforts. Afterwards, when both of them were Cabinet members in the so-called "Ministry of Talents", Ayub rounded on Suhrawardy at a Cabinet meeting and said that "he had done great harm to the army at the trial and was no friend of Pakistan." See Mohammad Ayub Khan, *Friends, not Masters,* p.37.
3. Moni Singh, *Jibon Songram (Part 2)*, Jatiyo Sahityo Prokashoni, Dhaka, 1992, p.31.
4. Interview with Sardar Fazlul Karim, 17.12.96.

10

AWAMI LEAGUE IN POWER

The 1956 Constitution had provided for a parliamentary democracy. In a democracy people are supreme, but Iskander Mirza had a low opinion about the ordinary people. By his birth and upbringing, by his colonial training, and by temperament, Mirza was anything but a democrat. In an interview given to a correspondent of the *Daily Mail* of London in October 1954, he had said that Pakistan's illiterate people were neither interested nor competent in politics. In his view, "political scalawags" must be brought under control to bring a sense of sanity within the country. Therefore, what Pakistan needed was a "controlled democracy."[1]

The tricks of the trade Iskander Mirza had learned in the service of the British Raj in the turbulent Frontier—cajolery, bribery, intimidation, setting one tribe against another—came in handy as he began to apply his doctrine of "controlled democracy" on the politics of Pakistan. Within months of his assumption of office of President he encouraged the formation of a new political party that would be beholden to him. The Republican Party was brought into existence almost overnight by Dr. Khan Sahib, a non-party man, who was an old friend of Iskander Mirza from his Frontier days. Dr. Khan Sahib was disgruntled with the Muslim League over a broken promise to make him the Governor of the newly-created province of West Pakistan and he was more than willing to take his *badla* (revenge) in the Pathan tradition. Muslim League legislators joined the Republican Party in droves for personal gain, as they reckoned that the new party had a more promising future.

Iskander Mirza, having co-opted Fazlul Huq by making him the Interior Minister in the Centre, now appointed Huq's nominee Abu Hossain Sarkar as Chief Minister of East Pakistan. Sarkar did not have a majority in the legislature and he refused to call it into session. To shore up his position, Fazlul Huq was sent as Governor in March and the two of them, working in tandem, did their best to prolong the life of the Sarkar Ministry. In order to buy the support of the legislators, Sarkar resorted to the practice of issuing permits for them to get rice from government godowns cheaply which could then be sold in the open market at an exorbitant price. This

officially sanctioned profiteering by legislators supporting the Sarkar Ministry made the already grave food situation worse. As the Sarkar Ministry became increasingly unpopular, Bhashani went on hunger strike in protest against the government incompetence and misrule while Mujib personally led demonstrations in the streets of Dhaka demanding that the most seriously affected districts be declared famine areas and called upon the government to put pressure on the Centre to come to the immediate aid of East Pakistan.

Suhrawardy did not take to the streets—that was not his style—but he went on an extensive tour of the province and wrote a letter to Iskander Mirza giving an account of the appalling conditions he had observed with his own eyes.[2] He followed it up by issuing a public statement on 17 August warning that "unconstitutional conduct on the part of the rulers breeds unconstitutional reaction on the part of the people" and threatened to resort to civil disobedience to bring down the unpopular KSP regime. Mirza had also received reports about the seriousness of the food situation from other sources, including the Pakistan Army garrisoned in East Pakistan.

Mirza summoned Fazlul Huq, Sarkar and Suhrawardy to Karachi for urgent face-to-face talks and reassessed his position. Mirza then got Fazlul Huq to understand that Sarkar could not indefinitely postpone calling the Assembly into session and that it would be advisable for him to resign now than to suffer the indignity of being removed from office by a vote of no-confidence. On 31 August, realising the hopelessness of their situation, the Sarkar government resigned.

Fazlul Huq had no option but to ask the Awami League to form a government. He invited Ataur Rahman Khan to do so immediately. Within the Awami League leadership, however, there were two points of view. One group held that it would be suicidal to take over the administration when famine stalked the country and there was no assurance that an Awami League-led coalition government would be able to improve the food situation markedly within a short period. The other group, to which Mujib belonged, argued that it was a challenge the Awami League must accept to prove its ability to play a positive governmental role in a time of crisis; in the end, they prevailed.[3]

Early on the morning of 5 September Ataur Rahman called on the Governor to inform him that he was ready to form a government. His Cabinet initially included Abul Mansur Ahmed and Sheikh Mujib of the Awami League; Kafiluddin Ahmed, a dissident member of the KSP; and Mahmud Ali of the Gonotantrik Dal. From the beginning Mujib radiated

confidence and his enthusiasm was not without basis. As he explained at the first meeting of the Cabinet on 6 September, the Awami League organisational structure was intact and widespread: all that was needed to mobilise it for the work ahead was to give it a well thought-out action programme. The main problem, he said, was to secure the cooperation of the bureaucracy on which so much depended. At this meeting he also suggested that all political prisoners be released forthwith. Seventy political prisoners, most of them Communists, were freed from the Dhaka Central Jail that very day in the presence of the entire Cabinet at the Jail Gate.[4]

If the KSP government had to bear a lot of blame for the severe food shortages that had brought East Pakistan close to starvation, then the Awami League would have to alleviate the near-famine conditions in the province in a reasonably short space of time if it wished to claim credit for good governance. For this it was essential that the central government should provide resources to take remedial action with a sense of urgency and it was by no means certain that it would be cooperative. Happily, events unfolded in Karachi in a positive manner that no one had expected.

It so happened that around this time Prime Minister Chowdhury Mohammed Ali began to lose control of the majority in the National Assembly. There were rumours that Iskander Mirza had inspired the formation of the Republican Party for the express purpose of creating difficulties for Chowdhury Mohammed Ali, with whom he was not getting on well. He resigned on 7 September, the day after the Awami League government was formed in Dhaka. Iskander Mirza flew to Dhaka personally to escort Suhrawardy to Karachi with an offer to make him the next Prime Minister. Suhrawardy was sworn in as Prime Minister of Pakistan on 12 September, although the Awami League had fewer members in the National Assembly than the Republican Party, the other coalition partner.

Manik Mian, a shrewd observer of the political scene in Pakistan, did not think that it was a good idea for Suhrawardy to head a government where his own party was a minority, since this situation could be utilised by a master-intriguer like Iskander Mirza to get rid of him at a suitable opportunity. Suhrawardy, on his part, was not unaware of the pitfall, but he felt that he had to take this job to tackle the grave food situation in East Pakistan in the short run, and then to pave the way to the holding of the first-ever general election in Pakistan. He knew that this would not be an easy task because there were powerful pressure groups who were not interested in the restoration of full democracy in the country.

Three days after becoming the new Prime Minister, Suhrawardy came back to Dhaka, accompanied by Amjad Ali, the Finance Minister, and a

number of high officials to take stock of the food situation and later allocated three crores of rupees to procure food for the province. But if Suhrawardy had thought that his efforts for easing the sufferings of the people of East Pakistan would be greeted with universal approval, he was mistaken.

Bhashani had been a thorn in the side of every government. Now it was the turn of the Awami League government. Never mind that he was the President of the Awami League, and that his party was holding power, both in the Centre and in East Pakistan. At a mass meeting held in Dhaka to welcome Suhrawardy, with Bhashani presiding, he made the astonishing remark that "the people had expected the Prime Minister to bring a planeload of foodgrain—he has brought instead a planeload of women" and added that "if he didn't perform his job properly, he would be dragged down by the ear from his seat of power".[5]

The Awami League government faced the food crisis with great determination. Ataur Rahman, the Chief Minister, directed his ministers to treat the food emergency as a top priority. Mujib was in charge of industries, trade and village aid. During this period he spent a good deal of time outside Dhaka making sure that his party people took an active part in relief work in conjunction with government efforts in the countryside. The food situation improved considerably after importation of rice from Burma and the opening of gruel kitchens in the seriously affected areas. The Awami League had passed its first test in administration with flying colours. Grateful Bengalis showed their appreciation in the by-elections held in December: out of seven constituencies, the Awami League won in six and lost only in one.

One might have thought that after the successful handling of the food emergency Bhashani would desist from finding fault with the Awami League government, both at the Centre and in East Pakistan. If anything, he became more strident in his criticism of the Awami League's policy and performance in government: How was it that no ban had yet been imposed on legalised gambling like horse-racing? Why were red-light districts and houses of ill-repute still allowed to function unhampered?

The Maulana's ecclesiastical wrath against such un-Islamic practices as gambling and prostitution was understandable. What was more difficult to explain was the vehemence with which he attacked Suhrawardy on a subject in which Bhashani had no credentials: foreign policy. Perhaps the explanation lay in the fact that for some time his closest political advisers were young leftist student leaders with intellectual pretensions. They took their cue from views propagated by Moscow and Beijing, which advocated a

stance of non-alignment for the Third World countries. Suhrawardy did not subscribe to this point of view, although he was in favour of improving relations with the Communist countries. He sincerely believed that so long as there was an ongoing confrontation with India over Kashmir, Pakistan could not afford the luxury of following a non-aligned course internationally. Suhrawardy was the first Prime Minister to make foreign policy a matter of public debate, especially in East Pakistan where there was considerable opposition to the regional military pacts like the Baghdad Pact (later called CENTO) and the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). In September, in his zeal to expound the usefulness of an alliance with the Western powers to the students of the University of Dhaka, he discounted the value of a Muslim bloc which was being talked about at this time by saying that zero plus zero will always be zero. Suhrawardy's equation was no doubt mathematically correct, but in the psychological climate of the period, it was politically incorrect.

Among the Arabs, Suhrawardy's blunt comment in a public forum caused resentment, which turned into anger after the tripartite (Israel, France and Great Britain) attack against Egypt during the Suez crisis in October 1956. Egypt rebuffed Pakistan's offer to provide an army contingent to the UN Peacekeeping Force in the Sinai and refused to receive Suhrawardy when he expressed a desire to go to Cairo to meet Nasser and explain Pakistan's position on the Arab World.

The repercussions of the Suez invasion were soon felt in East Pakistan. On 3 November, a crowd attacked the one-storey British Council building at Paltan Maidan and burned it down. Bhashani called upon the Awami League government in Dhaka to declare 7 November as "Egypt Day" and make it a public holiday. According to Oli Ahad, Mujib wanted to oppose this, but refrained from doing so because of "pressure of circumstances" and a holiday was declared.[6]

The biennial conference of the Awami League was due to be held next year and Bhashani fixed it for 7-8 February 1957. The venue was an obscure village called Kagmari near his home at Santosh in the district of Mymensingh. Suhrawardy suspected that the date of the conference was chosen to coincide with the UN Security Council meeting on the Kashmir dispute; Egypt was a non-permanent member of the Council and it was a foregone conclusion that Egypt would vote against any resolution favourable to Pakistan. The conference was to be followed by a cultural festival lasting several days.

It was evident that the focus of the conference would be on foreign policy and that there would be a showdown between the proponents of the

regional military pacts and those opposed to them. In preparation for the impending confrontation at the Kagmari conference the left-wing elements both inside and outside the Awami League had organised a youth festival at Rangpur in North Bengal in the first week of January 1957 to rally support for a movement against the "imperialist pacts." But if Bhashani and his leftist adherents had hoped that they would carry the day at the Kagmari conference, they were bitterly disappointed by the outcome.

On 6 February, the day before the opening of the conference, the Working Committee of the Awami League held a meeting. The main topic was the question of whether to adopt a resolution at the conference on the issue of the controversial pacts. The Working Committee decided not to raise the issue at the plenary session of the conference. The only dissenting vote was that of Oli Ahad.

Nevertheless, in his opening speech at the conference the next day Bhashani denounced the pacts, and warned that if the central government failed to ensure autonomy to the eastern wing and treat it as an equal partner in all respects, East Pakistan would be obliged to say *Assalamu Alaikum*, an Arabic greeting meaning "peace be upon you" but can also mean "good-bye", to Pakistan. Rhetoric aside, Bhashani took no steps to raise formally the issue of Pakistan's membership of the military pacts, to the chagrin of Oli Ahad and a handful of diehard opponents of the pacts. Bhashani was well aware of the fact that the Awami League rule, both at the Centre and in East Pakistan, was popular with the masses. So, for once, he chose to ignore his close advisers rather than become isolated from the mainstream of the Awami League.

In his memoirs Suhrawardy has given credit to Mujib and Manik Mian for winning the support of the people for his policies:

> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, one of my star organisers whose claim to prominence was because he was a good field worker in touch with both the workers and leaders throughout the province, and Tafazzal Ali (Manik Mian) whose powerful pen swayed mass opinion through the Bengali daily, *Ittefaq*, accepted my views and supported me. Thereafter, I toured the province and obtained mass approval.[7]

Suhrawardy perforce had to spend most of his time in Karachi and without the unstinted support of Mujib and Manik Mian in the weeks preceding the conference, Bhashani, might well have succeeded in undermining the position of Suhrawardy.

The Kagmari cultural festival, starting on 9 February, immediately after the close of the Awami League conference, was intended as a climax

to celebrate the expected victory of the anti-pact forces. It was an elaborate affair lasting several days. Leading writers, educationists and cultural figures from both East Bengal and West Bengal were invited for this occasion.

Numerous gates had been erected between Tangail, the sub-divisional town and Kagmari, in honour of well-known cultural and political figures, past and present. Visitors coming to Kagmari for the gathering could not have failed to notice that the first ceremonial gate was named after President Iskander Mirza. The irony of this symbolism was not lost on Bengali invitees, who could not have forgotten that it was Mirza, who, as Governor of East Bengal in 1954, had publicly threatened to shoot Bhashani, who had denounced the just-concluded alliance with the United States, should he return home from his trip abroad. The clue to this puzzle is to be found no doubt in the manner of the financing of this extravaganza. It must have cost a lot of money not only to erect these gates, but to transport, house, and entertain the visiting dignitaries. The man in charge of the Finance Committee was Sadri Ispahani, an industrialist friend of Iskander Mirza in East Pakistan. There has never been a proper accounting of the source of funds, but the possibility cannot be excluded that a substantial part came from funds donated by friends of Iskander Mirza. As an extremely crafty political operator, he could resort to any device to cause an internecine strife within the Awami League and it suited him to exploit the division within the ranks of the party on the issue of foreign policy. Iskander Mirza's ultimate target was Suhrawardy, for reasons that will be explained later.

So there was a legitimate suspicion that Bhashani had become a pawn in the hands of Iskander Mirza, wittingly or unwittingly. By way of documentation on the possible collusion between Bhashani and Iskander Mirza, it will suffice to quote from the memoirs of two Awami Leaguers—Abul Mansur Ahmed and Oli Ahad—representing opposite ends of the party:

> [Before the split] Bhashani was engaged in secret consultations with left-leaning West Pakistan politicians Mian Iftikharuddin, G. M. Syed etc. and the former Awami League Secretary Mohammed Huq Osmany who had been expelled by Shaheed Suhrawardy Sahib ... Still, the Awami League requested Maulana Bhashani to withdraw his letter of resignation. The Maulana responded by forming the NAP. I have no doubt that Iskander Mirza had a hand in the creation of the NAP.[8]
>
> Around this time he [Bhashani] was so full of rage against Suhrawardy that it blotted out all reason and he succumbed to an amorous embrace with Iskander Mirza. And because of this he did not hesitate to take one disastrous step after another. This is how the split in the Awami League was brought about.[9]

But we are running ahead of our narrative and must recount step by step the happenings after the Kagmari Conference which transformed a family squabble within the party over foreign policy into a critical breach.

The stinging defeat suffered by Bhashani in his home ground at Kagmari had made him bitter and Mujib was concerned that Bhashani might say or do something, which might mar the observance of *Shahid (Martyrs) Day* on 21 February. On 16 February Mujib went to visit Bhashani at Santosh. They talked for more than two hours and had a meal together. Addressing Maulana Bhashani as "huzoor", the respectful term with which Muslim religious leaders and holy men are addressed in Bengal, Mujib tried to convince the Maulana that the unity of the party was the urgent task of the moment. At the end of the day a joint statement was issued and published in the newspapers the next morning.[10]

Mujib may have mollified Bhashani but it was not for long. Soon after the *Shahid Day*, Oli Ahad managed to persuade Bhashani that despite the setback suffered at the Kagmari Conference, all was not lost. It was Mujib's control of the party apparatus as General Secretary that was largely to blame for the rout of the Bhashani camp at Kagmari. Once Mujib was removed from his position as General Secretary, the Bhashani faction would be able to regain the initiative and fight with renewed strength for their objectives. Oli Ahad had a plan: the Awami League constitution did not allow party members to hold at the same time an office in the party organisation and a ministerial position in the government. This rule had been breached by Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan and several of his Cabinet colleagues, including Mujib. All that was needed, therefore, was to oblige them to make a choice between the job of office bearer in the party and the membership in the Cabinet. Oli Ahad no doubt expected Mujib to give up his position as General Secretary of the Awami League in order to retain his job as Cabinet Minister; if that were to happen, Oli Ahad would be the most likely candidate of fill the vacant post of General Secretary.

Having planted this thought in Bhashani's mind, Oli Ahad went on a tour from 6-17 March and addressed Awami League workers at various places. At these meetings he denounced Suhrawardy's pro-Western foreign policy and complained about corruption among Cabinet Ministers. On completion of his tour, he went to meet his mentor Bhashani at his village home at Santosh. According to Oli Ahad, he was surprised to learn from Bhashani that he had made up his mind to resign as President of the

Awami League. Bhashani handed him a resignation letter addressed to the General Secretary, but oddly enough, asked him to deliver it to Zahur Hossain Choudhury, the editor of the daily *Sangbad*, a supporter of Bhashani.

Mujib had received disturbing reports about Oli Ahad's attempts to sow seeds of discord within the Awami League from his party workers in various districts. Now like a bolt from the blue came the resignation letter hand-carried by Oli Ahad after his visit with Bhashani at Santosh. Mujib became convinced that Oli Ahad's influence over Bhashani must have been responsible for his sudden decision to quit the presidency of the Awami League. Mujib vented his anger at Oli Ahad by bringing charges of "indiscipline and disruptive activities" against him before the AL Working Committee. On 31 May Oli Ahad was suspended with immediate effect from his post of Organising Secretary by the Working Committee and two months later was expelled from it.

Meanwhile Suhrawardy was having problems in his dealings with Iskander Mirza. As early as September 1956, when Suhrawardy became Prime Minister, Mirza had told the American Ambassador and the British Deputy High Commissioner in a joint meeting that the Suhrawardy government, like the previous government, lacked the guts to explain Pakistan's pro-Western foreign policy to the general public.[11] Now, after the Kagmari Conference, he continued his sniping at Suhrawardy by insinuating to the Western envoys that Suhrawardy had failed to win the approval of his own party for his foreign policy: all he had done was to finesse this issue by avoiding a vote in the conference. Suhrawardy therefore felt compelled to demonstrate that he had the backing of his party for the foreign policy he was espousing.

Another conference of the Awami League had to be convened to discuss mainly the issue of the foreign policy. At this special conference, held in Dhaka in mid-June 1957, both Suhrawardy and Bhashani spoke at length about their ideas on foreign policy. The conference approved Suhrawardy's foreign policy by an overwhelming majority. This did not satisfy Bhashani and he insisted upon another vote. This time Suhrawardy won by a much greater margin of votes: 800 to 35.

Mujib had played a major part in mustering the votes of Awami League councilors by convincing them of the imperative need to show decisively that Suhrawardy was on the right course internationally. Mujib's prestige within the Awami League had by that time improved considerably because of his decision to quit the Cabinet in late May in order to continue to function as the General Secretary of the party. He had

been the only Cabinet Minister to resign. Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan was apparently not pleased with this decision of Mujib, which boosted his profile as the only Awami Leaguer in the Cabinet to put the interest of the party above all other considerations.[12]

In mid-June 1957 Bhashani finally left the Awami League and sent out telegrams to a number of West Pakistani opposition political leaders inviting them to come to Dhaka for talks aimed at forming a new political party. Some of them, like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan of the NWFP and G.M. Syed of Sind, had earlier approached Suhrawardy expressing their desire to join the Awami League and had been rebuffed by him because he felt that their antecedents and views might prove to be a liability than an asset. They and other political orphans from the Western wing of Pakistan, such as Mian Iftikharuddin of Punjab, and Mahmudul Huq Osmani of Karachi, arrived in Dhaka post-haste to find shelter under the canopy of a new party. They joined the dissidents from the Awami League to form the National Awami Party (NAP). With Bhashani as its President, it was formally inaugurated at the Shahbag Hotel. Afterwards a mass rally was held at the Paltan Maidan. There may be substance to the allegation that Mujib was behind an attempt to cause disruption at the meeting by throwing brickbats in the direction of the dais where the NAP leaders were seated. It should be noted that the use of strong-arm methods to demonstrate disapproval of a breakaway faction is strongly rooted in the political tradition of the subcontinent. Such scenes were not uncommon even at the meetings of the Congress Party, supposedly dedicated to non-violence.

The schism in the Awami League endangered its position as the preeminent mass organisation in East Pakistan. While very few of the leaders of the Awami League had deserted the party, it was another matter at the grassroots level. Many left-wing rank and file Awami Leaguers now joined the NAP in the belief that the new party with its socialist programme would provide a more congenial environment for their work. Among them were Communists and fellow-travellers who had earlier enlisted in the Awami League for tactical reasons with the encouragement of the Communist Party. Their departure was more severely felt in the outlying areas where they often formed the backbone of the party.

With by-elections scheduled to be held in winter only a few months away, there was a legitimate concern among party people that an Awami League setback in these by-elections would have a disastrous ripple effect at the national elections expected to be held in early 1958. Some mass circulation dailies like the *Azad* and the *Sangbad* were already predicting

an irreversible decline of the Awami League in the national politics. Only *Ittefaq* struck a positive note about the future prospects of the Awami League.

As the General Secretary of the Awami League, Mujib was well aware of the implications of the loss of so many valuable party workers. He set to work with furious determination to control the damage done to the party and to reorganise it from the ground up. Throughout the month of August he travelled in the mofussil areas, town by town, addressing meetings, selecting local leaders and strengthening party apparatus. To energise them, he called upon them to agitate for more powers at the thana level and by doing so, get the people in the countryside involved in local affairs under the banner of the Awami League. Mujib could spare very little time to spend in Dhaka.

In the wake of the split in the Awami League some KSP leaders like Nanna Mian, (a nephew of Fazlul Huq) and Mohan Mian made gestures of reconciliation in the hope that a weakened Awami League would be amenable to a coalition with them. They were so anxious for a deal with the Awami League that they even offered to join a coalition without any preconditions. Mujib was not in Dhaka when the preliminary contacts were made, but he participated in the later discussions with the KSP leaders. Representatives of the Awami League and the KSP flew to Karachi for further talks with Suhrawardy with a view to giving final shape to the deal. It was generally agreed that the KSP leaders would issue a statement affirming their confidence in the leadership of Suhrawardy and expressing their desire to form a coalition with the Awami League. It was to be followed by a statement by Suhrawardy welcoming their desire to entire into a coalition with the Awami League. But at the last minute the deal fell through. Manik Mian, who was privy to the discussions between the two parties, has recorded his own account of what happened:

> I left Karachi by plane that night on the assumption that everything had been worked out. Next day I learned that the deal has fizzled out. The *Morning News* reported that the draft that had been prepared for Suhrawardy had not been approved by Abul Mansur Ahmed and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and that Sheikh Mujib had snatched the statement from Suhrawardy's hand and torn it to pieces. Shaheed Sahib had left that night for Japan. I was in the dark as to what had happened. Nanna Mian of course issued a statement on arrival in Dhaka that talks would continue. I felt sorry for these leaders who had broken ranks with some of their own party people to cut a deal with Suhrawardy but to no avail. I met Sheikh Mujib after his return to Dhaka. He tried to explain to me that the statement was worded in such a way that its issuance would have been harmful to the Awami League. I drew his attention to the report in the *Morning News*.
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> He vehemently denied the content of the report describing it as utter falsehood. So I requested him to publicly contradict the report. He replied that he had done so in Karachi and his denial had been published in a Karachi weekly. That is how he put an end to the discussion of this matter. The Prime Minister arrived in Dhaka after concluding his visit to Japan. Once again discussions were resumed about the question of coalition with the KSP. Shaheed Suhrawardy sought the advice of the Congress leader Monoranjan Dhar regarding this matter. He gave his consent after some hesitation and asked for the opinion of Mujib. At that time leaders of the KSP and the Awami League were present. Shaheed Suhrawardy said, "I will set my foot down, go ahead." He then went on a tour of mofussil towns and returned to Dhaka after visiting Sylhet, Jessore, Faridpur etc. During this tour Sheikh Mujib accompanied the Prime Minister ...We learned later that AL workers had opposed the idea of a coalition with the KSP. Then there was a meeting of Awami League leaders like the Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmed etc. at the residence of the Chief Minister's Political Secretary Zamiruddin. I do not know whether Sheikh Mujibur Rahman knew about this meting at Zamiruddin's place beforehand. He suddenly appeared at Zamir's house and expressed his displeasure about this meeting. Silence descended on the meeting-place. Shaheed Sahib broke the silence after a while and said, "My own party people are opposed to this I can't make up my mind." Having said this, he proceeded towards his car in order to go to Karachi. I followed him and boarded the car with him. Along the way I asked, "Sir, what happened?" Shaheed Sahib replied, "Nothing, I am just fed up with bickering within the party. No matter what happens now, I have lost all yearning for Prime Ministership." The curtain was thus drawn on talks with the KSP for the time being.[13]

Suhrawardy was disappointed by the failure to reach an agreement with the KSP. As a matter of practical politics he wanted an alliance with the KSP to buttress his position in Parliament and to strengthen his hands vis-a-vis the power elite in West Pakistan, especially Iskander Mirza. It was no secret that Mirza was looking for an opportunity to remove him as Prime Minister at a convenient moment. Suhrawardy was the only politician whose standing was not entirely based in only one wing of Pakistan. He was a man of fine intellect and formidable energy and was generally regarded as the shrewdest politician in Pakistan. His continuation in office as Prime Minister was the best guarantee that the general election under the new Constitution would be held on schedule in early 1958. Iskander Mirza was not keen to see the establishment of a constitutional

government based on parliamentary democracy. He was already toying with the idea of taking over power himself with the help of General Ayub, C.-in-C. of the Pakistan Army. For Iskander Mirza's plan to succeed it was essential to generate a sense of political instability in the country which would provide the necessary justification for an authoritarian rule to the people, as well as to the aid-giving Western powers. Consequently it suited Mirza to have a succession of short-lived ineffective ministries.

With the fracturing of the Awami League and its incapacity to repair its relations with the KSP, Suhrawardy found himself in a precarious position. The Republican Party, the senior coalition partner of Suhrawardy in the Centre, began to scheme with the NAP to undo One Unit and to criticise his foreign policy. Although Iskander Mirza was a supporter of One Unit and logically should have shored Suhrawardy up, he did not want to miss his long-awaited chance to work for the downfall of the Prime Minister. The wily President, using the special power granted to him by the Constitution, sent for Suhrawardy and asked him to resign on the ground that the Republicans had lost confidence in him. Suhrawardy advised Mirza to convene a meeting to the legislature on 24 October to seek a vote of confidence. Suhrawardy was told to resign by ten-thirty on the following morning, failing which he would be dismissed. Suhrawardy thereupon resigned.

Sometime before leaving office Suhrawardy saw to it that Mujib was appointed as the Chairman of the East Pakistan Tea Board, a sinecure, which assured him a cash flow without interfering with his more substantive function as party secretary. Later, after he got to know Yusuf Haroon, when they were fellow-parliamentarians in the National Assembly, Mujib was given the job of the Manager of the Alpha Insurance Company branch in Dhaka by the wealthy Haroon family which owned the enterprise. It was essentially another sinecure which gave him a monthly income of two thousand rupees, a substantial amount considering the money value of the rupee in those days. Yusuf Haroon was a businessman-cum-politician and he was astute enough to foresee the potential of Mujib in the politics of the country. It proved to be a shrewd investment for the Haroons in the long run. The money they invested on him was repaid in kind manifold in the years to come.[14]

These incomes enabled Mujib to build his house in the middle class suburb of Dhanmondi in Dhaka. This house became a familiar landmark to the residents of the city as Mujib rose in prominence as a political figure. It was popularly referred to as No.32, not because the house bore that number but because it was the most well-known house on Road No.32. He lived

happily with his family in that house until his death. The house is now a museum dedicated to his life-work.

Notes

1. Mirza's interview was quoted in *The Dawn* of Karachi on 31 October 1954. There was so much disparagement attached to the profession of politician in the minds of educated Pakistanis that the anti-democratic sentiments of Mirza failed to arouse much indignation among them. On the other hand, the power elite in Pakistan seemed to appreciate the concept of "controlled democracy."
2. Lawrence Ziring, *Bangladesh: From Mujib to Ershad: An Interpretive Study,* The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1992, p.27.
3. Abu Al-Sayeed, *Awami Leaguer Itihas,* Sahitya Prokash, Dhaka, 1993, p.79.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Moinul Hassan, ed. *Obishmoronio Manik Mian*, pp.119-120.
6. Oli Ahad, *Jatiyo Rajniti 1945-1975*, Bangladesh Cooperative Book Society, Dhaka, p.221.
7. Mohammed H.R. Talukdar (ed.). *Memoirs of Husseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, p.117.
8. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Ponchash Bochhor,* Nauroze Kitabistan, Dhaka, 1975, p.492.
9. Oli Ahmed, op. cit., p.241.
10. Abu Al-Sayeed, op. cit., p.84.
11. Oli Ahad, op. cit., p.232.
12. Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, p.73.
13. Moinul Hasan (ed.), op. cit., pp.124-125.
14. Yusuf Haroon does not appear to have shown any concern for Mujib when he was languishing in a Pakistani prison facing death penalty. I should have known if he was concerned because I was then representing Mujibnagar in New York where Yusuf Haroon was also living as a wealthy expatriate. When Mujib was released, Yusuf Haroon was a Vice President of the Pan American Airways, in New York. He was in charge of Inter Continental Hotels and he was able to make sure that no other hotel of comparable standard was built in Dhaka during Mujib's lifetime. There were other deals from which Haroon benefited greatly.

11

THE LAST DAYS OF DEMOCRACY

Suhrawardy was succeeded by the Muslim League leader Ismail I. Chundrigar as Prime Minister. He proved to be ineffective and he lasted in office for only two months. In December 1957, the Republican leader Firoz Khan Noon, took over as Prime Minister. He had previously served as Suhrawardy's Foreign Minister and they had good rapport. Suhrawardy gave the support of the Awami League to him, although no member of his party joined the Noon Ministry.

In East Pakistan, the Awami League continued in office, but with a narrow majority. Not surprisingly, it faced a crisis when the 1958-59 budget was put before the provincial legislature in March 1958. The budget had proposed new taxes to narrow the gap between expenditure and revenues. The opposition consisting of the Muslim League, the KSP and the NAP, already up in arms against the revenue-enhancing measures, was joined by a group of 11 Awami Leaguers, all from North Bengal. On 31 March, Fazlul Huq, the Governor, dismissed the provincial ministry, although it was by no means clear that it had caused to command the majority in the legislature. The action was so high-handed and partisan that under pressure from Suhrawardy, Prime Minister Noon dismissed Fazlul Huq as Governor and appointed a civil servant to replace him. Abu Hossain Sarkar, who had been installed by Fazlul Huq as Chief Minister, had to quit in less than 24 hours and Ataur Rahman Khan was restored to his position as Chief Minister.

Afterwards the leaders of the Awami League held an informal meeting at which there were frank exchanges of view and much self-criticism. Mujib described the performance of the party in power as being lackluster: in his view the provincial government had become excessively dependent on the advice and guidance of the bureaucracy, which had disappointed many party workers, especially in the mofussil areas. There was no doubt, he said, that the Awami League had lost much support and that it was important to regain the popular trust in view of the approaching general election. Ataur Rahman countered that the problem in administering East Pakistan had been made more difficult on occasions by the pressure exercised by

some party people. He reproached Mujib for being too much concerned with the organisational side of the party work. Mujib resented the remarks made by Ataur Rahman and tendered his resignation as the AL General Secretary. But he was persuaded by party leaders to withdraw his letter of resignation.[1]

In April 1958 Suhrawardy came to Dhaka from Karachi for the first time after relinquishing his job as Prime Minister in order to attend a meeting of the AL Working Committee. He had long recognised Mujib as a rough diamond in need of some polishing. Mujib had been his most valuable political worker in East Pakistan but he had only limited exposure to politics in the Centre and had practically no direct knowledge of the outside world. When Suhrawardy was studying at the Oxford University, it was customary for his English classmates, most of whom were of upper class background, to round off their formal education by going on a "Grand Tour" of European countries on the Continent, especially Italy and Greece, which were regarded as sources of Western Civilisation. Suhrawardy had something of this sort in mind for Mujib so that his political education could be complete and he would be ready to play a more meaningful role in national politics, as well as foreign affairs. Suhrawardy proposed that Mujib should go on a world tour of important countries like the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany and Japan. The tour would last two months. The Working Committee approved the tour plan and Mujib left Dhaka soon thereafter. It was in London, where there was the biggest concentration of Bengalis in the Western world, that he spent the longest time, twelve days in all.

It was a mark of Suhrawardy's nobility of spirit that he should have proposed an extensive tour for Mujib who had so recently opposed Suhrawardy's desire to enter into an alliance with the KSP for the purpose of strengthening his hands in the Centre. He had lost his Prime Ministership partly in consequence of this but he took it in stride. He was disappointed but not offended by this show of independence by Mujib. He understood Mujib's motive for opposing an alliance with the KSP and regarded it as a sign of his coming of age politically.

Mujib returned from his world tour in June to find Ataur Rahman on the verge of despair and ready to resign. Mujib tried to dissuade him. But the obstructive behaviour of legislators and their shifting allegiances had made his life miserable and he saw no reason to change his mind. On 19 June he resigned as Chief Minister and was replaced by Abu Hossain Sarkar next day. When he too found the situation difficult to manage, the

central government imposed the Governor's rule for two months ostensibly to determine which of the two leaders had the required majority to form a government. When the count showed that it was Ataur Rahman who had a majority of two, he formed a ministry on 25 August.

With such a paper-thin majority it was not easy to control the Assembly, where the habit of crossing the floor was a common practice, especially during the budget session. The KSP group led by Mohan Mian now began to make renewed overtures for an alliance of convenience with the Awami League. Mujib had aborted an attempt by them earlier and an alliance with them was still unacceptable to him. To him the KSP was a party of opportunists with no firmly-held convictions and their only interest was to improve their own electoral prospects and get other benefits. But something needed to be done to find support among other political parties to get a comfortable working majority in the legislature. Mujib thought it would be preferable to work for an understanding with the NAP. Mujib had always kept his line of communication open with Maulana Bhashani, for whom he had considerable respect. For his part, Bhashani had always shown a fondness towards Mujib and had even referred him publicly as his "son." Mujib felt that Bhashani's heart was in the right place, on the side of the oppressed peasantry and workers, and if he occasionally slipped into a wrong track, it was mostly due to bad counsel from his young advisers. Mujib called them "theoreticians" in a disparaging way, because their doctrinaire approach to political problems was derived from books, not from direct observation of the situation on the ground. Oli Ahad had been Bhashani's principal adviser, but after his advice had frequently been ignored during and after the Kagmari Conference, he had distanced himself away from his leader. This seemed to be a good time, therefore, to make an approach to Bhashani with an offer of reconciliation. Unfortunately Bhashani had left for Stockholm in July to attend the World Peace Conference and had prolonged his stay abroad, having accepted an invitation from President Nasser to visit Egypt as an honoured guest. Barely had Bhashani returned to Dhaka on 11 September that he issued a public rebuke to Suhrawardy and promised that "in no time his name would be obliterated." This was not a good omen for a rapprochement between the NAP and the Awami League, but Mujib persisted nevertheless, with Suhrawardy's blessing. Mujib's initiative paid off. In mid-September not only Bhashani, on behalf of the NAP, but Mahmud Ali of the leftist Ganatantri Dal, announced that they were in accord with the Awami League on all basic issues.

For the power structure in Karachi this was a most unwelcome development. It evoked memories of the United Front in their mind and a repetition of the 1954 election was something that had to be avoided at all costs. Iskander Mirza, in collusion with Ayub Khan, at this time was already planning for a military coup d'etat. In the last half of September Iskander Mirza began to have contacts with the KSP leaders and encouraged them to create chaos in the legislature and make a mockery of parliamentary practice by every available means. Mohan Mian, who had been spurned by the Awami League on two successive occasions, had several meetings with Iskander Mirza in Karachi, which suggests that he was a party to the conspiracy to create incidents in the East Pakistan Assembly that would cast doubts in the public mind about the utility of democratic institutions. Unseemly behaviour of the opposition legislators, including scuffles with Awami Leaguers, became commonplace. Such undisciplined and unparliamentary conduct was also indulged in by West Pakistani legislators.[2] But one single incident in the East Pakistani Assembly was so sensational that it made not only headlines in the Pakistani newspapers but became a newsworthy item in the world press.

On 23 September Shahid Ali, the Acting Speaker of the Assembly, was severely wounded by a flying object thrown at him by an opposition member. Shahid Ali was a diabetic. Three days later he succumbed to his wounds in a hospital. The death of the Acting Speaker was to provide an excuse for the military coup ten days later.

There are two prerequisites for staging a coup d'etat. In chronological order the first one is that the public opinion should be prepared to welcome a change of regime or at the very least should be passive or indifferent to such a change; a civilian regime unable to solve the basic problems of the people due to festering discord among politicians is especially vulnerable to a coup. The would be coup-makers therefore seek to create public opinion in their favour by destabilising the regime and by creating confusion. The second one is that the armed forces must be ready to move quickly to take over the machinery of the government before countervailing forces such as trade unions, student bodies etc. can organise resistance to military rule. In the special circumstances of Pakistan there was a third pre-requisite: the acquiescence of the United States to a military coup. American involvement in the affairs of Pakistan, especially in the modernisation of the armed forces, was so extensive that it was unthinkable that a coup could even be attempted without their knowledge and acquiescence.

We have seen how Iskander Mirza had deliberately engineered a series of ousters of civilian governments for the sole purpose of creating turmoil

in the political life of the country ever since he became the head of state, first as Acting Governor General and then as President. It was possible for him to meddle in political affairs because that office since the time of Jinnah had not been treated as a ceremonial one but endowed with special powers, regularly misused by his successors, except Nazimuddin. Mirza had made no secret of his contempt for politicians and for democracy. He had been itching to overthrow the democratic political system envisaged by the 1956 Constitution but had to wait for an opportune time. He had, above all, to secure that support of the Army.

Mirza had retired with the rank of Major General but the greater part of his career had been spent in the Indian Political Service. After independence he had served as Defence Secretary and had taken care to cultivate and promote the career of Ayub Khan, Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Mirza looked upon Ayub Khan as his protégé and in 1955 when he was Defence Secretary he was instrumental in getting Ayub's term as C.-in-C. renewed for four years. It was due to expire on 16 January 1959, just before the scheduled general election in Pakistan. Ayub was feeling insecure as he had no assurance that he would be given another extension. Suhrawardy and Chundrigar had kept him on tenterhooks and Noon did not seem to be in a hurry to take a decision on his future.[3]

Ayub Khan shared with Iskander Mirza a profound distrust and dislike of politicians who were responsible for the conduct of affairs in a parliamentary system of government. Both of them had reasons to be anxious for an army take-over before nationwide elections could be held under the 1956 Constitution. Their greatest concern was that the Awami League would sweep the polls and would form the next government in the Centre. Any new government that came into power after the elections would naturally enjoy a period of honeymoon so far as popular opinion is considered. It was imperative therefore that a coup must be staged before representative institutions could take root in the country. Otherwise, their prospects of continuing in their jobs were doubtful.

They had to convince the Eisenhower administration that if the general election was held on schedule the result would be the victory of left-wing elements hostile to Pakistan's pro-Western foreign policy. The task was not easy. For there was a growing doubt among a powerful group of Americans, especially in the Eastern Establishment, about the usefulness of Pakistan as an ally.[4] In their view it would be better to shift the emphasis away from Pakistan, a politically unstable country, to India, a

model of democracy in the developing world. There were some among them who argued that even on purely strategic grounds India was a worthwhile bet. India's interests were fundamentally at odds with those of China in view of its activities in Tibet and along their undemarcated and disputed border in the Himalayas; it was therefore India, more than Pakistan, that could be relied upon to act as a barrier against the spread of communism in South Asia.

Ayub Khan's visit to the United States in April 1958 in connection with securing US military aid on a long term basis was to serve as an ideal cover to put forward Pakistan's case for increased assistance as well as to raise fears over the likely consequences of the elections on the future of US-Pakistan relations in the minds of American policymakers. Since Ayub Khan would be dealing mainly with military matters, Mirza sent Syed Amjad Ali, former Finance Minister, who was well acquainted with influential people in Washington, to join Ayub Khan in his lobbying work. They were assisted by Mohammed Ali Bogra, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States. The trio met a number of high officials and other influential figures with their underlying message that Pakistan, with its vast mass of illiterates, was far from ready to experiment with general election; it would almost certainly bring to surface dangerous demagogues like Bhashani and "Red Shirts" under Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan determined to fight against existing friendly relations between the two countries. Ayub Khan, who was the most active lobbyist, seems to have succeeded in persuading high officials like the Dulles brothers—one of whom was the Secretary of State and the other the CIA Director—that in Pakistan only the military establishment had an abiding stake in an alliance with the United States to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Americans in the continuing Cold War. Allen Dulles, the CIA chief, assured him that he would do all he could on Pakistan's behalf. Ayub had reasons to be satisfied with his talks with the US Service Chiefs, to whom he promised to make available "an expeditionary force either in Iran or elsewhere in the Middle East", if the Americans would provide Pakistan with further military assistance to expand its forces.[5] In none of the talks there was any mention of a possible military coup in Pakistan, but from the thrust of the remarks of these three Pakistanis there could have been no doubt in the minds of the Americans they met that it was in the offing.

Ayub Khan returned to Pakistan on 18 May in an ebullient mood, having won the tacit American support for a coup d'etat in Pakistan. It would be his task now to line up the generals and the key officers behind

this move, but in such a way that the politicians did not get unduly alarmed. For one thing, he had to avoid being seen in the company of Iskander Mirza, unless absolutely necessary, to put the civilian government off the scent.

For his part, Iskander Mirza had been doing his best to create difficulties for Prime Minister Firoz Khan Noon by every means at his disposal. When Noon announced that the general election would be held in February 1959, Mirza raised the question of East Pakistan representation in his government. He complained to Noon that Bengalis needed to be included in his government not only in adequate numbers but in charge of some important portfolios. Noon thereupon entreated Suhrawardy to let some of his partymen join his ministry. Chief Minister Ataur Rahman was also of the view that Awami League, which was already supporting Noon in the Centre, should also be represented there. Suhrawardy had suspected that Mirza's sudden solicitude was a provocation with the ulterior motive of creating dissension within the Noon Ministry. It was doubtful that the expansion of the Cabinet by itself would take care of proper Bengali representation in the Centre. Some of the important politicians holding key portfolios would have to be displaced causing complaints over the redistribution of Cabinet posts. Suhrawardy was in a quandary. But with elections only a few months away he thought it would be better for some Awami Leaguers to join the Noon Cabinet to prop it up against Mirza's manifest desire to bring it down.

So, Suhrawardy directed Mujib to come to Karachi urgently to discuss the question of Awami League participation in the Noon Ministry and election matters. Mujib arrived in Karachi with six Awami League aspirants and Peter Gomez of the Congress Party. Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan and Manik Mian joined them the next day. After much haggling some Awami Leaguers were included in the Cabinet on 2 October; but unhappy with the distribution of Cabinet portfolios they resigned on 7 October. Mujib left for Dhaka in the evening.

In the interim Suhrawardy had gone to Quetta for electoral campaigning. It had earlier been agreed by the Awami Leaguers that he would finish his campaigning in West Pakistan by December so as to be able to devote his full attention to Awami League's traditional base in East Pakistan. Judging by the success of the party candidates in the by-elections held in the province, the prospects of the Awami League in the forthcoming elections looked very bright.

While Firoz Khan Noon was busy trying to form a new coalition, final preparations were under way for the military takeover. Mirza was

conspiring with political opponents of Noon to organise demonstrations against him and encouraging them to plan a "long march" from Peshawar to Karachi to destabilise the government, Ayub was meeting with his trusted generals and officers to plan for the final move. It took place on the night of 7-8 October. I happened to have arrived in Karachi shortly before midnight from the Hague where I was posted on my way to Dhaka for my home leave. I noticed pickets of army personnel at some intersections, which was rather unusual, but put no significance to this. The next morning, at breakfast in my hotel, I learned that the Constitution had been abrogated, the government dismissed and the country placed under martial law.

The coup d'etat was peaceful and was obviously a complete success. It had been well-planned and executed at a perfect psychological moment. The politicians were at loggerheads with each other and unable to mount any opposition to the coup. The Awami League was the most well-organised party, especially in East Pakistan, but its leaders were dispersed. Suhrawardy was in Quetta; Mujib was in the plane somewhere over India, unaware of the momentous development that had taken place.

A few friends had come to receive Mujib at the Tejgaon Airport. He could not have failed to notice that they looked glum. The reason became obvious when he was shown the morning newspapers announcing the proclamation of the martial law, with General Ayub Khan as the Chief Martial Law Administrator. He knew he would be arrested shortly. On 11 October, Zakir Hussain, who had been the Inspector General of Police when Ayub Khan had been the General Officer Commanding of the Pakistan army in post-independence East Bengal, was appointed as Governor. The very next day Mujib was arrested on corruption charges and taken to Dhaka Central Jail as an under trial prisoner. His status was changed to that of security prisoner under the just-enacted Special Powers Ordinance, which made him ineligible for bail.

Notes

1. Abu Al-Sayeed, *Awami Leaguer Itihash*, p.100.
2. *The Pakistan Times*, 22.3.58.
3. Lawrence Ziring, *Bangladesh: From Mujib to Ershad*, p.43
4. Prime Minister Noon finally offered an extension of General Ayub's tenure on 1 June. It was for two years, instead of customary four years. By that time Ayub Khan's appetite for power had grown following his visit to the United

States in April-May where he had secured tacit American Approval for a coup. On the day Ayub was told by Noon about this extension, he wrote in his diary: "Noon is lacking in ability and has no guts. He has a very bad memory and can't read anything .... But I am used to dealing with a bunch of morons starting from Khwaja Nazimuddin downwards." See Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, p.51.

5. *Ibid.* p.39-40.

12

MARTIAL LAW REGIME

In the martial law regime Iskander Mirza retained his position as President while Ayub Khan became the Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA). Mirza described the new order as a "two-man regime which makes policy for the army to carry out."

But power has its own logic in an authoritarian regime: there can be no two co-equals in it. Sooner or later, sooner rather than later, one of them becomes more "equal" than the other. With every passing day Ayub Khan, with the backing of the Pakistan Army, began to gain ascendancy in the new regime. Mirza felt that he had to do something soon before he was reduced to the status of a ceremonial head of state. The Military Intelligence under the control of General Yahya Khan was keeping a close watch on Mirza and one day they intercepted a telephone conversation between him and Syed Amjad Ali whose son was engaged to be married to Mirza's daughter. Amjad Ali was anxious to fix a date for the wedding, but Mirza suggested that it should be held when the situation was "normalised." When Amjad Ali said that it might take some time to normalise things, Mirza replied that he "would sort Ayub Khan out in a few days." Alerted by Yahya Khan, it was Ayub who sorted Mirza out. On 27 October, virtually at gunpoint, Mirza was forced to resign. A week later he was put on a plane bound for London, never to return.[1]

On the morrow of Mirza's resignation Ayub Khan concentrated in his person the offices of President, Prime Minister and Chief Martial Law Administrator. Ayub was at last firmly in the saddle.

Having usurped absolute power Ayub Khan set about the task of establishing a new political structure tailored to his requirements. He proceeded to base it on civil-military partnership, for both the military establishment and the civil bureaucracy were tightly knit cohesive elites sharing a disdain of politicians. He saw himself as a benevolent despot destined to modernise the country with a galaxy of reform measures in education, land tenure system, family law that the politicians could not even dream of, much less implement. To make sure that politicians did not create obstacles in the path of his grand designs, he detained a number of them who were likely to be troublesome and tried to keep others in line

by threatening to take legal action against them for corruption and abuse of power when they held ministerial positions in the government. The press, with rare exceptions, became a pliant tool in the hands of the Martial Law regime.

Ayub Khan did not want to give the impression that his rule was based only on coercion. As there were no signs of opposition which could pose any significant danger to the Martial Law regime, troops were withdrawn to the barracks within a month and civilians were appointed to aid the Martial Law Administrators. And within a few weeks he found it unnecessary to make much use of military courts—summary (one-man) or special (three-man)—which had been empowered to give stiff sentences not subject to civilian review. He restored to a large degree the independence of the courts.

There were some eight cases filed against Mujib for corruption and abuse of power as Cabinet Minister in the United Front government in 1955-56. By the time the charges were framed against him, military courts were by and large in disuse. Still he faced a special military court in July 1959, but he was acquitted when two key witnesses admitted to having made false statements under police pressure.

In the middle of 1959, at the height of the sweltering monsoon season, Mujib, brooding in the isolation of his prison cell, could not be sure of the outcome of the other upcoming cases against him, especially in view of the strong probability that some of them might be tried before military courts. In September Manik Mian was briefly detained and found himself lodged in a cell adjacent to that of Mujib's. He found Mujib in bad shape: his countenance was pale and his legs were swollen. He was also somewhat in a state of depression.

Manik Mian was soon released from prison. In October he was invited to a dinner for newspaper editors by General Musa, the new Commander-in-Chief of the Army, who had come to Dhaka to present the regimental flag to the East Pakistan Regiment. Manik Mian took advantage of this occasion to bring up the question of Mujib's continued detention as a security prisoner. Musa said that the matter was outside his jurisdiction since the function of the Army was merely to act as an "umbrella" for the Martial Law Administration. He however gave a patient hearing to Manik Mian as he pleaded that the Martial Law regime, however unpalatable it might be to people like him, should not behave in a vindictive manner toward those who did not agree with it. He said that all he was asking for was that Mujib should be given a fair trial. Musa made no comment. In December, within two months of this conversation, Mujib was set free.[2]

But he was restricted from travelling outside Dhaka and he was closely watched by the Special Branch of the Police. Mujib could have secured his release earlier had he agreed to sign a bond renouncing political activity as a number of political detainees had done, but politics was in his blood and he had no intention of giving it up.

Mujib was released from prison but some of the cases against him were still pending. One of them, involving charges of nepotism and abuse of power was tried before the Sessions Judge, Abdul Moudud, of the Dhaka District Court in September 1960. The judge found Mujib guilty and sentenced him to two years in prison and a fine of five thousand rupees. An appeal against the judgement was immediately filed before the High Court: Suhrawardy himself came to Dhaka to act as Mujib's defence lawyer. In June 1961, the High Court overturned the verdict of the lower court.

Suhrawardy then returned to Karachi to explore the possibility of starting a political movement for the restoration of the 1956 Constitution. Mujib assessed the political situation and came to a pessimistic conclusion about the prospects for democracy in Pakistan. Since his release from prison he had been grumbling to his associates that it was no longer possible to live with the Punjabis who dominated both the military and the bureaucracy which constituted the backbone of the Ayub autocracy. It is true, he would say, that Ayub Khan had been holding out hopes for a semblance of democracy, but it would be nothing more than putting on a velvet glove on an iron hand. He felt that the situation cried out for a radical approach. For the first time in his life he began to entertain seriously the thought of secession from Pakistan and the establishment of an independent government in East Pakistan.

Mujib could not yet afford to disclose his strategic goal to anyone outside the circle of his closest collaborators. So he needed like-minded allies outside his party to advance toward his objective. He decided to sound out the Communists to find out whether they were inclined to his way of thinking on the question of independence.

Notes

1. Mohammed Asghar Khan, *Generals in Politics: Pakistan 1958-1982*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983, p.8.
2. Moinul Hassan (ed.), *Obishmoronio Manik Mian,* p.144.

13

AN OVERTURE TO COMMUNISTS

Why Communists?

The Communist Party of India was the only major political party in British India to support the Pakistan movement launched by the Muslim League. The CPI took this stand because of their Marxist-Leninist belief in the right of nations to self-determination. In a well-known Marxist definition of nation it is asserted that a nation is a "historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."[1]

Not until the agitation over the inclusion of Bengali as a national language of Pakistan did the Communists in East Bengal have to concern themselves with the question of nationalities in Pakistan in a serious manner. However, the Communist Party was early to recognise the significance of the language movement in awakening the national consciousness of the Bengalis in the eastern wing of Pakistan. The contribution of the Communists to the language movement was considerable, although for tactical reasons they preferred to remain in the background.

It was easy for the Bengali Communists to identify themselves with the aspirations of the Bengali people. Their party had to go underground in the late 1940's when the Communists adopted a radical programme of peasant uprising. They had perforce to operate autonomously, it being difficult, if not impossible, to coordinate their programme with their comrades in West Pakistan. When the Awami League became a secular organisation in 1956, and opened its doors to minorities, the Communist Party decided to operate on two levels: The core of the party leadership remained outside, but lesser-known party members and sympathisers were encouraged to join the Awami League. They were welcomed in the Awami League because they brought with them new energy and vitality in the common struggle against the domination of distant rulers in Karachi. Mujib got to know them well. He had also met a few senior leaders of the Communist Party in jail. He admired their dedication, discipline and spirit of sacrifice to a cause without any expectation of

material reward, at least in the foreseeable future. The Communists however had a less charitable view of Mujib. To them he was a typical representative of the petty bourgeois class, mitigated by the fact he too was a dedicated political worker with a militancy equal to their own.

The Communists and fellow-travellers who had joined the Awami League could not see eye to eye with Suhrawardy's unabashed pro-Western foreign policy as Prime Minister. After Kagmari Conference they left en bloc to join the National Awami Party under Bhashani. Although there was much bitterness between the mainstream Awami Leaguers and adherents of the newly-formed NAP, Mujib saw to it that contacts between them did not cease altogether. Mujib made a conscious effort to keep open a line of communication with Bhashani personally. Mujib sometimes used Abdus Samad, who later pompously added "Azad" as a surname, as a go-between.

After martial law was imposed the Communist Party had every reason to fear further persecution of its members. In 1960-61, the Central Committee of the Communist Party held a secret discussion on the proposition of an "Independent East Pakistan". Nearly all members of the Central Committee were of the view that the demand for the independence of East Bengal was legitimate. The Communist Party prepared a circular to this effect. It was an internal document for discussion in wider party circles.[2]

It is possible, but by no means certain, that Mujib came to know that there was strong support among Communists for the idea of eventual independence of East Pakistan. Prominent members of the Communist Party were then leading an underground existence and it was not easy to establish contact with them. Mujib sought the help of Manik Mian, because he was on intimate terms with Zahur Hussain Chowdhury, Editor of the *Sangbad*, who was believed to be in touch with some of them. It was through him that a message was conveyed to Moni Singh, the CP General Secretary, that Mujib was eager to discuss possibilities of joint action against the Ayub regime with the Communists. The leadership of the Communist Party, suspicious at first, agreed to meet with Mujib.

Four or five clandestine meetings between the two sides were held in a safe house in the Magh Bazar area of Dhaka. These meetings, spread over a period of several weeks in the autumn of 1961, were attended by Mujib and Manik Mian on the Awami League side and by Moni Singh and Khoka Roy from the Communist side. There was a meeting of minds from the very beginning about the necessity to fight the Ayub regime with a concrete plan of action. It was agreed that a lakh of leaflets should be

distributed calling for the ending of the Martial Law, restoration of democracy, release of political prisoners, right of students to proper education, and granting of legitimate demands of the working people. It was also agreed that for the realisation of these aims an agitation should be initiated shortly by the student community on 21 February 1962, the Martyrs Day. The precondition for a successful agitation among students was an end to the dissention among them. There were at this time two main student bodies at loggerheads with each other: the Students League which supported the Awami League and the Students Union, a left-wing organisation. Both sides agreed to do their best to end the bickering between them to ensure a successful agitation.

Even though both sides were in basic agreement about the activities to be undertaken in an effort to bring the Ayub regime down, there was a profound difference on the rationale for them. The Communists proceeded from the assumption that the principal enemy on the world stage was imperialism and the fight against the Ayub regime was justified because it was an agent of imperialist powers, especially the United States. Mujib who did most of the talking from the Awami League side, started from the premise that the Ayub regime represented the interests of the Punjabi "Big Business" which was exploiting the resources of East Bengal and must therefore be confronted by every possible means.

At the final meeting Mujib said, "I accept your stand on foreign policy. It's all right. But I have one condition: I'll raise the slogan of Independent East Bengal." Moni Singh said in response that the Communist Party considered Pakistan to be an artificial state which would destroy itself. However it would be suicidal to give a premature signal for revolt on this issue of independence when the masses were not psychologically ready for it. It would only serve to create confusion among them and give the military regime a convenient pretext to intensify their repression.[3] Mujib then said, "*Bhai* (brother), I accept your counsel for now. Our leader (Suhrawardy) is also of the same view. So for the time being I'll go along with your position. But remember what I said."[4]

Mujib was using the Communists as a sounding board for his ideas. He was not totally surprised by their cautious reaction to his proposal. At least he was confirmed in his belief that he was not alone in his quest for independence. His talks with the Communist leaders probably made him realise that the attainment of his final goal would take time and he would have to proceed by stages. In the months to come he would give this matter long reflection.

Notes

1. This definition is from Stalin's "Marxism and the National Problem," a book that was not only inspired by Lenin, but edited by him line by line. After Stalin's consolidation of power he only paid lip-service to the Marxist-Leninist principle of self-determination of nations. He became a promoter of the Czarist policy of Great Russian chauvinism, which involved suppression of any signs of national feeling among minorities. Some of them like the Volga Germans, the Crimean Turks and the Chechens, who used to enjoy a measure of autonomy, were uprooted from their homelands and scattered in the vastness of remote Central Asia to extinguish any trace of their national identify. In post-Stalin Soviet Russia only the Chechens were allowed to return to their ancestral homeland. The policy of Communist China towards the minority regions like Tibet and Turkestan likewise has shown little regard for the national sensibilities of the non-Chinese indigenous people there. The Communist Parties outside the so-called Socialist bloc seemed to be blissfully ignorant of the real state of affairs in the countries ruled by the Communists.
2. Khoka Roy, *Songramer Teen Doshok*, Jatiyo Sahityo Prokashini, Dhaka, 1986, p.181.
3. Moni Singh, *Jibon Songram*, *Part II*, Jatiyo Sahityo Prokashoni, Dhaka, 1992, pp.59-60.
4. Khoka Roy, op. cit., p.183.

14

EMERGENCE OF DISCONTENT

Ayub Khan needed an aura of democracy around his regime to give it an appearance of respectability and legitimacy. On 10 October 1958, three days after the military take-over, Ayub Khan, in his capacity as Chief Martial Law Administrator, told Watson S. Sims, correspondent of the Associated Press, "We have got to get back to democracy; we must make it work."[1] That was meant for Western public opinion. His true feelings about democracy came out shortly thereafter in an impromptu statement: "We must understand that democracy cannot work in a hot climate. To have democracy we must have a cold climate like Britain.[2]

For the next two years Ayub Khan was hard at work devising a constitution that would guarantee his continuance in power behind a façade of democracy. It did not suit him to heed the advice of his Bengali Law Minister Muhammad Ibrahim to establish a federal parliamentary system of government taking into account the geographical peculiarity of the country. One of his first acts after the promulgation of the new Constitution on 1 March 1962 was to get rid of him when the Cabinet was re-constituted. When he returned to Dhaka he was virtually put under house arrest.

Needless to say, Ayub Khan opted for a highly centralised government where power would be concentrated in his hands. The institutional cornerstone of the new political structure was a system of Basic Democracy under which "every village and every inhabitant in every village in our country would become an equal partner with the Administration in conducting the affairs of the State." It was a five-tier system of councils to which candidates sought election as individuals, not as candidates of political parties. The BD's were linked to US-financed Works Programme to promote rural development administered by bureaucrats, which gave them ample opportunity to distribute patronage to BD's favoured by the government. The BD's soon became mired in corruption which discredited them in the eyes of the general public.

If Ayub was intent on imposing his own Constitution on Pakistan that would perpetuate his one-man rule in the country, Suhrawardy was determined to frustrate Ayub's designs and do his best to restore eventually

full democracy in Pakistan. Suhrawardy had spent the last weeks of 1961 in West Pakistan to build up resistance to Ayub's proposed constitutional measures among politicians there. He returned to Dhaka in mid-January 1962 to rally Bengali politicians for the same purpose. Prospects in East Pakistan for an agitation were better because disaffection against the Martial Law regime was more widespread and profound. In the early days of the military regime there had been some expectation that a strong government might be a better government. But except for a brief period immediately after the imposition of martial law when hoarders and black marketers had been obliged to release stocks to the market, there was no improvement in the well-being of the general public. The new rulers were less approachable and there was little scope for ventilating the grievances of the people. Even among the Bengali civil servants, who had a privileged status, there was some grumbling that during the screening out of supposedly corrupt and inefficient members of the civil service at the outset of the martial law regime, a disproportionately high number of Bengalis had been dismissed. Politicians of all stripes were unhappy because a large number of them, including those who had previously been in the good books of the power structure in West Pakistan had been disqualified from contesting in the forthcoming election for the National Assembly under various pretexts. It was Ayub's intention to make politicians obsolescent with the introduction of Basic Democracy.

Taking advantage of the favourable political climate in East Pakistan Suhrawardy took the initiative in convening a meeting of Bengali politicians. The meeting was held on the night of 24 January at the residence of Ataur Rahman Khan. Among those present were Mujib, Manik Mian, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Mahmood Ali, Abu Hossain Sarkar and Mohan Mian. They agreed to submerge their political differences and work for a common goal: the restoration of the 1956 Constitution. They all agreed to intensify their opposition to the Ayub Constitution expected to be promulgated shortly. Suhrawardy was arrested on 29 January after his arrival in Karachi and Mujib four days later in Dhaka. In the following days about three thousand political workers were detained to prevent any agitation against the Ayub regime being organised by them.

Ayub had gravely miscalculated. Ayub's visit to Dhaka shortly after Suhrawardy's arrest caused a hostile reaction. So sour was the mood of the townsmen that there was sullen silence as he drove past the streets of Dhaka, in contrast to his earlier visits in 1960 and 1962 when he was greeted in a friendly manner by the populace. His visit to Rajshahi had to

be cancelled. The mild-mannered Foreign Minister Manzur Qadir fared much worse when he came to the Dhaka University in the latter half of May to explain the new Constitution to the students there. He was showered with abuse.

Ayub had to find someone to lay the blame for the public display of hostility to him personally. He had no difficulty in finding a scapegoat. It was General Azam, the Governor of East Pakistan since June 1960. A man of boundless energy, this Pathan general had thrown himself body and soul into improving the lot of his Bengali countrymen. His constant demands on the civil servants to follow his example did not endear him to them, but he won the hearts of the Bengali masses by his obvious sincerity and hard work in their behalf. During the cyclone of 1961 he personally directed relief operations, listened to the complaints of the local people and took remedial measures. Ayub may have felt that he was losing in the popularity contest because Azam was playing to the sensibilities of the Bengali people to the detriment of Pakistan as a whole. Not only did he resent being upstaged by Azam in the eastern province but came to the conclusion that Azam had been negligent in countering anti-regime activities. Azam was forced to resign in May.

Ghulam Faruque, a technocrat, was sent to East Pakistan as Azam's successor. His outstanding quality was his administrative and managerial skills, which he had amply demonstrated when he headed the Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) and the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA).

Reserved by temperament, he did not try to court popularity with the masses. When a cyclone hit the coastal districts he was advised by senior officials to tour the affected areas, but he declined because he thought his presence might encumber the relief work by government officials there.[2] In one significant respect, however, Faruque resembled Azam: he considered his role as that of a guardian whose principal concern should be the welfare of the people entrusted to his care. He had ambitious plans for the development of East Pakistan which included improvement of transport and communication network, development of power stations, and the growth of industries, large and small. To realise his schemes, he needed the support of the Centre which was lacking. The Centre was displeased with him because he refused to be associated with the political party created by Ayub Khan: the Muslim League (Conventionist). He also displeased Ayub Khan by being reluctant to use force to repress growing student unrest.

In September a serious situation developed when the government announced its intention to implement the Report of the Commission on National Education. The report had recommended that the degree course should be increased by one year in the interest of higher standards. This recommendation, along with several other elitist features of the report, gave rise to the apprehension that poorer students might be prevented from getting their degrees because of their inability to finance an additional year of study. Students also resented the University Ordinances decreed by the Ayub regime forbidding students to take part in student politics. Demonstrations were held in Dhaka University and in other educational institutions in the province. Clashes took place with the armed police and some students were killed, further inflaming the situation. At the end of September the Government withdrew the three-year course and accepted the student demand to allow the functioning of student unions on democratic principles in an effort to pacify the student community.

In the process Faruque lost the confidence of Ayub Khan and like Azam Khan, he too was forced to resign. Abdul Monem Khan, a former protégé of Nurul Amin was chosen by Ayub Khan as the new Governor in October. Monem Khan's principal characteristic was his unabashed servility toward Ayub Khan. Monem Khan had a long career as an undistinguished lawyer and politician in Mymensingh where he had once been accused of embezzling school funds of which he was in charge. In spite of black marks in his records, or perhaps because of them, he was considered a suitable Governor for East Pakistan. People like Monem Khan could be counted upon to carry out the wishes of the President, however unreasonable, without a murmur. Authoritarian rulers tend to get along better with weak non-entities than with men of strong character. Not surprisingly, he lasted longer in his position than any other Governor of East Pakistan.

Monem Khan had two pet peeves: Rabindranath Tagore, long dead, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, alive and active. Monem Khan assumed charge of his office as Governor a year after the centenary of the birth of Rabindranath Tagore, poet, philosopher, educator, humanist. The occasion had been celebrated with great pomp and ceremony throughout the Bengali-speaking part of the subcontinent, in both East Pakistan and West Bengal in India. In East Pakistan, in particular, many people were exposed for the first time to *Rabindrasangeet* (Songs of Tagore). Monem Khan began to worry about the potential political impact of Tagore Songs. Throughout his tenure as Governor it became an obsession with him to curb what he considered to be the Tagore-cult. In 1965 Tagore songs were

banned from the Pakistan Radio in East Pakistan. There was a story in circulation, probably apocryphal, that when Monem Khan realised that a fight against *Rabidrasangeet* was a losing battle, he turned to some of his officials with a suggestion: "Why can't we find someone to compose our own *Rabindrasangeet*?"

It was not difficult to understand why Monem Khan should harbour such an intense dislike for Sheikh Mujib. In him Monem Khan saw his principal political antagonist in East Pakistan. Mujib could not be tempted by inducements of office or material rewards to give up his opposition to the Ayub regime. Intimidation remained the only possible alternative to keep him out of circulation from the political scene. Otherwise Monem Khan would lose his grip over the province and with it, the confidence of his master, Ayub Khan. At first Monem Khan had to be content with harassment of all sorts, including surveillance, because martial law had been lifted by the time he was appointed Governor and he had no good excuse to put Mujib in jail. But in the mid—1960's when Mujib stepped up his anti-regime activities with demands of meaningful autonomy, Monem Khan would often say in official meetings that he would not allow Mujib to stay out of jail even for a single day: "No mother's son can have the freedom to abuse my President."[3]

Notes

1. Karl von Vorys, *Political Development in Pakistan*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p.188.
2. Tariq Ali, *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, p.87.
3. Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, p.283.

15

IN SEARCH OF EXTERNAL ALLY

If there was one political leader, other than Suhrawardy, who had captured the imagination of Mujib before the partition, it was Subhas Bose. Mujib had never met Subhas Bose because he had escaped from house arrest in 1940, two years before Mujib's arrival in Calcutta, and had succeeded in reaching Germany, via Afghanistan, to carry on his struggle for the independence of India with the help of the Axis powers.[1] Even as a schoolboy in Gopalganj Mujib had followed with fascination the campaign of Subhas Bose to remove the Holwell Monument erected in the heart of Calcutta by the British Raj in memory of some Englishmen who had died while being held in captivity by Siraj-ud-Dowla, the last ruler of Bengal. Mujib had rejoiced when the monument was demolished.

In 1942, after Japan's entry into the Second World War, Subhas Bose travelled by submarine from Germany to East Asia to form the Indian National Army (INA) to fight the British and liberate India. He died in a plane crash just before the Japanese surrender which ended the Second World War. The INA personnel were repatriated to India where some of them were put on trial for treason because they had previously served in the Indian Army and had been recruited to the INA from the Japanese prisoners of war camps after the fall of Singapore. One of the first INA men to be tried was Rashid Ali. A huge demonstration was held in Calcutta to protest his trial. This was the only non-Muslim League demonstration in which Mujib participated in Calcutta. The political path taken by Subhas Bose and the example he had set in seeking outside allies had made a lasting impression on Mujib on a subconscious level.[2]

By the middle of 1962 Mujib had lost faith in the possibility of establishing true democracy in the country. He regarded the system of Basic Democracy introduced by Ayub Khan as a devise to continue his authoritarian rule while trying to fool the public opinion that some from of democracy had been put in place to suit "the genius of the people." The appointment of a puppet like Monem Khan as Governor of East Pakistan

and a brutal feudal landlord like the Nawab of Kalabagh as Governor of West Pakistan were a clear sign to him that Ayub Khan intended to tighten his grip over the country. It was evident to him that Ayub's autocracy would continue for years. And Mujib did not want to wait that long. He began to consider anew the pursuit of the goal of independence.

We have seen how Mujib had entered into a secret dialogue with the leaders of the Communist Party to start a movement with the aim of establishing a separate state in East Bengal. The talks had failed not because of any discord over the goal of independence but on the question of timing. Now Mujib began to ponder another radical approach: seeking the support of India, Pakistan's unfriendly neighbour, for a separatist movement in East Bengal. Given the longstanding animosity between Pakistan and India it seemed reasonable for Mujib to assume that his proposal would not fall on deaf ears. What Mujib wanted from India was technical help to set up a transmitter on Indian soil near the border to broadcast his propaganda.

Mujib sent a trusted lieutenant named Nasser, not prominent enough to attract police attention, to have a clandestine meeting with an official of the Deputy High Commission of India in Dhaka known to be an intelligence officer working under a cover post. Since it was not practicable for Mujib to meet an Indian official in Dhaka itself it was suggested to him that a meeting between Mujib and a competent Indian official of high standing should be arranged in Agartala, the capital of the Indian state of Tripura, which juts into the territory of East Pakistan within reasonable distance of Dhaka. He was assured that the Pakistani side of the border between East Pakistan and Tripura was not well-guarded so that it would be easy for Mujib to slip into Tripura across the porous border and then slip back to Dhaka after the discussion.

The meeting between Mujib's emissary and the Indian consular officer in Dhaka took place in early August, a couple of weeks before the release of Suhrawardy from prison in Karachi. Soon afterwards he came to Dhaka to energise the NDF campaign for the restoration of democracy. He then went on a "whirlwind tour" of all the four divisions of East Pakistan, accompanied by Mujib and other NDF leaders. Suhrawardy was unaware of Mujib's approach to the Indian Deputy High Commission in Dhaka when he was in prison and it seems unlikely that he was told about it during his visit to East Pakistan.

On 24 September, Mujib, along with sixteen other political leaders went to Lahore for the purpose of formally setting up the NDF. Public

meetings were held in the major cities of West Pakistan with Suhrawardy as the main speaker. Almost everywhere hired hooligans of the Ayub regime sought to disrupt the meetings. At Gurjanwalla shots were fired at his direction, either to kill him or to frighten him.

In October India's long-simmering border dispute with China erupted into a full-scale war in the Himalayas. Indian reverses were so alarming that New Delhi had to reckon with the possibility that the Chinese advance would cut off Assam and Tripura from the rest of India. There was panic, especially in the eastern region of India, and the Indian government appealed to Western powers for urgent assistance. The United States and Great Britain responded by sending arms shipments urgently to strengthen the defensive capabilities of both India and Pakistan and put pressure on them to settle their differences so that regional security against China could be enhanced. On 21 November, the Chinese unexpectedly declared a unilateral cease-fire.

Since September, when the first skirmishes between Indian and Chinese forces in the Himalayas took place, Indian leaders and officials were preoccupied with the Chinese threat. Mujib's request for a meeting with a competent Indian official to discuss his proposal got lost in the maze of bureaucracy with the result that authorities in Tripura were not informed about Mujib's proposal to go to Agartala.

Mujib had not taken into account the dramatic change that had been wrought in India's foreign policy priorities as a result of the border war. Encouraged by some of his close associates—especially Syedul Hasan, a businessman—he went ahead with his preparations for the Agartala trip. (In 1971 Syedul Hasan was taken into custody by the Pakistan Army and disappeared.)

Preparations were finalised by the end of 1962. Mujib was satisfied with the arrangements that had been made. But he had to wait because Suhrawardy was scheduled to visit East Pakistan in early January and Mujib had to be at hand. However Suhrawardy suffered two serious heart attacks in Karachi and had to be hospitalised.

On 27 January 1963 Mujib boarded the night train for Sylhet at Tongi with four companions. It was a cold night. They reached Srimangal train station around four o'clock in the morning. Two of Mujib's companions continued their journey to Sylhet while Mujib with his two other companions disembarked and proceeded to the Deanston Tea Garden belonging to the firm of Finlays. Qais Chaudhury, the Assistant Manager, entertained them to breakfast. For their onward travel to the border a Land

Rover had been procured from the Madhupur Tea Garden belonging to Ahmedul Kabir. A sardar from a tea garden acted as guide to the border which was along a shallow stream. They reached the border point just before daybreak when the likelihood of detection by prying eyes was minimal. The principal danger that Mujib and his two companions had to worry about was wild boars who are numerous in this sparsely populated location. They are most vicious in the early hours of the morning and at this time of the day the area is shrouded by thick fog in the winter season which often reduces the visibility to a few yards. Fortunately the border crossing was uneventful.

However, on their way to Agartala they were apprehended by local authorities in the sub-divisional town in Khoai. The SDO had received no information regarding Mujib and his party and decided to send them to Agartala. In Agartala the Chief Secretary was apparently in favour of returning them to East Pakistan under police escort but the Chief Minister of Tripura decided otherwise.[3]

In 1991 Chief Minister Satindranath Sinha recorded this version of what then happened:

> In 1963, my brother Sri Umeshlal Sinha, Member of the Legislative Assembly, arrived at my bungalow in Agartala around midnight with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and ten people in his party who had come via Khoai sub-division of Palam district. After preliminary talks Sheikh Sahib went to the house of Hemangini Devi, my sister, about one and a half miles away from my bungalow. Arrangements were made there for their meal and lodging. In accordance with the proposal made by Mujibur Bhai I went to visit our Prime Minister Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. Chief Secretary Sriraman was with me. I met the Prime Minister alone, leaving Sriraman in the room of Sri Bhandaria, the Foreign Secretary. The Prime Minister did not agree to Mujibur Rahman undertaking any publicity activity from Agartala. For he was not desirous of undertaking such a serious task so soon after the war with China. So, after fifteen days Mujib had to leave Tripura through Sonamura sub-division which adjoins Comilla. Sheikh Mujib, however, was assured of all help.[4]

It was a long and arduous journey back to Dhaka, all the more so because no preparations had been made for their return by this route. When Mujib reached his home his feet were swollen and he suffered a lot of discomfort. Mujib and some of his associates were questioned by the police about his whereabouts during this period but were unable to extract any useful information from them. The visit remained a well-kept secret and even after the independence the participants involved in this episode

were reticent to talk about it. Mujib himself briefly referred to it in 1974 to Shamsuzzaman Khan, under the condition that he was not to be quoted until after twenty years. Asked about the Agartala Conspiracy Case, Mujib said, "What conspiracy? Call it our striving for independence .... Yes, I did go to Agartala. I was drenched. I was feverish. I had to go on foot for a long distance. But I had useful and fruitful discussion with the leaders there."[5] It is curious that Mujib should have mentioned his visit to Agartala while talking about the Agartala Conspiracy Case, since in reality there was no connection between them. Was it because he wanted to impress his listeners that he had thought about independence for a long time?

Notes

1. Subhas Bose was inspired by the example of Ireland, whose leaders had sought the help of Germany during the First World War and made an abortive rebellion against the British in 1916, known as the Easter Uprising. After six years of armed struggle Ireland won dominion status in 1922. During his tour of Europe in mid-1930's Subhas Bose visited the Irish leader Eamon De Valera and no doubt sought his counsel. Subhas Bose could not see eye to eye with Gandhi and formed his own political group, the Forward Bloc. In retrospect, many serious scholars of the British Raj agree that Gandhi's espousal of non-violent passive resistance helped the British to prolong their rule in India. Michael Edwardes, for example has this to say about Gandhi: "As long as Gandhi was in control of Congress, they [the British] knew they had an ally. As long as civil disobedience remained non-violent, it did not worry the government. Who was hurt by non-cooperation anyway? Only the Indians. Gandhi's whole aim was to minimise violence; the government's was the same. A full-scale rebellion could not be crushed. So the government obliged Gandhi by treating him with considerable respect–jailing him occasionally to keep up appearances—while they took much more positive action against terrorists and those Western-style revolutionaries whom they really feared." (see *The Last Days of British India* by Michael Edwardes, The New English Library, London, Mentor Edition, 1963, p. 57).
2. An example of the influence of Subhas Bose on Mujib was the adoption of the rallying cry of *Joi Bangla*, echoing Subhas Bose's stirring slogan *Jai Hind* (Victory to India) used by the Indian National Army.
3. The information contained in paragraphs 6-14 is largely based on an interview with Moazzem Ahmed Chowdhury on 2-2-98. He had known Mujib since student days in Calcutta when both of them were political workers and had personal knowledge of preparations for the trip.

4. Faiz Ahmed, *Agartala Mamla: Sheikh Mujib O Banglar Bidraha*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka 1994, Appendix 7 p.128. This statement was given to Mufidul Haque, publisher of this book, in 1991 in the course of an interview with Sinha in Delhi, where he was living in retirement. At that time he was very old and his memory might not have served him well in every detail. The number of people in Mujib's party has been given as ten, but most of them were local officials. The statement that Mujib was assured of all help needs to be qualified. According to Moazzem, Nehru's reply had been: "We are prepared to help politically all democratic movements."
5. Shamsuzzaman Khan, *Bangabandhur Sange Alap Ebong Prasangik Kathakata*, Agami Prakashani, Dhaka, 1995, pp.52-53.

16

DEATH OF SUHRAWARDY

Suhrawardy was the preeminent leader and the prime mover of the NDF. But the six-month long solitary confinement at his advanced age had taken its toll on him. He had two successive heart attacks in the first half of January 1963. While he was thus incapacitated Ayub Khan promulgated two new ordinances amending the Political Parties Act, 1962. These were clearly aimed at crippling Suhrawardy's efforts to give a new lease of life to the NDF.[1] From his hospital bed Suhrawardy denounced them but he did not have the physical strength to do anything more. In fact, he was advised by his doctor to go abroad to get specialised treatment for his heart condition. So Suhrawardy left Karachi for Beirut and from there to London where his son, Rashed, was residing.

In Suhrawardy's absence the state of disarray in the NDF grew from bad to worse. The NDF was basically a motley group of politicians intent on furthering their own self-interest rather than working for the common goal of restoring democracy in Pakistan. Nurul Amin, who had been chosen to head the NDF in East Pakistan had neither the courage nor the ability to give it a strong leadership. And Maulana Bhashani had his own hidden agenda. Instead of marching in step with the others in the NDF, his NAP was holding its own meetings separately and demanding a high price for its cooperation. Worse still, he went to Rawalpindi in June 1965 for a meeting with Ayub Khan. Soon thereafter he accepted the offer by the government to take part in the twenty fifth National Day celebrations of the People's Republic of China in Beijing to be held in October. Bhashani was well on his way to break ranks with the NDF, although it was not quite apparent at this time.

Meanwhile Mujib was feeling hamstrung by the limitations placed on the Awami League in the interest of furthering joint action for the common goal of restoring democracy. Frustrated, Mujib flew to London in August to discuss the political situation in East Pakistan with Suhrawardy and to seek his permission to revive the Awami League. Suhrawardy was suffering from a sense of depressing futility and seemed to have a

premonition that he would not live to see the end of the Ayub dictatorship in Pakistan.[2] In Switzerland where he has gone for medical treatment and recuperation he began to write his memoirs. In his unfinished work he gave an indication of the thinking of Mujib about politics in Pakistan:

> There is some danger of the Awami League losing ground through inactivity and the curb I have placed on it. Mujibur Rahman, in particular, is fretting very strongly. He is prepared to accept the objective of democracy for Pakistan as the sole issue. He also feels that since, for the time being, I am the only person who can mobilise the masses in East Pakistan and capture their imagination, it is advisable to work under my umbrella. But he has doubts that national unity and national integration will solve the problems of East Pakistan. He is not interested in the field of foreign politics as he does not believe that any foreign country should become deeply committed here; East Pakistan must work out its own destiny. Hence, there is no point seeking foreign political involvement. But he is vitally interested in seeing that the Awami League is not destroyed or overwhelmed either by the opportunistic Muslim League (Council) organisation, whose main objective is to capture power for the benefit of its own clan, or the NAP with its strong leftist tendencies and contacts and its reliance on the unstable elements of the community. He is unable to take any steps in my absence other than to keep the party together and to prevent it from disintegrating in despair. He believes that the party should be revived and organised properly, as others are doing secretly or openly, and the younger generation should be prevented from straying into the communist camp. He feels that we are losing valuable time and opportunity.[3]

Mujib begged Suhrawardy to revive the Awami League, but he rejected the plea, because he had given his word to the NDF leaders not to revive the party without consulting them. Mujib returned to Dhaka empty-handed.

Maulana Bhashani, in the meantime, was gradually moving closer to the Ayub regime. He publicly ridiculed the NDF as a "Nothing Doing Front." And in October he proceeded to Karachi to board a plane for Beijing to attend the Chinese National Day celebrations as a member of the Pakistan government delegation. But he fell ill in Karachi and it seemed that he might not be able to go to Beijing. But the Chinese were so keen on his presence there that they promptly provided him with a plane equipped with sleeping accommodation. On arrival in Beijing he was taken to a Chinese hospital where no less a personage than Chou En Lai paid him a visit. The Chinese flattered his vanity by emphasising his role as a revolutionary leader and honoured him with an audience with

their supreme leader Mao Tse Tung. The Pakistani Ambassador General Raza was present at this meeting. According to Maulana Bhashani,

> Mao said to me that at the present time China's relationship with Pakistan was extremely fragile and that the United States, Russia and India would do their utmost to break this relationship. He said, "You are our friends, and if at the present moment you continue your struggle against the Ayub government it will only strengthen the hands of Russia, America and India. It is against our principles to interfere with your work, but we would advise you to proceed slowly and carefully. Give us a chance to deepen our friendship with your government."[4]

The Maulana heeded the advice of Mao and on his return to Pakistan proceeded to give effect to it with the enthusiasm of a new convert. Not everyone in the NAP shared his viewpoint. A clear split began to emerge among the leftists in the NAP between the adherents of the Moscow line and the Beijing line. The rift between Moscow and Beijing on the question of general line of the international Communist movement had been brewing for some time, especially since the Cuban crisis of October 1962. But its effect on the leftists of Pakistan had not yet come to the surface openly. Bhashani's attitude after his return from Beijing dealt a heavy blow to the leftist forces. The leftists splintered into many factions which reduced their importance in the political life of the country. Its immediate effect was to weaken the NDF as a serious opposition group against the Ayub regime. Within the Awami League there was now a fresh sentiment in favour of the revival of the Awami League. In early December there was a high level meeting of the Awami League where it was proposed that Mujib should once again meet Suhrawardy to try to persuade him to change his mind in view of the latest developments.

But fate intervened when Suhrawardy died in the early hours of 5 December in his room at the Hotel Intercontinental in Beirut, apparently of heart failure. He had been planning to go to Zurich for an overdue hernia operation and then to return to Pakistan in the first week of January 1964 via London. The timing and circumstances of Suhrawardy's death left no doubt in Mujib's mind that his leader's death was not natural. Who would benefit from his death? Only Ayub Khan. Mujib was therefore convinced that it was another case of "political murder," engineered by the Ayub regime.[5]

Notes

1. The first ordinance redefined the term "political party" to include "any group operating for the purpose of propagating a political opinion," hereby imposing the Political Parties Act (1962) on the NDF, which was claiming party status. The second ordinance gave the President wide powers to determine the period of disqualification of former political leaders.
2. That Suhrawardy had this feeling of impending death is clear from some of his correspondence. Only six days before his death he wrote in a letter to Manik Mian: "Of course this is only for you only. If I die, I shall be happy. There is no point in living."
3. Mohammad H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, p.71.
4. Cited in Tariq Ali, *Pakistan: People's Rule or People's Power*, p.140.
5. *The Dawn*, Karachi, 30-6-70.

17

THE REBIRTH OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE

With the demise of Suhrawardy in December 1963 the way now seemed clear for Mujib to realise his desire to revive the Awami League. Still, he had to overcome the objections of old-time senior leaders of the party who argued that Suhrawardy's wishes should not be disregarded so soon after his death. Suhrawardy's son Rashed who had come to Dhaka from London for his father's funeral also stressed this point. In early January 1964, at a high-level meeting on the Awami League where the subject was "passionately argued," he confirmed that his father had given his word to the other leaders of the NDF that he would not revive the party without consulting them.[1] But Mujib had his support among the young party workers, the backbone of the party. They had no faith in the NDF's ability to shake off the yoke of the Ayub regime; nor did they believe that restoration of democracy by itself could provide an answer to the needs of the Bengali people. Like Mujib, they wanted the struggle for the rights of Bengalis in various spheres to be continued simultaneously with the campaign for the restoration of democracy. For this, they believed, it was imperative that the Awami League be revived.

While the intra-party debate was going on, communal violence broke out in mid-January in Khulna and in the Adamjee Jute Mills near Narayanganj. It soon spread to the Dhaka area. The communal riots in East Pakistan apparently had been sparked off by an event that had taken place in Srinagar, the capital of the Indian-held state of Kashmir where a holy relic, believed to be one of the Prophet Mohammed's hair preserved in a mosque, had mysteriously disappeared. There was an agitation in Kashmir over this incident and Pakistani propaganda held the Indian authorities responsible for this outrage. Despite the fact that West Pakistan was adjacent to Kashmir and Punjabis professed a kinship with Kashmiris, they remained quiet. But in East Pakistan anti-Hindu riots were organised with government encouragement to inflame anti-Hindu passions before the presidential election for political reasons. Progressive political elements and intellectuals had to be mobilised to build up resistance against communalist goondas inciting violence against Hindus. Mujib was in the

thick of battle against communalists and helped to organise a Committee of Resistance to that end. Thousands of leaflets under the heading "East Pakistan, Resist!" were distributed. Communual tension soon subsided. However, many Hindus, feeling insecure, left for India. The outflow of Hindus was more than compensated by an inflow of Bihari Muslims, victims of retaliation in the industrial centres of Jamshedpur and Rourkela in India. In this connection charges were brought against politicians like Mujib, Ataur Rahman Khan, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Oli Ahmed and Mahmud Ali and press personalities like Manik Mian and Zahur Hossain Choudhury, under the Press and Publication Ordinance, 1960. The case dragged on for five years. The charges were withdrawn in April 1969.

In the mean time Bengali economists, statisticians and planners began to highlight vigorously the uneven economic development of the two wings of Pakistan. Implicit in their findings was the need to remedy the situation by decentralising the economic development by giving more autonomy to the regions.[2] Hitherto, perception of discrimination was based on anecdotal evidence; now at last there were hard facts and figures to back it up.

Within the highest level of the government itself a strong case for this "two economy" concept was made by Justice Mohammed Ibrahim when he was appointed a member of the Constitution Commission by President Ayub. In a letter to Ayub in May 1961 he referred to the widening economic gap between the two wings and recommended that "the responsibility for their economic development should be cast respectively on the provinces themselves and for that end each province should be recognised as a separate economic entity." Manzur Qadir, the Chairman of the Commission, commented that "this is sound," but did not agree with his other suggestion to limit the central government functions to defence, foreign affairs, inter-wing communication and currency.[3]

The idea that each province should be a separate economic entity was popularised in a pamphlet, *The Challenge of Disparity*, which appeared in 1962. It argued that to redress the disparity between the two wings certain basic institutional changes were necessary. These were: the dismantling of the Central Planning Commission and its replacement by two powerful regional planning bodies; the bifurcation of the Ministries of Finance and that of Economic Affairs. It was also suggested that the regional bodies should be actively involved in the formation of the foreign aid policy. These recommendations implied that the regions should have the power to tax, the power to make fiscal and monetary policy and to conduct foreign

economic relations. Almost all of these ideas, explicit or implicit, were later incorporated in the Awami League programme.

On 25 January 1964, the Awami League leadership decided to revive the party over the objections of such veteran leaders as Ataur Rahman Khan and Abul Mansur Ahmed. Their argument was that the revival of the Awami League as an organisation separate from the NDF would weaken the struggle for democracy. Mujib countered that it was necessary to combine this struggle with the struggle for the rights of Bengalis stressing that the former might have to be subordinated to the latter. If the Awami League did not do so, it would rapidly lose popularity. His view was shared by a majority of Awami Leaguers. Thus Mujib had his way and his ascendancy in the Awami League was secure. On 6 March the Awami League was formally revived. Among those present at this conference was the former Justice Minister Ibrahim, although he did not join the revived Awami League, as was generally expected. However, some unlikely people did. Foremost among them was Shah Azizur Rahman, a long-time antagonist of Mujib.

On 5 June the Awami League Working Committee met to discuss the party platform. The same day it announced its manifesto calling for measures to remove economic disparity between the two wings. It envisioned two currencies and separate trade policies for each wing. The idea of autonomy had been embraced by all political parties in East Pakistan. The Awami League platform however represented a radical departure from the idea of autonomy advocated by the others. While the other parties were prepared to settle for political autonomy, the Awami League went farther and demanded an economy for East Pakistan independent from that of West Pakistan, which would make it impossible for the central government to exploit East Pakistan economically.

Notes

1. Mohammad H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*, p.xv.
2. Dr. Nurul Islam in an interview in September 2002.
3. Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, p.99.

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THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The 1962 Constitution had been promulgated by Ayub Khan to perpetuate his rule in Pakistan in the guise of democracy. The electorate was not trusted to choose the President directly. Hence, the presidential election was to be channeled through an electoral college composed of 80,000 Basic Democrats elected by universal suffrage. This would enable the regime to influence the electors, that is, the Basic Democrats, by distribution of patronage or by pressure. The Constitution had provided for the first presidential election to be held in three years; the date for election was fixed for 2 January 1965. The President elected under this provision would serve for five years.

The untimely death of Suhrawardy had deprived the political scene of the only candidate who could have served as a bridge between the two wings and in consequence, acceptable to people of Pakistan as a whole. There seemed now to be no other candidate to take his place and provide an effective challenge to Ayub who had declared his candidacy for re-election as President. The opposition parties were fragmented and the NAP under Maulana Bhashani, actually wanted to strengthen the hands of Ayub. And yet, in many ways the political conditions in Pakistan were such that a strong candidate could have made life difficult for Ayub in the coming presidential election.

The Chinese have a saying that a fish begins to rot from the head down. In Pakistan the rot had started with the family of the Head of State. Ayub's eldest son, Gohar Ayub, having retired from the Pakistan army as a captain, managed in record time to take over large industries, including a million-dollar General Motors assembly plant, which were named Gandhara Group. His second son, Shaukat Ayub, become a director of some thirty firms. It was rumored that taking advantage of Ayub's daughter Nasim's marriage into the Swat Royal Family, its members were able to grow opium in their State with impunity and smuggle it across the border to Afganistan. It was common knowledge that Ayub's family was the principal beneficiary of the concentration of wealth that had taken place at a dramatic pace during Ayub's rule. The family of Ayub Khan

became one of the twenty families who controlled sixty per cent of the industrial capital and eighty per cent of banking in the country.[1]

"Gandhara" became a byword of corruption and nepotism and was used with devastating effect by the Opposition throughout the campaign. Altaf Gauhar, who was close to Ayub as a confidant and speechwriter was to write later that nothing destroyed his prestige and credibility more than "Gandhara."[2] Even Ayub's reforms which had been mentioned by the government as his great achievements became a target for criticism as being mere window-dressing or worthless. The Ulema as a group was incensed by one of reforms dealing with Muslim family laws and was denounced as a deviation from the Sunnah. Not surprisingly, mullahs could be counted upon to oppose Ayub in his re-election bid.

It was in East Pakistan that popular dissatisfaction with the Ayub regime was most pronounced. It had not taken any serious steps to narrow the yawning disparity in economic development between the two wings. Furthermore, Ayub's decision to shift the capital from Karachi to Islamabad, a city yet to be built, was extremely unpopular. The new capital was much farther away from East Pakistan, which would make it more difficult and expensive for Bengalis wishing to go there for licenses, permits and other favours. Ayub of course had his own reasons for locating a new capital adjacent to Rawalpindi, the headquarters of the Pakistan army. He wanted to be in a position to keep a close watch on the source of his power.

The opposition parties could have boycotted the presidential election on the ground that it was a meaningless exercise when the cards were stacked by the Constitution itself in favour of the incumbent. Nevertheless, they chose to contest it because the process of campaigning itself would rejuvenate the political life in the country. The Awami League took a lead in reaching out to leaders of other parties for a united front against Ayub. Khwaza Nazimuddin, who had been leading a quiet life since his dismissal as Governor General in 1953, was contacted through Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, a West Pakistan Awami Leaguer, to take the initiative for a meeting of opposition leaders in Dhaka. After the death of Fazlul Huq in 1962 and that of Suhrawardy in the following year, Nazimuddin was the most senior political figure in East Pakistan and was a natural choice for the role of convener. Nazimuddin was agreeable but he had some reservations about two persons: one was Maulana Bhashani on account of his closeness to Ayub and the other was Mujib whom Nazimuddin looked down primarily as a "street leader" who did not fit in with other leaders dedicated to parliamentary politics. Nazimuddin was persuaded to overcome his scruples in regard to Mujib and a conference of opposition leaders of both

East and West Pakistan was convened at his residence. The meeting, held on 26 July, led to the emergence of the Combined Opposition Parties (COP), much to the surprise of the Ayub regime, which had not reckoned with the possibility of the opposition leaders coalescing in opposition to Ayub so soon.

Another shock was in store for the Ayub regime. This was the announcement in the middle of May that Miss Fatima Jinnah had accepted the invitation of the COP to run as its candidate for the upcoming presidential election. As the sister and constant companion of M.A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, she was universally respected. During the lifetime of her bother she had refrained from meddling in politics. Even after Jinnah's death she kept herself generally aloof from day to day political happenings, but did not hesitate to speak out when she felt that the democratic system in Pakistan was being subverted or undermined by those in authority. Although she had initially welcomed the so-called Revolution of 1958, she lost no time in criticising the Ayub regime when it became evident that it had no intention of restoring genuine democracy.

Although she was not a good campaigner herself, she had the support of General Azam Khan, the former Governor of East Pakistan, who toured the province with her. They were greeted everywhere with great warmth and enthusiasm. Ayub's political organisation, The Convention Muslim League, was riven with internal discord and could not mount an effective campaign. The old anti-Indian and anti-Hindu slogans used in the 1954 elections in East Pakistan were recycled but did not carry conviction with the general public. Ayub's personal appearance in Dhaka was a disaster. The regime had to resort to administrative pressure on the BDs and had to buy support whenever possible, using funds reserved for the works programme.

Having failed to brand Mujib and Abdul Ghaffar Khan ("Frontier Gandhi") as Indian agents in the eyes of the general public Governor Monem Khan targeted Mujib especially for harassment in order to reduce his campaign appearances. He was arrested on 7 November under Section 124A of the Penal Code for making inflammatory public statements against Ayub. After his release on bail, he left for Karachi on 21 November for talks with Miss Jinnah. On his return to Dhaka he was once again arrested on 3 December, but was released on bail soon thereafter.

Ayub's victory in the presidential election held on 2 January 1965 was a foregone conclusion. What mattered was the margin of votes with which he won. Out of 80,000 BDs, 49,951 voted for Ayub and 28,691 for Miss Jinnah. In East Pakistan, however, Ayub secured 21,012 votes while Miss

Jinnah got 18,434 votes, a winning margin of only 2,578 votes. There could be no doubt that if the machinery of the government had not been blatantly misused, Miss Jinnah would have been the victor in East Pakistan by a wide margin and most probably in Pakistan as a whole. No one but the ruling party was convinced that Ayub had won a tremendous victory.

Altaf Gauhar who had accompanied the Ayub campaign trail was assigned by him the task of analysing the election campaign and its results. His conclusion was that Miss Jinnah's popularity with the intelligentsia was in large measure due to her demand for democracy. She had attracted vast crowds everywhere not simply out of curiosity but because they wanted to register protest against the government and its policies. Allegations of corruption had been widely believed by the people who also resented the use of the administrative machinery to swing the BDs in favour of Ayub. The BD system itself had helped to isolate the government from the people. It was suggested that if the demand for direct elections was not acceptable to the government then the size of the electoral college should be sufficiently enlarged to put it beyond the reach of the administration.

The analysis was placed before the Governors' Conference a few weeks later, but no action was taken on its recommendations. Instead the Conference decided to set up a "patronage committee" to reward people who had worked for Ayub during the election campaign.[3] The government carried on its business as usual. But as the simmering resentment of the people burst out into an open revolt against the government four years later Ayub finally realised that his Constitution was unworkable. On 25 March 1969, in his speech to the nation he acknowledged that "the people want direct election" and resigned his office.

Notes

1. Tariq Ali, *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power*, pp.151-152.
2. Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, p.174.
3. *Ibid*, p.183.

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CONFLICT OVER KASHMIR

Mujib could not bring himself to reconcile with Ayub's "constitutional autocracy" for another five years, perhaps much longer. His restless mind began to turn once again to the idea of securing India's help for the independence of East Bengal. The political climate in India seemed to him to have become much more favourable for another overture to India since his abortive attempt two years earlier to get India interested in the separation of East Bengal from Pakistan.

On 26 January 1965, a reception was held at the Deputy High Commission of India in Dhaka to celebrate India's Republic Day. Mujib was among the important Bengali personalities invited for the reception. At one point Ashok Kumar Ray, the newly arrived Indian Deputy High Commissioner, came up to Mujib while he was alone and said that he had been aware of Mujib's political activism while both of them were college students in Calcutta. As they were chatting Mujib casually asked, "So when are you going to help us to get our independence?." Ray had no knowledge of Mujib's excursion to Agartala two years ago. But in the course of further conversation there was no doubt in his mind that it was not an idle remark. As a seasoned diplomat Ray realised that his talk with Mujib, even though it was in a social setting, was important enough to bring it to the attention of his superiors in New Delhi. The Indian Foreign Office thereupon set up a secret "cell" to examine the viability of East Bengal as an independent country. This became known to Ray only eight months later when he was summoned to New Delhi for urgent consultations in connection with the crisis in Kashmir which was beginning to reach a boiling point.[1]

Ever since their independence India and Pakistan had been at loggerheads with each other over the status of Kashmir, a princely state during the British Raj with a Muslim-majority population but a Hindu ruler. The Kashmir dispute had been referred to the United Nations Security Council in 1948 where both countries agreed to settle the issue by ascertaining the wishes of the people by means of plebiscite. But India refused to abide by its international commitment after Pakistan's adherence

to Western-sponsored regional alliances like the Baghdad Pact and the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) on the ground that this had materially changed the situation. In 1957, when Pakistan brought the Kashmir dispute before the Security Council to complain about India's non-compliance with the Council resolution on this issue, Krishna Menon, the Indian representative, raised another objection: Since Kashmir was constitutionally a part of India, the whole issue had entered into the realm of sovereignty, which could never be subject to arbitration or plebiscite.[2] This legal quibbling may have satisfied the general public in India but not the people of Kashmir. In 1963, when India tried to erode the special status that had been granted to Kashmir, Muslims in Kashmir exploded in protests and demonstrations. In an effort to stifle dissent the whole of Kashmir was placed under curfew by the end of the year.

By this time Nehru was in deteriorating health and an astrologer had earlier warned him that he would not survive beyond 27 May 1964. As an agnostic Nehru was not a believer in the occult but he seems to have taken the astrologer's prediction seriously because he had been remarkably clairvoyant in recent years. Nehru was a Kashmiri Brahmin by origin and it bothered him that in the seventeen years he had been at the helm of Indian affairs, he had failed to win the heart of the Kashmiris. He decided to seek a belated solution to the problem of Kashmir which had so far eluded him. In April, the Government of India released Sheikh Abdullah from prison. Sheikh Abdullah was the most prominent political figure of Kashmir and his sacrifices for the people of Kashmir had made him a hero in their eyes. His decade-long imprisonment in India for championing the rights of the Kashmiri people had made him acceptable to Pakistan. Nehru placed high hopes in his ability to come up with proposals which could form the basis for negotiations between Nehru and Ayub directly.[3] Even if he were to fail to complete the process before his death, he would at least have the satisfaction of having laid the groundwork for a constructive solution of the Kashmir issue.

With Nehru's blessing Sheikh Abdullah flew to Pakistan for talks with Ayub. Before leaving India Sheikh Abdullah had said that he regarded the accession of Kashmir as provisional. He was a secularist and he had no sympathy for a plebiscite which would give Kashmiris only the option of joining India or Pakistan. So he discussed with Ayub three alternative proposals: first, independence for Kashmir, which Ayub dismissed as a "non-starter;" second, a condominium, which he regarded as unworkable and third, a confederation between India, Pakistan and Kashmir, which

was also not acceptable to Ayub. He said that a major problem with a confederal arrangement was that it "would generate strong pressures in East Pakistan to merge with West Bengal, and for Bengal as a whole to join the confederation as an independent member". Still, Ayub was deeply impressed with Sheikh Abdullah's "sincerity and determination to see the Kashmir dispute resolved in a manner which would not harm Pakistan's vital interests, and bring about happier relations between India and Pakistan."[4]

Unfortunately, Nehru died on 26 May 1964 while Sheikh Abdullah was still in Pakistan. The day before his death Sheikh Abdullah had announced President Ayub's agreement to meet Prime Minister Nehru to "discuss ways and means of finding a satisfactory solution" of the Kashmir issue. He flew back to India in the same plane with the official funeral party of Pakistan, led by Foreign Minister Z.A. Bhutto.

Lal Bahadur Shastri was now the Prime Minister of India. He was a little-known politician who had been chosen by the Congress party machine to fill the shoes of Nehru, a political giant. What impressed Bhutto was not the fact that the succession had taken place smoothly, but that Shastri, from all appearances, was weak and indecisive; he could be pushed around. Bhutto was not alone in this assessment. It was shared by Aziz Ahmed, the Foreign Secretary, and by Brigadier Riaz Hussain, the head of the all-powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).[5] Their combined hawkish views influenced Ayub, who himself had a poor opinion of the Indian Army, to blunder into an adventure in Kashmir.

In August Pakistan sent infiltrators into Kashmir in the expectation that Muslims there would join them and liberate Kashmir from Indian rule. Without any previous contact with the local people these so-called "freedom fighters" achieved nothing. On 6 September this misguided operation escalated into a full-scale war when India retaliated by striking across the international border. "Indians have you by the throat", warned the American Ambassador in Pakistan to Ayub.[6] The United States, fearing Chinese intervention, put pressure on Pakistan through U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations, to accept a cease-fire. In the field the Pakistan Army fared miserably as its vaunted armour got bogged down in the flooded plains of East Punjab and it could not replenish materiel destroyed in the course of fighting a numerically superior enemy. After seventeen days of war Pakistan had to agree to an unconditional cease-fire and to accept the offer of good offices of the Soviet Union. This led to a meeting between Shastri and Ayub in Tashkent where Premier Kosygin sought to bring about a settlement of their dispute.

Throughout the seventeen-day war East Pakistan remained totally isolated from the rest of the world. Ayub needed the support of political leaders from both wings of Pakistan for a show of national unity against India, but only those from West Pakistan could visit him for a briefing on the situation and a demonstration of support, since all inter-wing Pakistan International Airways flights had been cancelled as soon as the war started. The only non-belligerent country that operated an air service to East Pakistan was Burma, but the Union of Burma Airways (UBA) also suspended its flights to Chittagong via Akyab. There was no road or railway link with Burma. So the only way East Pakistan could communicate with the outside world was by radio.

The Pakistan government asked its Ambassador in Burma to persuade the Burmese to resume their flights to Chittagong. I was then serving as First Secretary in the Embassy in Rangoon. I called on the head of the UBA and pointed out to him that a resumption of UBA flights would be very profitable as a large number of foreigners in East Pakistan were trying to get out of East Pakistan and many Pakistanis, officials and non-officials alike, were stranded abroad and anxious to return to East Pakistan. His response was simple: Pakistan itself had wasted no time to fly out all its PIA aircraft to China; Pakistan had made no effort to seek the permission of Burma, as required by international usage, to overfly its territory, no doubt because Pakistan did not want to endanger the safety of its civil aircraft even for the briefest possible time He would certainly pass on our request to higher authorities, but he could not recommend or justify a resumption of UBA flights to Chittagong so long as the war lasted.

East Pakistan was not psychologically prepared for this unexpected isolation. It made the people realise for the first time how defenceless they were. The Indian Army could have marched into East Pakistan and the Pakistan Army garrisoned there was in no position to offer any effective resistance. It had always been the military doctrine of the Pakistan Army that the best defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan; in other words, the Pakistan Army would pose such a threat to New Delhi that the Indians would be unable to concentrate their forces against East Pakistan. In the recent weeks however it was the Indian Army which seemed to be on the verge of capturing Lahore while the Pakistan Army was farther away from New Delhi than at the start of the war.

It may be that Mujib's approach to India through its Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka early in the year had influenced India to exercise restraint by not opening an eastern front against the Pakistan Army. New Delhi also had to take into account the fact that all political parties,

including the Awami League, had patriotically condemned India for the outbreak of the war. Any attack or incursion into East Pakistan would have delayed, if not destroyed, assertion of local nationalism after the war.

In the aftermath of the war Bhutto claimed that "East Pakistan has been left out of the war because of China."[6] Even if this was so, Bhutto's implication that the defence of East Pakistan was China's responsibility did not satisfy the intelligentsia. They began to question whether there was any point in East Pakistan sharing the enormous cost of maintaining a huge army more than a thousand miles away when it was unable to protect the eastern wing. And if East Pakistan had to rely on China for its defence, what guarantee was there that it would always be in China's national interest to protect East Pakistan from foreign aggression?

The consequences of the war were harmful to East Pakistan in many ways. Trade between East and West Bengal suddenly came to a standstill. Coal and cement used to be imported into East Pakistan from India before the conflict; now it had to pay much higher prices for these commodities obtained from distant lands. Fresh water fish from East Pakistan found a ready market across the border in Calcutta; the stoppage of this cross-border trade caused much distress among fishermen and traders. Transit trade between West Bengal and Assam through the inland waterways of East Bengal was a source of revenue to East Pakistan and used to provide jobs for boatmen engaged in this trade. The suspension of the transit trade caused a loss of revenue for the provincial government and added to the unemployment problem.

Of all the Bengali politicians Mujib was almost alone in consistently propagating the view that the Centre had practically no interest in East Pakistan other than to exploit its resources and could not be trusted to look after its well-being. The results of the war had finally vindicated him in his belief that Bengalis must be masters of their own fate. He began bursting with energy as he discerned new possibilities for political upheaval in East Pakistan.

Under Mujib's leadership the Awami League was the first political party to exploit the deep sense of insecurity felt by Bengalis during the war. Bengali soldiers, although numerically small, had proved that they were in no way inferior to the fighting men from West Pakistan. Some Bengali pilots in the Pakistan Air force distinguished themselves as aces during aerial combat. Courage displayed by Bengalis was given wide publicity by the media in Pakistan, no doubt with an eye to strengthening

national unity. But by doing so, they helped to explode the myth of martial races so assiduously propagated by the British Raj and believed as gospel in the regions of West Pakistan which served as the principal recruiting grounds of the Pakistan Army. Mujib was not the man to lose the opportunity to take advantage of the situation. He concluded that East Pakistan must demand the means to defend itself locally by a paramilitary territorial force so as not to be totally dependant on the Pakistan Army. This idea was to find expression several weeks later in his Six Points as the last, but not the least important point.

In the final week of December Ayub came on a visit to East Pakistan and on 25 December he invited the Bengali political leaders for a meeting to consult with them about the post-war situation. They now had the opportunity to express their views directly to him. While most of them pleaded for more democratic reforms, Mujib complained about the neglect of the defence of East Pakistan. He also faulted the government for inadequate economic development of the eastern wing as well as for the repression of Bengali culture as evidenced by the ban imposed on Tagore Songs by the Radio Pakistan since the outbreak of the war. By his audacity and outspokenness he became a marked man. Hitherto he had been the subject of surveillance by the civil intelligence. From this time onwards, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) began to take a close interest in his activities and started to assemble materials about him for possible use against him in future.

Notes

1. Interview with A.K. Ray, 7.1.91.
2. T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, Taplinger Publishing Company, New York, 1965, p.204.
3. Michael Edwardes, *Nehru,* Praeger, New York, 1965, pp.326-327.
4. Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, p.167.
5. *Ibid*, p.224.
6. *Ibid*, p.232.

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TASHKENT AND ITS AFTERMATH

In January 1966 Shastri and Ayub travelled to Tashkent for a series of meetings at the invitation of Soviet Union with a view to peacefully settling their difference. They had a number of face-to-face talks between 2-10 January as well as separate meetings with Premier Kosygin, the Soviet mediator.

After a good deal of persuasion and arm-twisting Kosygin was able to negotiate a Declaration containing an agreement of the two leaders of the subcontinent to normalise relations between their countries. It was a compromise document and each side had to yield ground on their cherished objectives in the interest of lasting peace. Ayub could not secure his goal of making the issue of Kashmir the central point of negotiations; on the other hand, Shastri had to surrender valuable strategic gains the Indian Army had made across the Kashmir cease-fire line such as Haji Pir. Both Shastri and Ayub had genuine reasons to be apprehensive about the adverse reaction to the Declaration in the public mind of their respective peoples. Shastri had a foretaste of it in Tashkent immediately after the signing of the Declaration when some Indian journalists bluntly told him that he had made a "bad bargain." That very night Shastri died of a heart attack in his room. He was thus spared the agony of being "greeted by a black-flag demonstration on reaching home."[1] As his body was brought to New Delhi in a casket for cremation there were only eulogies for him. He was remembered for his human qualities of austerity, personal integrity and amiability which had built his reputation as a conciliator in the fractious Congress Party as well as for the leadership he had displayed as Prime Minister by his decisiveness in confronting Pakistan militarily, thereby removing the stain of defeat suffered by India only three years before.

Had Shastri been alive to face the angry criticism of the Indian public about the concessions he had to make in Tashkent, Ayub might have been able to persuade his countrymen that if the Indians were so unhappy about the Tashkent Declaration there must surely be something positive in it for Pakistan. Shastri's premature death had robbed him of the opportunity to

spin the public opinion in his favour. Instead, it was Ayub who became the lightning rod for dissatisfaction with the conduct of military operations and foreign policy. The publication of a photograph showing Ayub and Kosygin jointly lifting Shastri's coffin into an Indian aircraft as a mark of respect for a departed leader in accordance with the Russian custom outraged the people in West Pakistan, especially in the Punjab, which provided the Pakistani Army with eighty per cent of its strength.

Punjabi Muslims had been brought up in the machismo tradition that they, along with the Pathans, were the pre-eminent martial races of the subcontinent.[2] Since it was inconceivable to them that the Pakistan Army could be defeated or stalemated by the Indian Army, their minds provided a fertile ground for the growth of a "stab in the back" legend. Senior officers of the Army, whose performance during the war had been mediocre at best, had good reasons to look for a scapegoat for their setbacks. They began spreading the word, in the mess halls and beyond, that things would have been vastly different if Ayub had not lost his nerve: that is why he had succumbed to the UN pressure and accepted the ceasefire prematurely and that is why he had given in to the Soviet pressure and accepted the Tashkent Declaration. Within days the impression gained ground that Ayub had surrendered at the negotiating table the gains made by the armed forces in the battlefield.

On 31 January the police opened fire in Lahore on students agitating against Ayub and killed two of them. Next day, to prevent further violence, all educational institutions were closed. But agitation spread to Multan and Rawalpindi and there were more casualties. This was only the beginning of Ayub's troubles in the very heartland of West Pakistan.

Ayub had to reap what Bhutto had sown. For it was Bhutto, with Foreign Secretary Aziz Ahmed at his side, who had badgered Ayub to take advantage of India's vulnerability after the death of Nehru. They were supported by a hawkish group of generals in the Army itching for a fight against India in Kashmir. But they had completely misjudged the reaction of India and got Pakistan mired in a wider war for which they were unprepared. The sequel was swift and inevitable.

Ayub held Bhutto responsible for the debacle of the September War and sacked him in June 1966. Instead of being thrust into political oblivion, as Ayub no doubt had expected, Bhutto was able to skillfully turn the situation in his favour. With his rhetoric of "thousand-year war" with India during the recent conflict he had already become a hero in the eyes of many people, especially in the Punjab. Bhutto's exit from the

Cabinet was not regarded by them as a disgrace for him, but as a badge of honour for trying to uphold the dignity of Pakistan. They now expected him to provide the leadership to rid the country of the Ayub autocracy. He did not disappoint them for too long. Towards the middle of 1967 he formed his own political party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), with its programme of Islamic Socialism. Among the people who flocked to the banner of the new party were adherents of the pro-Beijing faction of the NAP disenchanted with Bhashani's support for Ayub.

The leader of the PPP was a feudal landlord addicted to a lavish lifestyle which had little in common with the practices of Islam. His catchy slogan of Islamic Socialism nonetheless seemed to have resonated with the people of West Pakistan because it promised many things to many men. Traditional political parties had failed to take advantage of the simmering discontent of the people against an authoritarian regime, and Bhutto had managed to step into the void with his undoubted dynamism and oratorical skills. The government now tried to discredit him. It was leaked out that he had travelled to the United States with an Indian passport in 1947 with the sole aim of holding on to his ancestral properties in Maharasthra and that he had been engaged in corrupt practices in Pakistan. But the attempt backfired: If he was not a patriotic Pakistani why had he been given a key portfolio in the Ayub Cabinet? And if he was corrupt what about the others, including Ayub himself? There were no satisfactory answers to these questions; West Pakistanis were ready to forgive Bhutto for his peccadilloes even if they were true, so long as he kept on hammering on his theme "Ayub must go!".

In stark contrast to West Pakistan where there was a general feeling of letdown about the Tashkent Declaration, in East Pakistan the general opinion was more guarded. The only major politician to criticise the Declaration was Nurul Amin. At the other end, Ataur Rahman hailed the Tashkent Declaration which he said had brought "a measure of hope and peace for the people of India and Pakistan." On 18 January, following the meeting of the AL Working Committee Mujib issued this statement:

> We are looking forward to the development of fraternal relations between our two countries. Therefore we have put forward our demand that the emergency imposed during wartime be lifted. It is unreasonable to expect that the people will be in a state of exultation and greet the Tashkent Declaration when they feel bound hand and foot by the emergency.

On the same day the Dhaka Bar Association also called for the lifting of the emergency. This demand was echoed within days by the NDF and

the East Pakistan Nizam-e-Islam. Understandably, the Ayub regime was deeply concerned about the rising demand for an end to emergency. Khan A. Sabur, the Bengali Cabinet Minister in charge of communications, made it clear that the emergency might last for some time because armed forces of both countries were in a state of alert and normalcy had yet to be restored. And Monem Khan in a speech to the National Students Federation, a government-sponsored student body, said that miscreants were engaged in destroying the national unity: they were possessed by Suhrawardy's dream of a united Bengal. "Inshallah, these evil designs of the conspirators will come to naught."

Notes

1. Krishna Bhatia, *The Ordeal of Nationhood*, Atheneum, New York, 1971, p.254.
2. It was the British who developed the concept of martial races in the post-Mutiny period. This was done to justify their recruitment to the Indian Army of peoples who had not sided with the mutineers in what most Indians regard as the Indian War of Liberation in 1857. However the British did not consider the Indians fit to replace British officers of the Indian Army. As late as early 1918, the Commander of the Indian Corps in France wrote: "The Indian has not the instincts which make leaders in modern war". The disparaging view of the British ruling class of the Indian as officer material was either not known or conveniently ignored by officers of the Pakistan Army. See Humayun Mirza, *From Plassey to Pakistan*, University Press of America, New York, 1999, p.134.

21

SIX POINTS

In the wake of the September war, many politicians in West Pakistan did not want to miss the golden opportunity to turn the popular dissatisfaction with the Tashkent Declaration into a major political issue. To that end they called an All-Pakistan National Conference in Lahore on 5 February 1966. The declared purpose of the conference was to make a review of the post-war political situation. The convenors of the conference were keen to get a large contingent of political leaders from East Pakistan to attend the conference so as to rally the entire nation against the Ayub regime mainly over this issue.

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, President of the All-Pakistan Awami League, flew to Dhaka to urge Awami League leaders to take part in the conference. After some discussion there was a general consensus among the Awami Leaguers in favour of attending the conference. Mujib himself was not enthusiastic about participating in this conference since there was little likelihood of an open discussion there on matters of special concern to East Pakistan. He suggested that Shah Azizur Rahman should lead the Awami League delegation to Lahore. Manik Mian, however, had reservations about giving such prominence to someone who had joined the Awami League so recently. So he personally appealed to Mujib to reconsider his position: "If somebody has to go to the conference it should be you. This will give you a chance to say whatever is on your mind. Jot down your thoughts on paper. It does not matter if they don't want to listen to you. Something good will come out of it anyway."[1]

The more Mujib thought about Manik Mian's advice the more he liked it. By going to Lahore he would no doubt tangle with a number of West Pakistani politicians who were either blind or indifferent to the dismal state of affairs in East Pakistan. He might also annoy some sympathetic West Pakistanis for creating disharmony in the conference. On the other hand, the Lahore Conference would allow him to argue that the solution of the problems of an inherently unstable country lay with a federal form of government, with maximum autonomy for the two geographically separate regional units of Pakistan.

Mujib made up his mind to press for the demand for autonomy in such a radical form that it would automatically command national attention. More importantly, it would ignite the imagination of the people in East Pakistan. Within his own party there were very few people who could be relied upon to come up with concrete proposals backed up by cogent arguments. Most of the Awami League old-timers were cautious parliamentarians out of step with the approach Mujib wanted to take at the conference. So he decided to pick the brains of people outside the party who were on the same wavelenght with him on the question of the future of East Pakistan. The man who was closest to Mujib's way of thinking was Ruhul Quddus, a Bengali member of the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). Having served in senior positions in the government he had an insider's view of the mechanisms of the unwritten state policy to plunder the resources of East Pakistan and to deprive it of its equitable share of foreign aid. He, along with a CSP batchmate, Ahmed Fazlur Rahman, had been briefing Mujib for some time about the various ways in which East Pakistan was being systematically exploited. Ruhul Quddus was entrusted by Mujib to prepare the talking points for him. Originally consisting of seven points, it was reduced to six points in the final form. Tajuddin Ahmed, the best mind in the party and the ablest of Mujib's lieutenants, helped to edit the text in its final form.

The Six Points were:

1) Pakistan must have a federal system of government, parliamentary in form and based on adult franchise;
2) Federal government shall deal with Defence and Foreign Affairs only. All other subjects shall be dealt with by the federating units;
3) There should be two separate but freely convertible currencies for the two parts of the country. In the alternative, there could be a single currency, but in this case, there should be effective safeguards against the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan;
4) Power of taxation and collection of revenues shall be vested in the federating units and not in the centre;
5) There shall be separate accounts for foreign exchange earnings of the two parts of the country. The requirements of the federal government are to be met by the two wings in equal proportions or by any other fixed basis as may be agreed upon;
6) There should be self-sufficiency in defence matters. An ordnance factory and a military academy should be set up in East Pakistan; the Navy Headquarters should be located in the eastern wing.

Armed with his Six Points, Mujib departed for Lahore to explain where the Awami League stood on the fundamental question of power sharing between the two wings in the light of East Pakistan's experience in the recent war. With Tajuddin at his side, he made it clear before the start of the Conference that the Awami League had no quarrel with the Tashkent Declaration: "Awami League is not a party to opposition to the Tashkent Declaration because they want to live in peace with India." In the Subjects Committee of the Lahore Conference Mujib argued in favour of inclusion of his proposal of Six Points for discussion. As expected, the Committee, dominated by the vested interests of West Pakistan, did not want to put the Six Points in its agenda for the Conference. Mujib walked out of the Conference. Six Points were no longer talking points; they had become formal demands of the Awami League made by its *de facto* leader.

It had been a bold and risky move on the part of Mujib to put forward Six Points for deliberation by the Lahore Conference without the approval of the AL Working Committee. Now there was a distinct possibility, indeed a certainty, that the West Pakistan branch of the Awami League headed by Nasrullah Khan, would be totally alienated: its membership was in favour of autonomy in general but it could not be expected to accept a proposal which envisaged not a federation but a confederation for Pakistan where its constituent units would be quasi-sovereign. Worse still, the Working Committee members of the East Pakistan Awami League would resent the fact that they had deliberately been kept in the dark by Mujib. The only clear knowledge they had of it was when the evening newspaper *Awaz*, published the Six Points to coincide with its presentation to the Lahore Conference. Its owner Abdul Ghaffar Choudhury had somehow got hold of the text of the Six Points through his access to Mujib.

Mujib had anticipated a storm of disapproval by the senior leaders of the Awami League for his unauthorised action upon his return to Dhaka. So he had taken the precaution of muting the criticism by getting his party workers to plaster the city walls with posters like "Bengalis Demand Six Points" and "The Autonomy of East Pakistan can only be guaranteed by Six Points."

On arrival at the Tejgaon airport in Dhaka on 11 February, Mujib once again expounded his Six Points to newsmen who questioned him about his Lahore visit. Needless to say, Mujib's behaviour had displeased many senior Awami Leaguers. They pressed for an early meeting of the Working

Committee to discuss the Six Points. But even before the Working Committee met on 21 February, leaflets in support of Six Points continued to be distributed by Mujib's followers. Abdul Momen, who was in charge of publicity in the Awami League, had a booklet printed about the Six Points. It was distributed to university students on 21 February on the occasion of Shahid Day. The Working Committee was left with no option but to formally endorse the Six Points.

The bitterness among some of the Working Committee members over this episode did not go away and it surfaced at the Council Session of the Awami League on 18-19 March. Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, President of the Awami League, walked out of the session to register his protest against the highhanded conduct of Mujib. Although many of his followers also boycotted the session, Mujib was able to get the support of the conference for his Six Points without much difficulty. Mujib was elected President of the Awami League, with Tajuddin as its General Secretary. Mujib's position within the Awami League was now unassailable. Some Working Committee members who opposed the Six Points tried to form a rival Working Committee but they became marginalised within months as the popularity of the Six Points increased throughout East Pakistan.

The mass support behind the Six Points programme was not achieved without a planned, organised effort by Mujib and his associates. In March and April Mujib crisscrossed East Pakistan spreading the message of Six Points as the salvation of the Bengalis. Mujib was an accomplished public speaker, both in standard Bengali and in the dialects of East Bengal. The government, on its part, did everything possible to make life difficult for him. In almost every district he went he was arrested after a speech under the penal code. He would then be released on bail and arrested again elsewhere under the same charge. A lot of his time was thus wasted in police detentions and in court appearances. He had a feeling that his days of relative freedom would not last long. On 8 May, after a speech in Narayanganj he was once again placed under arrest. This time he was held under the Defence of Pakistan Rules which made it impossible for him to get bail. By the end of September more than nine thousand Awami Leaguers were in prison. *Ittefaq* was closed down and Manik Mian thrown into prison.

The government spared no efforts to discredit the Six Points. In April, a month before Mujib's arrest, it had tried to enlist Bhutto, who was already under notice that he would shortly be relieved of his duties as Foreign Minister, for this purpose. In his eagerness to regain the favour of Ayub,

Bhutto had issued a challenge to Mujib then to engage in a public debate with him on the Six Points. Bhutto, a gifted debater, no doubt was confident of his ability to expose the Six Points as a device to break up Pakistan as a state. Mujib, who was very busy at that time with his whirlwind tour of the districts, delegated Tajuddin, his right-hand man, to debate with Bhutto. Bhutto, however, backed out of his commitment on the very day fixed for the debate on the plea that he was extremely preoccupied with his official duties. Be that as it may, this was perceived as a moral victory for the Awami League.

Wittingly or unwittingly, Bhashani now stepped forward to aid the Ayub regime by trying to disparage the Six Points. In the middle of 1966, when Ayub's ruling party, perturbed by the United States embargo on arms sales and reduction of bilateral foreign aid, insinuated that the CIA was behind Six Points, Bhashani seemed to be in agreement. For this reason he did not support a province-wide strike in favour of Six Points, which was widely observed on 6 June throughout the province. Eleven days later he justified his stand by saying that "East Pakistan finds itself in the vortex of imperialist intrigues in South-East Asia."[2]

Many of Bhashani's followers were so disenchanted with his blatant pro-Ayub stance that they split to form a rival NAP under the leadership of Professor Muzaffar Ahmed in East Pakistan and that of Wali Khan in West Pakistan towards the end of 1966. In early 1967, NAP's student front also split for the same reason. Most of its members formed a dissident wing and gave their support to Six Points.

Still, with Mujib and so many of his lieutenants and activists in jail, the movement for Six Points virtually came to a standstill by the end of 1966. In the past the flame of political movement had been usually kept alive by the student community when political leaders were persecuted or arrested. But the University of Dhaka, the nerve centre of student political activism, had been infiltrated by so-called students paid by the government to keep an eye on genuine students. With the support of Governor Monem Khan, the Chancellor of the Dhaka University, they had formed their own student body called the National Student Federation (NSF) and established their control over the two main student hostels. They terrorised students with impunity. These strong-arm measures succeeded in keeping a lid over open student political activity. There were virtually no student demonstrations in 1967.

The Ayub regime missed an excellent chance to undermine the popular support for "Six Points." Most of the important political figures in

both West and East Pakistan had some reservations about the Six Points. In May they had formed the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) under the presidentship of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan in Dhaka. The PDM had brought under its umbrella prominent politicians of all political stripes—religious right, conservatives, centrists. Its own eight-point formula to solve Pakistan's political problems included some measure of autonomy and an equal participation of the two parts of Pakistan in the centre. Autonomy envisaged in the PDM programme was more extensive than that provided in the 1956 Constitution but less than that demanded by the Six Points.

Some concessions by Ayub on the question of autonomy would have enabled some Bengali politicians in the PDM to argue that it was better to be prudent rather than passionate on this issue. Some Bengalis, perhaps many Bengalis, would have given them high marks for trying to get the best possible deal under the circumstances.

But the very idea of autonomy was such an anathema to the Ayub regime that no serious thought seems to have been given to woo them. On the other hand, there were powerful forces within the regime which believed that the ordinary wishy-washy method of handling the movement for autonomy was unproductive. They naively believed that a policy of treating the movement with an iron hand would put an end to the movement.

Notes

1. Mazharul Islam, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib,* Agami Prakashani, Dhaka, 1974, p.247.
2. Quoted in Rangalal Sen, *Political Elites in Bangladesh,* The University, Press Limited, Dhaka, 1986, p.216.

22

THE AGARTALA CONSPIRACY

When Ayub came into power in October 1958 the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had full and exclusive jurisdiction in matters having to do with military intelligence and counter intelligence. It had a Civil Intelligence Bureau but it was a minor adjunct to the ISI. During the Ayub regime it became more active in providing Ayub with political intelligence. The ISI had tarnished its reputation during the 1965 War by failing to anticipate Indian military moves and by providing inaccurate estimate of the strength and deployment of the Indian forces. In its efforts to rehabilitate its reputation the ISI thought it had "hit the jackpot" when it stumbled upon a separatist plot within the armed forces of Pakistan in late 1967.[1]

The story begins with Lieutenant-Commander Muazzam Hussain of the Pakistan Navy who had become discontented with the discriminatory treatment meted out to Bengalis serving in the armed forces. Long before the 1965 War he had discussed with a group of likeminded servicemen the possibility of an armed uprising in East Pakistan. Realising the need of securing the support of popular political figures, Muazzam established contact with Mujib in Karachi in October 1964. There were two more meetings between Muazzam and the nucleus of his group and Mujib in the next four months. Mujib appears to have listened with sympathy to their grievances but did not commit himself to their plan of action. Muazzam also contacted Colonel M.A.G. Osmani for his support and advice. Osmani was cautious and counseled him not to take any precipitate action until the number of Bengali regiments had increased to at least ten. At the time of the conversation there were only six Bengali regiments. But Muazzam was too impatient to wait that long and he went ahead with his preparations. He managed to persuade a Hindu businessman in Chittagong, nicknamed Manik Choudhury, to provide financial assistance for this venture, principally for the purchase of arms. Muazzam was toying at this time with the idea of buying arms from Karen rebels in Burma. The idea was preposterous; Karen tribesmen live along Burma's border with Thailand, too far from East Pakistan to be of practical use as supplier of arms.

In order to bring off a commando-style military action, which would serve as a signal for general insurrection, it was imperative for Muazzam himself to be on the scene of action in East Pakistan. To his dismay he was transferred to the submarine fleet, based in Karachi. He had to get the help of a friendly Bengali doctor to certify that his failing eyesight made him unfit for service in a submarine. He was then able to wangle a transfer to the naval base in Chittagong. He encouraged his co-conspirators to try to get themselves posted to East Pakistan.[2]

After the 1965 War Muazzam became concerned when he learned that Mujib would be going to the Lahore Conference of opposition leaders in early February 1966 to present his formula for autonomy. A constitutional quest for autonomy was the last thing he wanted, for it would upset his plans for direct action. Frantically he sought to dissuade Mujib from going to Lahore. Since it would have been dangerous for him to seek out Mujib, who was under close surveillance, he had to send his message through a trusted intermediary.

The emissary happened to be Abdul Ghaffar Choudhury who was well acquainted with Mujib as a friendly journalist. Muazzam sent one of his co-conspirators, Steward Mujib of the Pakistan Navy, to request Ghaffar Choudhury to meet him and other freedom-seekers at a secret place. Suspicious at first, his curiosity as a journalist was aroused and he agreed to meet them. He had two meetings with Muazzam and some of his military associates. At the first meeting he was asked for his help in writing manifestoes for the projected insurrection. At the second meeting, having in the meantime won his confidence, Muazzam came to his real point and begged him to see Mujib immediately: "Please request Sheikh Mujib not to reveal his demands at the Lahore conference because it will put the Ayub regime on its guard. Please beg him to remain silent for a while. Our preparations are almost complete. As soon as we are in possession of needed arms we will stage a revolt and control cantonments, arms depots, radio and TV stations as well as the airports. If Sheikh Mujib starts his movement now Ayub will be alerted and all our plans will be frustrated."[3]

Ghaffar Choudhury went post-haste to see Mujib to convey Muazzam's message to him. As soon as Muazzam's name was mentioned, Mujib said: "I know him. I also know all about his proposal. He has recently been hobnobbing with Manik Choudhury. I have told Manik not to have anything to do with this madness. I would also advise you not to get involved in it. Our struggle is for the establishment of democracy and the realisation of

autonomy for the people of Bangladesh. I have always fought against the Pakistani military junta. It is not the purpose of my movement to replace it with a Bengali military junta."[4]

There were no further contacts between Mujib and Muazzam, either directly or indirectly. In May 1966 Mujib himself was arrested and incarcerated in the Dhaka Central Jail under the Defence of Pakistan Rules, to prevent him from speaking out on Six Points.

Around this time Muazzam was under orders to report for duty in Chittagong. Before leaving for Chittagong he went to see ex-Corporal Amir Hussain Mian, who was acting as treasurer for the group, to discuss financial matters. The accounting of the funds was most unsatisfactory and Muazzam was left in no doubt that Amir Hussain had misappropriated the funds with which he had been entrusted. On further investigation, he found that Amir Hussain was unscrupulous and given to social vices. Muazzam decided to have him liquidated. But the man who was given the task of murdering him happened to be a personal friend of Amir Hussain and he warned him that his life was in danger. In the autumn of 1967 Amir Hussain turned into an informer and divulged what he knew about the plot, along with the names of participants in it, to the ISI in Rawalpindi.[5] From 10 December onwards the conspirators were rounded up in great secrecy in various parts of Pakistan.

Yahya Khan, the new C.-in-C. of the Pakistan Army, had justifiable grounds to take suitable legal action against the conspirators. Even so, he was not satisfied with the notion of punishing the guilty alone. He sensed a chance to discredit and undo the movement for Six Points, the root of all evil. If the arrested conspirators could be induced or pressed to testify falsely that the plot had the backing of India and that Mujib was personally involved in it, the popular support behind the Six Points would vanish. Extreme punishment for Mujib and the actual ringleaders of the plot by a tribunal composed of handpicked judges would silence the clamour for autonomy, perhaps for ever. Having conceived his master-plan, Yahya now proceeded to implement it.

The arrested persons were held incommunicado. All of them were subjected to harsh interrogation of the type common in police states. They had to undergo torture and various forms of pressure by military interrogators to extract information from them and more important, to induce them to sign false confessions. The main aim of the confessions was to implicate Mujib in the conspiracy. The most severe treatment was reserved for non-commissioned officers and soldiers. They were taken to a military intelligence

safehouse in the Magh Bazar section of Dhaka where they were mercilessly beaten and tortured until they agreed to cooperate with them by signing prepared statements. At night their agonised screams could be clearly heard by the residents of the neighbourhood. Their complaints even reached Governor Monem Khan who was unaware of these goings-on. He sent his personal physician, a Bihari, to enquire. Thanks to the doctor's intervention conditions improved.[6] But by this time, the military interrogators had obtained sufficient number of signed confessions to concoct their conspiracy case to their satisfaction. Those who agreed to become government witnesses were taken to the Dhaka Central Jail to be lodged there until the conclusion of the trial. They were promised pardon for their cooperation.

Yet another three arrests were made in the last week of December 1967 and the beginning of January 1968. They were all CSP officers: Ruhul Quddus, Ahmed Fazlur Rahman and Shamsur Rahman Khan. Ruhul Quddus, it will be recalled, had a leading role in the drafting of the Six Points. Fazlur Rahman was the anonymous author of the vastly popular Bengali version of the booklet, "Our Right to Live", which explained the Six Points to ordinary people in lucid language.[7] It is not clear why Shamsur Rahman Khan was roped in. For more than a year he had been in Jakarta on an assignment in connection with the Pakistan-Indonesian economic cooperation projects. Soon after he arrived in Karachi for routine consultations he was placed under arrest. He was not close to Mujib politically. However, he was probably the only senior CSP officer with whom Mujib was on familiar ("*tumi*") term socially. Military intelligence might have wrongly assumed that Shamsur Rahman Khan also belonged to Mujib's secret brain trust of CSP officers.[8]

The three arrested CSP officers were spared physical abuse and torture. But they were told that they would face extreme punishment if they did not cooperate. Other forms of subtle pressure were brought to bear on them. Fazlur Rahman, for instance, was given a book, "The Fall of Sukarno", written by the Ceylonese journalist Tarzie Vitachi, for bedside reading. The book described in vivid detail the tortures inflicted by the Indonesian military on Communists and other dissidents during their suppression of the Communist uprising in Indonesia in 1965. This was probably the Pakistani equivalent of "showing the instruments" of torture to the victims of Inquisition in mediaeval Europe, in an effort to secure their cooperation.

In the first week of January 1968 it was announced that twenty-eight Bengali-members of armed forces and some civilians had been arrested for conspiring to bring about the secession of East Pakistan. Mujib had

already been under detention on charges which had nothing to do with the conspiracy for which these arrests had been made.

It was inconceivable to Yahya that Mujib should be left out of picture in the great show trial he had in mind for the secessionist conspirators, since it was Mujib who was the driving force behind the movement for Six Points. He instructed the military interrogators to get the arrested alleged conspirators to implicate Mujib in their plot by hook and by crook. Unable to withstand the terrible torture inflicted on them, most of them signed confessions to that effect. The ground was thus prepared for Mujib to be put on trial for the alleged conspiracy.

Around 1 a.m. in the night of 17-18 January Mujib was awakened from deep sleep to be told that he had been released from prison. He got dressed in a hurry and was then taken to the front gate. Suddenly the darkness of the night was pierced by the flash of the headlights of two military vehicles turned on simultaneously. Faced by the blinding light directed at him Mujib thought he was going to be shot out of hand. Instinctively he kneeled to touch the ground as a gesture of farewell to his beloved homeland.[9] He was wrong. The military had come to take him away to the Kurmitola Cantonment. He was confined there to a small room with bolted windows. He was denied the right of communicating with anybody in the outside world. He was not even allowed to read a newspaper. After five months of isolation, he was allowed to see Abdus Salam Khan, his lawyer, on 18 June, the day before the start of the trial.

Yahya now only needed the green light from Ayub to hold a show trial on the basis of his framed-up evidence. In fairness to Ayub it must be said that although he was an autocrat, he tried to show respect for legal niceties. So Ayub had to be convinced that the conspiracy case prepared by the military intelligence was based on facts and legally unassailable in a court of law. Knowing his scruples, Yahya had sought to put psychological pressure on Ayub while he was visiting East Pakistan in December 1967. The military intelligence at that time claimed to have unearthed a plot to blow up his plane while taking him to Chittagong to visit the Chandragona Paper Mill. The visit had to be cancelled.

Ayub had been shocked to learn that a separatist plot had been hatched within the armed forces. He was deeply disturbed that Bengali Muslims saw little benefit in living together with West Pakistanis. In a moment of candour he confided to Altaf Gauhar: "They are not going to live with us."[10]

Before the question of how to handle the conspiracy case could be properly discussed. Ayub fell seriously ill toward the end of January 1968. It took eight weeks for him to recover sufficiently to attend to official business. When Yahya broached the subject to Ayub, he expressed a preference for the case to be tried by a special tribunal. Ayub was not happy with the proposal because of his earlier experience with the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Trial. Yahya then convened a meeting of the concerned Cabinet Ministers and officials, civil and military. Present at this meeting at the GHQ were: the Defence Minister, the Defence Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Director of Intelligence Bureau, as well senior military officers including the Judge Advocate-General. Yahya claimed that the conspiracy had been engineered by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, this being the first time that Mujib's name was linked to the conspiracy. He proposed that the culprits should be given a public trial with full publicity. The Information Secretary assured him that publicity would be the least of all problems because "the World Press would descend on Pakistan like vultures to tear into the proceedings." He cautioned Yahya that if there was an open trial the press would "begin highlighting holes in the prosecution case." Yahya told the Information Secretary not to worry: "We have a fool-proof case." "In that case," said the Information Secretary, "You will get fool-proof publicity."[11]

When Altaf Gauhar reported to Ayub about the meting at GHQ he expressed his misgivings about including Mujib in the conspiracy without solid evidence. As a result of Ayub's intervention, Mujib's name was taken off the list of the accused. However, a few days later another press note was issued where Mujib's name headed the list of the accused. Apparently Yahya had been able to persuade Ayub to change his mind by telling him that according to his legal advisers it was essential for the successful outcome of the case to place the name of Mujib high on the list of the accused.

No decision of Ayub had such fateful consequence for him as this one. Far from isolating Mujib from the masses, the conspiracy trial served to popularise him as the heroic embodiment of Bengali nationalism. The movement launched for his release proved to be the first nail driven into the coffin of the Ayub regime.

The movement began, of all places, in London, where Ayub had gone for a medical check-up and what he called "my first real holiday in thirty years." But it was not destined to be a period of rest and recreation for him. On the very day of his arrival in London, Bengalis resident in London,

joined by students, staged a big demonstration in front of his hotel demanding Mujib's release. The expatriate Bengali community in England also set up the "Rights of East Pakistan Defence Fund" to engage the services of Tom Williams, QC, to defend Mujib in the forthcoming trial. Ayub was distressed to read the editorial comment of *The Times* that Mujib was "being charged with complicity in a plot alleged to have been hatched while he was behind bars."

The so-called Agartala Conspiracy Case had been concocted for the purpose of destroying the prestige of Mujib as a political leader. There could be little doubt now that it had failed as a propaganda exercise to influence opinion at home and abroad even before the commencement of the trial.

Notes

1. Altaf Gauhar: *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, p.983.
2. This account is based mainly on Faiz Ahmed's *Agartala Mamla, Sheikh Mujib o Banglar Bidraha*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 1994, pp.17-22.
3. Abdul Ghaffar Choudhury, *Bangladesh Civil o Army Bureaucracy'r, Larhai*, Kakali Prokashani, Dhaka, 1992, pp.52-53.
4. Ibid, p.36.
5. Faiz Ahmed, op. cit., pp.23-24.
6. Interview with Amir Khusro, ex-PSP officer, Intelligence Branch, 24 December, 1996.
7. Hasina Rahman, *Bangalir Mukti Sangram o Ahmed Fazlur Rahman,* Agami Prakashani, Dhaka, 1993, p.67.
8. Conversations with Shamsur Rahman Khan in the winter of 1998.
9. Interview with Amir Khusro, 24 December, 1996.
10. Altaf Gauhar, op. cit., p.285.
11. Ibid, p.293.

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THE TRIAL

The trial of the case "State vs Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others"—35 persons including Mujib—began on 19 June 1968 in a bungalow within the Dhaka Cantonment. The Special Tribunal set up to try this case was headed by a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, S.A. Rahman. Other members of the tribunal were two judges of the Dhaka High Court: M.R. Khan and Maksumul Hakim. The prosecutor of the case was Manzur Qadir, a distinguished lawyer and a former Foreign Minister in the Ayub regime. Apart from the accused there were eleven conspirators who had confessed and agreed to serve as witnesses for the prosecution.

The prosecution statement alleged that the accused were involved in "a conspiracy to deprive Pakistan of a part of its territories by an armed revolt, with weapons, ammunition and funds provided by India, and to establish their own independent government recognised by India." Mujib was a leader of the conspiracy and had personally given money to the conspirators in pursuance of their objectives. He had convened a meeting of the conspirators on 12 March 1966 at the home of Tajuddin only a few weeks before he was arrested and taken into custody on a charge unrelated to the conspiracy. Ruhul Quddus was present at this meeting, among others. The other conspirators carried on with their activities in connection with the conspiracy. Their main point of action was "to capture the armouries of military units in commando-style operations, creating political difficulties by propaganda etc." In pursuance of these objectives some of the conspirators repeatedly met P.N. Ojha, First Secretary in the Indian Deputy High Commission in Dhaka, at his office and at other locations, such as "Anchorage", the residence of Lieutenant-Commander Muazzam Hussain, in Chittagong. Muazzam, accompanied by Manik Choudhury, met P.N. Ojha at his residence for the sixth time in July 1967. The latter, at this meeting, expressed dissatisfaction with the caliber of Bengali delegates designated to cross the border and go to Agartala, on the Feni side, for the purpose of further discussions. The meeting with the representatives of India took place at "AGARTALA" in India on 12 July 1967.The activities of the conspirators ended with the arrest of a number of them in December 1967.

It soon became evident why the place-name Agartala was written in block letters in the prosecution statement. Although the official title of the case was "State vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others" the government wanted to highlight the main thrust of its accusation namely, that the separatist conspiracy led by Mujib, No 1 in the list of the accused, had the full backing of India, Pakistan's mortal enemy. So the government-owned Press Trust newspapers—twenty one in all—adopted a new name for the case: The Agartala Conspiracy Case. Other newspapers were informally told to follow this example. Abdul Ghaffar Choudhury, the publisher/editor of *Awaz*, a Bengali evening paper, remembers receiving a call from the provincial publicity department to use this designation for the case. He asked, "Supposing I don't do so?" The answer was, "You know what the consequences will be."[1]

Interestingly, the government had been unable to discover the fact that Mujib himself had gone to Agartala in early 1963 in a vain attempt to get the support of India for a political struggle for the independence of East Pakistan. But all this had remained unknown to the government because the handful of people who knew about it guarded their silence. In fact, they remained tight-lipped well after the independence of Bangladesh. Had the government had some knowledge about this trip it would no doubt have sought to establish a link between this fact and the conspiracy, which might have given its case some credibility.

The so-called Agartala Conspiracy Case before the tribunal had therefore to be based on trumped-up charges for the most part. The legal team assembled for the defence of the accused represented the best legal brains of East Pakistan and had the advantage of being supplemented by that of Tom Williams, QC, an eminent British lawyer. Even before the trial had started, Dhaka was abuzz with talk about the absurdity of the case: How could a trained professional like Ojha go on meeting with the alleged conspirators in his office in broad daylight and in the home of Muazzam repeatedly when it was an open secret that the movements of Indian diplomats were closely monitored by Pakistani intelligence? How could it have been possible for Mujib to provide leadership to the conspiracy when he was in the prison during its most crucial phase?

The trial began in the Dhaka Cantonment on the morning of 19 June 1968. There was pin-drop silence as Mujib was let into the room by a side door five minutes before nine o'clock, the time set for the start of the trial. All eyes were on him as he took his seat next to Muazzam. Nattily dressed in white punjabi and trousers, he looked around to see familiar faces with an air of nonchalance. Faiz Ahmed, the Chief Reporter of the

Bengali daily *Azad*, was sitting behind him in the press gallery. He was startled to be addressed and prodded by Mujib with his unlit pipe: "Faiz, Faiz, Hey Faiz!" Faiz whispered: "Mujib Bhai, it is absolutely forbidden for us to speak. I can't even turn my head around. Or else, I'll be expelled." Mujib said aloud, "If you have to live in Bangladesh you'll have to talk to Mujib." The tribunal chose to ignore this rude interruption in its proceedings.[2]



Photo 8: Being escorted to the venue of the Special Tribunal of the Agartala Conspiracy Case hearing (1969)

Mujib's courage was undimmed and he behaved with a great sense of dignity throughout the trial. One instance will suffice to illustrate his conduct: On 29 July. Witness No. 1, Muzammel Hussain, testified that it had been decided in January 1964 that Muazzam should contact Sheikh Mujib to bring him into the circle of conspirators. Justice S. A. Rahman asked, "Is he here?", whereupon Muzammel looked at the dock and said, "Yes, Sir." Then pointing at Mujib he said, "Would you kindly raise your hand, Sir?" Visibly annoyed, Mujib stood up and said: "I am here! Everybody knows me. It is for the court to ask me. He is an approver and he is talking all lies and nonsense. I have never seen him."[3]

The Agartala Conspiracy Case began to fall apart after the prosecution witness, Kamaluddin Ahmed, was called upon to give evidence. He broke down while giving evidence and said that he had been tortured and threatened with death by Army intelligence officers to induce him to testify falsely against Mujib and others. Unable to bear the extreme torture he had agreed to do so; an Army brigadier had helped him to dictate the statement. Letters smuggled out of prison to his wife describing the torture inflicted upon him were submitted as evidence by the defence.[4] Kamaluddin was not the only person to make allegation of torture to obtain confessions. In fact the testimony of Sergeant Mujib was far more graphic in this respect. But Kamaluddin happened to be a prosecution witness and the retraction of his statement had a more telling impact on the public opinion.

As the hearings continued the defence went on picking every flaw in the testimony of prosecution witnesses. One of the darkest days for the prosecution was when Sayeedur Rahman, a key government witness, gave his testimony. He had stated that in May 1966 he had gone to Dhaka by car, along with Lieutenant Commander Muazzam Hussain, to meet Ojha. Questioned by Abdus Salam Khan, Mujib's chief counsel, he could not recall what type of car they had traveled in. He claimed to have stayed in Green Hotel, but the register of guests produced by the defence did not have his name in it. He could not recall the route he had taken to go to Ojha's house. Nor could he remember on which side of the road the house was located. He could not describe distinguishing features of Ojha's face.

The evidence submitted by the prosecution was so full of inaccuracies and inconsistencies that any fair-minded person was bound to conclude that it had been fabricated. It also became clear that the case had failed to achieve its objectives and indeed had become counter-productive. But once the machinery of legal process had been set in motion it became almost impossible to stop it. Even if Ayub realised that it was in his

interest to drop it, he could not afford to do so when the Army insisted that its case was on strong grounds.

As the proceedings dragged on month after month there was mounting dissatisfaction outside the courtroom among the general public. There were some isolated incidents which reflected the general mood of the people; leaflets were distributed demanding an end to the trial and there were scattered anti-regime strikes and demonstrations. Students of Dhaka University who in the past had always been in the forefront of political movements, remained relatively quiet as the student halls were firmly controlled by the hired student agents of Monem Khan. The Awami League had been considerably weakened by the arrests of its top leaders and activists. Syed Nazrul Islam was the titular leader now but he was not a rabble rouser. At this juncture there was only one politician who had the prestige and proven ability to lead a mass upsurge; Maulana Bhashani.

Mujib had the genial idea of establishing contact with him and appeal to him to take the lead. It was done surreptitiously through a journalist covering the trial. The timing was perfect. For the past several years Bhashani had kept himself aloof from any political agitation against Ayub, for he had given his word to Mao not to disturb Ayub in the interest of growing China-Pakistan friendly relations. Of late, however, the Chinese had ceased to look upon Ayub as the sole guarantor of friendly relations with China. Faced by the growing unpopularity of Ayub among the people, as evidenced by serious clashes between the police and anti-Ayub demonstrators since the first week of November 1968 in a number of cities in West Pakistan, the Chinese had quietly let it be known that they were not averse to an alternative government in Pakistan so long as it followed a pro-China policy. Bhashani was now ready to make an about-turn in his attitude toward Ayub without any pangs of conscience. When he received Mujib's message his immediate reaction was: "Sheikh Mujib has said this! I know I must act. The regime is planning to hang all of them."[5] So Bhashani left his village home to take to the streets of Dhaka. He held a big meeting at Paltan Maidan lambasting the Ayub regime for its misdeeds.

Encouraged by the unprecedented large-scale agitation throughout West Pakistan in which students were in the vanguard, the two main student bodies of East Pakistan—Students League (affiliated to the Awami League) and the leftist Students Union—agreed at last to join forces to launch their anti-government agitation. In early January 1969 they drew up an Eleven Point programme, amalgamating the Six Points with the leftist demand

for nationalisation of key industries. A Student Action Group was formed to organise demonstrations in defiance of Section 144. Inevitably there were casualties and tension mounted.

Pakistan was going through convulsions and it was obvious that the situation could not be brought under control by the overstretched police. Yahya Khan, the C.-in-C. of the Army, was reluctant to bring in the armed forces to supplement the regular police or to impose martial law, even selectively. In his judgement the problems faced by the regime were political and should be resolved by political means. On 5 February 1969, Ayub announced his decision to call a Round Table Conference of political leaders.

The Awami League was eager to participate in the RTC. An advance group of Awami leaguers led by Tajuddin and Mushtaque Ahmed went to Islamabad to explore the possibility of getting Mujib released so that he could attend the RTC. They made it clear that the Awami League would not take part in the RTC while Mujib was in detention. But there was a complicating factor: there was no provision for bail under the Ordinance which had created the Special Tribunal to try the Agartala case. However, Ayub was keen to have the Awami League taking part in the RTC, all the more so because Bhashani and Bhutto had decided to boycott it. So a formula was devised so that Mujib could be released on parole. Mujib was agreeable to this arrangement and he instructed Barrister Amirul Islam to apply for his parole.

The Special Tribunal was scheduled to hold an extraordinary session on 17 February to act on Mujib's request for parole. However, three days before the scheduled hearing Mujib changed his mind due to an event which had taken place in the Dhaka Cantonment. In the evening of 14 February two under-trial prisoners, Sergeant Zahurul Huq and Sergeant Fazlul Huq, were shot by their guards while they were being accompanied to an outhouse toilet. Zahurul Huq succumbed to his injuries the next day at a hospital. An unarmed prisoner had died while in military custody and it was viewed by many as a political killing. Almost a million people joined his funeral procession. Emotions ran high and the situation went out of control. The police and the military watched helplessly as the full-throated crowds directed their fury at the symbol of military justice. The house where Justice S.A. Rahman was staying was burned to the ground. It was rumoured, wrongly, that he had barely escaped with his life by a backdoor dressed in the borrowed *lungi* of his cook. Another house that was torched was that of Khwaja Shahabuddin, the Minister of Information,

who was believed to be an influential adviser of Ayub on matters pertaining to East Pakistan. Mujib now took the position that he would not attend the RTC until the case had been withdrawn and all he accused released unconditionally.

On 21 February 1969, Shahid Day, Ayub announced his "final and irrevocable decision" not to contest the next presidential election. On the following day the Agartala case was withdrawn freeing Mujib and the other accused persons. The atmosphere in Dhaka was still tense, so General Muzaffaruddin, GOC of the Eastern Command, asked Brigadier (later Major General) Rao Farman Ali to escort Mujib by car to his house. Farman Ali remembers that on the way to his house Mujib looked around wide-eyed and remarked on the changes that had taken place while he was in prison: how a tree that had grown big, how new housing had transformed an old neighbourhood and so on. No one had expected him to arrive so suddenly. The reunion with his family after an absence of almost three years became so joyous that "the house soon assumed the festive look of a place where a marriage was taking place."[6] Farman Ali was invited in to share in the festivities.

This is how Farman Ali got to know Mujib and his family. In the months to come he used this introduction to cultivate other Awami League leaders. In the eyes of his military superiors Farman Ali became an expert on Awami League and Bengali politics. Because of this he was put in charge of civil affairs in the military administration after the military crackdown in March 1971. His expertise served him well during the 1971 liberation war.

Notes

1. Abdul Ghaffar Choudhury, *Bangladeshe Civil o Military Bureaucracy'r Larhai*, p.983.
2. Faiz Ahmed, *Agartala Mamla*, *Sheikh Mujib O Banglar Bidroha,* Sahitya Prokash, Dhaka, 1994, p.17.
3. *The Pakistan Observer*, 29.7.1968.
4. Keesings Contemporary Archives, March 1-8, 1969, p.23217.
5. Faiz Ahmed, op. cit., p.27.
6. Rao Farman Ali, *Bhutto Sheikh Mujib Bangladesh* (abridged Bengali translation by Mustafa Haroon of Farman Ali's Diary published serially in the *Urdu Digest* in Pakistan in March, April and May, 1978), Shoukhin Prakashani, Dhaka, November 1978, p.52.

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THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

In all of Dhaka there has never been a place more favoured for political meetings than the Paltan Maidan. Although no public announcement had yet been made about the release of Mujib the word spread in the morning of 22 February, 1969 like wildfire that Mujib was free at last. It was rumoured that he would soon be making a public appearance in the Paltan Maidan. From 11 o'clock onwards people started to stream towards the spot in the hope of catching a glimpse of Mujib. Mujib did not want to disappoint them and he proceeded by car to the Paltan Maidan, but not quite sure of what to do then. En route he happened to meet Tofael Ahmed, the student leader. Mujib picked him up and they briefly conferred on the best course of action. Mujib agreed with Tofael that it was not a good idea for him to face the people in such an impromptu manner. Tofael suggested that the Student Action Committee should organise a public reception for him the next day at the Race Course Maidan, which was more spacious than the Paltan Maidan, and therefore could accommodate a bigger crowd.[1] In any case, Mujib needed some time to rest, reflect and spend time with his family. So the driver of the car wheeled around to drop Mujib at his house and then took Tofael to the Paltan Maidan. Tofael formally announced there that Mujib had been released and would address them at a huge rally the very next day at the Race Course Maidan. The announcement was greeted with great joy.

On the following day, which was a Sunday, the Race Course Maidan was crammed with people long before the scheduled time of the mass rally. An overflow of people had spilled over into the Ramna Park. They had come not only from the city proper but from surrounding districts as well as from Chittagong and Sylhet by train and by river transport.

There is a long tradition in the subcontinent to give complementary titles to its great leaders. Thus Gandhi was given the title "Mahatma," meaning "Great Soul," C.R. Das "Deshbandhu" meaning "Friend of the Nation" and Jinnah "Quaid-e-Azam" meaning "The Great Leader." The time had now come to pay tribute to Mujib by conferring on him a worthy title. The Student Action Committee, after considering several suggestions

opted for "Bangabandhu", meaning "Friend of Bengal". The proposal was carried by acclamation at the mass meeting.[2]

With the mandate of the people behind him Mujib left for Rawalpindi via Lahore to attend the Round Table Conference. He was pleasantly surprised to be welcomed at the Lahore Airport on 24 February by a large friendly crowd. No doubt there was an element of curiosity in seeing a leader whose life had been put in the balance so recently by the Ayub regime, but there was also admiration for his conduct in the ordeal he had gone through. Within hours of his arrival in Rawalpindi he had a private meeting with Ayub in the evening. This was their first face-to-face meeting alone.

The RTC opened the next day, 25 February, but it was adjourned on the same day until 10 March to allow participants to spend the Eid holidays with their families and more important, to enable them "to get their act together", in the words of Altaf Gauhar. So Mujib returned to East Pakistan with his companions on the same day. After a couple of days in Dhaka he left by launch for Tungipara to celebrate Eid festivities with his parents. But even in this remote village he did not remain undisturbed. Literally out of the blue there appeared one day Yusuf Haroon. He had come by helicopter to spend a few hours with Mujib.[3] Then he turned up in Rawalpindi and "managed to persuade (Ayub) that he had close relations with Mujibur Rahman and with most of the opposition leaders in West Pakistan and could bring them over to his side."[4] Ayub was clutching at every straw for his political survival and therefore it was not surprising that Yusuf Haroon was appointed Governor of West Pakistan within a few days and admitted to the inner circle of Ayub's advisers.

When the RTC resumed on 10 March Mujib put forward his case for autonomy on the basis of Six and Eleven Points Programmes. And he asked for one-man, one-vote system and the dissolution of One Unit. On 21 March he submitted a draft amendment to the Constitution to President Ayub to that effect. Nothing, of course, came of the constitutional amendment, which, as Ayub rightly feared would "liquidate the Central Government and the Army."[5] Ayub Khan was of the view that these were matters for the new National Assembly to decide. "If these things have to come, let them not come in by rush. No East Pakistani is in a reasonable frame of mind (now). They are all trying to outbid Mujib."[6]

At the closing session of the RTC, Ayub said that he would like to confine himself to two issues: the holding of elections and the transfer of power. Ayub's offer was supported by all opposition leaders except Mujib and Wali Khan. We will soon see how the all-important question of transfer of power was resolved by Ayub.

Notes

1. Tofael Ahmed, *Unosotter Gana Andolon o Bangabandhu,* Agami Prokashani, Dhaka, 1997, p.31.
2. *Ibid*, p.33
3. M.A. Wazed Miah, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibkey Ghirey Kitchhu Ghatana O Bangladesh*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1983, p.53.
4. Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Leader,* p.330.
5. *The Times* (London), 9.4.1969.
6. Altaf Gauhar, op. cit., p.330.

25

THE RISE OF YAHYA KHAN

On 3 November 1958, the day after the deposition of President Iskander Mirza and assumption of supreme power by Ayub Khan, the British High Commissioner in Pakistan, Alexander Simon, sent a despatch to Sir Gilbert Laithwaite in the Commonwealth Relations Office in London, in which he wrote:

> He (Ayub) has behind him some able Generals, some of whom may well have aspirations to succeed him. From these I would exclude the military members of his Cabinet, namely Azam, Sheikh and Burki ... Below these there are some ambitious and able general officers and I would put General Yahya Khan, the Chief of the General Staff, as the most able and ambitious of those nearest to Ayub. If one were looking for a Nasser to play opposite to Ayub's Naguib, Yahya would be a possible candidate.[1]

Ayub remained unaware of all this wisdom, for he died in 1974 and this document was not declassified and released until recently. Ayub had a great respect for British assessment of their Indian native subjects, without which they would not have been able to rule the vast subcontinent for almost two centuries. After all, his own military career was launched when he was spotted by a British general who had come to Aligarh University looking for "suitable soldierly material" for the British Indian Army.

Ayub was born in 1907 in a village in the North West Frontier Province, which had been carved out of the Punjab only a few years before his birth by Lord Curzon during his tenure as Viceroy. The Punjab as a whole had come under direct British rule only in 1849. It remained loyal to the British Raj during the Mutiny and acquired strategic significance because of the gradual Russian expansion into Central Asia in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For this reason the British expended large sums of money in the Punjab for its physical improvements—roads, railways, and irrigation canals—which benefited the population greatly. This helped to promote a childlike devotion, especially among Muslims, to the paternalistic British rule. The Punjab and the adjoining frontier districts became a favourite recruiting-ground for the British Indian Army. The Punjabis alone comprised more than fifty per cent of the Indian Army before the Second World War.

Yahya Khan, ten years junior to Ayub, belonged to the same milieu. He became one of Ayub's prote'ge' early on. In 1958, it was Yahya who was entrusted by Ayub with the staff work for carrying out the coup which brought him to power in October. In June 1966, he was appointed C.-in-C. of the Army after the winding-up of the operations in Kashmir. Ayub appears to have chosen him for this all important assignment in preference to other generals mainly because he was considered to be "a harmless and loyal person" by Ayub.[2] Yahya had a well-deserved reputation as a pleasure-loving man addicted to alcohol and women. If Ayub thought such men were not dangerous he was mistaken. For Yahya was basically an ambitious officer and when he became the C.-in-C. of the Army he began to lust for the ultimate prize: supreme power. In Pakistan coups are carried out by C.-in-C.'s, not by colonels, as in the Middle East.

Towards the end of January 1968, the health of Ayub, then only sixty one, deteriorated suddenly when he suffered a massive heart attack. Yahya moved in to show who was in control. On 29 January, the President's House was surrounded by soldiers and no one, with the exception of his physicians and Begum Ayub, was allowed access to him. For the next two weeks Ayub remained prostrate in a semi-conscious condition and for another six weeks was unable to discharge his official duties. The Constitution provided for such a contingency. It laid down that during the temporary absence and the incapacity of the President, the Speaker of the National Assembly would act in his place to conduct the affairs of the state. It was the job of the Minister of Law to bring up the question to the Cabinet for decision. This was not done. Instead, the matter of succession to Ayub, should he not recover, was earnestly discussed informally among the higher echelons of the civil-military establishment. It was implicit in these discussions that the matter should be handled in an extra-constitutional manner. Writing about this period years later Altaf Gauhar made this illuminating comment: "A *coup d'etat* had, in effect, taken place. Yahya would later claim that he had acted under Ayub's instructions."[3]

By the end of March Ayub had recovered sufficiently to resume his duties, but his grave illness had taken its toll on his strength and stamina as well on his mental agility. It had deprived him of his capacity to pose perceptive and probing questions before taking a decision. It was during this period that Yahya was able to persuade Ayub to go ahead with the Agartala Conspiracy Case and to put Mujib as No.1 in the list of alleged conspirators. When the case backfired, especially after the shooting death of Sergeant Zahurul Huq while in military custody, there was a suspicion that the incident had been deliberately provoked by the military to make difficulties for Ayub. It was thought that the provocation was designed to

create an inflammatory situation in East Pakistan which would leave Ayub with no choice but to impose martial law, thereby strengthening the hands of Yahya and paving his way to power. No one realised the need to avoid such a development more than Manzur Qadir. Idealistic by nature, he had joined Ayub's Cabinet because of his belief that a strong man was needed at the helm of Pakistan's affairs and Ayub had seemed to him to be the best possible man to guide the country through perilious waters, both nationally and internationally. He allowed his considerable talent to be placed at the disposal of Ayub. He volunteered to serve as the prosecutor in the Agartala case after he had been satisfied about the *prima facie* evidence of the case shown to him. It did not take him long to find out that the evidence in this case had been concocted by the military intelligence by the use of impermissible methods like torture. Still, he carried on but without enthusiasm, as a professional lawyer. He was probably relieved when the trial came to an ignominious end.

He now realised that the Constitution he had helped to craft was utterly irrelevant in this national crisis. He put forward a startling proposal to Ayub in the closing days of the Round Table Conference. He proposed that Ayub should "invite one who is acceptable to you to form a parliamentary government immediately with himself as the Prime Minister. As soon as a person of your choice has assumed office you can tender your resignation." He said that he was in touch with the Opposition leaders and they would agree to the nomination of Mujib as Prime Minister in an interim government. During the heated discussion of this proposal among Ayub's close advisers there were moments when Ayub seemed attracted to the proposal. Manzur Qadir was however vehemently opposed by Altaf Gauhar who argued that "it would be rather odd for Ayub to nominate a person, who only a few days earlier had been under trial for treason, as Prime Minister of the same country." In the end, Altaf Gauhar had his way.[4]

On 15 March, the day after the conclusion of the RTC, West Pakistan was paralysed by a general strike. Factory workers, who began the strike, were joined by doctors, lawyers, teachers, postmen and others. On the same day, Bhashani, who had come to West Pakistan to observe the RTC, but not participate in it, was attacked by some assailants in a train. This provided the spark for a general strike in East Pakistan. While the strike in West Pakistan was generally peaceful, the tactic of "jalao-gherao" (burn and surround) practiced by Bhashani's followers in East Pakistan resulted in a total breakdown of the law and order in East Pakistan. An emergency meeting of the Central Cabinet was called to discuss the situation. A.R. Khan, the Minister of Defence, gave a gloomy picture of the situation there. He said that chaos reigned in East Pakistan; the police were completely

demoralised and felt helpless; the Director of the Intelligence Bureau had himself been gheraoed in his office and bodily thrown out by an unruly mob. Ayub wanted to know whether the people were fed up with the situation; if so, they would accept martial law he had been urged by the military to impose. In the evening of 20 March, it was finally decided to impose martial law, with no dissenting voice in the Cabinet. But next morning, heartened by the morning newspapers which carried statements of several opposition leaders expressing support for him, Ayub began to wonder whether the decision of the previous evening had not been too precipitous. So, Ayub asked the Law Minister, the Minister for Defence and the Information Secretary to discuss the matter with Yahya.[5]

Upon their arrival at GHQ Yahya greeted them with these words: "What is this? A civilian coup d'etat?" The mocking tone of Yahya was understandable. He had already come to know about the President's change of mind from the Defence Minister. He was palpably angry at this new development because in anticipation of martial law, he had already set in motion logistics of the action by sending ships loaded with troops, tanks and ammunition to East Pakistan several days earlier. His face went red as Altaf Gauhar recounted why the President, after further reflection, had undergone a change of mind overnight: Several Opposition leaders had come out in support of Ayub's formula to break the political deadlock and the newly-appointed Governors—Yusuf Haroon in West Pakistan and Nurul Huda in East Pakistan—should be given time to bring the agitation under control. Angrily Yahya dismissed these leaders as having no influence and he turned to the Defence Secretary and shouted: "Why don't you speak up?" The Defence Secretary said that in his view the country would continue to flounder in anarchy unless the President stepped aside and allowed the Army to decide the timing and the phasing of martial law which had become absolutely necessary. Impatiently Yahya said that "if you fellows can't make up your mind," he would go home. He had his duty to perform and he was not "going to let anyone interfere with that." Ayub took Yahya's attitude quite philosophically, saying: "But for him, the Army would have acted much sooner." Apparently Yahya had assured Ayub that after putting down the agitation and restoring normalcy, he would put Ayub back into power after three months. This feeling was reinforced when Yahya came to call upon Ayub as he was polishing his abdication speech. "The poor man was crying at the thought of his Supreme Commander leaving in such painful circumstances,"[6] said Ayub after Yahya left for GHQ. Yahya had every reason to be satisfied with the operative words in Ayub's script: "There is now no institution except the armed forces which can save the country from chaos and ruin. I have

therefore asked the Commander-in-Chief of the Army to carry out his legal obligations."

On 25 March, Altaf Gauhar was at the GHQ when Ayub's abdication speech was broadcast. There he found Yahya, along with his co-conspirators, Generals Hameed, Peerzada, and Gul Hasan, wrestling with the recording of Yahya's speech over the radio. After the recording, Yahya said, "I don't know about you fellows but I definitely deserve a drink." The civilians took their leave as the ruling junta settled down to enjoy what they considered to be their well-deserved "booze."[7]

It is apparent from Ayub Khan's Diaries (1966–1972) which he started to write in the twilight of his presidency that it took him a long time to learn about Yahya's perfidy. As a good family man, Ayub Khan was shocked by reports that "President Yahya at times puts some young women in his car and goes around the city unescorted at night." (Diary entry of 4 family 1970). He was disappointed that Yahya did not bother to consult with him on important affairs of state and did not credit him for the establishment of Islamabad as the new capital (which was his brainchild) where no thoroughfare was named after him, although one was named after Suhrawardy. It was only in August 1970 that Ayub learned "some interesting things" from Ghulam Jilani Malik, a former civil servant who was later elected a member of the National Assembly, that the Speaker was not allowed to officiate for him (as required by the Constitution) as Yahya Khan was expecting to replace him should be not recover from his illness in 1968. Ayub confided in his diary: "I am told that Yahya goes around saying that politicians had no business claiming credit for my removal. It was he who had given me the push."[8]

Notes

1. Pakistan: DO 134, High Commission Correspondence: 1958, British Record Office, London.
2. Altaf Gauhar: *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*, p.281.
3. *Ibid*, p.287.
4. *Ibid*, pp.326-7.
5. *Ibid*, pp.331-3.
6. *Ibid*, pp.335-6.
7. *Ibid*, p.339.
8. Diaries of Field Marshal Ayub Khan 1966–1972. The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2007.

26

THE YAHYA REGIME'S GAME PLAN

On 26 March 1969, immediately after the seizure of power, Yahya Khan assured his countrymen in a nationwide broadcast that he had "no ambition other than the creation of conditions conducive to the establishment of a constitutional government. It is my firm belief that a sound, clean and a honest administration is a prerequisite for same and constructive political life and for the smooth transfer of power to the representatives of the people elected freely and impartially on the basis of adult franchise." This, then, was Yahya's rationale for the imposition of martial law for the second time in ten years.

The military coup did not come as a shock for Mujib. He had observed how the Army had remained passive throughout the anti-Ayub agitation. It was clear to him that the Army was not willing to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for Ayub. During the Round Table Conference, Yahya had taken the initiative to arrange for a meeting with Mujib in Rawalpindi. At that time Yahya had hinted to Mujib that a political deadlock might lead to martial law, implying that it would be a good thing because it would inject a sense of realism into the political process.[1]

In the third week of April Yahya went on a tour of both wings of Pakistan and assured the political leaders, including Mujib, that he was sincere about an early return to democracy. But once he returned to Rawalpindi he did not seem to be keen on implementing his promise to politicians. General Peerzada, who, as Yahya's Principal Staff Officer, was acting as the virtual Prime Minister, recalls that whenever Yahya used to come from his meetings with the other generals in the messes, where policy matters were often discussed informally over drinks, he would admonish him "not to be soft in civilian matters and in such a hurry to transfer power to civilians."[2] Yahya, of course, was not a complete master of the military establishment, as had been the case with Ayub prior to the 1965 War, and Yahya had to be mindful of the opinion of the other members of the junta.

Within days of his assumption of power Yahya began to take conciliatory steps towards those who had been in the forefront of the mass upsurge in

1968-69. A new wage policy was introduced. Educational reform was announced giving staff and students greater participation in the educational institutions. For the first time Bengali officials were put into senior positions in the central government by giving them accelerated promotions. In August Yahya appointed a civilian Cabinet where Bengalis were well-represented but real power remained concentrated in the informal 'inner cabinet' consisting of Generals Yahya, Peerzada and Hamid Khan.

Unlike Ayub who had banned political parties and arrested some political leaders upon assumption of power, Yahya allowed the political parties to continue to exist and new political parties to be formed, while prohibiting them to engage in political activities like holding public meetings and demonstrations. Since no restrictions had been placed on the organisational work of political parties Mujib busied himself with closed-door meetings with party functionaries and activists. For the past two years he had been in prison or busy with negotiations in Dhaka and Rawalpindi in connection with the RTC. Now he had ample time to go around East Pakistan and organise and energise party workers everywhere. Party organisation had always been a congenial work for Mujib. He relished this opportunity to work at the grassroots level with his party people. He got a hero's welcome as he travelled from town to town. He was also testing the limits of martial law regulations, but the authorities wisely refrained from doing anything that would provoke an unpleasant incident. Watching the phenomenal rise of Mujib in the political horizon of East Pakistan, Bhutto was at the same time envious and resentful. Indignantly he lodged a protest in writing with General Peerzada, with whom he had close relations. The letter, dated 12 September, reads in part as follows:

> In marked contrast [to treatment meted out to Bhutto] Mr. Mujibur Rahman strides across the land of East Pakistan as a mighty colossus preaching his hymn of hate without let or hindrance. On the 10th of September 1969, *Dawn* reported that on his arrival in Chittagong, Mr Mujibur Rahman was given a reception by one of the biggest crowds assembled on both sides of the road all over the 12 miles from the Airport to the City.[3]

At this time Admiral S.M. Ahsan was functioning as the Governor of East Pakistan. He had been selected for this job in late August mainly because he enjoyed the confidence of Mujib. A naval officer of Hyderabad origin, Ahsan had served in East Pakistan and was respected by officials

and non-officials alike as a soft-spoken, urbane and moderate man. Yahya needed someone like Ahsan in Dhaka to act as an interpreter for the regime with political figures like Mujib. As a token of his good faith Yahya had not only appointed a civilian Cabinet of non-politicians in August but a Chief Election Commissioner and promised elections by the end of 1970. Through these measures Yahya did his best to create the impression that he was anxious to transfer power to a civilian representative government at an early date.

Professor G.W. Choudhury, a Bengali, became Yahya's constitutional adviser, although he was nominally appointed as Minister of Communications. The other Bengali Cabinet ministers had tried to oppose his inclusion in the Cabinet alleging that he had acted as a government informer when he was teaching in Dhaka University. Yahya, who liked Choudhury very much and had high regard for his expertise in constitutional matters, overrode their objection. Choudhury became the most influential Bengali around Yahya.[4] Yahya, after examining various constitutional proposals, including the resuscitation of the 1956 Constitution, decided in favour of a Legal Framework Order (LFO), which would set the parameters of the future constitution to be drafted by the National Assembly. The LFO was discussed in the 'inner cabinet' of the military junta, but not by the formally appointed civilian Cabinet. Choudhury was the only Cabinet Minister to attend these meetings in his capacity as a constitutional expert. Before the LFO could be publicly announced, a number of questions which were in doubt needed to be settled: Was the constitution to be adopted by simple or two-thirds majority? Should the extent of provincial autonomy be spelled out in the LFO? According to Choudhury, it was "almost decided" to accept the demand for the two-thirds majority in constitutional matters and to define the extent of the provincial autonomy. But Mujib made clear to Governor Ahsan that this would mean the end of negotiations and the beginning of an armed rebellion. The generals were in favour of an early confrontation with Mujib before he could strengthen his hold in his native province. At this juncture it was Ahsan who counseled prudence. He warned Yahya that a united Pakistan would not survive a confrontation with Mujib.[5]

It was laid down in the LFO that Pakistan would be known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; the Islamic ideology, the basis for the creation of Pakistan, would be preserved, and the Head of State must be a Muslim (Section 20). The Constitution Bill, as passed by the National Assembly within 120 days from the date of its first meeting, would be

presented to the President for authentication. The National Assembly would be dissolved if it failed to produce the Constitution or if the authentication was refused (Section 23). Only the President was empowered to resolve any question or doubt as to the interpretation of any provisions of the Order. Such decisions would be final and not liable to be questioned by any Court (Section 27).

Modern constitution-making in a democracy is based on the principle of popular sovereignty. Evidently some of the provisions of the LFO, in particular Sections 23 and 27, constituted a negation of the sovereignty of the National Assembly which represented the will of the people freely exercised through the process of general election. The LFO was immediately rejected by leaders of both factions of the NAP: Bhashani (pro-Beijing) and Muzaffar Ahmed (pro-Moscow). The leaders of the Awami League were likewise outraged by the LFO and wanted to oppose it on two counts: its total rejection of the principle of secularism and the veto-power granted to the President which would allow him to deny a constitution based on Six Points. Mujib, although incensed by the LFO, decided to take a more practical attitude and persuaded his colleagues not to boycott the elections. According to G.W. Choudhury, "He (Mujib) was reported to have told them that his sole aim was to win the elections by capturing 99 per cent of the Bengali seats. Who would then, he was said to have argued, ignore his plan for Bangladesh? He was also reported to have predicted support from outside sources"[6]

Choudhury wondered why Yahya chose to ignore this report obtained by his own intelligence people. We now know that the regime had made its game plan on how to neutralise the influence of Mujib. It was assumed that no single party would be able to get an absolute majority in the forthcoming elections. The Awami League would be confined to East Pakistan and the PPP to West Pakistan. The only parties which had national appeal were the Jamaat-i-Islam and the Muslim League. Jamaat-i-Islam was not expected by the regime to win significant number of seats; Muslim League, on the other hand, could become a strong force provided the heads of its three factions—Qayyum, Daulatana and Fazlul Qader Choudhury—could be induced to merge their divisions into a unified single party.[7] The regime would therefore provide the political parties favoured by them with ample funds for the coming electoral campaign. The outcome of the elections would most likely lead to the emergence to two regional parties, the Awami League and the PPP, at odds with each other, and a number of smaller parties beholden to the regime. Yahya would then be in position to manipulate

them to his advantage and get a constitution which would endow the office of the President with extraordinary powers. Furthermore, the conflicting interests of these parties would make it difficult for them to form an effective coalition government. Yahya, as the President, would automatically become the arbiter among competing political parties and interest groups. This is the kind of role which suited his temperament. He did not have the inclination to run a one-man show like Ayub, his predecessor. Basically a pleasure-loving man, Yahya found the details of administration tedious and was inclined to delegate them to his subordinates. However, as President with extraordinary powers, he would be free to meddle in politics and assert his authority whenever he felt it desirable or necessary to do so. And as Commander-in-Chief he would act as the custodian of the interests of the armed forces, the ultimate source of his power.

Notes

1. Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, p.114.
2. Ibid, p.105.
3. Rafi Raza, *Bhutto and Pakistan 1967-1977,* Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1995, p.20.
4. Hasan Zaheer, op. cit., p.110.
5. G.W. Choudhury, 'The Last Days of United Pakistan: A Personal Account,' *International Affairs*, April 1973, p.233.
6. Ibid, p.234.
7. Hasan Zaheer, op. cit., p.123.

27

THE 1970 GENERAL ELECTION

Ever since the lifting of restrictions on political activities on the New Year of 1970 the Awami League had gone from strength to strength eclipsing its rivals completely. The Awami League opened its political campaigning the next evening with a spectacular torchlight parade. So confident Mujib was of the Awami League success in the elections that he refused to entertain any thought of electoral alliance with other parties. None of them had supported his demand for Six Points and he saw no reason to follow any other course than "go-it-alone" in the forthcoming elections. By doing so he was in effect claiming to be the embodiment of Bengali nationalism. In December 1969, on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Suhrawardy, Mujib, standing before his mausoleum, had declared that "henceforth the eastern region of Pakistan will be known as Bangladesh instead of East Pakistan."[1]

The Yahya regime, however, did not seem to be overly perturbed over the growing strength of the Awami League. As we have noted, it had reached the conclusion that no single party would be able to secure absolute majority. In line with its strategy to fragment the politics of the country the regime wanted to strengthen the Muslim League as a national party and give covert support to other political parties deemed desirable by it. One major snag in this policy was that the Muslim League was not united. So Yahya met the leaders of the three feuding factions of the Muslim League—Qayyum, Daulatana and Fazlul Qader Choudhury—in an effort to unify the party but failed to persuade them to sink their differences. The Yahya regime decided to patronise Qayyum, who had intimate relations with the intelligence agencies of the regime. Qayyum, however, suffered from a serious disadvantage. His influence was limited to the NWFP.

Money matters in an election campaign. The Yahya regime found an ingenious device to fund the Muslim League faction led by Qayyum and other political groups and individuals favoured by it. In June, a Martial Law Order was issued which placed the funds amassed by the Convention Muslim League during the Ayub regime under the control of the Yahya

regime. In this way the Yahya regime punished the Convention ML for its failure to cooperate with it and obtained funds to finance the electoral campaign of its favourites. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau, who was in charge of these funds, additionally collected large sums of money from leading industrialists and businessmen which were deposited in fictitious bank accounts. Later investigation revealed that considerable amounts of money had ended up in the pockets of army officers entrusted with their distribution to the candidates.[2]

The irresistible rise of Mujib was a source of worry for other Bengali leaders contesting the elections. This was especially the case with Bhashani. For he was the only politician other than Mujib, who had mass appeal in East Pakistan and he was far from ready to take a second place in politics to an upstart like Mujib. He recognised early on that Mujib's vast popularity was mainly due to his uncompromising demand for complete autonomy. He felt that Mujib could be thwarted from gaining outright majority in the polls if Yahya could be induced to grant some measure of autonomy before the elections to deny Mujib the opportunity to exploit the issue. He made an appeal to Yahya in January to do so. But Yahya did not oblige Bhashani. The idea of autonomy was unacceptable to the military rulers of Pakistan, whether Ayub or Yahya. Without opposing it straightaway Yahya left this question to be decided by the National Assembly, which he figured would be hopelessly divided on this issue. Even if by some miracle the Awami League did win a complete victory in East Pakistan, Yahya could still prevent the adoption of a constitution which incorporated the principle of autonomy based on Six Points, by refusing to authenticate it under the powers granted to him by the LFO, on the excuse that it imperilled the integrity of Pakistan.

In early June the Awami League held its last biennial conference in united Pakistan. It was immediately followed by a massive rally in Dhaka Race Course Maidan in drenching rain. In his speech Mujib said that Pakistan's first national election would be a referendum on the question of Six Points. He warned the people to be ready for any eventuality in the great struggle for their rights. It was at this public meeting that Mujib used the slogan "Joi Bangla" for the first time. It became the battle cry in the electoral campaign and later, in the liberation war.

The date for the general election had been originally fixed for 5 October 1970. But it was postponed to 7 December because of devastating floods in East Pakistan during the month of August. The Awami League made good use of the additional time available to it for electioneering.

In November the coastal areas of East Pakistan were hit by the most terrifying cyclone in living memory. In what was described in the world press as the cyclone of the century, an estimated half a million people perished. The best way to succour the victims of the catastrophe was by air drops of relief supplies. No helicopter was made available for this purpose by the government although as many as 59 were sitting idle in West Pakistan under the control of the armed forces. India, the next-door neighbour, was quick to offer relief assistance in various forms, including aircraft, but Pakistan was reluctant to accept it "out of pride and paranoia."[3] Permission was later given to India to provide humanitarian help but only on condition that relief supplies should be sent overland, which delayed assistance to victims who needed it urgently.

Mujib won the hearts of the cyclone victims by touring the affected areas and sending volunteers to provide relief to them. After the tour he held a press conference where he made bitter reproaches to the ruling class and vested interests of West Pakistan.

> Whilst individuals and charitable organisations the world over are raising funds for relief the '22 families' who have prospered on the blood of our people have yet to make any significant contribution towards relief. Indeed, the textiles mills of West Pakistan, which have exploited Bangladesh as their principal market, have not donated even a yard of cloth for the shrouds of the dead. Is this why we have spent 72% of our common resources in West Pakistan over the last two decades? Is this why we have channeled 60% of our budget to the Defence Services? Is this why the jute growers of Bangladesh have starved so that the capitalists in Karachi and Lyallpur can prosper?
>
> And where are the pillars of national integration, those self-appointed apostles of Islam, Maulana Maududi, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan, Mian Mumtaz Daulatana, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and other West Pakistani leaders today? They have not found time to come even for a day to Bangladesh to extend sympathy and succour to the survivors.
>
> Our present experience has only brought into sharp focus and underlines the basic truth that every Bengali has felt in his bones, that we have been treated as a colony and as a market .... All decisions of consequence are made in Rawalpindi or Islamabad. All powers vest in the Central Government and its bureaucrats. It is they whom I accuse today of criminal neglect and discrimination against Bangladesh, which has made us so vulnerable a prey to every vagary of nature.
>
> Power must be won by the people, whether it is through elections, or if the elections are aborted, through the strength of an awakened people.

It suited Mujib to have the general election while the memories of the people were still fresh about the "criminal neglect" of the government to respond promptly and adequately to the natural disaster in their hour of need. Mujib suspected that there might be attempts to postpone the elections on the ground that it would be extremely difficult to hold them in the southern districts on the scheduled date. On 26 November, he called for resisting any move to delay the holding of the general election. Anticipating hostile reaction to province-wide postponement of elections, the government limited the postponement to the cyclone-affected areas only, involving nine seats. These were held on 17 January 1971.

Bhashani had been vacillating for a long time as to whether his party should contest the elections. Initially he was in favour of the idea but it was rejected by his radical supporters. On account of its internal disarray the NAP(B) could not even formulate its election platform. Realising that his candidates would be trounced in the coming elections by the Awami League candidates, Bhashani was probably looking for a graceful exit and the cyclone provided him with a convenient excuse to withdraw from the electoral race. Only a week before the scheduled elections Bhashani directed his candidates to dedicate themselves to relief work rather than the elections.

There could be little doubt about now that the Awami League would sweep the polls. Nevertheless no one suspected, including probably Mujib,



Photo 9: Sheikh Mujib in a happy mood in the company of Awami League leaders and friends after the 1970 General Elections

the dimension of the electoral victory of the Awami League. It captured 167 seats out of 169 seats in East Pakistan. The two non-Awami League winners were Raja Tridiv Roy and Nurul Amin. Tridiv Roy's victory was a foregone conclusion, for he represented the Chittagong Hill Tracts, an area inhabited by hill tribes with a distinct culture and religions of their own. However Nurul Amin's victory was surprising. In the 1954 provincial elections he had been defeated by a mere student, because Nurul Amin was held responsible for the suppression of the Bengali language movement by force. By the time of 1970 election, it was well known that it was not primarily Nurul Amin, but non-Bengali officials in charge of administration who had ordered police to open fire on Bengali students demonstrating for Bengali to be granted equal status with Urdu as a state language.

In West Pakistan, Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was the big winner, having secured 85 seats out of 144 seats there. However, with one exception, the PPP winners were all from the Punjab and Sind. Mujib sent a telegram congratulating Bhutto on his great success in the Punjab and Sind. Bhutto did not like being reminded that his victory in West Pakistan was confined to these two provinces. On 20 December, at the conclusion of a victory celebration, he declared:

> Punjab and Sind are the bastions of power in Pakistan (sic). Majority alone does not count in national politics. No government at the centre could be run without the cooperation of the PPP which controlled these two provinces. I have the key of the Punjab Assembly in one pocket and that of the Sind in the other.[4]

Three days later, Maulana Farid Ahmed, the leader of Nizam-e-Islam, who, as a young man had been a militant supporter of the Bengali language movement, but at the same time was a fervent believer in the unity of Pakistan, pointed out that Bhutto's pronouncements "could turn the situation into an East-West confrontation."[5] These words proved to be prophetic.

Notes

1. *Ittefaq,* December 6, 1969.
2. Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, p.125.
3. *The New York Times,* November 29, 1970.
4. Rafi Raza, *Bhutto and Pakistan 1967-1977,* p.44.
5. Quoted in Appendix 4 (Chronology), Kalam Siddiqui, *Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan,* Praeger, New York, 1971.

28

THE MAKING OF A CONSPIRACY

1970 had been a glorious year for Mujib. He had enjoyed campaigning in the first ever general election in Pakistan, which was in his words, "a referendum on Six Points." Even Nature, cruel in her devastations, had helped him to make a convincing case that the Punjabi-dominated military-bureaucratic elite of Pakistan could not be trusted to look after the welfare of Bengalis. The verdict of the people had been clear and unmistakable. It had vindicated his often lonely stand that East Pakistan must have complete autonomy as outlined in his Six Points to put a definitive end to the brazen exploitation to which it had been subjected since the birth of Pakistan.

On 3 January 1971, at a public ceremony in the Race Course in Dhaka, watched by an estimated one million people, Mujib declared that since the Awami League had won such an overwhelming mandate for the Six Points it could not amend it now. He administered an oath to the Awami Leaguers elected to the National Assembly that they would not deviate from the Six Points. Present at the ceremony were the members of the diplomatic corps which attested to the newly-gained standing of the Awami League internationally.

No one at the Army GHQ in Rawalpindi had reckoned with the possibility that the Awami League would secure an absolute majority in the National Assembly. They were in a state of shock after the election results came in. On a personal level some of the generals were afraid that Colonel (Retd.) Osmani might become the Defence Minister in an Awami League government and might seek revenge against them for having forced him out of the Army into an involuntary retirement. Collectively they were concerned that the budget allocation for the defence services might be cut drastically, slowing down promotions and removing some of the privileges to which they had become accustomed. They were not willing to be relegated to the sidelines by a civilian government formed by the Awami League. Their attitude was tersely expressed by a general close to the junta who came to Dhaka in a late December and assured military officers during an informal chat after a formal dinner: "Don't worry … we will not allow these black bastards to rule over us."[1]

Yahya's reaction was more measured for the time being. At the Cabinet where the implications of the election results were discussed, he gave a "tongue-lashing" to Rizvi, the Director of Intelligence, who had been reporting all along that no single party would win an absolute majority.[2] Since Yahya had been led to believe that there would be a multiplicity of parties, none of whom would be in a commanding position in the National Assembly, he had not bothered to study the text of the Six Points in detail. When the realisation dawned on Yahya that Mujib might after all get the National Assembly to adopt a constitution based on Six Points, he asked a trusted Bengali General, Karim, to explain the Six Points to him. After he had done so, Yahya burst out: "This man (Mujib) is talking nonsense. He is talking sedition." When Karim pointed out that Mujib had been talking like this throughout the election campaign without any objection by the regime, Yahya replied: "But he had told me that this was a political thing but now he is serious about them."[3]

After this tutorial Yahya was ready to have a dialogue with Mujib. He invited Mujib to Rawalpindi. Mujib's colleagues were against the idea of his going to West Pakistan. They were apprehensive that a trap might be set for him there; worse, he might even be assassinated. Mujib had not forgotten that an attempt had been made on the life of Suhrawardy in West Pakistan and he was convinced that he had been eventually killed by Ayub's agents in a hotel room in Beirut. Mujib declined the invitation of Yahya and instead, invited him to Dhaka for talks.

Yahya flew to Dhaka on 12 January where they talked for two days. Their first meeting was a private one. This meeting was exploratory in nature and they got an opportunity to know each other better. According to Choudhury, who accompanied Yahya, there was no meeting of minds at this meeting: "Yahya emerged from the meeting a bitter and frustrated man. Mujib, he (Yahya) complained, had gone back on his word and refused to show him his draft constitution on the grounds that as the leader of the majority party, he and he alone was responsible for the new constitution."[4]

Now that they had a glimpse of each other's intentions they met for a formal meeting the next day. Mujib was accompanied by Tajuddin Ahmed, Nazrul Islam, Kamruzzaman, Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed and Mansur Ali. The principal members of Yahya's teams were General Peerzada and Admiral Ahsan. Peerzada recalled later that the atmosphere at the meeting was pleasant. Mujib congratulated Yahya for holding free and fair elections and Yahya felicitated Mujib on his election victory. Mujib then gave a presentation of his Six Points and answered questions raised by Yahya. There followed, according to Ahsan, this exchange:

MUJIB: Sir, you now know what the Six Points Programme is. Please tell me what objections you have to this programme.

YAHYA: Sheikh Sahib, I have no objections to this programme but you will have to carry the West Pakistan leaders with you.

MUJIB: Of course. Sir, kindly call the Assembly as soon as possible. I suggest 15 February. You will see that I will obtain not only a simple majority but a two-thirds majority.

AHSAN: With an absolute majority in the Assembly the Awami League can bulldoze their constitution without bothering about West Pakistan's interests.

MUJIB: No, no. I am a democrat and the majority leader of all Pakistan. I cannot ignore the interests of West Pakistan. I am not only responsible to the people to East and West Pakistan but to the world opinion. I shall do everything on democratic principles. To begin with I hope you will arrive in Dhaka three or four days before the Assembly session. I will show you our draft constitution. If you find objections, I will try to accommodate your wishes ....

Mujib then dwelt on the modalities of constitution-making and made a proposition to Yahya to elect him as the next President of Pakistan. Yahya protested that he was a simple soldier and would like to "go back to the barracks or go home." Yahya reverted to the theme of the need for the two majority parties of East and West Pakistan to work together. Mujib replied that he would certainly seek the cooperation of the People's Party and also the other parties of West Pakistan: "I do not wish to impose any solution to the problems of West Pakistan provinces. I realise they cannot have nor do they need the same extent of autonomy in East Pakistan. I am prepared to help if requested but I will not interfere with any arrangements West Pakistan leaders themselves wish to make."[5]

Within hours of Mujib's offer to make Yahya the elected President the news trickled down to the cantonment at Kurmitola. Some Army officers went to the President House to suggest that Yahya should remain the actual Commander-in-Chief and not become a ceremonial figurehead.[6] Yahya's hold over the Army was not very firm in the post-election period. There had been some rumours not long ago that General Hamid had the aspiration to replace Yahya by engineering a coup. Yahya had to be mindful about the mood of the Pakistan Army.

Before leaving for Rawalpindi Yahya expressed his satisfaction to the pressmen about the discussions he had with Mujib and referred to him as

the future Prime Minister of the country. In answer to a question by a reporter as to whether he was going to meet Bhutto also, Yahya replied: "I am going for shooting of birds in Sind which is in Bhutto's area. If he is there I will meet him also."

Indeed, the lands around Larkana, the home town of Bhutto, are a hunter's paradise abounding in ducks, partridges and wild boar. Providentially, or more likely by pre-arrangement, Bhutto was there to offer Yahya his lavish hospitality in his country estate. Yahya was accompanied by two fellow-hunters, Generals Hamid and Peerzada. They were there not merely to give Yahya company but to make sure that he did not compromise the vital interests of the Army or that of West Pakistan. Next to Yahya they were the most powerful members of the ruling junta.

Yahya and Bhutto talked for five hours without any aides. Because of the secretive nature of their talks not every detail of what they talked about is known. However Yahya had to keep his fellow-generals in the junta informed and they leaked out some information to others. Bhutto, on his part, gave a sanitised version of their conversation to his close advisers and wrote a paragraph about the meeting in his slim book *The Great Tragedy* published several months later to justify his role in the military crackdown of March 1971. It is possible to reconstruct, therefore, in broad outline what transpired at their Larkana meeting.

Yahya told Bhutto about his encounter with Mujib in Dhaka: "I had very good discussions in East Pakistan and the Six Points were explained to me. I think it is quite possible to have a Six Point constitution. Even in Australia foreign trade is in the hands of the provinces." Bhutto observed that the President had not given careful thought to the implications of the Six Points. To be sure, it might be possible to reach a compromise on some of the points like foreign trade and foreign aid, but in their totality the Six Points were bound to lead to secession. He had no objection to sitting as the leader of the opposition but he could not allow Mujib to nominate both the President and the Prime Minister. By convention one of them should be nominated by the majority party of East Pakistan and the other by the majority party of West Pakistan.[7]

Bhutto also proposed that the President should test the loyalty of Mujib by postponing the National Assembly session. If Mujib accepted the postponement he should be considered a loyal Pakistani and if he did not, then obviously he was disloyal.[8]

In the middle of 1970, only a few months before the scheduled general election, Bhutto had suggested privately to Yahya that the two of them would make a very good team and could together run the country. Yahya

had replied that "this made sense" and asked what he proposed to do about East Pakistan. Bhutto replied: "East Pakistan is no problem. We will have to kill some 20,000 people and all would be well." This story was recounted by Yahya to Air Marshall (Retd.) Asghar Khan and it is quite in line with Bhutto's well-known pet theory that the Awami League was a bourgeois party and it had no stomach for a confrontation with the military. What was dismissed by Yahya as a pipe dream a year before was now apparently embraced by him.[9]

According to Rafi Raza, a close adviser to Bhutto, he "at all times had a poor opinion of Mujibur Rahman, referring to him as a coward and a mere rabble-rouser." Soon after the elections Bhutto had discussed with him the post-election situation in which each of the principals—Mujib. Bhutto, Yahya—appeared "fixed in the triangle" with little room for maneuver. Bhutto had agreed with Rafi Raza that an imaginative initiative was needed to prevent a tragedy, yet he had also remarked, "I will ensure Yahya remains on my side."[10]

After Larkana there could be little doubt that Bhutto had achieved his purpose. No longer would Yahya refer to Mujib as the future Prime Minister of Pakistan. Nor would he disavow his desire to remain the President of Pakistan.

Notes

1. Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender,* Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1977, p.29.
2. Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, p. 130.
3. Ibid, p.131.
4. G.W. Choudhury, 'The Separation of Pakistan: A Personal Account', p.236.
5. Hasan Zaheer, op. cit., p.132-4.
6. Ibid, p. 137.
7. Rao Farman Ali, *How Pakistan Got Divided*, Lahore, 1992, p.53.
8. Ibid , p.53.
9. Mohammad Asghar Khan, *Generals in Politics: Pakistan 1958-1982*, p.28.
10. Rafi Raza, *Bhutto and Pakistan 1967-1977,* p.47.

29

HEADING TOWARDS CONFRONTATION

The Larkana talks between Bhutto and Yahya had the effect of solidifying Mujib's perception that a conspiracy was being hatched by them to nullify the will of the people. This sense of latent distrust cast a dark shadow over the impending talks between Mujib and Bhutto.

Bhutto arrived in Dhaka with a large entourage on 27 January 1971 for a series of meetings lasting three days. Bhutto sought to reassure Mujib that although the people of West Pakistan had the general impression that the Six Points spelt the end of Pakistan, he personally was in favour of going as far as possible to meet the essential demands of the Six Points. Bhutto argued that it was necessary to allay the fears of West Pakistanis and he pleaded for a reasonable length of time before convening the National Assembly. Mujib, suspicious from the start, turned the proposal down. He probably regarded the proposal as intended to give the vested interests of West Pakistan more time for their machinations against the Awami League.

There was also no agreement on how to work out a viable constitution for the country. They agreed to hold discussions on this matter in future.

During their discussions Bhutto raised the question of power-sharing in the government. Bhutto said that as the Prime Minister would be from East Pakistan, the President must be from West Pakistan. Mujib had no objection to this. But when Bhutto suggested that as the majority leader of West Pakistan he would nominate the President, Mujib said no. Mujib made it clear that as the leader of whole of Pakistan and as the majority leader of the National Assembly, it was his privilege to nominate the President, who would be a West Pakistani. In this connection Farman Ali, who was acting as Army's liaison officer with Mujib at this time, tells this remarkable story related to him by Mujib: "I (Mujib) also told him (Bhutto) that I had already promised the position to somebody. Bhutto retorted by saying, 'Supposing I nominate the same person you have in mind. I said even then I should not abdicate my authority and responsibility.' Then Mujib said, 'You know Farman what would have happened if I had

allowed him to nominate the President? He would have nominated himself and dismissed me within ten days."[1]

To underline his dissatisfaction with these talks, Mujib did not come to the airport to see Bhutto off but sent Tajuddin to deputise for him. After a two-and-a-half hour flight the PIA plane landed in Lahore. Only a day earlier an Indian Airlines aircraft had been highjacked by two Kashmiri young men and brought to Lahore. On disembarking, Bhutto greeted them as freedom fighters. Thus encouraged, they blew up the Indian plane the following day, 1 February. Mujib was under pressure to issue a statement in support of the two highjackers to prove his patriotism but he declined to rush to judgement. He said that the matter should first be thoroughly investigated. Mujib was condemned by Bhutto for demanding an enquiry and feelings ran high against Mujib in the Punjab. An enraged mob burned down the Awami League office in Lahore.

Pakistan's refusal to extradite the highjackers to India even after the destruction of the Indian plane served as a reason for India to ban overflights of Pakistani aircraft through its airspace. It took Pakistan nearly a fortnight to restore the air link between the two wings via Colombo which increased the flight time and fuel cost almost threefold. More importantly, the distance between the two wings of Pakistan, psychologically speaking, increased immeasurably.

An Enquiry Committee headed by Justice Arefin of the Sind High Court later held that the highjacking was an Indian provocation perpetrated by Indian agents.

Meanwhile Bhutto's plea for delaying the calling of the National Assembly had been rejected by Mujib. Bhutto was by no means the sole leader of West Pakistan in the sense that Mujib had become the undisputed leader of East Pakistan following his landslide victory in the General Election. Bhutto desperately needed time to build up a broad understanding against the Six Points among the elected representatives of West Pakistan, 57 of whom did not belong to the PPP. There was a strong sentiment among most of them for an early debate in the National Assembly to proceed with the task ahead of constitution-making and as a first order of business to try to break the deadlock over the Six Points by compromise. Bhutto knew that in an open debate in the National Assembly he might lose because many of the former opponents of the Six Points in the other political parties had moderated their objections and were willing to accept the programme with slight modifications. Even in his own party, the PPP, there was a small minority who did not feel strongly against the Six Points programme. Bhutto was in a difficult situation.

Bhutto met Yahya on 11 February. He advised Yahya not to convene the National Assembly until after he (Bhutto) had a completed his discussions with West Pakistan leaders and held mass meetings to judge the public reaction to the Six Points. Yahya was under intense pressure from Mujib to fix an early date for the National Assembly. Two days before Bhutto met Yahya, Mujib had publicly expressed concern over the unnecessary delay in calling the National Assembly and said it seemed another conspiracy to deprive the people of their own government. In the circumstances, Yahya could not afford to openly side with Bhutto. On 13 February, Yahya announced that the National Assembly would meet in Dhaka on 3 March.

In retrospect there is little room for doubt that by this time Yahya and Bhutto were acting in concert to keep Mujib from coming into power and to give him a chance to implement his mandate. We know now from an account of G.W. Choudhury, Yahya's trusted constitutional adviser, that the very next day, 14 February, the junta secretly decided to dissolve the Central Cabinet, "apparently because the Bengali ministers and one non-Bengali minister (who was a close friend of Mujib) were working hard to find a compromise. At the same meeting it was also decided that Admiral Ahsan (who had in fact expressed a wish to resign) should be replaced as Governor of East Pakistan by a hawk, General Tikka Khan."[2] On 21 February Yahya announced the dissolution of the Cabinet "in view of the political situation in the country."

The "political situation" mentioned in Yahya's announcement in effect echoed Bhutto's statement on 15 February that because of "alarming and threatening" deterioration of Pakistan's relations with India following the highjacking incident and the Awami League's "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude on its Six Points draft constitution, he could not allow himself or his party members to be put in jeopardy as "double hostages" by going to Dhaka. Bhutto also added a subtle threat to West Pakistani leaders intending to attend the Assembly session in Dhaka by reminding them that "they will have to come back also." What would happen to them upon their return to West Pakistan was left to imagination for the time being.

At a farewell dinner for the departing Cabinet ministers, General Hamid, one of the hardliners in the junta, told G.W. Choudhury that his "boys" were "getting restless for action." When Choudhury pointed out the dangers of such an action, Hamid replied, "I could fix it up in 72 hours."[3] Farman Ali, who had been summoned to Rawalpindi for consultations earlier, also got an inkling of the murderous mood of the



Photo 10: The raising of original Bangladesh flag (a golden map of Bangladesh embedded in a crimson sun, bordered by green) at a rally in the Dhaka University campus on 15th February, 1971

junta from no less a person than Yahya himself. He recalls that on 19 February, when he, along with Peerzada, were ushered into the President's office, the first words uttered by Yahya were: "I am going to sort out that bastard", meaning Mujib. Farman Ali claims that he requested to speak privately to Yahya in order to dissuade him from a confrontation with Mujib but he failed. When he got up to leave at the end of the interview, Yahya told him: "I am not afraid of myself. West Pakistan is my base. I have to look after it."[4]

The contingency plan for a possible confrontation with Mujib was already under preparation. The decks needed to be cleared for a possible military action in East Pakistan. To that end, on 22 February, Yahya called a conference of the Governors and Martial Law Administrators. Generals Peerzada and Hamid were also present at the conference. Yahya brought up the matter of political deadlock in the Assembly session and the desirability of postponing it. Both Governor Ahsan and MLA Yakub were against the idea of postponement and wrote a memorandum bringing out the disastrous implications of rolling back the political situation to what it was in 1969. Yahya seemed somewhat shaken and told them: "I am willing

to accept your views. But go and convince Mr. Bhutto. He is the one who is insisting on postponement." Ahsan and Yakub went to Karachi to meet Bhutto. He told them: "You need not be apprehensive about the reaction of East Pakistan. Awami League is a bourgeois party. It is not a party of the masses. It cannot fight a guerrilla war. There will be no violent conflict in East Pakistan" and so on. Back they went to Rawalpindi to apprise Yahya of the failure of their mission. Yahya instructed them to inform Mujib about the postponement on 28 February, not earlier and not later. So on that day Ahsan, Yakub and Farman Ali met Mujib accompanied by Tajuddin, in the Governor House to break the news. According to Yakub: "Mujib was perturbed when told about the postponement. He asked Tajuddin to go out and then said that he would be in serious trouble with the extremists. He pleaded that if the postponement was inevitable, a fresh date may be announced simultaneously." Ahsan conveyed Mujib's message to Yahya, but he stuck to his decision for an indefinite postponement of the National Assembly.[5]

Notes

1. Rao Farman Ali, *How Pakistan Got Divided*, Jung Publishers, Lahore 1992, p.56.
2. G.W. Choudhury, 'The Last Days of Pakistan; A Personal Account', p.237.
3. Ibid, p.237.
4. Rao Farman Ali, op. cit., pp.55-65.
5. Ibid, pp.59-60.

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PARALLEL GOVERNMENT

Shortly after noon of 1 March 1971Yahya announced that the National Assembly due on 3 March would be postponed *sine die* "to give more time to the political leaders of East and West Pakistan to arrive at a reasonable understanding on the issue of constitution-making."[1]

Already restive, the populace of Dhaka exploded in anger. Within minutes of the announcement, hundreds of thousands of people, many armed with sticks and iron rods, poured into the streets and public places to give vent to their feelings. Even the staff of the Secretariat came out of their office to join the demonstrators. An international cricket match was being played when the news of the postponement broke. The enraged demons-trators chased out the players and spectators from the stadium for being engaged in frivolous pursuit at such a grave moment. A large crowd led by student leaders went to the Purbani Hotel where the Awami League Parliamentary Board was giving final touches to the draft constitution to be submitted to the National Assembly. For the first time the student leaders raised the slogan "Take Up Arms, Heroes of Bengal" and clamoured to hear what Mujib had to say about the crisis provoked by Yahya.

In a press conference soon afterwards, Mujib said that he could not allow the action of the President, "for the sake of a minority party's disagreement with the democratic process of constitution-making", to go unchallenged. He announced a programme of action for the next six days including a province-wide complete strike on the following day. He said that a public meeting would be held on 7 March in Dhaka where he would announce his final programme. In reply to a question whether he would proclaim unilateral independence on that day, he said, "You wait."[2]

At around 10 p.m. that evening, Peerzada made a telephone call to Yakub to tell him that with immediate effect he was to take over the post of Governor from Ahsan in addition to his duties as CMLA. Ahsan, who was present when the call came, accepted his dismissal stoically with one word, "Fine." "His entire staff wept as he departed by helicopter on 4 March."[3]

As the dawn broke on 2 March, Dhaka had the look of an embattled city. Barricades had been erected overnight at key points to immobilise

traffic. The hartal was a complete success in Dhaka as well as in the district towns. In Dhaka, however, it was not entirely peaceful. Arms shops were plundered, which was perhaps understandable, but unruly elements also indulged in the looting of shops of non-local Muslims. Curfew was imposed in the city from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. the following morning but it was widely violated. The Army had been called in to enforce the curfew and they fired on curfew violators at several places, resulting in nine deaths and fifty-one wounded. On 3 March, Mujib condemned the killing of unarmed people by the forces and urged the government to desist from this reckless course. At the same time he urged the people to continue the struggle in a peaceful and disciplined manner and reminded them that any breach of discipline "will serve the interest of agent provocateurs and the anti-people forces."

The extensive defiance of the authorities during the hartal and the government's inability to bring under reasonable control the chaotic condition that seemed to prevail in East Pakistan alarmed Yahya and the junta in Rawalpindi. A contingency plan had been prepared by the junta to bring East Pakistan under military control by naked force but the means available to break the hold of Mujib and the Awami League were woefully inadequate. The Pakistan Army's Eastern Command consisted only of one division at this stage. The division had 15 battalions, of which 9 were from West Pakistan. The remaining six were sections of the East Bengal Regiment, whose rank and file were exclusively Bengalis, and among the officers, a sizeable number were Bengalis. The East Pakistan Rifles numbered 14,000 trained men, almost exclusively Bengalis. If the lightly-armed police, who had shown themselves reluctant to act against agitators during the recent hartal, was taken into account, there were over 150,000 "armed Bengalis" against some 10,000 soldiers from West Pakistan.[4] In order to close the gap between "armed Bengalis" and West Pakistani soldiers, the Pakistan Army had begun sending troops to Dhaka by air via Colombo, wearing civilian clothes to disguise their identity.

The Bengali staff of the PIA at the Dhaka Airport refused to handle the flights which brought incoming troops. On 1 March, after an attempt to blow up a Boeing aircraft, Pakistan Air Force personnel took over the airport management and handling of the flights. Mujib expressed his concern that the Boeings which should have brought Assembly members to Dhaka were being used to fly in troop reinforcements.[5]

By the morning of 3 March the entire province of East Pakistan had been paralysed by the non-cooperation movement launched by Mujib.

Even the communication links between East and West Pakistan had been severed. The Army and the Air Force had their own independent communication links, of course, so that Yahya was kept fully informed of the dire state of affairs in the province. Yahya needed more time to build up the strength of the Eastern Command for a head-on military confrontation with the Awami League. It was calculated that a minimum of three weeks were required for this purpose. To be sure, Pakistani troops would still be quantitatively inferior at the end of the period, but this deficiency would be more than compensated by their superior fire-power and mobility and their exclusive possession of tanks and aircraft.

Yahya therefore felt compelled to temporise until the Eastern Command was reinforced to be ready for military action to suppress Bengali nationalism once and for all. So on 3 March, only four days before Mujib's much-anticipated public speech, Yahya invited all parties to a conference in Dhaka on 10 March to resolve the constitutional problems. Mujib issued a statement saying that the invitation to such a conference was being made at gunpoint while the military build-up was continuing unabated. "Under these circumstances, the question of accepting such an invitation does not arise. I, therefore, reject such an invitation."

Both Yahya and Bhutto were shaken by the complete success of the non-cooperation movement and Mujib's outright rejection of the proposal for an all-party conference. Farman Ali was summoned to Rawalpindi to brief the President on the situation in East Pakistan. Before leaving, Farman Ali sought an urgent meeting with Mujib to get an idea of his thoughts. It was rather late in the evening, 11 p.m., but Mujib agreed to see him immediately. Being in a hurry himself, Farman Ali says he asked a direct question without any preliminaries: "Please tell me if Pakistan can be saved?" Mujib replied: "Yes, it can be saved if somebody listens to us. So many people are being killed by the Army. They listen to Bhutto. They do not listen to me even now. Even after all this, we are willing to discuss." At this point Tajuddin arrived to join in the talks. Mujib asked Tajuddin's views on Farman Ali's question whether Pakistan could be saved. Tajuddin said: "Yes, it could be, but under a new formula. We cannot after all this butchery sit with Bhutto under the same roof. He is responsible for all this. Let the Assembly be divided into two houses, one for East and the other for West Pakistan. Each Assembly should write the constitution for its own wing. Then the two Assemblies should write a constitution for Pakistan." It was a formula for confederation rather than federation, thought Farman Ali.[6]

Before Farman Ali left for West Pakistan on the fourth of March, Yakub had resigned from his post, being no longer able to agree with the

hard-line approach of Yahya to the problems of Pakistan. His replacement was General Tikka Khan, known as the "Butcher of Baluchistan" for the harshness with which he had suppressed the people of this neglected region yearning for some form of autonomy. Farman Ali happened to meet him at the Lahore Airport when both of them were waiting for the plane to take them to Rawalpindi to meet the President. Farman Ali gave him a resume of the situation in East Pakistan. Exuding confidence, Tikka Khan thought he could handle the situation.[7]

Farman Ali was asked to call on the President at 11 a.m. on the following morning. It was a working day. So Farman Ali expected to see him at his office. Instead, he had to go to Yahya's residence where he found him seated barefooted in the verandah, having drinks with General Hamid and Bhutto. After saluting the President, Farman Ali requested to speak to him alone because "what I (Farman Ali) am going to tell you is likely to embarrass Mr. Bhutto." Bhutto then withdrew to an adjoining room with his glass and Farman Ali gave his report on the grave situation in East Pakistan and an account of his meeting with Mujib. "Listen to my speech tomorrow. It has answers to your problems in East Pakistan", responded Yahya.[8]

By the time Yahya's speech was delivered on the sixth of March, the writ of the government had ceased to apply in East Pakistan. The armed forces, which had been called in to enforce the martial law during the civil disobedience movement, had proved to be singularly ineffective and they were withdrawn to the barracks. In his speech, widely believed to have been written by Bhutto, Yahya announced a new date for the holding of the inaugural session of the National Assembly: 25 March.

If Yahya had expected that his speech would be greeted by Bengalis as a grand gesture of conciliation, he was mistaken. For them, it was too little and too late. Rioting and clashes with the authorities continued. The most dramatic incident was at the Dhaka Central Jail where 325 prisoners broke out of the jail and brought out a procession in the streets. Their example was followed in the next few days by prisoners in Narayanganj, Comilla and Barisal. It was only through the efforts of the Awami League that some semblance of civil order in the province could be maintained.

Mujib had galvanised the people into action by his call for civil disobedience. The anger against the rulers of Pakistan had been so intense that the flag of Pakistan and the portrait of Jinnah had been set on fire on several occasions. A flag of Bangladesh—a red disk with the map of East Bengal on deep green field—had been hastily devised by some students and flown at some meetings. Not surprisingly, there was general expectation that Mujib would declare independence in his speech on 7 March.

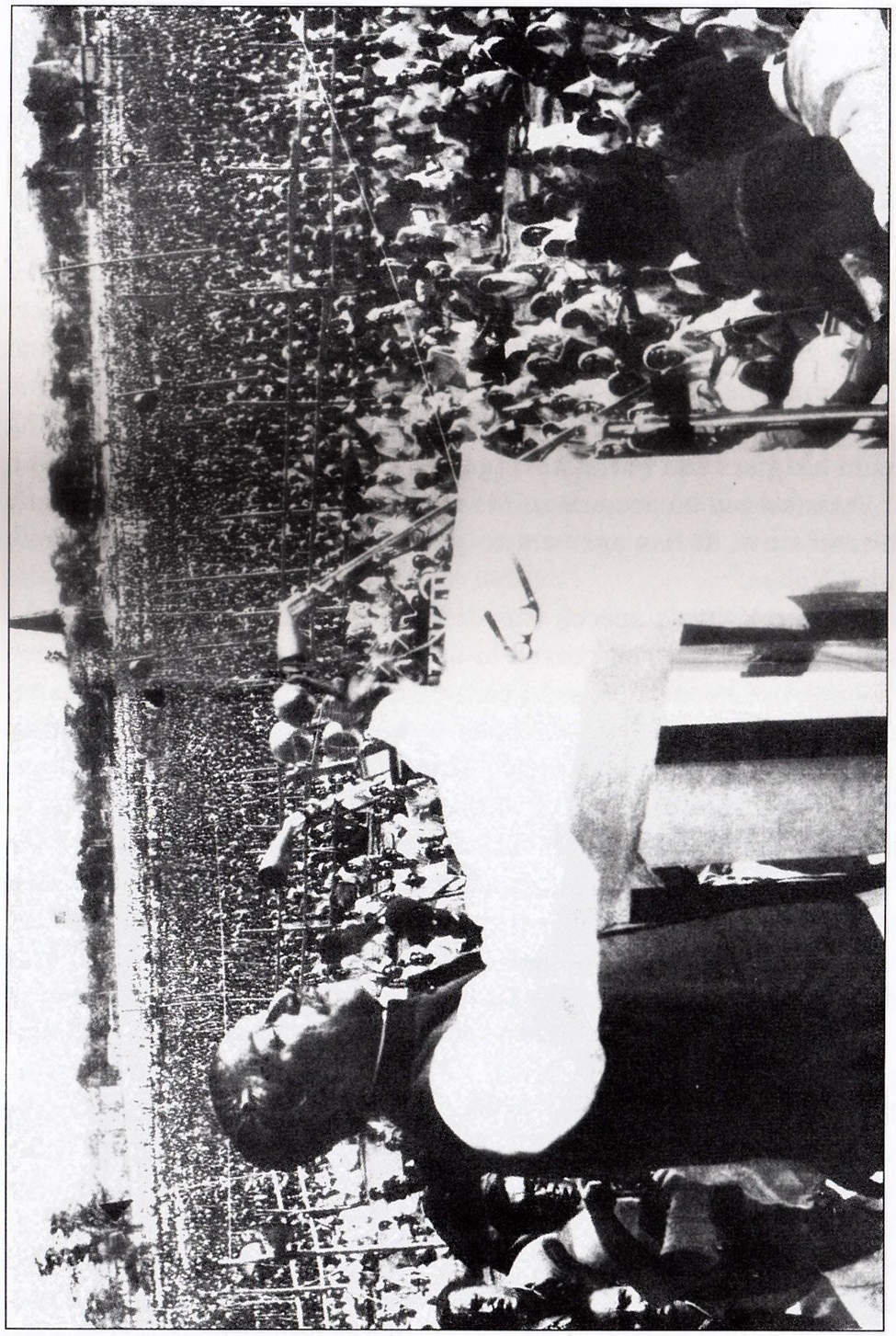


Photo 11: The call for freedom — Sheikh Mujib addressing the historic mass rally at the Dhaka Race Course Maidan on 7th March, 1971.

It was in this atmosphere that the leadership of the Awami League assembled at Mujib's residence for a closed-door meeting to decide on the theme of his speech. The main issue was: Should Mujib declare independence or not? The militant student leaders were strongly in favour of it as were broad masses of the people. On the other hand, Mujib was under immense pressure not to take a precipitous course by declaring independence. Yahya himself rang up from Rawalpindi to dissuade Mujib from any rash announcement and give negotiations a chance. The US Ambassador Farland called on Mujib to urge moderation. There is no overt evidence that India counseled any particular course of action, but it stands to reason that an orderly transfer of power to elected representatives was more in India's interest than a state of continued unrest, perhaps civil war, which could destabilise the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal, still in the throes of Naxalite uprising. There was universal agreement among Awami League leaders that it would be unwise to declare independence unilaterally at this time.

In his speech before a gathering of more than a million people at the Ramna Race Course, Mujib said that there could be no question of attending the Assembly on 25 March stepping over the blood shed by the martyrs. He laid down four preconditions for joining the National Assembly: immediate withdrawal of martial law, the return of the armed forces to the barracks, an enquiry into the conduct of forces during the general strike, and the immediate transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people. He said that he did not aspire to become the Prime Minister of the country, he merely wanted the realisation of the rights of the people. He concluded his speech by these stirring words: "The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation; the struggle this time is the struggle for independence."

Mujib's carefully calibrated speech fell short of a declaration of secession from Pakistan, as had been expected by a large number of people, especially the extremist student wing of his own party. But the conclusion of his speech, which implied that his ultimate goal was independence, pacified them. Soon after Mujib's speech, political leaders from both East and West Pakistan issued statements supporting Mujib's four preconditions and urging the President to accept them. Even Maulana Bhashani, who, along with a few other leaders had earlier called for a declaration of independence, held a public meeting on 9 March at Paltan Maidan, where he declared that unless something was done before 25 March, as demanded by Mujib, he would join Mujib to start an unprecedented mass movement.

The Awami League issued a series of make-shift directives to keep the machinery of the government functioning. They were obeyed not only by the general public but by Bengali government servants. Even Governor-designate Tikka Khan could not persuade Siddiqui, the Chief Justice of the High Court in Dhaka, to administer the oath of office to him. There was virtually a parallel government in East Pakistan run by the Awami League. It was so successful that Wali Khan reportedly observed, "Even Gandhi would have marvelled."[9]

Notes

1. In his book *Bhutto and Pakistan 1967-1977*, P.62-68, Rafi Raza, a confidant and political collaborator of Bhutto, states that on 28 February 1971, the day before Yahya's speech announcing the *sine die* postponement of the National Assembly, Bhutto, in a public meeting in Lahore had threatened a "general strike from Peshawar to Karachi" if the Assembly session was held on 3 March, as scheduled. In the light of Yahya's postponement of the Assembly the very next day, there was speculation in West Pakistan that Bhutto's tough speech had been made after consultation with Yahya.
2. *The People*, Dhaka, March 2, 1971.
3. Rao Farman Ali, *How Pakistan Got Divided*, pp.61-62.
4. Figures regarding the strength and composition Pakistan Army and East Pakistan Rifles in East Pakistan before the arrival of reinforcements in late February and March 1971 have been taken from Rushbrook William's book, *The East Pakistan Tragedy,* published in London in 1971.
5. Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p.45.
6. Rao Farman Ali, op. cit., p.67.
7. Ibid, p.67.
8. Ibid, p.68.
9. Rafi Raza, op. cit., p.69.

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THE GATHERING STORM

The dazzling success of the civil disobedience movement and the Army's inability to control it had upset Yahya's calculations. Time, that is what he desperately needed to buy to put his plans into action: Time to restructure higher echelons of the Eastern Command demoralised by the pronounced defeatism of Ahsan and Yakub; and time to bring up reinforcements from West Pakistan.

For this, it was imperative to get the Awami League engaged in a negotiating process which should be dragged out for at least three to four weeks. This would provide a perfect smokescreen for the Army to complete its preparations for military action.

We have seen how Yahya had made an urgent telephone call to Mujib the day before his historic speech on the seventh of March to implore him "not to take a step from which there would be no return." Later he followed it up with a formal proposal in writing in the form of a teleprinter message delivered to him by a brigadier. Siddiq Salik who saw this message recorded its content in his diary:

> Please do not take any hasty decision. I will soon come to Dhaka and discuss the details with you. I assure you your aspirations and commitments to the people can be fully honoured. I have a scheme in mind which will more than satisfy your Six Points. I urge you not to take a hasty decision.[1]

Mujib could not reject outright a proposal in writing which had a ring of sincerity. Yahya's comedown from haughty disdain of the Awami League to willingness to grant its basic demands calmed the atmosphere in East Pakistan. By 10 March 1971 law and order situation had improved to the point that no police personnel were put on duty in the city of Dhaka. Awami League volunteer groups did their job. Incidence of violence against the non-local Muslim minority which had marred the movement had ceased altogether.

On his way to Dhaka Yahya stopped in Karachi on 14 March for talks with Bhutto. Since no one else was present during their meeting we have to be content with Bhutto's version. According to him, Yahya asked him

whether he too wanted to go to Dhaka. Yes, Bhutto answered, if Mujib was ready to talk to him.[2] Bhutto also told him that any settlement relating to the lifting of martial law and transfer of power to elected representatives would require the consent of the PPP.[3]

Yahya arrived in Dhaka the next day with a high-powered negotiating team. It included Justice A.R. Cornelius, General Peerzada, General Akbar of the Inter-Services Intelligence, General Rizvi, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau and M.M. Ahmed. The Awami League team included Tajuddin, Mushtaque Ahmed, Captain Mansur Ali, A.H.M. Kamaruzzaman and Kamal Hossain. Yahya and Mujib had their first meeting on 16 March and the two negotiating teams began their talks the following day. These talks, both at the summit level between Mujib and Yahya and their respective negotiating teams were conducted with such hypocritical sincerity and in business-like manner by Yahya and his men that Mujib and his senior advisers were lulled into belief that progress, however slow, was being made. On 19 March, Mujib had his second meeting with Yahya. According to Farman Ali, he rang up Mujib to get some information about the talks. Mujib told him that an agreement was at hand and a proclamation would be issued by the President containing the outline of arrangement for the transfer of power. Mujib was to be the Prime Minister with equal number of ministers from each wing. Mujib expressed satisfaction with the arrangement.

Yahya then sent a telegram to Bhutto to invite him to Dhaka, apparently to get his concurrence to the proposed deal and lend weight to the proceedings. Upon his arrival in Dhaka on 21 March Yahya briefed him on developments. The next day Yahya had another meeting with Bhutto and Mujib. Following their meeting Mujib and Bhutto went outside so that no one could hear their conversation. In his book *The Great Challenge,* published during the liberation war, Bhutto stated that Mujib had cautioned him against the military and told him not to trust them: If they destroyed him first, they would also destroy Bhutto later.

In the retelling of the story to the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci after the liberation war, Bhutto asserted that Mujib had suggested to him that Bhutto must take West Pakistan for himself, while he (Mujib)—East Pakistan and that he had set up everything for a secret meeting. Bhutto told Mujib that "he didn't like the business" and that "he hadn't come like a thief under a banana tree and in the dark."[4] The problem with the story is that it was precisely Bhutto who had spoken about "*Idhar ham, Udhar Tum*" (We here, you there) at a large PPP rally in Karachi only a week before as a way out of the political impasse in Pakistan.[5]

If Mujib, by warning Bhutto about the danger of courting the military, was trying to drive a wedge between Yahya and Bhutto, he did not succeed. At this stage Mujib and his colleagues were so immersed in the details of the negotiations that they lost sight of the bigger picture of what was happening outside the conference room. They ignored signs of the gathering storm, even though there were plenty of straws in the wind to indicate that military preparations were continuing for a possible crackdown. For instance. On 19 March, the very day Mujib expressed optimism about the success of negotiations to Farman Ali there was a serious clash between West Pakistani troops who had been sent to disarm an EPR contingent guarding the ordnance factory at Joydevpur near Dhaka and the local people siding with the Bengali *jawans*. The troops opened fire on them killing more than a hundred people and injuring many more. This incident should have rung alarm bells within the Awami League leadership: Why did the soldiers who were supposed to be confined to the barracks venture out to secure control of the only ordnance factory in East Pakistan? If Yahya was conducting the negotiations in good faith why should he have sanctioned such a provocative action? Mujib contented himself with verbal protests against this action while negotiations were in progress. It was desirable, he urged, that there should be political solution and no bloodshed. Yahya's excuse was that the movement of army supplies must continue.[6]

There was a dearth of military expertise in the Awami League to counter these specious arguments put forward by Yahya. Osmani was the only senior Awami Leaguer with military background. He had joined the Awami League as a latecomer after having been retired against his will, after an undistinguished career in the Army. It should have been his job to keep a sharp eye on the military scene in East Pakistan and maintain contacts with the Bengali officers in the cantonments, but he was not equal to the task.

His antenna picked up nothing significant to alarm him, even though planes were flying round the clock bringing in military personnel in civilian dress to Dhaka from West Pakistan. Defensive sites had been built within and around the airport Dhaka. The entire area bristled with machine gun nests and anti-aircraft artillery. Trenches had been dug and strands of barbed wire were placed around the perimeter to ward off any assault from outside.[7]

Among those who arrived in Dhaka at this time were high-ranking Pakistani generals, including General Hamid, the Deputy C.-in-C. of the Pakistan Army. They toured by helicopter the various cantonments to

co-ordinate arrangements for the implementation of the "Operation Searchlight"—the code-name for the military crackdown scheduled for the night of 25 March. Bengali officers were excluded from their discussions. Bengali officers and men in the East Bengal Regiment as well as in the EPR were broken up into smaller units to make the task of disarming them easier. All these activities could not escape their attention and there was a feeling of unease among them. In order to carry out this operation successfully it was necessary for the Yahya regime to engage in a major deception effort to mislead the Awami League leadership and the people of East Pakistan. On 22 March, Dhaka Radio reported that President Yahya Khan and Sheikh Mujib "have reached a compromise formula to end the country's political crisis."

The next day, 23 March, there was a sense of euphoria among the citizenry, since the emancipation of the Bengali people from the West Pakistani dominance seemed to be imminent. 23 March had been hitherto celebrated as Republic Day in Pakistan. Bhashani promptly dubbed it Independence Day. The day started with a big rally organised by the Students League at the Paltan Maidan. After the rally student leaders led a procession to Mujib's residence where they hoisted the Bangladesh flag. Student-led crowds toured the city hauling down Pakistani flags from government buildings and replacing them with Bangladesh flags. All the foreign missions in Dhaka, with the exception of the Chinese Consulate, considered it prudent to fly the Bangladesh flag on this day.

While the people of Dhaka were celebrating, the popular mood in Chittagong was altogether different. The situation there was very tense. A supply ship, M.V. Swat, had just arrived in Chittagong, carrying not only military personnel, but a large quantity of arms and ammunition. M.R. Siddiqi was the President of the District Awami League in Chittagong at the time. In his capacity as the Chairman of the Awami League Sangram Parishad he urged the port workers not to clear the ship. The EPR, already in the militant mood under the command of Captain Rafiqul Islam, was then asked to force the workers at gun point to unload the deadly cargo. When the EPR *jawans* refused, seven of them were shot on the spot by the Army. Then the Army ordered the East Bengal Regiment to do the job. Brigadier Mazumdar, the senior-most Bengali officer in Chittagong, asked Siddiqi for advice, Siddiqi felt that a refusal by the East Bengal Regiment to obey orders would be tantamount to mutiny and lead to an open confrontation with the Army. He therefore drove straightaway to Dhaka to seek instructions from Mujib personally.

Siddiqi met Mujib on the same day, the 23rd, at his residence. Mujib said he was hopeful about a satisfactory conclusion of his dialogue with Yahya; he did not think there would be "war" so long as Yahya was President. Siddiqi said that the situation in Chittagong was akin to war and there were preparations for a full-scale attack there. Mujib asked him to hurry back to Chittagong to mobilise Bengali units in the Army, the EPR, and the police to defend Chittagong. When Siddiqi enquired as to when he should give "green signal" to them, Mujib was not sure. At this point Osmani was called in for his views. In Osmani's opinion the zero hour would be when the radio stopped broadcasting. When Siddiqi pointed out that power failure could also cause the radio broadcasting to stop, Osmani said that resistance should start when the Army made an effort to disarm Bengali servicemen. Mujib told Siddiqi that in the event of an attack he (Mujib) would go to Chittagong and join in the struggle. Siddiqi rushed back to Chittagong but it was too late. Mazumdar had already been taken to Dhaka by helicopter under some pretext and the Chittagong Cantonment placed under the command of a West Pakistani officer.[8]

Everything was now ready for the military operation to begin on the night of 25-26 March. Officially, the talks were still open and on the morning of the 24th, the Awami League negotiating team met with the Yahya team for another round of talks to finalise the draft proclamation. They met again in the evening to iron out minor details before it could be submitted to Mujib and Yahya the next morning. But the Yahya team persisted in their dilatory tactics and no conclusions were reached. General Peerzada suggested that a time for a further meeting need not be fixed and this could be done over the telephone. Tajuddin said that their team had exhaustively discussed everything and there was nothing more to discuss. Throughout the 25th, Kamal Hossain waited for the call but it never came.

On that fateful day Yahya's men had other pressing matters to take care of. A reconnaissance of target areas for the military onslaught was carried out unobtrusively by a select group from the Army in civilian clothes and vehicles. The President had to get out of Dhaka and reach Pakistan before the military strike. His plane was due to leave at 7 p.m. and every precaution, including deception measures, was taken to keep it a secret. But Wing Commander Khondakar could see from his office what was going on. He managed to warn Mujib. By this time Mujib had received warnings from other sources of the impending strike. But Mujib,

although pessimistic, had not abandoned all hope. In the evening while many of his colleagues and well-wishers had gathered in Mujib's house for consultations, Mujib anxiously enquired from Kamal Hossain whether he had received the promised telephone call. When he received a negative answer he must have finally realised that all his efforts to arrive at a peaceful political settlement with the Yahya regime had failed.

Although Mujib was hoping against hope for a negotiated settlement until the last moment, he had also reckoned with the possibility that the military junta could resort to force. He had therefore advised his son-in-law, Wazed Miah, to rent a house which could be used as a shelter for his family members. He gathered his family members around him to tell them that it was no longer possible for him to go elsewhere: "If they want to kill me, they will have to kill here in this house." His two daughters clung to him and cried uncontrollably.[9]

Mujib's decision to allow himself to be arrested in his house was entirely his own. His colleagues had almost unanimously advised him to lead the struggle from underground. The total success of the non-co-operation movement had ensured that he could have found any number of hiding places in the city. He rejected a suggestion that he should seek asylum in the residence of the Japanese Consul-General, behind Mujib's house.

To his well-wishers who advised him not to court arrest, he said: "If I leave my house, (Pakistani) raiders are going to massacre the people of Dhaka. I don't want my people to be killed on my account."[9] Death held no terror for him personally. But the thought that many innocent lives would be lost if he went underground probably led him to the conclusion that it would be better for him to be the sacrificial victim and accept, if need be, martyrdom.

Was he also afraid that in the event of unbridled terrorism unleashed by the military while searching for him from house to house, the initiative for active resistance would be taken over by the better-prepared, but irresponsible extremist elements, plunging East Bengal into anarchy? Or did he believe that his arrest would be followed by another mass upsurge, similar or bigger than that of 1969, leaving Yahya with no option but to accede to his demands?

We cannot be certain about the interplay of complex motives that guided his action. Given his soft sentimental nature, it seems plausible that humanitarian motives primarily influenced his decision to surrender.

After his capture by the military a message was sent in his name to the Awami League in Chittagong to broadcast an appeal to the world and to

the people "for help in our struggle. Resist by all means." It has not been established whether the message was authorised by him or whether it was sent by someone else without his knowledge.

Mujib's decision to court arrest was taken in the final hours of the 25th. He had no time apparently to give precise instructions to his lieutenants and colleagues except to advise them to flee. Mujib had been informally given total power by the Awami league to deal with the crisis. Yet he did not nominate anyone to act on his behalf as his deputy during his absence.

It was Mujib himself who had called upon all Bengalis to turn their homes into fortresses. Yet at this critical juncture he was the first Bengali to open his gate to the enemy. However noble his motive, his absence from the scene of action was to have grave consequences in the months ahead for the liberation struggle. And in the long run, it impaired his ability to govern effectively the newly-independent country after its liberation.

Notes

1. Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p.52.
2. Rafi Raza, *Bhutto and Pakistan 1967-1977*, p.70.
3. Ibid, p.71.
4. Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History*, Houghton Miffin, Boston, 1976, p.192.
5. Kamal Hossain's Account in Vol. XV of *Muktijuddher Itihas*, Dhaka, pp.268-278.
6. A.W. Bhuiyan, *Emergence of Bangladesh,* Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p.178.
7. M.R. Siddiqi's account in Vol. XV of *Muktijuddher Itihas*, Dhaka, pp.181-84.
8. M.A. Wazed Miah, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibke*, *Ghire Kichhu Ghotona O Bangladesh*, p.77.
9. Amirul Islam, *Muktijuddher Smriti,* Kagoj Prokashona, Dhaka, 1991, p.11.

PART III

PAKISTAN-INDIA-BANGLADESH

There is general agreement that, by virtue of its personal and territorial supremacy, a state can treat its own nationals according to discretion. But there is a substantial body of opinion and of practice in support of the view that there are limits to that discretion and that when a state renders itself guilty of cruelties against and persecution of its nationals in such a way as to deny their fundamental human rights and to shock the conscience of mankind, intervention in the interest of humanity is legally permissible.

F.L. Oppenheim, *International Law, A Treatise*
7th Edition, H. Lauterpacht, Editor, London, 1948-52, p. 279.

"*...khoon ke dhabbe dhoolenge kitni barsato ki baad!*"
(How many monsoons will it take to wash away the blood stains)

Extract from a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Pakistani poet,
during his visit to Bangladesh in 1974.

32

OPERATION SEARCHLIGHT

On the evening of 25 March 1971 Dhaka Cantonment was a hive of intense activity as West Pakistani troops were getting ready to pounce on the targets assigned to them by the Operation Searchlight. They had been instructed to wait until midnight. By that time the plane carrying Yahya would be safely within the air space of West Pakistan. Operations were scheduled to commence simultaneously in all the cantonments in East Pakistan. In Dhaka the troops were expected to be in their target areas an hour after midnight. But the local commander, anticipating delays caused by makeshift roadblocks erected by the people in major arteries to impede troop movements, sought permission to "advance the H-hour." Permission was granted and the troops led by tanks and armoured personnel carriers started to move out of the cantonment shortly before midnight. Key points like the telephone exchange and radio and television stations were occupied by troops already in the city.[1]

The hammer-blows of the tank-led forces fell on four main targets: the police lines at Rajar Bagh, the East Pakistan Rifles barracks at Peelkhana, the Dhaka University campus and the slums of old Dhaka. The police and the EPR were natural targets, since they were the only organised Bengali forces capable of offering armed resistance against the Army. Indeed, they put up a spirited fight but they were overwhelmed by the superior weaponry of the Army. As for the Dhaka University, it had always been the principal centre of agitation against the government since the language movement and its students and faculty members had to be taught a lesson they would never forget. The university had been closed during the civil disobedience and its hostels were only partially occupied. The troops were able to gun down many students who were unable to escape or hide. They also rampaged through the housing complex of the faculty and killed or wounded some members of the university teaching staff and terrorised the rest. As regards the slum dwellers, they were targeted presumably because they had eagerly participated in political movements and demonstrations against the military rule, especially since 1969. Slums were set on fire by flame throwers and the inhabitants fleeing from the blaze were shot.

The most important single target of the Army was the person of Sheikh Mujib. After all, he was the embodiment of Bengali nationalism. If the nationalist movement could be deprived of his leadership, the movement would suffer a blow from which it would probably never recover. There was no other person in the Awami League or outside who had the organising skill and charisma to give it an effective leadership. The Army did not want to kill him, for to do so would give him an aura of martyrdom. A specially selected commando unit was given the task of capturing him alive. They reached Mujib's house shortly after 1 a.m., 26 March. They made their presence felt by firing a rocket launcher to remove an obstruction blocking their path to Mujib's house. When they reached their destination they found Mujib ready for his arrest with a packed suitcase. Mujib's capture could have been carried out quite peacefully, but the commandos could not resist the temptation to shoot several *darwans* of neighbouring houses. Dhaka was already aglow with houses on fire and plumes of smoke rising from the ruins. Mujib looked at the skyline and asked the commanding officer, "Was it necessary to do all this?" He replied, "Sir, I am only carrying out orders."[2]

The only other individual target was Lieutenant-Commander Moazzem, Accused No.2 in the Agartala Conspiracy Trial. He was a harmless person after the trial and his attempt to float a political party had failed. He had no connection with Mujib, who distrusted and ignored him. But in the eyes of the military he was a dangerous man who had plotted to separate East Pakistan by inciting a mutiny among Bengali servicemen. He was killed in his house by a squad sent to liquidate him.

In his book *Witness to Surrender*, Siddiq Salik, Public Relations Officer of the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan during 1971, has given a text of the Operation Searchlight. The actual course and the objectives of the military action on the night of 25-26 March suggest that it was published either as deliberate disinformation, or else, it was replaced by a revised version which remains a secret. It has been stated in the text provided by Siddiq Salik that Awami League leaders were to be arrested. In fact, no attempt was made to arrest any of them, with the exception of Mujib. "Other leaders," meaning probably student leaders, were also to be arrested according to this document but none of them were detained. Lieutenant-Commander Moazzem's name was not mentioned in it, yet his killing was carried out as a matter of priority, making him the first political martyr in 1971. As regards Hindus, it states that during day time there was to be "house to house search of Hindu houses in old Dhaka" for collection of data. Instead, the Hindu slum area of Sankharipatti in old Dhaka, inhabited by



Photo 12: Under arrest at a West Pakistani airport on his way to a jail in the Panjab (March, 1971)

generations of skilled artisans, was razed to the ground, and its dwellers butchered. In the university campus, Hindu professors and students were singled out for massacre. There, even the owner of a tea shop, Madhu, was killed with members of his extended family, simply because they were Hindus.

Hindus who were deliberately executed included some of East Pakistan's prominent businessmen, philanthropists and politicians. One victim was J.C. Ghosh, a chemist, who became a millionaire by manufacturing Ayurvedic medicine. Another victim was Ranada Prasad Saha, a rich philanthropist, who was taken away from his home, along with his son, and "disappeared" in military custody. In Comilla, Dhirendranath Dutta, a politician of great moral courage, who had first raised the question of recognising Bengali as an official language, also "disapeared" after he was arrested by the Army.

By daybreak, Pakistani soldiers on patrol and forlorn dogs were the only living creatures to be seen in the streets of Dhaka. Pakistan Army had succeeded in imposing a peace of the graveyard on the city with practically no opposition.

The subjugation of Chittagong, however, would prove to be no easy matter. Tension had hung over Chittagong for the past several days. The mood of the local Awami League leaders darkened as reports began to arrive on the twentyfifth that the talks had stalled and that the Army was getting ready to strike. At 8:30 p.m. local time Awami League leaders held a meeting at the house of Siddiqui to review the situation and decide on their course of action. A message was conveyed to Captain Rafiqul Islam of the EPR "to take appropriate action."[3] He was in favour of a pre-emptive strike against the Pakistani force in and around the city while they were still relatively weak. He had even discussed this idea on the previous day with two senior Bengali officers, Lt. Col. M.R. Chaudhury of the East Bengal Regimental Centre (EBRC) and Major Ziaur Rahman of the 8 East Bengal Regiment. Not only did they refuse to join him but asked him to "stop your men from taking immediate action."[4]

On receiving encouragement from the District Awami League, Rafique promptly began arresting West Pakistanis, mostly non-commissioned officers, in the EPR lines and secured the armoury. While Rafique was boldly confronting Pakistani troops, Zia was on his way to the port to unload arms and ammunition from M.V. Swat and bring them to the cantonment. While Zia was loyally doing his duty, Pakistani troops suddenly attacked Bengali soldiers of the East Bengal Regimental Centre (EBRC). It was 11:30 p.m. and most of them were in bed. Taken by surprise, many of them were killed, including M.R. Chaudhury, the Commanding Officer. Some were, however, able to escape to the EBR barracks. Captain Khalikuzzaman, having heard of the incident, rushed to Zia to warn him that if he went to the jetty, as ordered, his own life would be in danger. Zia immediately returned to his regiment which was composed almost entirely of Bengali soldiers and officers. Escapees from the EBRC barracks had requested the EBR troops to come to the aid of surviving EBRC men and their families. But Zia, after consulting with his officers, decided that it would be too risky to do so. The troops under Zia's command then killed the Pakistani officers of the regiment and moved out of their barracks to Patiya, and later to Kalurghat across the river. Zia also ordered some EPR troops to come with him to Kalurghat, leaving Rafique to fight the Pakistanis alone.[5] An opportunity to inflict a crushing defeat on Pakistani troops clinging on to their strong points in Chittagong was thus lost.

The unleashing of the full force of the Eastern Command against the Bengali majority of Pakistan seeking a large measure of autonomy of their homeland destroyed the last hope of a united Pakistan. An independent Bangladesh was a dream of many Bengalis before the night of 25-26 March; the bloodbath of that night would make it a reality.

Notes

1. Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, pp.71-73.
2. This is based on what I was told by a Bengali businessmen who knew the Commanding Officer socially and gave him an account of Mujib's arrest.
3. Rafiqul Islam, *A Tale of Millions,* Ananya, Dhaka, 1995, p.101.
4. Ibid, p.101.
5. Ibid, pp.119-121.

33

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Early in the morning of 26 March, Begum M. R. Siddiqi was woken up by an urgent telephone call from Moinul Alam, the *Ittefaq* correspondent in Chittagong. He gave her the following message from Bangabandhu received through wireless operators of Chittagong:

> Message to the people of Bangladesh and to the people of the world. Rajarbagh police camp and Peelkhana EPR suddenly attacked by Pak Army at 2400 hours. Thousands of people killed. Fierce fighting going on. Appeal to the world for help in freedom struggle. Resist by all means. May Allah be with you. Joi Bangla.

The *Sangram Parishad* (Council of Struggle), chaired by M.R. Siddiqi, decided to announce the message over the radio. The Chittagong radio station at Agrabad could not be used for this purpose, since Pakistan troops were present in strength in the area. There was, however, a relay transmitter at Kalurghat. It had a capacity of ten kilowatts and its range was extremely limited. Still, it was better than nothing and so it was decided to make use of this facility. The Bengali staff of Radio Pakistan were collected and sent to Kalurghat for this purpose. The message was read out by M.A. Hannan, General Secretary of the District Awami League at 2:30 p.m. It became known as the Declaration of Independence of Bangladesh. Because of this the Government of Bangladesh later decided to observe 26 March as the National Day.[1]

When Major Zia arrived afterwards with his troops at Kalurghat he was requested by some Awami League leaders to broadcast a message on behalf of the fighting forces. The next day, the 27th, he went on the air to call upon the people to fight the Pakistani Army as the President of Bangladesh. A.K. Khan, the leading Bengali industrialist and an elder statesman, was shocked to hear this announcement in his home in Chittagong. He pointed out to Siddiqi, his son-in-law, that Zia's claim to be the head of state would be regarded as an army coup and the liberation movement would lose support nationally and internationally. Awami League leaders then went to Zia to tell him that his unauthorised speech had created confusion and asked him to read out a text prepared by A.K. Khan to limit

the damage he had caused. In his second speech Zia made it clear that he was speaking on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the nation.[2]

Kalurghat station continued to operate until the afternoon of 30 March when it was put out of action by an enemy air raid. It had served an essential function by keeping the morale high among the fighting men and the civil population. Because of its extremely limited range very few people outside Chittagong could hear it. It was not heard by foreign correspondents who had gone to Dhaka to cover the political crisis. For 48 hours after the commencement of the crackdown they had been kept confined in the Intercontinental Hotel to prevent the world from knowing what was going on in the eastern region.[3]

It was only after the collapse of resistance in Chittagong and the arrival of political leaders and retreating Bengali troops in Agartala that the full story of what had happened in Chittagong became generally known. Chittagong was not the only place where there was stiff resistance against Pakistanis. In the Kusthia-Jessore area, for instance, last-ditch resistance continued until 12 April and in North Bengal until the middle of April. It took Pakistani troops, fanning out in all directions from their cantonments, another week to subdue opposition by resistance fighters in other areas, notably around Sylhet. By the third week of the month the Pakistan Army had secured control of all towns.

Let us now turn to see what the politicians were doing in the wake of the crackdown. In the absence of any clear directive from Mujib, they felt bereft and were left to their own devices. Most of them went to their homes to await developments. Since a curfew had been imposed to coincide with the military action, they could have been picked up easily from their houses. But the Army did not bother to do so, perhaps because the only people they considered dangerous were armed Bengalis in the forces. As for the student leaders who had been pressing Mujib since early March to declare independence, the military had correctly gauged that they were primarily agitators, not revolutionaries, and therefore posed no threat to their pacification efforts by brute force.[4]

The first prominent Awami Leaguer to go underground was Tajuddin. Accompanied by Barrister Amirul Islam, he proceeded towards the Indian border via Kusthia. Travelling by foot much of the time, they managed to reach an outpost of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) near Chuadanga on 30 March. The BSF border checkposts had been instructed to be on the look-out for Bengali political leaders seeking safety and shelter. The

Inspector General of the BSF, Golak Mazumder, himself came to welcome them to India.[5]

One of the first things Tajuddin wanted to do after arriving in Calcutta was to get in touch with Chittaranjan Sutar. He was a Hindu Awami Leaguer from Barisal who had been asked by Mujib in the late 1960's to settle in Calcutta to maintain contact with the Indian authorities in case any help was needed from them. He was living in Bhowanipur area of Calcutta and Tajuddin had memorised his address, instead of writing it down, for security reasons. Tajuddin mentioned the address of Chittaranjan as 26 Prasad Road to Surajit Chattapadhya, a BSF officer, who was looking after him. But there was no road called Prasad Road in Calcutta. Chittaranjan Sutar's name was not listed in the telephone directory, because he had changed his name to Bhujanga Bhushan Roy. The street where Chittaranjan Sutar was living had been named after Dr. Rajendra Prasad, a former President of India, and was called Rajendra Road, not Prasad Road. Chittaranjan had only links with the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the intelligence agency of the Government of India. At this stage there was practically no co-ordination between the RAW and the BSF. So the idea of contacting RAW did not occur to Chattapadhya. Thus Tajuddin could not meet Chittaranjan.[6]

Since Tajuddin was the first member of the Awami League High Command to reach India, it was considered desirable that he should meet Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Travelling under assumed names, Tajuddin and Amirul Islam were put aboard a Russian-made Antonov cargo aircraft in great secrecy in the evening of 1 April. It was only after reaching New Delhi that Tajuddin learned that Siddiqi was already in town. After the collapse of resistance in Chittagong he had gone to Agartala to revive the resistance movement with Indian help. While he was in Agartala an appointment had been made for him to meet Indira Gandhi in New Delhi. Now that Tajuddin was also present in New Delhi, Siddiqi requested him to meet the Indian Prime Minister on behalf of the Awami League. After all, Tajuddin had acted as Mujib's right-hand man during the critical month of March and was in a far better position to provide information and present the case of the Awami League to the Indian leader. It was fortunate for Tajuddin that Siddiqi and his companions were at hand to acquaint him with developments in Chittagong and some other parts of Bangladesh.

Tajuddin's meeting with the Indian Prime Minister was to take place two days later, 3 April. The question that bothered him most was the

capacity in which he would be meeting the Indian leader. He did not know for certain whether Mujib had been arrested; he did not know where the other members of the AL High Command were. He was clear in his own mind that he must project the image of Sheikh Mujib in a positive light. He would therefore assert that Mujib was not only alive and well but was providing active leadership to his followers from his hiding-place within Bangladesh itself.[7]

After welcoming Tajuddin at her official residence, the first question that Indira Gandhi asked was, "How is Sheikh Mujib? Is he all right?" Tajuddin replied that he had not met Bangabandhu since the twenty-fifth of March but he was sure that he was continuing to provide leadership for the nation. Indeed, it was at his instructions that he was acting. The struggle for the liberation of Bangladesh had started and would continue until its independence had been achieved. Meanwhile arms and ammunition would be needed by freedom fighters; they would also need training in their use. Tajuddin earnestly requested Indira Gandhi to give assistance in this regard. He also requested Indian assistance for feeding and taking care of the huge inflow of Bengali refugees to India to escape Pakistani repression.[8]

Tajuddin discussed with Amirul Islam and others the next steps to be taken. Considering the circumstances, it was felt that a provisional government of Bangladesh should be formed, as it would strengthen Tajuddin's hands if he spoke to Indian authorities in his capacity as the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. An official seal of the new government was sketched and approved. A speech was drafted for the new Prime Minister to be recorded and broadcast over the Swadhin Bangladesh Betar Kendra.[9]

Shortly after this Indira Gandhi received Tajuddin for the second time. She informed him that Sheikh Mujib had been arrested and flown to West Pakistan, news of which had not yet been announced by Pakistan. Tajuddin told her that their side was considering the formation of a provisional government and requested her to accord recognition to it. Indira Gandhi was non-committal on the question of recognition but indicated that the provisional government would be allowed to function on Indian territory as if it were a government-in-exile. They also discussed the matter of establishing a transmitter near the border to broadcast information to the people of Bangladesh.[10]

Back in Calcutta on the 4th, Tajuddin faced a storm of criticism from the student leaders like Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni and Tofael Ahmed who

had arrived in Calcutta in the meanwhile. They had gone to Chittaranjan Sutar's house after their arrival and were irked to learn that Tajuddin had not contacted Chittaranjan before leaving for New Delhi to meet Indira Gandhi. Immediately after his return to Calcutta Tajuddin briefed the student leaders and newly arrived Awami League leaders like Kamruzzaman and Mizan Choudhury about his visit to New Delhi. Sheikh Moni blamed Tajuddin for failing to contact Chittaranjan and acting unilaterally without consulting other leaders when he declared himself to be the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. He vehemently opposed the idea of a provisional government. He argued in favour of a revolutionary council to conduct the liberation struggle. With the encouragement of Chittaranjan, a petition was sent by 42 signatories to persuade the Indian Prime Minister to stop Tajuddin from addressing the people of Bangladesh on the radio as the Prime Minister of the provisional government.

Tajuddin had foreseen the opposition he would encounter from unruly student leaders and factions within the Awami League. He had complained about his thankless task to Amirul Islam in New Delhi: "If only Bangabandhu had not left me alone to carry this burden. You have no idea of the internal situation in the Awami League."[11] But he was convinced that he was doing the right thing and would not be deterred from going ahead with his plans. His own preference was for a government of national unity where representatives from the NAP (Muzaffar group) and the Communist Party would be given ministerial responsibilities. But Awami Leaguers, having won a massive electoral victory were in no mood to share power with other political parties which had been unable to win any seats in the general election.

If a provisional government had to be formed around the High Command of the Awami League, it was essential that senior Awami Leaguers must be located as soon as possible. There was still no news about some of the veteran Awami Leaguers. So Tajuddin's next move was to go to Agartala by plane and en route try to pick them up from various border posts manned by the BSF. On 10 April, Tajuddin left Calcutta for Agartala accompanied by Amirul Islam, Sheikh Moni, Tofael Ahmed and Monsur Ali. While they stopped overnight at Siliguri, Tajuddin's pre-recorded address was broadcast from a clandestine radio station nearby. Moni was furious and threatened dire consequences if a revolutionary council was not set up instead of a provisional government.[12] Tajuddin's broadcast, however, had the effect of undercutting Moni's ambition to exercise his authority through a revolutionary council, and he

was left embittered but powerless for the time being. On the onward flight they picked up from a BSF border outpost near Mymensingh two prominent Awami Leaguers: Syed Nazrul Islam and Abdul Mannan. When they reached Agartala they found that Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed had managed to cross the border by disguising himself as a woman clad in a burkha (veil). Col. Osmani was also there, minus his trademark moustache. Mushtaque put forward his claim to be the head of government because of his seniority over Tajuddin. However, he was persuaded to accept the position of Foreign Minister after much haggling. It was agreed that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would be named President and in his absence Syed Nazrul Islam would be the Acting President. Tajuddin would remain the Prime Minister.

On the morning of 17 April, Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam and other Awami League leaders set out in a convoy of cars to one of the few remaining pockets of resistance on the soil of Bangladesh for a historic occasion: the inauguration of the Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh. Some 50 foreign journalists accompanied them to cover the solemn occasion for the world press. Amidst great rejoicing, it took place in a mango grove of a small village called Baidyanathtala in Meherpur subdivision of Kushtia district. It was aptly renamed "Mujibnagar." Syed Nazrul Islam was named as the Acting President and the Councel of Ministers was constituted as follows:

Prime Minister	:	Tajuddin Ahmed
Foreign Affairs	:	Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed
Home Affairs	:	A.H.M. Kamaruzzaman
Finance	:	Mansur Ali

Col. Osmani was appointed Chief of the Bangladesh Army.

The mango grove of "Mujibnagar" lies at a short distance away from the mango grove in Plassey, the scene of the British victory over the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Dowla, in the summer of 1757. Now, in the summer of 1971, another mango grove in the vicinity became the scene of the inauguration of the government of the sovereign state of Bangladesh, erasing the humiliation of two hundred years of alien rule.

Notes

1. M.R. Siddiqi's account in Vol. XV of *Muktijuddher Itihas*, Dhaka, 1991, p.183.
2. Ibid, pp.183-185.
3. David Loshak, in his book *Pakistan Crisis* (London: 1972) claims that after the first shots in the night of 25-26 March 1971, he heard the voice of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman faintly "on a wavelength close to that of Pakistan Radio ... the Sheikh proclaimed East Pakistan to be the People's Republic of Bangladesh." This assertion has not been corroborated by any other source, including the large contingent of foreign correspondents in Dhaka at that time. Even the Awami Leaguers who assert that Mujib sent a message to Chittagong that night by wireless do not claim that was a pre-recorded message in his own voice. The message that was broadcast in his name called upon the people to "resist" but contained no direct reference to the independence of Bangladesh.
4. Based on several accounts, including a conversation I had with a Pakistani staff member of the UN Secretariat who had a close relative serving in the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan in 1971.
5. Amirul Islam, *Muktijuddher Smriti*, pp.12-28.
6. Interview with Surajit Chattapadhya (BSF) on December 23, 1995.
7. Amirul Islam, op. cit, p.29.
8. Ibid, p.34.
9. Ibid, p.36.
10. Ibid, p.38.
11. Interview with Surajit Chattapadhya, see also Amirul Islam op. cit., p.46.
12. Amirul Islam, op. cit., pp.44-45.

34

MUKTI BAHINI

There were two distinct elements in the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Army) of Bangladesh; Bengali troops who had defected from the EPR and Pakistan Army and the resistance groups which had sprung up in the course of rebellion against Pakistani occupation. Col. Osmani, the C.-in-C. of the Mukti Bahini, had joined the Indian Army during the Second World War and had been much impressed by the Japanese method of warfare. The Japanese had employed their regular troops to fight enemy troops frontally while local guerrillas opposed to their colonial masters frequently harassed them from the rear. At a conference of Bengali military officers at Teliapara in Sylhet, one of the few pockets still held by the Mukti Bahini, Osmani advocated that the main fighting should be done by the regular troops of the Mukti Bahini and the guerrillas should be relegated to an auxiliary role. Major Khalid Mosharraf, who had received commando training in the Pakistan Army, favoured a different approach. He argued that Mukti Bahini as a whole should turn itself into a guerrilla force and engage in partisan warfare instead of wasting its strength in frontal attacks against the strongly entrenched and better equipped Pakistan Army. Only after a sustained guerrilla campaign had a paralysing effect on the Pakistan Army should the Mukti Bahini resort to conventional war. These two approaches were merged in a compromise paper known as the Teliapara Document.

The strategy of the liberation war, as spelled out in the Teliapara Document, was: First, a large guerrilla force should be trained in India and then infiltrated into East Bengal. Its task would be to engage in hit-and-run attacks against the enemy forces, destroy their communication lines and liquidate enemy collaborators. Second, regular units would be enlarged by raising new battalions and artillery batteries. Their immediate task would be to provide cover for guerrilla operations. Third, at a later stage the best fighters would be selected to form a regular force. Its main task would be to launch direct attacks on the Pakistan Army strongholds after guerrillas had cut off their logistical support.[1]

This strategy was approved by the Bangladesh provisional government and by the Indian Army. General B.N. Sarkar was designated by the Indian Army as its Chief Liaison Officer with the Mukti Bahini. He had his office in the Mukti Bahini headquarters at Theatre Road in Calcutta.

The provisional government was eager to train a guerrilla force of 100,000 and send them by batches to East Bengal as soon as possible. At this time there was practically no resistance by Awami League cadres in East Bengal. Almost all of them had sought shelter in India and those who had remained in East Bengal were demoralised and inactive. The only effective guerrilla activity that was causing some trouble for the Pakistani forces was in Tangail near Dhaka. It was organised by Kader Siddiki who had no connection with the Awami League or the provisional government at this stage. He had served in the Pakistani Army briefly as a non-commissioned officer and was a college student at the time of the crackdown. If the Awami League had to gain credibility in the eyes of the people it had to demonstrate its ability to put up resistance against Pakistani occupation. It would also serve to restore confidence among Awami League exiles in India which had reached a low point after reverses suffered in the weeks following the crackdown. There was no lack of volunteers among the thousands of young men eager to get into action. The Awami League did not want all and sundry to get military training and join the Mukti Bahini. They were determined to screen out leftists, who for years had denounced the Awami League as a bourgeois party, from this armed body. The Indian side heartily agreed with this view.

The task of selection was performed by the four student leaders—Sheikh Moni, Abdur Razzak, Tofael Ahmed and Sirajul Alam Khan—because they claimed to have been entrusted by Mujib in January with the responsibility for organising armed resistance against the Pakistani troops if negotiations failed. Their knowledge of irregular warfare against a conventional army armed with modern weapons was pitifully inadequate. They had not studied the texts of guerrilla warfare by its most successful practitioners like Mao Tse Tung or Che Guevara. In the two months before the military crackdown the only military training they could think of imparting to the students was practicing with outmoded rifles. They had not even considered the use of Molotov cocktails-home-made fire bombs made of easily available ingredients—which had been used so successfully against the German Army in the streets of Paris during the Second World War and against the Red Army in Budapest during the Hungarian uprising in 1956. In all likelihood these student leaders had not even heard of Molotov cocktails.[2] Not surprisingly, resistance against the

Pakistanis on the night of 25-26 March collapsed within hours whereas in other parts of East Bengal resistance continued for several weeks. However, they did a good job of screening out young men who were ideologically incompatible with the Awami League. It was relatively easy to screen out "undesirable" elements. The recruitment was done in the reception camps for the youth along the border. These camps were for the most part run by the Awami Leaguer MNA's who knew the background of nearly all the young men there.



Photo 13: Some posters published during the liberation war

These recruits were sent to training centres set up for them in West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya. At these places they were trained in the use of light automatic weapons, mortars and explosives. They were given training for five weeks only. Guerrilla leaders were trained for six weeks at a special camp in Bihar. The Indian Army would have liked them to receive a training for a minimum of three months but they had to give in to the Awami League insistence that they should make their presence felt in East Bengal quickly. This desire on the part of the Awami Leaguers in exile is easy to understand in the light of the situation within East Bengal. While the pro-Moscow Communists and fellow travellers had sought exile in India, many other leftists, especially the Maoists, had remained in East Bengal. They were in the habit of blindly following the line laid down by Beijing and they had received no direction or advice to follow. It would appear the Chinese Consulate in Dhaka studiously avoided any contact with the Maoist factions so as not to create any difficulty with their relations with the Pakistan Government.[3] The first indication of the Chinese position on

the crisis in Pakistan was given in a message from Chou En Lai to Yahya Khan on 13 April expressing appreciation of Pakistani leaders' "useful work to uphold the unification of Pakistan and to prevent it from moving towards a split." The principal Maoist party, the East Pakistan Communist Party, with their "Yes-Sir" mentality, as Badruddin Umar characterised it, described the conflict in East Bengal as akin to a fight between two dogs, which did not deserve their support for either party. There were however other independent-thinking leftists who saw little advantage in passively accepting the presence of a brutal occupation army on the soil of East Bengal and advocated armed resistance. Their point of view was eloquently expressed by Tariq Ali, a Pakistani radical long active in British left-wing circles. During a fact-finding mission to Calcutta in the third week of May, he told a British reporter, Peter Hazelhurst:

> The revolutionary movement has a big opportunity in Bengal and if we can capitalise on it, we should soon make tremendous headway. This is a heaven-sent opportunity which we should not miss. What I see in the future is the distinct possibility of India and Pakistan disintegrating and Bengal is the spark.[4]

It was in the interest of both Bangladesh and India to deprive Tariq Ali and his like of their "big opportunity." So the first batch of hastily-trained guerrillas were sent into East Bengal in late May or early June. They did not operate far from their sanctuary across the border. Even with this limitation they were able to harass Pakistani soldiers, disrupt communications by blowing up culverts, and inflict some casualties on collaborators. This first phase of guerrilla activity lasted for about two months.

The second phase, in August and September, was marked by more aggressive action by the guerrillas. They were better led and better prepared. Their exploits were no longer restricted to border areas but were extended right up to Dhaka. But at the same time there were some disturbing aspects of the guerrilla warfare which were beginning to come to light. In an assessment of the Mukti Bahini operations, Col. Osmani, prepared in late September, he observed that the selection of the guerrillas had been unsatisfactory: "As a result there are large number of people who joined only to have means of livelihood, or to get arms for anti-social activities or for self-protection." These so-called guerrillas were not weeded out or disciplined because they enjoyed the protection of the student leaders or the Awami League MNA's who had selected them. After the liberation they became a source of trouble for the authorities and for the Bengali society as a whole.

Osmani had placed high hopes on his "golden boys" as he used to call the freedom fighters. His disappointment with some of these boys for their lack of devotion to the high ideals of the freedom struggle was evident in his assessment. Yet, he was powerless to take remedial measures. One reason for the dilution of quality of the Mukti Bahini was the siphoning off of the more promising youth to form a parallel force: Mujib Bahini. This was a product of the underhand maneuvers of Sheikh Moni. Since his arrival in India Sheikh Moni had developed a good working relationship with RAW, the Indian intelligence service, through Chittaranjan Sutar. It was Moni who persuaded Kaw, the RAW chief, that it would be a good thing to have a separate force outside the control of the provisional government. The argument that he put forward in favour of a separate force can be summed up as follows: If the liberation struggle became a prolonged affair, the influence of the radical elements would become more pronounced, perhaps within the Mukti Bahini itself. There was no certainty that the present leadership of the Awami League, disunited and faction-ridden, would be able to control the turmoil and chaos that could easily develop in post-liberation Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujib had nominated Sheikh Moni and his associates to create an armed force. India was therefore morally bound to help him to establish this force, which would be ready to fight evil-doers and restore order. Sheikh Moni's arguments fell on receptive ears, for RAW was deeply concerned with the insurrection of Naxalites, named after Naxalbari in the foothills of the Himalayas, close to the strategic corridor that links Assam with the rest of India. This group of fanatical Maoists had not been content to create mayhem in this area, but had extended their activities to Calcutta and attempted to paralyse its economic life. If a similar insurrection were to spread to North Bengal, the rear of the Indian Army facing China would not be secure. Kaw, a member of the inner circle advising Indira Gandhi on Bangladesh matters, sold the idea to his government that Mujib Bahini could be a useful instrument to check the radical elements in Bangladesh, especially Maoists.

The decision to raise the Mujib Bahini was not communicated to Tajuddin or Osmani. Tajuddin might have had some inkling about it but Osmani was totally ignorant. Major General (Retd.) Uban of the Indian Army, who had overseen the formation of guerrilla groups of Tibetan refugees, was put in charge of training the Mujib Bahini. Their training commenced in June near Dehra Dun. Their camp was adjacent to another camp where Mukti Bahini recruits were being trained. One day recruits belonging to these two groups became involved in a clash which turned

ugly and some of them suffered severe injuries. When the news of this incident reached Osmani in Calcutta, he flew into a rage. He cancelled his letter of authorisation to the four student leaders to recruit volunteers for the Mukti Bahini and threatened to resign. Tajuddin, despite his reputation for equable temperament, also bristled at this egregious undermining of the authority of his provisional government. He met D.P. Dhar in early August to register his protest. By then Mujib Bahini was a fait accompli. However some form of modus vivendi was worked out and Osmani, still fuming, withdrew his letter of resignation. Mujib Bahini did not play any active role in the liberation war. It was kept as a force-in-being for possible use after the liberation.[5]

If the record of the Mukti Bahini was spotty it was due in large measure to the recruitment policy in which the single most important criterion was political reliability. Since the selection was done by the student leaders in conjunction with Awami League MNA's, there was a certain amount of cronyism and favouritism. This was not the case with the naval wing of the Mukti Bahini. The core of the naval wing was composed of eight Bengali submariners who had escaped from the French naval base in Toulon on the Mediterranean where they were undergoing training under the watchful eyes of Pakistanis. They were joined by some naval ratings who had come to India after the crackdown. But the bulk of the naval wing consisted of volunteers from the BSF youth camp at Harina. Several hundred young men were identified as suitable material because of their excellent physique, educational background and ability to swim. They were given a general idea of their task, which was to sabotage shipping in the ports of East Bengal. Because of the "suicidal" nature of the job, they were told that they were free to leave if they wanted to. Very few did and they were kept in isolation for the rest of the liberation war so as not to jeopardise their highly secret operation. It was aptly code-named Operation Jackpot, for it was expected to yield rich dividends.

They were given an extremely rigorous training for three months near Plassey (Palashi in Bengali) in Murshidabad on the banks of the Bhaghirathi. At the end of July they were ready for action. Both Tajuddin and Osmani visited them during their training to stress the importance of their mission.[6]

Operation Jackpot was a highly complex undertaking. It was decided that the crippling of shipping should be carried out simultaneously with clockwork precision at various ports so that it should have the maximum impact on the Pakistanis and on the world opinion. The naval commandos were secreted into East Bengal by different routes and reached their assembly points before 14 August. On that day they received their final

signal for the start of the operation. The signal was a devotional song by Tagore broadcast from the Calcutta radio station: *Ami tomae joto shunie chhilem gan, tar bodole ami chaini kono dan* (I did not ask for any reward for all the songs I sang for you).[7]

Shortly after midnight the commandos swam up to ships anchored in the ports of Chittagong, Mangla and Chandpur and attached limpet mines timed to explode after they were out of harm's way. In the explosions that followed some ships were sunk, others severely damaged. Pakistanis were stunned by this new dimension of the guerrilla war for which they were not fully prepared. Tikka Khan flew down to Chittagong to inspect personally the damage done to the ships.

In the course of the liberation war these commandos, together with a Mukti Bahini gunboat, sank or damaged 15 Pakistani ships, 11 coasters, 7 gunboats, 11 barges and 19 river craft. "These were the most significant achievements of the Mukti Bahini", writes Lt. Gen. J.F.R. Jacob in his account of the liberation war.[8] Regrettably the naval commandos have remained unsung heroes of the liberation war in Bangladesh itself.

The exploits of the naval commandos lifted the spirits of Mukti Bahini guerrillas. Until mid-August their activities had been rather limited and the Pakistanis could afford to treat them as mere pin-pricks. To counter the guerrillas the Pakistanis had created a paramilitary force of Razakars who bore the brunt of guerrilla action while the Pakistanis remained relatively unmolested. The remarkable achievements of the naval commandos helped to galvanise the Mukti Bahini freedom fighters and they became more confident and aggressive. From October onwards the level of their activities, as well as those of independently operating resistance groups, began to show a marked increase. They ambushed Pakistani troop convoys, attacked vital installations and assassinated puppet political leaders and increased pressure on Pakistani outposts all along the border, taking advantage of their safe haven on the other side of the border.

Notes

1. Talukdar Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and its Aftermath*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2003, pp.107-110.
2. Based on conversations with several students of the Dhaka University during the period in question.
3. Badruddin Umar, *Ekattarer Swaddhinata Juddhe Bangladeshe Communistder Rajanitik Bhumika*, Jatiya Grantha Prokashani, Dhaka, 1996, pp.10-11.

4. *The Times*, May 24, 1971.
5. Information about the formation of the Mujib Bahini was provided to me by several people, including S. Chattopadhay in Calcutta and A.K. Roy in New Delhi. For a perspective from the Bangladesh side, see Amirul Islam, *Muktijuddher Smriti*, Kagoj Prakashana, Dhaka, 1991, pp.65-66 and Moidul Hasan, *Muldhara '71*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 1986, pp.77-78.
6. Md. Khalilur Rahman, *Muktijuddho O Naubahini*, Dhaka, 1997.
7. Interview with A.K. Ray.
8. Lt. Gen. JFR Jacob, *Surrender at Dhaka: Birth of a Nation*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, pp.91-92.

35

IMPACT ON INDIA

They came in waves, the refugees from East Pakistan. The first wave of refugees were political leaders, members of the East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles, professionals and government servants who had taken part in the resistance. The second wave of refugees were mostly ordinary people trying to escape the atrocities of the marauding Pakistani troops in the strife-torn areas. As they gradually established control of practically the entire territory of East Bengal, the composition of the refugees underwent a radical change. The third wave of refugees from mid-April onwards were overwhelmingly Hindus.

When the Pakistani forces began to consolidate their hold on the occupied territory they instituted a deliberate campaign of getting rid of the Hindu community as a whole once and for all. Hindus were marked out for special treatment because of the prevalent belief in the governing classes of Pakistan that they had been responsible for fomenting Bengali nationalism among gullible Muslims since the language movement. The officer corps trained in the cadet schools and the military academy had been indoctrinated that India was Pakistan's mortal enemy and Hindus in East Pakistan were "Indian agents." Given their view of the Hindu role in shaping the culture and the political thinking of Bengalis in East Pakistan, it is not altogether surprising that the military junta should feel that the current crisis had provided them with an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to solve the Hindu problem by brute application of force. Faced with the choice of living in constant dread of massacre or emigration, Hindus would no doubt prefer the latter course. India's already fragile economy would thus be burdened with a huge load of refugees. A collateral benefit of the purge of Hindus would be the downsizing of the Bengali population of the eastern wing, bringing it to rough parity with that of western wing. If the persecution of Hindus in East Pakistan should touch off communual violence against Muslims in India, so much the better. For the influx of Indian Muslims affected by the riots would help to dilute the strength of Bengali nationalists. The loyalty of the incoming Indian Muslims to the central government would be assured by the distribution to them of lands

and shops belonging to the departing Hindus. The attempt to turn a country into a "land of the pure" had not been practised on such a scale since Hiler's attempted "final solution" of the Jewish question.

Generally speaking, the major Indian newspapers, mostly owned by business magnates, were sympathetic to the plight of the refugees but favoured an attitude of non-involvement to avoid worsening the situation.[1] Encouraged by the published opinion, as distinguished from the public opinion, Yahya must have thought it reasonable to assume that the Indian government would exercise restraint. Yahya was wrong.

As the influx dramatically increased from 119,566 during the week ending on 17 April to 536,308 in the following week, the Indian Cabinet met in New Delhi to consider the scope of the problem and how to solve it.

At the Cabinet meeting on the morning of 25 April, General Manekshaw, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, was also summoned. Mrs. Gandhi was not in the best of tempers.

"Do you know what is happening in East Pakistan?", she asked.

"Yes, there are killings," Manekshaw replied.

"I have telegrams from the Chief Ministers of Tripura, Manipur, Assam, Bengal. Refugees are pouring in. You must stop them. If necessary, move into East Pakistan but stop them."

"You know that means war."

"I don't mind if it's war," said Mrs. Gandhi.

The General did not want to plunge in and he gave his reasons. Large contingents of troops were already tied down in West Bengal to check the Naxalites. It would take him at least one and a half months to assemble forces for combat and by that time the monsoons would break. Rivers would swell restricting troop movements to roads and the Air Force would not be able to operate. Manekshaw pointed out that it was harvest time in the Punjab and Haryana. Troop movements would cause difficulties for food production and transportation and there could be famine. Referring to the danger that China could pose, he asked, "If the Chinese give us an ultimatum, what do we do?"[2]

In fact, the Chinese Premier Chou En Lai had sent a letter of support to President Yahya Khan less than a fortnight ago, the concluding paragraph of which could have ominous significance:

> The Chinese Government holds that what is happening in Pakistan at present is purely an internal affair of Pakistan, which can only be settled by the Pakistani people themselves and which brooks no foreign interference whatsoever. Your Excellency may rest assured that should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese Government and people will, as always, firmly support the Pakistan Government in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence.

Although the Chinese message was couched in broad terms, the possibility of Chinese intervention could not be dismissed, especially in summer and the rainy season when the Himalayan passes are open. Mrs. Gandhi deferred to the expert judgement of Manekshaw. But she remained firm in her determination to help the liberation struggle in Bangladesh to end in a quick victory. The Finance Secretary assured her that even in the event of the Americans going against India, the country would be able to sustain itself for the next five or six months; for the first time India had a thousand crores in foreign exchange reserves and ample foodgrains in the granary.

Indira Gandhi appointed an advisory group consisting of senior officials to deal with the crisis. They were: D.P. Dhar, Chairman of the Policy Planning Committee, P.N. Haksar, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister; T.N. Kaul, Foreign Secretary; P.N. Dhar, Secretary in the P.M.'s office and R.N. Kaw, the Director of the RAW. All but one member of this team were Kashmiri Brahmins, like Mrs. Gandhi. Working in perfect harmony, they laid out the strategy and time table to achieve her objective within the time-frame of one year.

As April came to an end there could be little doubt about the growing involvement of India in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh. In the course of the month India permitted the Awami League émigré leaders to set up a provisional government in the very building which used to house the office of the Deputy High Commissioner of Pakistan in Calcutta and appointed A.K. Ray, a former Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka, to liaise with it. The BSF had been allowed to give limited assistance to freedom fighters within East Bengal after the crackdown; on the 29th. In a significant development the responsibility for assisting them was now turned over to the much better trained and equipped Indian Army. India also set in motion a publicity campaign to create awareness about the gravity of the refugee problem and prepare the world public opinion in favour of the Bangladesh liberation struggle. And it began to apply diplomatic pressures on foreign countries and the United Nations to provide urgent relief to the suffering refugees.

In mid-May the Indian press reported that the refugees were arriving at the rate of 100,000 a day, bringing the total up to two million. By the end of May the refugee total was more than four million. There was an

outbreak of cholera in the crowded refugee camps and within one week two and a half thousand people succumbed to the disease. Mrs. Gandhi visited the United States to draw attention of the Nixon administration and the people to "the very dangerous situation" and to ask donor countries like the United States to stop all aid to Pakistan. She asked her future biographer, Pupul Jayakar, who was going on a visit to the United States to tell the people she knew there—writers, artists, thinkers,—"on the authority of the Prime Minister of India that in one year there will not be a single refugee on Indian soil."[3]

This remark was an expression of Indira Gandhi's implicit commitment to bring about the establishment of an independent, secular government in what was East Pakistan. For it was inconceivable that the Hindu refugees would want to go back to East Bengal and face the risk of being slaughtered by a cruel army of occupation.

Indira Gandhi had indicated her positive attitude towards the provisional government of Bangladesh in mid May by her gesture to invite its entire Cabinet and the C.-in-C. of the Mukti Bahini to meet her in New Delhi. One of the purposes of this visit was to take a measure of the men who formed the Bangladesh government in-exile before deciding on what further steps should be taken. She was already informed of their tendency towards factionalism and the meeting served to confirm what she had been told. Instead of letting Tajuddin speak on their behalf, many members gave vent to their feelings about the Indian position which was still somewhat fluid in regard to Bangladesh. To some extent their complaint reflected a great worry on their part that they might have to stay on in India indefinitely as political exiles like Dalai Lama and his followers. Some of them expressed their disappointment with the Indian disinclination to accord immediate recognition to their government-in-exile. Tajuddin himself understood that in the prevailing situation it was natural for India to exercise restraint in the matter of recognition, especially when the provisional government did not have any sizeable liberated area under its control. But he kept quiet because he did not want to create the impression that his Cabinet consisted of excitable individualists over whom he had little authority. Indira Gandhi had previously been somewhat annoyed with Tajuddin for giving him false information about Mujib's whereabouts when she was anxious to ascertain the state of affairs in East Bengal immediately after the crackdown. But her respect for Tajuddin grew from this time onward as she realised that he was the only Awami Leaguer who was mentally equipped to lead the party in the absence of Mujib.[4]

In this situation, the Indian government decided that "the best policy was to help training freedom fighters, create turmoil within the country and wait," in the words of P.N. Haksar.[5]

Notes

1. Indian business interests had their own reasons to discourage Indian involvement in Bangladesh freedom struggle. Eastern states of India-West Bengal, Asam, Tripura—were going through a difficult period because of Naxalite terrorism and insurgency by Mizos. Indian big business was afraid that support for Bengali separatists would destabilise the whole region where they had huge investments. *The Hindustan Standard*, one of the leading Indian newspapers, carried a series of articles by Nirad Choudhury, the well-known expatriate man-of-letters of East Bengal origin, arguing that any encouragement of Bengali resistance would only prolong the suffering of Bengalis and therefore, "the desperate but futile resistance should cease at once."
2. Pupul Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1992, pp.166-167.
3. Ibid, p.169.
4. This paragraph is based on conversations with several knowledgeable persons including late M.R. Siddiqi.
5. Moidul Hasan, *Muldhara '71*, pp.30-38.

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'BIG BIRD IN THE CAGE'

Pakistanis had no inkling of how Mujib would react to their attempt to arrest him: Would he go underground to lead the struggle? Would he resist in his house as he had urged his people to do? Mujib's voluntary arrest must have come as a great relief to them. The success of the mission of the raiding party was promptly radioed to the Army Headquarters: BIG BIRD IN THE CAGE. Siddiq Salik, Public Relations Officer of the Pakistan Army in Dhaka, who had heard the wireless message, remembers seeing soon thereafter "*the big bird* in the white shirt being driven in an army jeep to the cantonment for safe custody"[1] Mujib was lodged overnight in Adamjee High School and was shifted the next day to Flag Staff House. Three days later he was flown to Karachi.

It was only after Mujib was under the secure control of Pakistani authorities that the news of his arrest was announced on 10 April. It was accompanied by the release of a photograph showing him seated in the Karachi airport VIP lounge waiting for his onward journey. Apparently the Pakistan government did not want to take the risk of Mujib being rescued by a commando-type operation in Dhaka or his flight to West Pakistan intercepted by the Indian Air Force and diverted to India. Hence the delay in announcing his arrest.

After his arrival in Karachi he was immediately taken to the prison in Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) in the Punjab. From his tiny cell his only view of the world outside was through grated iron bars. The heat was oppressive. An electric fan had been provided but it only circulated the dry hot air. It was the worst imprisonment that he had ever experienced. And it was not so much due to the physical discomfort of being cooped up in a bare cell in the summer months as because of his complete isolation from the rest of the world. No newspapers, books or radio were made available to him. Prison guards who brought him his meals were forbidden to converse with him. He had no news of his family and he was denied any visitors or right of correspondence. Most likely his worst torture was not knowing how the liberation struggle was progressing in his absence.

Mujib had no illusions about his own likely fate. Just before his arrest he had observed how Pakistani soldiers were busy pillaging Dhaka and killing thousands of innocent civilians. There was no reason for him to hope that he would be able to escape their fate. But Yahya had no intention of killing Mujib unceremoniously as he had killed so many Bengalis in the night of the crackdown. It was judicial murder that he had in mind for Mujib. He should therefore be in perfect health when he appeared before the military court. So Mujib was not physically maltreated in any way. Within a few days of his confinement in prison in the jail in Lyallpur a Bengali cook was hired to prepare Bengali food for him. He was solicitously provided with his favourite brand of tobacco for his pipe. Arrangements were made for a doctor to be in constant attendance.

Yahya's decision to put Mujib on trial "very soon" was made known through an interview with *The Financial Times* of London. In the interview, published on 19 July, Yahya indicated that the trial would be held in secret by a military tribunal. He did not reveal the precise charges against Mujib but said that some of them carried death penalty, subject to confirmation by himself as President. Mujib would be allowed a lawyer, but only a Pakistani one.

Clearly, Yahya wanted to avoid at all costs the fiasco of the Agartala Conspiracy Trial. It was at this trial that a British barrister had helped to discredit the case against Mujib by his sharp cross-examination of a key prosecution witness. Mujib's trial would be secret and there would be no prying eyes of the press or independent observers. Yahya apparently believed that the verdict of the tribunal would satisfy Pakistanis that Mujib had been given a proper trial and the sentence imposed on Mujib was consistent with the gravity of the charges against him.

The secret trial of Mujib opened on 11 August before a special military court in a red brick building adjacent to the jail. The presiding judge was a brigadier. The other members of the court were two army officers, one naval officer and a district judge from the Punjab. There were twelve charges against him, six of which were capital offences. The most serious charge was that of waging war against Pakistan.

Since Mujib was allowed to select his own Pakistani defense counsel, Mujib indicated that he would like to have Dr. Kamal Hossain to defend him. He was told that this was not possible. He then chose A. K. Brohi, a Sindhi. A brilliant lawyer, Brohi was also the leading constitutional expert in Pakistan.

After hearing in the courtroom the tape of Yahya's broadcast of 26 March, in which he denounced Mujib's action starting the non-cooperation movement "as an act of treason", Mujib refused to take part in the trial and relieved Brohi. Nevertheless, Brohi continued to represent him at the request of the court.

With the knowledge that the proceedings of the trial were only farcical preliminaries to his grim execution, he sat impassively as witness after witness were brought in to give evidence that would implicate him as being involved in a conspiracy to destroy the integrity of Pakistan. The prosecution had originally submitted a list of 105 witnesses but no more than half of them were produced. Almost all of them who did testify had confessed while under police or military custody. Brohi asked that Cornelius, Peerzada and M.M. Ahmed who had participated in the negotiations prior to the crackdown—should be called to testify but his request was denied.

There was world-wide humanitarian concern about the secret trial of Mujib. The Secretary General of the United Nations, U Thant, expressed his concern through a spokesman the day before the trial commenced. The Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience. The International Commission of Jurists raised doubts as to the validity of Mujib's trial. Some Western countries deplored the detention of Mujib and put pressure on the military junta to refrain from sentencing him to death after summary proceedings. Yahya could afford to ignore widespread condemnation of the treatment of Mujib. But he had to be mindful of the attitude of the United States on account of Pakistan's heavy dependence on American aid and military hardware. The United States favoured a policy of status quo in South Asia and did not want the dismemberment of Pakistan which would alter the balance of power in the region. However the Americans had reasons to be apprehensive that Mujib's execution after a secret trial would inflame the situation and make it impossible to reach a compromise settlement short of independence. The United States exercised its leverage on Pakistan and in September Ambassador Farland reported to the State Department that "we have received personal assurances that he (Mujib) will not be executed."[2]

Along with trying to extract Yahya's promise not to execute Mujib, the Americans sought to negotiate a settlement between Pakistan and the rightist pro-American elements in the Bangladesh government-in-exile. George Griffith, a junior official in the American Consulate in Calcutta was put in charge of making contacts with Mushtaque Ahmed, the

Bangladesh Foreign Minister, for this purpose. It was no secret to the Americans that Mushtaque was ideologically and personally hostile to Tajuddin and would therefore be receptive to the idea of reaching a compromise with Pakistan. Mushtaque rationalised his willingness to compromise on the ground that Mujib's fate was his paramount concern. Amirul Islam recalls that when he called on Mushtaque to discuss a proposal by Sean McBride, a leading lawyer of London, to save Mujib's life by making an appeal to the International Red Cross, Mushtaque said: "You must decide whether you want Sheikh Mujib or independence. You can't have both."[3] Contacts with the American officials in Calcutta were continued with the intermediary of Zahiruddin Qayyum an Awami League MNA, without the approval of Syed Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin. All American officials were under the surveillance of the Indian intelligence and the Indians suspected that the goal of these contacts was to split the Awami League and to embarrass India. Mushtaque was scheduled to go to New York in September or October on the occasion of the forthcoming session of the UN General Assembly. It was feared by them that he might establish contact with the Pakistan delegation in New York and then issue a statement favouring a compromise settlement. To avoid such a possibility D.P. Dhar suggested the removal of Mushtaque as Foreign Minister and the appointment of Abdus Samad Azad in his place, although Azad's seniority in the Awami League did not justify his appointment to such an important position. Azad's name had been recommended to Dhar by Nikhil Chakrabarty, the editor and publisher of *Mainstream,* a pro-Moscow periodical, as a reliable man.[4] Tajuddin was hesitant to act on this suggestion for it would give the appearance of a rift within the Awami League. However, Tajuddin made sure that Mushtaque would not go to New York as the head of the unofficial Bangladesh delegation at the time of the UN General Assembly session in September. The delegation to the UN was led by Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. Mushtaque was formally relieved of his Cabinet position only after Tajuddin's return to Dhaka in December after the liberation. Mushtaque nursed his grievance against Tajuddin and was probably able to convince Mujib later that it was he, more than any other Awami Leaguer in the "Mujibnagar Government," who was concerned about Mujib's fate and had done his best to save his life.

In August the US Ambassador Farland was instructed by the Nixon administration to 'try to persuade Yahya to be more flexible and sophisticated on the question of political settlement' in Pakistan.[5] Clearly the Americans were not satisfied with Yahya's efforts so far. In June, Yahya

had asked Begum Suleiman, daughter of Suhrawardy living in Karachi, to go to Dhaka to use her influence in restoring "normalcy" by prevailing upon Awami League MNAs and MPAs to cooperate with the authorities. She found only fifteen to twenty of them willing to do so.[6] She expressed her disappointment with the results of her visit to American diplomats and said that unless a general amnesty was issued other legislators would not come forward. Yahya however was impervious to any sensible advice. In his first major speech of 28 June in which he outlined his political plan since the crackdown, he took a hard line. The main feature of his plan, so far as East Pakistan was concerned, was to disqualify all MNAs who had taken part in "anti-State" activities and to fill those vacancies by holding by-elections. Not much enthusiasm was generated among politicians by Yahya's speech. Even Bhutto described the plan as "a complete fraud" to American diplomats.[7]

On the political front Yahya appointed Dr. M.A. Malik as Governor of East Pakistan in place of Tikka Khan. Dr. Malik accepted Yahya's offer on two conditions. One was that Tikka Khan must be called back to West Pakistan. Yahya had wanted to put him back in charge of troops to fight Mukti Bahini, but Dr. Malik's benign image was such a valuable asset that Yahya complied with his wishes. Dr. Malik's second condition was that a general amnesty be declared as soon as possible.[8] It was announced on 4 September but it was too late.

At the end of September, US Congressman Freilinghausen called on Yahya to express congressional concern over the trial of Mujib. Yahya acknowledged that during the conversation that Mujib's trial was "causing him considerable trouble in some foreign circles." Under pressure of both the executive and legislative branches of the American government, Yahya for the first time began to give hints of softening his stand on Mujib. In the month of October he gave two interviews to foreign correspondents. The first was to the correspondent of the French newspaper *Le Monde*, published on 19 October. Asked whether rumours of talks between himself and Mujib to safeguard the unity of Pakistan were well-founded, Yahya replied that that he could not speak with a rebel unless the court judging him declared him not guilty. Then there was the following exchange:

Question: Would you, nevertheless, use your right to grant pardon if Mujibur Rahman is sentenced to death?

Answer: Before making a decision, I would have to know the country's feelings on the matter. If the people want clemency, I shall grant it.

The second interview, granted to Arnaud de Bochgrave of *Newsweek*, was published in its issue of 8 November. Yahya's comments on the fate of Mujib were more widely read in this interview for the simple reason that this English-language, American news weekly magazine is easily available in Pakistan. On Mujib, Yahya said: "What we do after the sentence is passed is the prerogative of the head of state. It's one hell of a responsibility. But if the nation demands his release, I will do it."

The Pakistan Times, the government-owned newspaper, interpreted Yahya's remarks as meaning that Yahya was not actually advocating Mujib's release but merely emphasising that Mujib's future was of legitimate concern only to Pakistanis and not to foreigners.

Yahya's remarks had the effect of encouraging more than 40 prominent Pakistani personalities to issue a joint statement calling for Mujib's immediate release. Among them were Asghar Khan (Tehrik-i-Islam) and the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

As for the United States, all this was a welcome sign that "what was unthinkable six months ago in West Pakistan may have become acceptable today—regime could probably survive opening of negotiations with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman provided latter agreed to support unified Pakistan."[9] Washington, concerned about risks of a war between India and Pakistan which could spin out of control and upset the balance of power in the subcontinent to the detriment of the United States, prodded Yahya to start a dialogue with Mujib or his nominee. On 23 November, Prince Sadruddin, the UN High Commissioner of Refugees, told Sisco, Assistant Secretary in the State Department, that it was his assessment based on long meetings with Brohi, Mujib's defence counsel, that "even today he (Mujib) wants unified Pakistan.' Sadruddin said that he had pleaded with Yahya for many hours to establish his credibility by starting a dialogue with Mujib. Yahya argued that there would be tremendous unrest in West Pakistan. Sisco asked whether Mujib could in fact settle for substantial autonomy or confederal link between East and West Pakistan. Sadruddin said that he was convinced that Mujib would go along. The problem was that Yahya felt that the Army would not accept an end to its privileges in Pakistan. During the conversation with Sisco, Sadruddin noted that D.P. Dhar had told him that if there were indication of slightest progress in dialogue with Mujib, the situation would be immediately improved and India might accept the UN Secretary General's good offices.

Five days before Prince Sadruddin's review of the current situation in the subcontinent with Sisco in the State Department, Ambassador Farland

had called on Yahya to brief him on the recent visit of Indira Gandhi to the United States. He concluded his briefing with the observation that time was running out for negotiations and Sheikh Mujib was the "key thereto." Yahya took the position that Mujib was not the key to the solution of the current problem, it was rather Indira Gandhi who held "both the key and the lock." Yahya explained that she had "locked" the refugees in India and prevented their return. She had at the same time trained and armed the Mukti Bahini whose numbers roughly equalled those of West Pakistanis in East Pakistan. He admitted that the law and order situation there was "getting much, much worse." Farland asked whether the Pakistan government was willing to consider meeting with Bangladesh representatives designated by Mujib, inasmuch as the Indians had indicated a degree of favourable interest. Yahya replied that his view continued to be that Mujib no longer had the political control over the Bangladesh movement with which he was credited in foreign circles. If Mujib were to make a statement disclaiming any association with the independence movement it would lessen his authority and also his credibility. Mrs. Gandhi's public statements extolling Mujib's virtues and demanding his release had limited his ability to take such an action even if he so wished. "I, too, am under political pressure," he added.

Yahya then outlined his plans and timetable for turning the government over to the elected representatives of the people. He would speak to the nation on 18 December highlighting the degree of "federated independence" which East Pakistan would have under the new constitution. He planned to convene the National Assembly on 27 December and in several weeks there would be a civilian government. Yahya said that "if the civilian government then wants to deal with Bangladesh through Mujib or otherwise, that will be the business of the civilian government and of no concern to me." Yahya assured the American ambassador that in the meantime Pakistan would exercise utmost restraint even under undue provocation from India. But if India was foolhardy to prod Pakistan into military action, Mujib would be the first casualty. That Yahya's veiled threat was meant seriously became obvious when only a fortnight later Pakistan initiated a full-scale war with India and the very next day, the secret military court trying Mujib found him guilty of all charges. The verdict was unanimous except for the sole civilian judge who was absent on that day because of the death of his father. Mujib was sentenced to death by hanging.

Notes

1. Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, pp.75-76.
2. *The American Papers: Secret and Confidential India-Pakistan-Bangladesh Documents 1965-1973,* Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1991, p.684.
3. Amirul Islam, *Muktijuddher Smriti*, p.98.
4. Interview with A. K. Ray, January 2000.
5. *The American Papers*, op. cit., p. 603.
6. Ibid., p.660.
7. Ibid., p.618.
8. Rao Farman Ali, *How Pakistan Got Divided*, p.96.
9. *The American Papers*, op. cit., p.709.

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WAR

At 5:20 p.m. of Friday, 3 December 1971, Pakistan Air Force planes commenced a series of sneak attacks against Indian airfields within their striking range. It remains a mystery as to why these raids were carried out at dusk rather than dawn, as is customary with surprise air strikes (e.g. Japanese raid on Pearl Harbour, Israeli attack on Egypt at the start of the Six-Day War). No wonder that not a single Indian military aircraft was lost.

Mrs. Gandhi was in Calcutta to deliver a speech when the news of the Pakistani air strikes reached her. "What do they hope to gain?", she asked. It did not seem to make much sense for Pakistan to attack India with its vastly superior military strength, manpower and resources. But this undeclared war could not have come as a complete surprise to her. On several occasions Yahya had publicly warned that there would be war if India continued to "escalate" its support for the Bengali guerrillas. We have a glimpse of the "inner thinking" of the junta from the memoirs of Asghar Khan, which suggests that there was method behind their apparent madness. Asghar Khan happened to meet his old schoolmate General Gul Hasan at a social function in October shortly after his fact finding tour of East Pakistan and gave him his impressions of the grave situation there. When Gul Hasan admitted that the situation there was indeed grave, Asghar Khan asked him what the answer was. Gul Hasan said: "The only answer is to start a war." Asghar Khan concluded that in their desperate situation the junta believed that if hostilities broke out with India, they would be bailed out by the United States.[1]

Immediately after the outbreak of the war Pakistan approached the United States for assistance under Article 1 of the Bilateral Agreement between the two countries. Kissinger informed the Pakistan Ambassador in Washington that the American military involvement was out of the question. He had no objection to Iran and Turkey providing American arms to Pakistan. He also suggested the possibility of obtaining American arms from Israel.

The Indians gave top priority to the elimination of the Pakistan Air Force from the skies before launching their major offensive against Pakistanis in East Bengal. In the small hours of 4 December and for the following two days the Indian Air Force planes bombed the runways of the Tejgaon airport and the not-yet completed Kurmitola airport so intensively with special Russian-made high-explosive devices that all efforts to repair the craters were unsuccessful. The PAF jets were unable to fly for the rest of the war and their pilots were evacuated to West Pakistan through Burma. The PAF was reduced to five or six helicopters. One of their notable exploits was to bomb an orphanage run by a kindly non-Bengali lady. Obviously the Pakistanis wished the people to believe the Indians responsible for this atrocity.

The relentless Indian pressure in support of the Mukti Bahini attempts to secure lodgments in Pakistani-held areas along the border, especially since 21 November, had forced Niazi to disperse Pakistani troops in forward positions. Yahya had neglected to inform Niazi or Dr. Malik of his intention to start a war against India. They came to know that the war had started from news reports. It was now too late to withdraw Pakistani troops to more defensible river lines. Most of them remained isolated in small pockets along the border or in the cantonments.

The Indian plan was to bypass the Pakistani strong points and to leapfrog to their principal objective, Dhaka, the provincial capital and the command and control centre of Pakistan's Eastern Command. This was sound strategy. For the Indians advancing into East Bengal could be sure of being treated as liberators by the local population and could depend on reliable intelligence provided to them by the Mukti Bahini, in addition to their harassment role. The Pakistanis even could not trust Razakars, the mercenary para-military force created them to assist the Pakistani authorities. In a signal to Rawalpindi, days before the outbreak of the war, Niazi complained that Razakars, no doubt sensing which way the wind was blowing, had "started blowing up bridges and laying ambush against own troops."[2] The news reaching the Eastern Command from various sectors was bleak. Particularly distressing was the information that one battalion had surrendered after their own commander "had been forced to give a call to the troops for surrender by megaphones" in an area south of Comilla.[3]

Initially Niazi remained buoyant in the face of bad news from every sector under his command. For it had always been the military doctrine of Pakistan that the defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan. It meant that any attack on East Pakistan would be countered by a devastating

blow from West Pakistan which would force India to withdraw from East Pakistan. In his map room Niazi followed with avid interest the reported progress of the Pakistan Army. He was also encouraged by a signal received from the Chief of Staff on the 5th: "Every hope of Chinese activities very soon."[4] When he realised that Pakistan claims of advances into Indian territory from West Pakistan were imaginary and there was no sign of Chinese activity to relieve pressure on his forces, his mood swung from optimism to despondency.

On 7 December Niazi arrived in the Governor House to brief Dr. Malik about the military situation. Farman Ali described to the Commission of Enquiry appointed by the President of Pakistan in December 1971 to report on the circumstances of the surrender of the Eastern Command what happened during this meeting:

> He (Niazi) was in a terrible shape, haggard, obviously had no sleep. The Chief Secretary Mr. Muzaffar Hussain was also present. The Governor had hardly said a few words when Gen. Niazi started crying loudly. I had to send the bearer out. The Governor got up from his chair and patted him and said a few consoling words. I also added a few consoling words saying "our resources were limited. It is not your fault etc." We discussed the situation after he regained his poise. The Governor suggested that an effort was required to be made to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem.[5]

In the re-telling of this story in his book, *How Pakistan Got Divided*, Farman Ali relates what caused Niazi to lose all self-control and composure. The Governor had started the meeting with a general statement that anything could happen in war: "When both sides fight one wins and the other may lose. At times a commander may have to surrender and at other..." Before Dr. Malik could finish his sentence, Niazi began to sob loudly, covering his face with his hands. It is the word "surrender" that would appear to have triggered Niazi's total loss of control in front of an orderly serving refreshments.

Only the day before this meeting, Mrs. Gandhi had announced in the Indian Parliament her government's decision to recognise the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The Indian recognition meant that Indian and Bangladesh forces would henceforth fight side by side under a joint command. It is quite likely that Niazi realised the implications of such a joint command. There was already an undercurrent of worry running through the Eastern Command that with the Indian blockade in force, there would be no replenishment for losses in men and ammunition suffered by the Pakistanis. Surrender was a distinct probability in a matter

of days. It is entirely possible therefore that Niazi was troubled by the thought of surrender because it could result in Pakistanis, including himself, being interned in POW camps within Bangladesh run by the Mukti Bahini for an indefinite period. The Mukti Bahini or the Pakistan Army had not been known to treat each other's prisoners tenderly.

Shortly after, Dr. Malik's meeting with Niazi, an encouraging message was received from Yahya: "World powers are very seriously attempting to bring about a cease-fire. The subject is being referred to the General Assembly after persistent vetoes in the Security Council by the Russians. A very high-powered delegation is being rushed to New York. Please rest assured I am fully alive to the terrible situation you are facing."[6] The Russians had indeed made it clear that they would continue to veto any resolution which did not link cease-fire with political solution. It was not much of a consolation that the General Assembly adopted a resolution urging a cease-fire without linking it to a political solution. The General Assembly can do no more than recommend; only the Security Council has the mechanism to enforce its resolutions.

Meanwhile the situation on the ground continued to deteriorate. In the western sector Jessore fell on the 7th; it was the turn of Brahmanbaria to fall the next day in the eastern sector. One Indian column advanced toward Chandpur and another in the direction of Chittagong. The top echelons of the civil administration lost their faith in the capacity of their military counterparts to protect them from the Mukti Bahini. They packed up their belongings and proceeded toward the Governor House. The well-guarded Governor House could provide protection against the lightly-armed Mukti Bahini elements in the city but lacking anti-aircraft emplacements, it was exposed to air strikes by the Indian Air Force. The IAF had spared it so far but it would not be for long.

The promised high-powered delegation to the United Nations led by Bhutto left for New York on the 8th. Bhutto first went to Kabul by road, then flew to Tehran. From there Bhutto flew to Frankfurt via Rome. After an overnight stay in Bonn, he was finally on the last leg of his trip to New York. It took him 60 hours in the jet age to reach his destination to attend to his business which he knew required his urgent attention. But he had his own agenda and it suited him to lengthen his journey as long as possible.

While Bhutto was proceeding at a leisurely pace by a circuitous route to New York, events were moving fast on the ground. On the morning of 9 December, Niazi, facing a critical situation, sent a message requesting

the CGS to reinforce Dhaka by air-borne troops, which was patently beyond the capacity of hard-pressed PAF from bases a thousand miles away. The Governor, on the other hand, sent a more realistic message to Yahya the same evening, which deserves to be quoted in full:

> Military situation desperate. Enemy is approaching Faridpur in the West and has closed up to the river Meghna and in the East bypassing our troops in Comilla and Laksham. Chandpur has fallen to the enemy thereby closing all river routes. Enemy likely to be at the outskirts of Dacca any day if no outside help forthcoming. Secretary General UN's representative in Dacca has proposed that Dacca may be declared as an open city to save lives of civilians especially non-Bengalis. Am favourably inclined to accept the offer. Strongly recommend that this be approved. Gen. Niazi does not agree as he considers that his orders are to fight to the last and it would amount to giving up Dacca. This action may result in massacre of the whole army, WP police and all non-locals and loyal locals. There are no regular troops in reserve and once the enemy has crossed the Ganges or Meghna further resistance will be futile unless China or USA intervenes today with massive air and ground support. Once again urge you to consider immediate cease-fire and political settlement otherwise once Indian troops are free from East Wing in a few days even West Wing will be in jeopardy. Understand local population has welcomed Indian army in captured areas and are providing maximum help to them. Our troops are finding it impossible to withdraw and manoever due to rebel activity. With this clear alignment sacrifice of West Pakistan is meaningless.[7]

Yahya sent the following reply within six hours to Governor Malik, repeated to the Commander, Eastern Command:

> Your flash message A 4600 of 9 December received and thoroughly understood. You have my permission to take decisions on your proposals to me. I have and am continuing to take all measures internationally but in view of our complete isolation from each other decision about East Pakistan I leave entirely to your good sense and judgement. I will approve of any decision you take and I am instructing Gen. Niazi simultaneously to accept your decision and arrange things accordingly. Whatever efforts you make in your decisions to save senseless destruction of the kind of civilians you have mentioned in particular the safety of our armed forces, you may go ahead and ensure safety of our armed forces by all political means that you will have to adopt with our opponent.[8]

A high-powered Committee consisting of the Governor, Minister of Finance, Commander of the Eastern Command and the Chief Secretary, with Farman Ali as its Member-Secretary had been set up before the war

to take decisions on behalf of the central government in the event that communications with the Centre broke down. Acting in the belief that the Governor had been authorised to take the final and fateful decision he consulted with the Committee members. Following a review of the hopeless military situation by Niazi, they reached a consensus on a draft note to be handed to Paul Marc Henry, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Dhaka. The note handed to him by Farman Ali was as follows:

> It was never the intention of the Armed Forces of Pakistan to involve themselves in all out war on the soil of East Pakistan. However a situation arose which compelled the Armed Forces to take defensive action. The intention of the Government of Pakistan was always to decide the issues in East Pakistan by means of a political solution for which negotiations were afoot. The Armed Forces have fought against heavy odds and still continue to do so but in order to avoid further bloodshed and loss of innocent lives I am making the following proposals. As the conflict arose as a result of political causes, it must end with a political solution. I therefore having been authorised by the President of Pakistan do hereby call upon the elected representatives of East Pakistan to arrange for a peaceful formation of the Government in Dacca. In making this offer I feel duty-bound to say the will of the people demand the immediate vacation of their land by the Indian forces as well. I therefore call upon the United Nations to arrange for a peaceful transfer of power and request:
>
> 1. An immediate cease-fire
> 2. Repatriation with honour of the Armed Forces of Pakistan
> 3. Repatriation of all West Pakistan personnel desirous of return into West Pakistan.
> 4. Safety of all persons settled in East Pakistan since 1947.
> 5. Guarantee of no reprisals against any person in East Pakistan.
>
> In making this offer I want to make it clear that this is a definite proposal for transfer of power. The question of surrender of the Armed Forces will not be considered and does not arise and if this proposal is not accepted the Armed forces will continue to fight to the last man.[9]

Paul Marc Henry received the note from Farman Ali on the afternoon of the 10th. He transmitted it immediately to the UN Secretariat and because of the time difference it was received there in the early hours of the 10th. In view of the urgency of the message Brian Urquahrt, the Under Secretary for Peace Keeping, woke up Agha Shahi, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, at 5 a.m. to convey to him the

contents of the note. Shahi decided to wait for Bhutto who was scheduled to arrive at five o'clock in the afternoon that day. Agha Shahi recalls:

> I went into the plane as it landed and in the general bustle of getting down told him about Farman Ali's message. When we were in the car along with an army officer of the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence), Bhutto said, 'Shahi, what were you saying about Farman's message in the plane? You were not coherent.' When I repeated the contents, addressing the army officer, he said, 'look, Colonel, we have been betrayed.'[10]

In the evening Bhutto asked Yahya to rescind the authority he had given to the Governor, Dr. Malik, to approach the UN and informed him that he had already told Shahi to inform the Secretary General to disregard the message from Dhaka. He threatened to return to Pakistan if his advice was not accepted.

Bhutto must have liked the way things were going. Ever since the military crackdown in March, Bhutto had been awaiting to be rewarded for his part in preparing the groundwork for it. But instead of transferring power to the PPP in the West Wing, Yahya went on consolidating his own power. He asked Justice Cornelius to draft a constitutional scheme where he would remain President, Supreme Commander, C.-in-C. of the Army and would have special responsibility for the preservation of the integrity and ideology of Pakistan. Bhutto had criticised a constitution to be imposed on the country which would make Yahya "a virtual dictator."[11] Increasingly despondent, he saw no future for himself in the politics of the country, unless the prestige and the influence of the military could be reduced, better still, destroyed. Only an unmitigated defeat of the Pakistani forces or its surrender to the Indian Army in the East Wing, would pave his way to power.

The following morning Bhutto met George Bush, then US Permanent Representative to the UN and Chiao Kuan Hua, Vice Foreign Minister of China. Referring to his talks with them he sent a second message to Yahya proposing that the ground situation be improved for a week; in any event he urged waiting three days before making any move in the United Nations.

Bhutto must have known that after three days the ground situation would be infinitely worse and any deal then would also be far worse than something that could be negotiated now. It was of course the height of folly to permit the Indians and the Mukti Bahini to advance deeper into

East Wing, for it could be fatal for the Pakistani troops. But then, it was in the interest of Bhutto that the military establishment should be humiliated in such a conclusive manner that the people of West Pakistan would turn to him for leadership.

In Washington, the Nixon administration had been worried as early as 8 December that the Pakistanis might not be expected to hold out longer than 72 hours; the Indians would thereupon shift their troops from East to West, forcing the disintegration of Pakistan. It was Kissinger's thesis that India should be viewed as the Soviet Union's proxy. Believing that this regional dispute should be solved by putting pressure on Moscow, Nixon wrote a letter to Brezhnev urging restraint. In order to make the American pressure credible, a United States task force of warships, spear-headed by the aircraft carrier *Enterprise*, moved into the Bay of Bengal. On 9 December, Brezhnev, in his reply to Nixon's letter proposed a cease-fire and resumption of negotiation with Mujib from the point it was broken off on 25 March. Clearly Brezhnev did not want any repetition of a Cuban-type missile crisis of 1962. The Russians let the Indians know that they could not go on vetoing resolutions in the United Nations indefinitely.

This was to cause a change in the strategy so far adopted in the Indian campaign in East Bengal. On 13 December, General Manekshaw ordered the field commanders to immediately capture all the towns that had been bypassed. The towns mentioned in his order did not include Dhaka. Manekshaw no doubt was anxious to capture as many towns as possible so as to be in an advantageous position if a cease-fire came into effect soon. The Chief of Staff of the Eastern Command of India, General Jacob viewed this sudden shift in the centre of gravity of the campaign with utmost concern. He took matters into his own hands and spoke to the corps commanders not to take any action on the signal stating that it was only for their information.[12]

Indian army columns resumed their advance through the gaps between Pakistani strong points. Indian paratroopers had been landed on the 11th south of Narsingdi and in Tangail close to Dhaka. An Indian brigade coming by road from Jamalpur soon linked up with them. The Indian troops however lacked tanks, artillery, and heavy equipment and did not yet pose any serious threat to Dhaka itself. Nonetheless their very presence in the vicinity of Dhaka had a demoralising effect on the Eastern Command of Pakistan.

However, Niazi's morale was boosted by a message from Rawalpindi for his "personal information" that the American Seventh Fleet would

very soon be in position and the NEFA front had been activated by the Chinese. He was also reassured by telephone that the intervention of the "yellow from the north and white from the south" was imminent, according to Siddiq Salik. Thus encouraged, Niazi told a group of journalists at the airport waiting to be evacuated to Bangkok, "Dhaka will fall only over my dead body. They will have to drive a tank over this," pointing to his chest.[13]

Next day, the 12th, he sent a signal to Rawalpindi saying that he "had issued orders to troops to fight out last man last round in their respective areas" and that despite extremely critical situation "will turn Dacca into fortress and fight it out till end." His defiant mood seems to have undergone a change later that day, for he sent another message complaining: "one of our officers taken PW sent to Comilla Fortress with following message quote. If you do not surrender we will hand over all your prisoners to *Mukti Fauz* for butchery unquote." The message was sent as unclassified. Hamoodur Rahman Commission later came to the conclusion that "this threat might have played some part in the final decision to surrender."[14]

Niazi had sent his generals to contact the Consul Generals of the United States and China to find out how soon their "friendly" help would materialise, but they had received no information in this regard from their governments. There is a note of despair in his signal sent to the Chief of Staff on the 13th: "Promised assistance must take practical shape by 14 December. Chinese fighting in NEFA will have no effect. Its effect can only be felt in Siliguri and by engaging enemy force against us."[15]

The Chief of Staff, probably realising that Niazi was beginning to lose his nerve, sent him this message on the 14th:

> The United Nations Security Council is in session and is most likely to order a cease-fire. Knowing this the Indians are doing all they can to capture Dacca and form a Bangladesh Government before the cease-fire resolution is passed. As far as we can anticipate it is only a matter of hours. Urge you to hold out till the United Nations resolution is passed.[16]

A high-level meeting had been called by the Governor for noon on the 14th to discuss the grave situation. The Indian intelligence came to know of it through a signal intercept two and a half hours before the scheduled time. The Indian Air Force was instructed to strafe the Governor House and disrupt the meeting to spur the Pakistanis to accept the surrender call.

John Kelly, the Representative of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees, had received an invitation from Dr. Malik that morning to discuss with him his own personal situation. Kelly told him that he

thought that he, as well as his Cabinet Ministers, were in great danger of being killed unless they sought refuge in the Neutral Zone. This Zone had been established in the Intercontinental Hotel under the joint protection of the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross recently. Kelly told the Governor that he and his Cabinet Ministers would have to resign their official functions to gain entry there. Dr. Malik said that his Cabinet was already considering whether or not to resign. He himself felt he should not resign because in the eyes of history it would look like desertion. He asked whether he could send his wife and daughter to the Neutral Zone. Kelly replied that this would not achieve his purpose. The hotel was full of journalists and they would say that Dr. Malik had lost confidence in the future and would then ask when he himself was coming.

It was at this moment that the Governor House shook violently as the building came under direct attack from IAF planes. Kelly, a war veteran, immediately left and jumping over the balustrade took shelter under a jeep. There were about six Indian planes which were strafing the building with rockets. Between the strikes he found shelter in a trench full of soldiers. Just then Farman Ali passed also looking for shelter and said to him, "Why are the Indians doing this to us?" When the air strikes stopped Kelly left for the UN location to inform Paul Marc Henry of what had happened.

Kelly then drove back to the Governor House. The Military Secretary took him to the bunker where Dr. Malik and his Cabinet Ministers had taken shelter. They were shaken but still undecided whether to resign or not. When Kelly was explaining to them the danger that they were facing of being killed by the irregulars, the IAF planes made a second devastating attack on the Governor House. The bunker was located above ground and was not a safe place. A direct hit would have wiped it out. While the aircraft continued to make rocket and cannon strikes, one of the Ministers drew up a letter of resignation to the President of Pakistan which was signed by Dr. Malik and by all the Ministers present. Dr. Malik then withdrew to an inner room of the bunker where his wife and daughter were waiting and said his prayers. They and the ex-Ministers moved a little later that day to the Neutral Zone in the Intercontinental Hotel.[17]

Their collective resignation led to the collapse of the whole civil administration and provided a shock to those directing the war in the Eastern Command. The shock was felt not only in Dhaka but in Islamabad.

Notes

1. Asghar Khan, *Generals in Politics: Pakistan 1958-1982*, pp.40-41.
2. Hamoodur Rahman Report (Supplementary), Para 2.
3. Rao Farman Ali, *How Pakistan Got Divided*, p.129.
4. Hamoodur Rahman Report (Supplementary), Para 7.
5. Ibid, Para 13.
6. Ibid, Para 16.
7. Ibid, Para 19.
8. Ibid, Para 20.
9. Ibid, Para 21.
10. Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, p. 389.
11. Rafi Raza, *Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Pakistan*, 1967-1977, p.118.
    The text of Yahya's proposed constitution has not been published. The first hint of what it would be like was provided by Z. A. Suleri, the editor of *The Pakistan Times*, on 11 July 1971. Writing under the heading "What kind of a Constitution?", he advocated, among other things, the division of East Bengal into three or more provinces, leaving the Punjab as the dominant unit of the federation of Pakistan.
12. Lt. Gen. JFR Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca*, p.129.
13. Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, pp.201-202.
14. Hamoodur Rahman Report (Supplementary), Para 33.
15. Ibid, Para 35.
16. Ibid, Para 36.
17. John Kelly, *Three Days in Dacca 1971*, an unpublished account, a copy of which was given to me by the author.

38

SURRENDER

In between Dr. Malik's resignation and his departure from the Governor House on the afternoon of 14 December 1971 the following message was sent by Yahya to the Governor and General Niazi:

> You have fought a heroic battle against overwhelming odds. The nation is proud of you and the world full of admiration, I have done all that is humanly possible to find an acceptable solution to the problem. You have now reached a stage where further resistance is no longer humanly possible nor will it serve any useful purpose. It will only lead to further loss of lives and destruction. You should now take all necessary measures to stop the fighting and preserve the lives of all armed forces personnel, all those from West Pakistan and all loyal elements. Meanwhile, I have moved the UN to urge India to stop hostilities. In East Pakistan forthwith and to guarantee the safety of the armed forces and other people who may be the likely target for miscreants.[1]

This message, for reasons that are not clear, was sent as unclassified making it possible for the Indians to read it. The message was in the hands of Dr. Malik some time in the evening. Early next morning he came to Kelly in the hotel to tell him that he had been unable to contact Niazi concerning Yahya's instructions and asked him for his assistance. Kelly agreed to do so in a personal capacity. When contact was established Niazi said that he would like to discuss the matter with Dr. Malik in the Cantonment. Kelly suggested that he should invite Niazi to the hotel. Niazi did not come but sent Farman Ali to represent him. He and Colonel Gaffur, the Liaison Officer of the Pakistan Army at the Neutral Zone, conferred together and drew up the following proposals for a cease-fire and cessation of hostilities:

> To bring an end to loss of further human lives and destruction we are willing, under honourable conditions:
>
> A. Cease fire and stop all hostilities immediately in East Pakistan;
>
> B. Hand over peacefully the administration of East Pakistan as arranged by the UN;

C. The UN should ensure:

i) Safety and security of all armed personnel of both military and para-military forces of Pakistan pending their return to West Pakistan;

ii) Safety of all West Pakistani non-locals settled in East Pakistan since 1947;

iii) Guarantee of no reprisal against those who helped and served the Government and cause of Pakistan since March 1971.

Farman Ali returned to the hotel at 9 o'clock to inform Dr. Malik and Kelly that although Niazi had approved those proposals, Islamabad had rejected them, objecting in particular to the proposal "to hand over the administration of East Pakistan".[2]

This was not the only set of proposals put forward on this day in Dhaka to end the fighting. Another one was drafted in the Cantonment in the morning and after its clearance from Islamabad over the telephone, Niazi went to the American Consul General to hand it to him and to seek his help to negotiate a cease-fire. Farman Ali accompanied Niazi to the US Consulate. Herbert Spivack, the US Consul General, told Niazi "Why did you start this war? We can't help you. The most I can do is to convey your message to the Indians and act as a message relayer. Not as a negotiator." Spivack sent the proposals to the American Embassy in Islamabad and the State Department in Washington. The message handed to Spivack reads:

> To save innocent lives request arrange immediate cease-fire under following conditions: (1) Regrouping Pakistan Armed forces in designated areas by mutual agreement between opposing forces. (2) Safety of all military and para-military forces. (3) Safety of all those settled in East Pakistan since 1947. (4) No reprisals against those who helped administration since March 1971. Will abide by UN resolutions.

The presentation of this message was apparently delayed by the Americans for a day to give Pakistanis more time to gain territory in the West before the cease-fire came into effect. Manekshaw received it on the 15th in New Delhi. In his reply he gave assurances that the safety of Pakistani personnel would be guaranteed, provided the Pakistani Army "surrenders to my advancing troops."[3] It was relayed to the Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi who instructed Niazi: "Suggest you accept the cease-fire on those terms as they meet your requirements. This is a purely local military decision and has no bearing on the political outcome. Mutual decisions now arrived at by you will not be acceptable if repugnant to any United Nations decision."[4]

Any account of the events leading to the surrender of the Pakistan Army would therefore be incomplete without an examination of the possible solutions available in the United Nations at this time. On this crucial day of the 15th when Manekshaw was giving assurances that the safety of Pakistani personnel would be guaranteed provided they surrendered, Bhutto in New York was ideally placed to avert the humiliation of unconditional surrender through UN diplomacy. The Security Council was considering on this day several draft resolutions to solve the crisis in the subcontinent. But none of them except one had any realistic chance of being adopted. The exception was a resolution tabled by Poland almost certainly at the instigation of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had been under considerable pressure for the past several days to moderate its stand and feared that unless the conflict was resolved expeditiously there was a danger of an irreparable breach with the United States, jeopardising the process of détente. Under the Polish resolution, the Security Council would "decide" that power in East Pakistan "will be peacefully transferred to the lawfully elected representatives of the people headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman." It also called for West Pakistani troops in the East to be concentrated in "present locations" for ultimate evacuation from the East, and for unrestricted transfers of West Pakistanis from the East and East Pakistanis home from the West.

The Polish resolution put the Indian delegation in the Security Council in a quandary. Indians were on the verge of total victory and the Polish resolution, if adopted, would have snatched the victory out of their hands. Three months later I happened to overhear the Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh describing the scene on that day in the Security Council during the boat trip from Dhaka to Narayanganj and back on the occasion of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Bangladesh. Swaran Singh said that the Indians were worried about the passage of the resolution and had decided to ignore it even at the risk of incurring the odium of the international community.

Swaran Singh need not have worried. Bhutto made a fiery, intemperate speech out of keeping with the staid and dignified proceedings of the most important organ of the United Nations, tore up the resolutions and walked out of the Security Council chamber. I was in the visitors' gallery and in the row of seats behind me were a group of Pakistani students. I heard a gasp of admiration for Bhutto as he staged his dramatic walk-out and I heard one of them saying rather loudly, "*Bhutto ne kamal kar diya.*" (Bhutto has done a great job!) Suddenly it dawned on me that the real audience of his crowd-pleasing performance was back home in West Pakistan.

While Bhutto was destroying the last chance of an honourable exit of the Pakistan Army from the East, it was early morning of the 16th in Dhaka. The situation of the beleaguered garrison was desperate. The last three PAF helicopters flew out of Dhaka to Akyab in Burma carrying General Rahim and family members of Pakistani officers, leaving behind Pakistani army nurses who had been promised priority in the event of an evacuation. During the previous night the commando troops of the Indian Army had reached the Mirpur bridge, just outside the city, aided by Kader Siddiqui's men. The Indian commander, General Nagra, sent a chit to Niazi whom he had known from their college days in Lahore before partition. The message was: "Dear Abdullah, I am at Mirpur bridge. Send your representative." Pakistani generals were stunned by the unexpected appearance of crack troops of the Indian Army practically on the outskirts of the city. The bridge was undefended. Farman Ali turned to Niazi and asked, "Do you have any reserves?" Niazi looked to General Jamshed, in charge of Dhaka's defences, who shook his head to indicate there was none. Farman Ali then told Jamshed to "go and do what he (Nagra) wants."[5] It was Farman Ali who was speaking at this juncture for the Eastern Command, even though he was outranked by at least four generals and officially he had no functions since the resignation of Dr. Malik as Governor.

The UN location in Dhaka was on the alert at this time to serve as a possible channel of communication between the two belligerents. It was necessary for it to perform this vital function since the Eastern Command's communication centre had been destroyed. John Kelly was sent to contact Niazi in his command bunker but he was not there. However, he "found General Farman Ali in the bunker, looking ashen-faced and broken. He informed me that he was authorised to speak for the whole Pakistan Army in East Pakistan and that they had agreed to accept the Indian ultimatum." The Indians had earlier issued an ultimatum to the Pakistanis to surrender by 9:30 a.m., failing which they would launch an all-out assault on Dhaka. The IAF planes were already circling Dhaka in preparation for the onslaught. Kelly asked Farman Ali whether he wished to convey by the UN radio network the Pakistani acceptance of the Indian ultimatum. Farman Ali replied in the affirmative and added two points: first, extension of the truce by another six hours and second, to invite the Indian Army to send their staff officers for further arrangements, if possible by helicopter.[6] The time was 9:20 a.m.

At about the same time General Manekshaw was speaking on the telephone to General Jacob in Calcutta to go to Dhaka immediately to organise the formal surrender in the evening. A message was sent to Dhaka that Jacob would be arriving around noon. Farman Ali relates that when



Photo 14: Surrender — General Niazi signing the instrument of surrender before the Joint Indo-Bangladesh Command on 16th December, 1971

he went to the Corps Headquarters to make arrangements for reception of the Indian team, he was surprised to find an Indian Army detachment outside the building. Inside, "General Niazi was in the chair. In front of him was General Nagra. Also there was Tiger Siddiqui of the Mukti Bahini." Niazi was in a jovial mood telling dirty jokes in Punjabi. Jacob arrived soon after midday, interrupting Niazi's recital of bawdy jokes. Jacob presented the terms of surrender to Niazi. As he listened to the terms of surrender, "tears streamed down Niazi's cheeks."[7] He had expected the terms to be on the lines of the proposals communicated by him through Spivack which envisaged a cease-fire to be followed by an evacuation of Pakistanis to be arranged through the auspices of the UN. Farman Ali objected to the Instrument of Surrender which stated that the Pakistan Armed Forces would surrender to the Indian and Bangladesh forces. Jacob said that this was how the document had come from New Delhi: "You take it or leave it." Jacob asked Niazi whether the document was acceptable to him. Niazi handed it back to Jacob without comment. This was taken as acceptance. Then they began to discuss the modalities of surrender. Niazi wanted the surrender to take place in his office, but

agreed eventually to Jacob's demand that it should take place in the Race Course, now known as Suhrawardy Udyan.[8]

The surrender of Pakistan forces was going to be to the Joint Command of the allied forces. But where was the representative of the junior partner of the Joint Command? There was no one from Bangladesh during the proceedings leading to Niazi's acceptance of the surrender terms even as an observer. There was not even the symbolic presence of any unit of the regular Bangladesh Army during the entry of Indian forces into Dhaka. But for the fact that Kader Siddiqui and his irregulars had made their presence felt on this memorable day of the liberation of Dhaka, it would have remained essentially an Indian affair.

Col. Osmani the C.-in-C. of Bangladesh forces, was on his way to Sylhet, his home district, without the knowledge of the Prime Minister, Tajuddin. A helicopter was sent by the Indians to fetch him to Calcutta to accompany Lieut. Gen. Aurora, the Theatre Commander, to Dhaka for the surrender ceremony. Unfortunately, the helicopter was damaged by hostile fire en route. Since Osmani was unable to be present at the ceremony, his No. 2, Wing Commander A.R. Khondakar, had to get ready in a hurry to represent Bangladesh for the occasion.[9] Almost all the high ranking officers of the Indian forces connected with the campaign and the lone member of the Bangladesh force arrived at the Dhaka airport at about 4:30 p.m. and proceeded to the Race Course. The Instrument of Surrender was signed there in full view of the cheering populace of Dhaka. Then Niazi undid his epaulette and handed over his revolver to Aurora, formally marking the capitulation of Pakistani forces to the "Joint Command of Indian and Bangla Desh forces in the Eastern Theatre."

Notes

1. Hamoodur Rahman Report (Supplementary), Para 38.
2. John Kelly, *Three days in Dacca 1971*; an unpublished account.
3. Lt. Gen. JFR Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca*, pp.136-138.
4. Hamoodur Rahman Report (Supplementary), Para 51.
5. Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p. 210.
6. John Kelly, op. cit.
7. Rao Farman Ali, *How Pakistan Got Divided,* pp.151-152.
8. Lt. Gen. JFR Jacob, op. cit., pp.141-142.
9. Interview with (Retd.) vice Air Marshal A.R. Khondakar.

39

"THE BIRD HAS FLOWN"

Having been sentenced to death by the military tribunal on 4 December 1971, the day after the outbreak of the war with India, Mujib calmly accepted the verdict and prepared himself for his death. His only request to the military junta, it is said, was to allow his body to be flown to his homeland for burial.

Mujib had no way of knowing that Yahya had promised the Americans that he would not carry out the execution. But there was always the possibility that Yahya would find some excuse for wriggling out of his promise now that Pakistan was at war with India.

Within days of the conclusion of the trial of Mujib, he was transferred at night from the Lyallpur jail to the jail at Mianwali by helicopter. Here he was lodged in the female ward, which had been vacated earlier to accommodate him. The rumour soon spread among the inmates of the prison that Mujib now was with them. Some inmates were housed in a ward literally within a stone's throw from Mujib's cell. One morning they started throwing whatever objects they could lay their hands on toward him, possibly because they were outraged that a traitor had been moved to their prison. Even criminals can feel a sense of patriotism in wartime. Prison guards scattered them by firing warning shots. To pacify them further, the jail superintendent told them that Mujib had been brought to the Mianwali jail for the express purpose of hanging him.[1]

Referring to this incident in his interview with David Frost in January 1972, Mujib said that "they", meaning Yahya's men, "mobilised some prisoners in the jail to attack me early in the morning and kill me." Later, at 3 o"clock in the night, the jailer "took me out of the jail and kept me in his bungalow for two days without any military guards. After two days, he took me from there to another deserted area in a colony. There he kept me for four, five or six days." Mujib thought that the jailer had done this because "he took a liking to me, I think."[2]

Mujib's recollection of chronology of events during the short period he spent in Mianwali jail is fuzzy. He appears to have lost his sense of time to such an extent that he could not recall only a few weeks later

while being interviewed by Frost whether he had spent four, five or six days outside the prison. It would appear that he was subsequently taken back to his cell. By that time some Indian prisoners of war had been brought to the prison to be housed there. Eight of them were detailed to dig a trench in the yard which Mujib could see. And he thought: "I know this is my grave perhaps. All right, I'm ready." But he was told by the prison officials not to worry: "We are making some arrangements that if we have some bombing then you can take shelter."[3]

Within a few days the Pakistan Army surrendered in the East on the 16th and the next day Yahya accepted the unilateral cease-fire announced by Indira Gandhi.

Pakistanis, traumatised by the defeat and surrender of their armed forces, heaped insults on them for their inept performance. There was discontent within the armed forces and on the 19th, some army units demanded the resignation of Yahya. When he was left in no doubt by the officers that the Army was not going to suppress public demonstrations against him, he agreed to hand over power to Bhutto.

Before leaving for Pakistan Bhutto had meetings with Secretary of State Rogers and President Nixon. Since the Americans expected Mujib to play a stabilising role in emerging Bangladesh, the subject of Mujib was brought up. From the record now available we know what Bhutto told Rogers; "Mujib was an important element but public opinion must first be prepared for his re-involvement in picture and he (Bhutto) did not in any event believe Mujib would remain influential political figure beyond three months' time. Mujib was a good speaker but 'very blank in the head'... Bhutto declined to name others in AL leadership who might assume leading role."[4]

Bhutto's gratuitous put-down of Mujib in his talks with Rogers barely concealed his own anxieties over how to deal with the problem of Mujib's detention after his return to Pakistan. It was in the interest of Pakistan that Mujib be released and public opinion prepared for this purpose. He had not helped matters by his much-publicised support of the vicious military action in March. Even after Yahya, under pressure of the world opinion, had said that "if the nation demands his (Mujib's) release, I'll do it," Bhutto had not joined those who had called for an end to his incarceration. In fact, the pro-Bhutto *New Times* editorially treated Mujib's fate as a matter of law courts, leaving no doubt that it considered Mujib guilty of treason.[5]

In the midst of all his preoccupations after assuming the offices of President and Chief of Martial Law Administration, one of Bhutto's early

decisions was to shift Mujib from his prison cell to more comfortable surroundings. On the 26th he was first taken to a guest house. After an overnight stay there he was moved to the Sihala Rest House in Rawalpindi. For his entertainment he was provided with a cassette player with Urdu/Hindi film songs.

Bhutto drove down to the bungalow to visit Mujib the next day without prior notice. Mujib was naturally surprised to see him. He had some idea that Pakistan had suffered defeat in the war and that Indian troops had driven Pakistanis out of parts of his homeland. But he did not know that Bhutto was the new ruler of Pakistan. His guards had strict instructions not to talk with him unless absolutely necessary. Bhutto's unexpected appearance was no doubt staged to create a dramatic effect which he no doubt relished.

Mujib had his cassette player on as Bhutto walked in. Mujib probably suspected that the room was bugged, for he made no effort to tone it down. The sound recording of their conversation was in consequence not very clear, despite an attempt to clean up the background noise by sending it to experts in Germany.[6]

After dramatically announcing that he was now the President of Pakistan, Bhutto went on a charm offensive to disarm Mujib of any lingering ill—will he might bear against him. Bhutto told Mujib that when Yahya wanted to surrender power to him after the "tragic defeat" suffered by the Pakistan Army, he said: "Mr. Bhutto, I've made the greatest blunder (of my life) of not killing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Now kindly allow me, before handing over power, to kill Sheikh Mujibur Rahman giving ante-date, back-date hanging and then hand over power." But Bhutto refused on the ground that "not one soul" out of one hundred and twenty thousand Pakistani troops and civilians held as prisoners would return to West Pakistan if such an action was taken and it would also endanger the lives of half a million non-Bengali population of the eastern wing.[7]

"I'm happy", Mujib responded. "believe me I am happy. Tell me the condition of Bengal. I am very perturbed." Bhutto briefed Mujib about the situation in the East: the Indian Army, under the cover of Soviet warships and planes had occupied Dhaka. Mujib was indignant: "That means they have killed us. You'd better get me to Dhaka. You have to promise one thing to me that I will be having your help if the Indians put me in jail. You will have to fight for me."[8]

"We will have to fight together, Mujib." Bhutto said "No, no," Mujib replied. "I have to settle matters there. The occupation army is there, that I

am sure. Awami League cannot move them, that I am sure. The world will understand. I want your help. Believe me. I never wanted the Indians. You don't believe me?" "I believe you," Bhutto responded. "Otherwise, do you think that I would have immediately taken this action? The first thing I did was to order your release from there and coming here."[9] By "there" Bhutto meant Mianwali jail and to win Mujib's sympathy, he mentioned that he too had been held in the same prison and same cell during the Ayub regime.[10] Bhutto's reference to "the same cell" was obviously incorrect, but this half-truth nonetheless served his purpose in gaining Mujib's trust.

From his personal experience Mujib must have known that Bhutto's statements should be treated with a certain amount of circumspection. Bhutto's claim that it was he who saved Mujib's life at the last minute rests entirely on what Bhutto told him. It cannot be corroborated by Yahya who was in virtual house arrest at that time and has since died of causes natural to his life-style, that is over-indulgence to alcohol. That Mujib accepted Bhutto as his saviour is evident from his interview with Frost in January 1972: "I am very grateful to Mr. Bhutto. There is no doubt about that."

Their talks were conducted in a very friendly, intimate manner. Recalling his warning to Bhutto about the military nine months ago in Dhaka, Mujib asked Bhutto, "You have done away with the military?" Bhutto replied: "Now it is a secondary matter. Military will not come back again. I just want to see the unity of my country on whatever terms you want."[11] If Mujib wanted to become the President it was all right with him. If he wanted the post of Prime Minister he could have it too. If he wished Bhutto to be the Prime Minister the Cabinet would be formed with his approval. There would be total freedom for each part and constitutional arrangements could be worked out as he wished. Then, breaking into Urdu, he begged, "*Khoda ke liye, Pakistan ko kisi tare bachao.*" (For God's sake, save Pakistan somehow).[12]

It was an appeal Bhutto must have felt would resonate with Mujib. How often had Mujib bitterly reproached West Pakistanis he had met during negotiation in Dhaka in March 1971 for doubting his patriotism? Had he not played a part in the Pakistan movement and travelled from Calcutta to Delhi with a Pakistan flag shouting "*Ban kar rahega Pakistan*" (Come what may, Pakistan will surely emerge)? "Where were Yahya and Bhutto then?" he had asked, choking with emotion.[13]

Now Mujib, still a hostage if not a condemned prisoner, responded to Bhutto's plea in Urdu, "*Yar, mujhe jane to do na.*" (My friend, you have

to let me go first). Bhutto persisted, "Mujib bhai, is there any possibility that we can live together?" Mujib said: "I'll meet my people, discuss with them and inform you. That is my promise. Inshallah we'll do something. I have not to say about this outright. You understand my position."[14]

Mujib had learnt from overheard conversations during his trial that Dr. Kamal Hossain was a prisoner in another jail in West Pakistan. He requested Bhutto to bring him to the Sihala Rest House to join him. Bhutto agreed. The very next day Dr. Kamal Hossain was released from Haripur jail and brought to the Rest House. Radio and newspapers were made available to them. Aziz Ahmed, who had been brought back from retirement to head the Foreign Office as State Minister by Bhutto came to visit them and discuss modalities of their return to Dhaka. Mujib suggested that they should be flown to Bangladesh by a UN or Red Cross plane. Aziz Ahmed replied that this was not possible. They would have to use a PIA plane but there was a snag. A direct flight to Dhaka would entail overflying Indian air space and Pakistan was not going to ask India for this favour in the current situation. He suggested that the PIA plane could take them to Tehran from where they could reach their destination after a change of planes. Following further negotiation it was agreed that they would be taken to London as soon as arrangements were completed.[15]

Aziz Ahmed entrusted Air Marshall Zafar Chaudhury with the logistics of the flight to London. To his query whether a Boeing plane was capable for flying non-stop to London, the Air Marshall replied "Yes, provided there is a favourable tail wind." He was told that he would have to make all the arrangements at very short notice and in great secrecy. Two or three days after this conversation he was told to go to Karachi and (a) collect a bagful of foreign currency from the State Bank and (b) pick up Mrs. Kamal Hossain and her children and bring them to Islamabad.[16]

On this day, 7 January 1972, Bhutto celebrated his forty-fourth birthday in his home town of Larkana and returned to Islamabad at night to see off Mujib before his flight to London and freedom. The Foreign Office was opened at night for the express purpose of issuing Pakistani diplomatic passports for Mujib and Kamal Hossain. The passports were signed by Birjees Hasan Khan, a batchmate of mine in the Pakistan Foreign Service.[17]

At the airport Bhutto reverted to his favourite theme: "On the 27th (December) you said that we can have two or three things together—defence, foreign affairs and currency—I don't mind confederation (however) loose it is." Mujib protested: "No, no, ... I have already told you that we can

wait ... Some sort of arrangements we can make. This is absolutely between you and me. I know you have not told anybody." Bhutto promised to keep it "absolutely confidential."[18]

"You leave it to me," Mujib said, "absolutely leave it to me. Trust me." Mujib hinted at many difficulties that he would have to contend with after his return. "*Tum ne to ayesh kiya*" (You have enjoyed life), Mujib said. "You have lived in England and in America. I have seen nothing. Now I have to go and cope with so many difficulties. You understand."

Bhutto said that he was prepared to go to Dhaka if that would help to bring reconciliation between the two parts of Pakistan. "No, no," Mujib told him. "I'll meet with my people ... I need time ... I'll tell you from there."[19]

Bhutto handed over to Mujib fifty thousand dollars which Air Marshall Zafar Chaudhury had brought from Karachi, saying that this was for his expenses. Mujib declined the offer of money and suggested that he "contribute it for my chartered plane."[20]

They embraced each other warmly at the airport as the special "cargo" flight of the PIA to carry Mujib, Kamal Hossain and his family, was readied for the long flight to London. As the plane took off shortly after midnight on Saturday, 8 January 1972, Bhutto turned to his entourage and said, "The bird has flown."

The PIA jet plane, with Air Marshal Zafar Chaudhury on board as well, landed at the Heathrow airport at 6:30 in the morning while London was shrouded by a thick fog. As Mujib walked down the aircraft to freedom, his last links with Pakistan, which he had helped to create and to preserve, were at last severed.

Notes

1. Ahmed Selim, *Sheikh Mujiber Bandijiban*, Sahitya Prokash, Dhaka, 1998, pp.55-57.
2. David Frost's, Interview with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, WNEW-TV, New York, 18 January 1972.
3. Ibid.
4. *The American Papers*, pp.773-774.
5. Ibid, p.712.
6. Interview with Yusuf Buch, Acting Minister for Information 1972-1977 during the Bhutto regime, December 17, 1996.

7. David Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, pp.173-176.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. *The American Papers*, op. cit.
11. David Wolpert, op. cit.
12. Yusuf Buch, op. cit.
13. Asghar Khan, *Generals in Politics*,Pakistan 1958-1982, p.30. See also Anthony Mascarenhas, *The Rape of Bangladesh*, Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1971, p.137.
14. Yusuf Buch.
15. Conversations with Dr. Kamal Hossain in Winter 1997.
16. David Wolpert, op. cit.
17. Conversation with Birjees Hasan Khan.
18. Wolpert, op. cit.
19. Yusuf Buch, op. cit.
20. Wolpert, op. cit.

PART IV

BANGLADESH

We will have to turn the independence movement into a struggle for building our country. The struggle for reconstruction is more difficult than the struggle for freedom.

Sheikh Mujib, 30 January 1972

What an irony of fate that it is I, who for my entire life have struggled for democracy and spent many years in prison for it, should now have to create a one-party [state]. BAKSAL will start functioning fully from August. I didn't want this. I have been obliged to do this. Pro-Pakistan parties, armed followers of the JSD, Sarbahara Party and others are out to destroy the normal political life and administration of our country... Since there is no other way I have established BAKSAL as a platform for like-minded people in favour of independence... This one-party arrangement is purely temporary. Once I have saved the country from counter-revolution I'll restore multi-party democracy.

Sheikh Mujib, June 1975, while talking to members of a delegation departing for Moscow to attend a conference of Afro-Asian writers

There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.

Machiavelli, The Prince

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TRIUMPHAL RETURN

In the Western Christendom the religious commandment to observe the seventh day, Sunday, as a day of rest had always been taken seriously. Since the two World Wars religious feelings have steadily been on the wane. Yet the demands of modern servantless society on the working men and women are such that it is regarded as an imperative to allow them a well-deserved rest not only for Sunday but also for Saturday. Only the essential personnel work on weekends. Mujib's arrival in London without prior notice was planned by Bhutto so that the event would not be well-publicised beforehand and Mujib would have a quiet, not a warm, public reception.

Since weekends are generally uneventful, the duty officer at the Foreign Office in London was startled to receive an urgent message at around 5:20 on the morning of 8 January 1972: An unscheduled PIA aircraft carrying Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by now a household name, would be landing at the Heathrow airport within the hour.[1] The duty officer was a well-trained professional and he knew his routine. He rang up Ian Sutherland, the head of the South Asia Department in the Foreign Office, arranged for the VIP room in the airport, and procured a limousine to drive Mujib and his companions from there to his hotel.

In view of the paucity of time Ian Sutherland could not reach the airport in time to receive Mujib when he got down from the plane. Only some airport officials were in the VIP room to look after his needs. Mujib's first request to them was to be put in touch with some people he knew in London. They were mostly Bengali restaurant owners who had been active in mobilising support for him when he was in military custody during the Agartala trial. Bengali restaurants were of course closed in the early hours of the morning and he could not talk to any of them.

The Foreign Office had in the meantime thoughtfully communicated to the VIP room the telephone number of Rezaul Karim, the Acting Head of the unofficial Bangladesh Mission, staffed by Bengalis who had defected from the Pakistan High Commission recently. The news of Mujib's arrival in London had been flashed by the BBC but like almost

everybody else Rezaul Karim was fast asleep at that time. He could not believe his ears when the telephone rang and he heard the familiar voice from the other end of the telephone line: "Rezaul Karim, this is Sheikh Mujib."[2]

He got dressed in a hurry and sped to the airport in his Ford Cortina. Shortly afterwards Ian Sutherland also arrived in the VIP lounge. To their query whether Mujib had any preference for a place to stay Mujib mentioned the name of a hotel in Russel Square where he had stayed during a previous visit. It was a moderately priced hotel usually patronised by students. After some consultation it was suggested to Mujib by them that he should move into the posh Claridges Hotel. Whereupon Mujib exclaimed: "That would cost a lot of money. Where will you get the money?" However he agreed to the suggestion when it was pointed out to him that the Claridges Hotel was one of the few hotels in London suitable for a Head of State. Sutherland booked a suite where Yahya and Mrs. Gandhi had stayed during their separate visits to London.[3]

Starved of news for the past nine months, except for Pakistani newspapers in the final days in Rawalpindi, Mujib asked Rezaul Karim to accompany him to the hotel and brief him on developments. Rezaul Karim was afraid that if he left his car unattended at the airport it might be towed away. Mujib understood his predicament and decided to travel in his small car, letting Dr. Kamal Hossain and his family use the big limousine. While listening to Rezaul Karim's narration of events Mujib several times exclaimed: "*Amra sattyi swadhin hoechh*" (So we are really free) as if he could not get over this reality.[4]

After they reached the Claridges Hotel visitors began to stream in from all walks of life. There were media people, prominent personalities and of course, hundreds of Bengalis. Among the early visitors was Anthony Mascarenhas, the Pakistani journalist of Goanese origin, whose exposé of atrocities committed by the Pakistani troops in East Bengal in the *Sunday Times* had created a world-wide sensation. He was personally known to Mujib having travelled together across the United States in the summer of 1958. Doubtless Mujib wanted to reward Mascarenhas for his valuable service to the cause of the liberation struggle, for he confided to him: "I have a big scoop for you. We are going to keep some link with Pakistan but I can't say anything more till I have talked it over with the others. And for God's sake don't write anything till I tell you". Mascarenhas tried to tell Mujib that this was a preposterous thought after what had happened in East Bengal but they were interrupted by the appearance of

B.K. Nehru, the Indian High Commissioner, who wanted to have a private word with Mujib. Afterwards Mujib had a long telephone conversation with Mrs. Gandhi in New Delhi. "Mujib's re-education had begun", in the words of Mascarenhas.[5]

It is difficult to say whether the Indians were primarily responsible for Mujib's change of heart on the question of "link" with Pakistan. Be that as it may, Mujib's answer to this question posed by newsmen at the crowded press conference in the grand ballroom of the Claridges Hotel was non-committal: "I told him (Bhutto) I would not say anything about this until I returned to my people."

It was a hectic, wonderful time for Mujib in London. In the 26 hours he sojourned there he spoke on the telephone to Begum Mujib, members of his family, Tajuddin and others. He met Bengalis resident in London in groups of five. He talked to selected media representatives like David Frost. Above all, he met a number of distinguished political personalities of Great Britain. The former Prime Minister Harold Wilson visited him at the hotel; so did Peter Shore, a former Cabinet Minister. The Prime Minister Edward Heath cut short his weekend at the Chequers and returned to his official residence at No.10 Downing Street to receive Mujib. The Commonwealth Secretary-General Arnold Smith called on him as the leader of a potential member of the Commonwealth.

Prime Minister Heath left no doubt in Mujib's mind that Britain entertained friendly feelings towards Bangladesh and would accord recognition to the new government as soon as it was perceived to be firmly in control. Meanwhile the British government put a Royal Air Force jet at his disposal to fly him to Dhaka.

Shortly after dawn of 9 January 1972 the plane was on its way to Dhaka. It made a brief "fuel stop" in Cyprus and stopped over in New Delhi for a few hours to allow Mujib "to pay personal tribute to the best friends of my people." Thousands of people lined the route to the Rashtrapati Bhavan to get a glimpse of him. A low-flying plane showered the motorcade with rose petals.

Overwhelmed with emotion Mujib addressed afterwards a public meeting. He began his speech in English but he switched to Bengali when the crowd demanded that he speak in his native language. "I am at last going back to *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal), the land of my dreams," he said: "I go back to the sunshine of a million victorious smiles. I go back to free, independent Bangladesh." He expressed his firm belief that his country would prosper amid undying friendship between the two countries.



Photo 15: Triumphal homecoming — on return to Dhaka, and on his way to address a mammoth public gathering on 10th January, 1972

He ended his speech with the shout of "Jai Hind." Mrs. Gandhi responded spontaneously with the shout of "Joi Bangla" in perfect Bengali accent. Her father had seen to it that Santiniketan should be her finishing school.

The Indians suggested that Mujib should fly from New Delhi to Dhaka in an Indian aircraft. Mujib declined the offer, saying that it would be graceless on his part to ask the RAF aircraft provided by the British Government to go back to London without completing its mission.

The white RAF Comet landed in Dhaka at 2:30 p.m. on 10 January 1972. A public holiday had been declared to celebrate Mujib's return to an independent Bangladesh. The tumultuous welcome he received from the populace was unprecedented. He was driven directly from the airport to the mass meeting in Race Course in an open Dodge truck. Bangladesh, he declared, would be guided by "socialism, democracy and secularism", making it clear that the concept of a Muslim State had been abandoned. Then, addressing Pakistan, he said: "You have killed lakhs of my people, dishonoured our mothers and sisters, burned uncounted number of houses, and driven away ten million of my countrymen to India .... Even so, I do not harbour any hatred against you. You have your independence. Let us have our independence." Referring to Bhutto's request to him to consider some sort of a link between Bangladesh and Pakistan, he said: "Now all of you please note what I tell him: the link has been snapped. From now on, we will have nothing to do with you."

It was only after the mass rally that he was driven to meet his family at their residence in Dhanmondi. His house at Road No. 32 had been extensively damaged on the night of his arrest and the family had to rent a place temporarily until their house could be made habitable. There was a tearful reunion as he embraced the family members and knelt down to touch the feet of his elderly parents.

Nothing significant in history is ever achieved without paying a price. It had been a long struggle and Mujib personally had paid a heavy price for leading his people to emancipation, to freedom. He had spent the greater part of the Pakistan period, more than eleven years, in prison. He had barely escaped the gallows. Now at last he had arrived. His greater challenge was now ahead of him: How to transform a liberated Bangladesh in ruins into a *Sonar Bangla* of his dreams.

Notes

1. Robert Payne, *The Tortured and the Damned*, Inca Publishers, Bombay, 1975, p.22. Although it is a fiction about the liberation war, it does contain interesting details about Mujib during this period. The author had visited Bangladesh in 1974 at the invitation of the Bangladesh Government.
2. An article by Rezaul Karim, "Bangabandhu's Historic Landing in Freedom—26 Hours in London," in the *Daily Star*, Dhaka: 16-1-1997.
3. Ibid.
4. Conversation with Rezaul Karim.
5. Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood*, Hodder and Stoughlon, London, 1986, pp.4-5.
6. Faruq Chowdhury, Foreign Office, who was present in New Delhi when Mujib arrived there.

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PRIME MINISTER

Mujib had been in prison so many times that he sometimes called it his second home and at other times his university. He was never an avid reader. However the prison regulations for a political prisoner allowed him to correspond, receive visitors and mix freely with other political detainees. So he was able to keep himself abreast of political developments in the country. More importantly, his stay in the prison gave him the leisure to reflect and work out plans for the future course of action.

His latest prison experience in West Pakistan was altogether different. Except for the last few days of his detention in Pakistan when he was at the Sihala Rest House awaiting release, he had no knowledge of happenings of the world outside his prison cell. Even his guards were strictly forbidden to talk to him. Mascarenhas, after meeting Mujib in his hotel suite shortly after his arrival in London, described him as a "latter-day Rip van Winkle."[1] It was an apt description.

Mujib had escaped the oppressive isolation of a tiny cell with bare walls but he was soon to face isolation of a different kind. Men in supreme power often find themselves hemmed in by human walls built by sycophants and self-seeking people. Mujib's great strength had always been his bond with the people based on his human contacts with them. As soon as he landed in Dhaka, however, he became isolated from them by a wall erected primarily by the student leaders. It was they who flanked him on his way to the mass rally. It was they who threw a protective cordon around him to foil any assassination attempt and accompanied him to his temporary residence for the emotional family reunion.

This was their moment and they took full advantage of it. The top four student leaders—Sheikh Moni, Sirajul Alam Khan, Tofael Ahmed and Abdur Razzak—waited until the reunion was over. Then they sat down with Mujib in a separate room for more than two hours to brief him about developments of the preceding year in the "Mujibnagar" Government. Mujib's son-in law, Wazed Miah, was also present at the meeting as an onlooker. The student leaders gave their version of the role played by Tajuddin and other members of the provisional government led by him,

the Awami League, and the other political parties NAP (Bhashani), NAP (Muzaffar) and the Communist Party. They also gave their opinion of the Mukti Bahini, its sector commanders and their attitudes. "Finally, they advised him about the steps which should be taken."[2]

It is not difficult to imagine the tenor of their diatribe: Tajuddin was hungry for power and that is why he had unilaterally declared himself to be the Prime Minister of the government-in-exile. He had disobeyed the wishes of Bangabandhu and tried to keep the student leaders from performing their rightful role during the liberation struggle. He was responsible for the disgraceful infighting within the Awami League. Instead of uniting the ranks of the Awami League he had divided them. He had excessive ambition and would like nothing better than to relegate Mujib to a figurehead position as President. Hence, he must be removed from his position as Prime Minister. It is also not difficult to imagine that some members of Mujib's immediate family, especially his brother-in-law, Serniabat, who had sided with Sheikh Moni in Calcutta, helped to create an unfavourable opinion of Tajuddin in Mujib's mind.

To understand fully how quickly they had been able to plant the seeds of suspicion in Mujib's mind in regard to Tajuddin one should recall that only a few hours ago he had paid fulsome tribute to him at the mass meeting when he said: "On that night of March my colleagues—Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam and others—were all sobbing while taking leave of me. I told them, carry on the struggle as I have directed you. They have been true to their vow." It is noteworthy that Mujib had mentioned only two of his colleagues by name, Tajuddin and Nazrul Islam—in that order—although Nazrul Islam outranked Tajuddin in the party hierarchy. So far Mujib had heard nothing but praise and admiration for Tajuddin by all and sundry both in London and New Delhi.

Early next morning Tajuddin, unaware of the intrigues against him on the previous evening, came to visit Mujib at his temporary residence in Dhanmondi. By all accounts their meeting was glacial. According to one account, Mujib did not greet him and stared at him in silence. It was Tajuddin who broke the ice: "I had hoped you would ask me about how I had conducted myself during the liberation struggle under trying circumstances. But I see you are not interested. But in the greater interest of the country I feel I should talk to you about one thing. A large quantity of arms are in the hands of freedom fighters right now. My requests to them to hand over those arms have been ignored." Tajuddin was referring to the fact that freedom fighters could not be disarmed because of the

express directives to the Mujib Bahini by Sheikh Moni not to deposit their arms to authorities until after the return of Mujib. Tajuddin continued: "My plan for the recovery of arms is based on the Algerian experience. You love Bangladesh. They will surrender their arms if you appeal to them. Otherwise it will be difficult to maintain law and order in the country." To which Mujib commented: "Don't worry about my boys holding on to their arms. They will hand them over when I tell them to do so."[3]

By the end of their brief meeting Tajuddin was left in no doubt that he had lost the favour of his leader. As advised by Serniabat and student leaders Mujib assumed the position of Prime Minister. If Tajuddin had hoped to be named Deputy Prime Minister he was disappointed. Tajuddin was shunted off to the post of Minister for Finance and Planning, which limited his functions to one area of government only. The change in the character of the government was justified on the ground that it was "the manifest aspiration of the people of Bangladesh to establish a parliamentary democracy." The essence of this system is that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are accountable to the people through Parliament at all times. No such body was in existence at that time. So what was established was a parliamentary system in name only.[4]

Mujib and Tajuddin were complete opposites in many ways. Mujib was a powerful orator and had an uncommon ability to win the trust and loyalty of the people by voicing in simple language their inner thoughts and longings. But he had practically no experience in running a government. He had two brief stints as Cabinet Minister for seven months in the provincial government in the mid-fifties. Tajuddin was a man of different temperament and talents. He had a lively intellect and an orderly mind. He was no demagogue and he was most persuasive in smaller circles. He had a strong sense of duty and was extremely hard-working.

The two men had got on surprisingly well together, as complete opposites often do, in the critical weeks before the crackdown. It was Tajuddin who took charge of the civil disobedience movement and was largely responsible for its success which outshone similar movements launched by Gandhi himself during his heyday. He was also intimately involved in the tortuous negotiations in March of the previous year with the Yahya regime. Tajuddin had become in effect the right-hand man of Mujib.

Tajuddin was a forthright person, a quality which earned him the enmity of student leaders at that time. In the first week of March 1971

when the Awami League High Command chose the path of negotiations with the Yahya regime and give it a chance to show whether it was sincere before opting for an alternate course, these student leaders were unhappy. They had pressed Mujib to declare independence unilaterally in his forthcoming speech on the 7th. Mujib was annoyed with their presumption that they had a better answer to the question of the day than the Awami League High Command in their collective wisdom. But he was reluctant to express his disapproval directly to them. Tajuddin took it upon himself, out of a sense of duty to Mujib and the party, to rebuke them for their irresponsible adventurism and earned their displeasure.

We have seen how these student leaders, especially Sheikh Moni, did their best to make life difficult for Tajuddin in Calcutta. Even after Tajuddin's return to Dhaka they continued to thwart him from performing his functions. And they succeeded in creating a rift between Mujib and Tajuddin the very day of Mujib's return to Dhaka by portraying Tajuddin as an ambitious man who posed a threat to him.

Actually Mujib had no reason to feel threatened by Tajuddin with whom he had developed a good working relationship prior to the crackdown. Mujib's standing with the people was very similar to Jinnah as a revered Father of the Nation. Like Jinnah, he would have remained a central figure in the government in whatever position he chose for himself. Unlike Jinnah, Mujib concentrated all power in his hands and was overwhelmed by the daunting tasks which required his personal attention.

No man's judgement can be better than the information on which it is based. Mujib, who knew almost nothing about the "Mujibnagar" government and its inner workings, had allowed himself to be influenced by misinformation and disinformation provided by student leaders and his brother-in-law Serniabat.

Tajuddin felt deeply wounded by the way he was treated by Mujib but stoically he carried on, hoping perhaps that Mujib would realise his error soon. When this did not happen, he is said to have told one of his well-wishers: "It would have been better if I had died immediately after the attainment of the independence of Bangladesh."[5]

Notes

1. Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood,* p.6.
2. M.A. Wazed Miah, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibke Ghire Kichhu Ghatana O Bangladesh*, p.122.

3. Badruddin Ahmed, *Swadhinata Sangramer Nepathay Kahini*, Nauroze Sahitya Sambhar, Dhaka, 1988, p.122.
4. Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1983, pp.8-10.
5. Badruddin Ahmed, op. cit.

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DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

Although the liberation war had lasted only nine months it had a profound impact on the Bengali society. It was jokingly said that the post-liberation Bengali society was divided into three groups: the Hajis, the Ghazis, and the Niazis. Hajis were those who had crossed over to India after the crackdown; Ghazis were the freedom fighters who had fought valiantly against Pakistani troops; and finally, the Niazis who did their best to keep out of trouble either by remaining passive or by collaborating with the Pakistani authorities.[1]

It was the Ghazis who fared the worst in the post-independence Bangladesh. This paradox can perhaps be explained by Gresham's law in political economy, which is commonly stated as "bad money drives out the good." In Bangladesh, fake freedom fighters drove genuine freedom fighters out of circulation from the first day of liberation, 16 December 1971. On that day bands of armed men, mostly goondas and other opportunists including even Razakars, went on a spree of looting of shops and properties belonging to non-Bengalis. A number of cars parked outside the Intercontinental Hotel were expropriated by them under the eyes of the Red Cross and the UN officials protecting the area as Neutral Zone. This cannot be explained as a campaign of vengeance against elements who had helped the Pakistan occupation authorities because Bengali collaborators as a group were not targeted by them. As these armed men suddenly emerged on the Liberation Day posing as freedom fighters they became known, in common parlance, as "the 16th Division".

It should be borne in mind that at this time there was practically no government in Dhaka, or for that matter, in the whole of Bangladesh. "Mujibnagar" government was still in Calcutta. Tajuddin, with a few associates, made his presence felt on the soil of Bangladesh by visiting Jessore but it would take him a week to establish himself in Dhaka itself. What the situation was until then has been described by a perceptive correspondent, Clare Hollingworth, in *The Daily Telegraph* (21-12-71) as follows:

> The Indian Army's struggle to restore normal life to Dacca without acting as an occupation force is proving far more difficult task than

invasion, according to more than one General. The city is without petrol, short of food, lacking about 80 per cent of local telephone service which was destroyed during the fighting. A handful of Bengali police have returned. Indian patrols are attempting to stop looting of houses and shops, and have established road checks, not only to look for arms, but to recover thousands of private cars stolen by the armed rabble calling themselves Mukti Fauj guerrillas.

The Indian Army's task was an unenviable one. The Indian government had taken into account these difficulties and had set up a Civil Affairs Cell at Fort William in Calcutta in anticipation of the liberation of Bangladesh. It consisted of Bengali-speaking Indian Administrative Service officers and personnel from other services to perform tasks of technical nature. The IAS officers were soon withdrawn when it was felt that Bangladeshi officials were adequate for administrative purposes. The technical personnel stayed on for a longer period to liaise with the Indian government in connection with the relief and rehabilitation needs of Bangladesh.

Mukti Bahini was powerless to prevent the slide into lawlessness. Mukti Bahini was unable to control the "16th Division;" in fact it was not even able to control its own members. The reputation of the Mukti Bahini was tarnished by the manner in which this organisation was exploited by some student leaders and Awami Leaguers for their selfish reasons.

By some estimates there were approximately 300,000 Mukti Bahini guerrillas in the field and in the training camps in India when the fighting ended. It should have been possible to prepare an authentic list of the freedom fighters but for one snag. Awami League leaders had been allowed to issue certificates designating anyone in their district as a freedom fighter. The number of "certified" freedom fighters soon exceeded the genuine freedom fighters. Not surprisingly, many real freedom fighters felt cheated because the fake ones also became entitled to jobs and other benefits without undergoing hardship and sacrifice.

One result of the inflation of the number of freedom fighters was that it became very difficult to ascertain who among them had been issued with arms. Independent guerrilla units had also sprung up after the crackdown in several parts of the country. They were equipped for the most part with captured Pakistani weapons. Some light arms had also been provided by the Pakistanis to their Razakars. Tajuddin had a plan to disarm them. Since genuine freedom fighters had the preponderance of these arms, his plan envisioned initially the setting up of camps where freedom fighters would assemble. Here they would be lodged and fed and in return for the

surrender of their arms they would be retrained for various national reconstruction programmes. Some of them would be absorbed by agencies of the government while others would join the National Militia. An 11-member Board of National Militia was constituted in the first week of January 1972. It included, among others, Maulana Bhashani.

Mujib ignored the existence of this Board. In the absence of a concrete scheme the majority of freedom fighters were not reassured that their interests would be protected. Some of them went so far as to criticise Mujib for not being with them during the liberation struggle and hence unable to understand their sentiments. After a series of meetings with them Mujib sought to win their goodwill by offering them rewards for their selfless services to the nation. They were promised a quota of government jobs, promotions for those already in government service and the establishment of a Freedom Fighters Trust to provide benefits for the disabled freedom fighters and for the family members of those who had fallen in the struggle. However most of them remained aggrieved.

True, there was a much-publicised ceremony at Tangail, the home base of "Tiger" Siddiqui, where an impressive quantity of arms were turned over to Mujib personally. There was another ceremony in Dhaka itself for the collection of arms. But it was evident that most freedom fighters held on to their arms or at best handed over a token amount. Among those who paid a lip service to surrender of arms were the student leaders and their followers. These arms were often used against each other in their factional struggle for supremacy.

The police force, normally equipped with lathis and old-fashioned rifles, was in a state of disarray after the liberation. It was therefore not in a position to deal with the armed bands possessing superior weapons. Nor were the ex-EPR personnel of much use to the civil authority. A sizable number of EPR men had been massacred at the start of the crackdown. Many of those who had survived had fought well against the Pakistanis; some had been held in captivity at their headquarters in Dhaka. After the liberation they were joined by ex-EPR fighters from different sectors. Ex-EPR personnel were apprehensive that they might be merged with freedom fighters who were also lodged with them at Peelkhana barracks. There was a clash between them necessitating the intervention of Mujib himself to calm the situation.

To calm the situation he assured them that they would be included in an independent force to combat insurgency and restore governmental authority throughout the country. An Order was promulgated on 7 March

1972 to create a para-military force called Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini (JRB), with retrospective effect from 1 February. Its purpose was to assist the civil authority in the maintenance of internal security and to perform such duties as the government would direct. Its major immediate tasks were to collect unauthorised arms, recover fake ration cards and to take action against miscreants and subversives.[2]

The Indians had long anticipated the problems that might arise after the independence of Bangladesh as a result of the activities of the leftist elements. This was the principal reason why the RAW, the Indian intelligence service, had encouraged the formation of the Mujib Bahini. Loyal to Mujib and purged of leftist elements, the Indians believed that it could serve as a parallel force to conduct a merciless war against them similar to what was being waged at that time by India against Maoist Naxalites. The force used by India to wage a ruthless campaign against Naxalites in West Bengal was the Central Reserve Police (CRP). It was to serve as a model for the JRB in Bangladesh. Maj. Gen. S. S. Uban, who had trained the Mujib Bahini in India and had accompanied Sheikh Moni to Bangladesh, fighting along the way the rebel Mizos in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, was given the job of advising Bangladesh on the composition, training and structure of the JRB. He came back to Bangladesh for this purpose. Mujib chose Captain Nuruzzaman, a co-accused in the Agartala Trial, as its commander.

Recruits from the Mujib Bahini formed the core of the Rakkhi Bahini. Some Mukti Bahini and Kaderia Bahini youth were also selected to join this force. Their training was conducted at Savar near Dhaka by Indian instructors initially. Later Rakkhi Bahini officers were sent to India for intensive training there. The olive-coloured uniform of the Rakkhi Bahini was similar to that of the Indian Army. This gave rise to rumours that Rakkhi Bahini had been created at the behest of India as a counterforce to the regular army and that its real function was to facilitate Indian intervention in Bangladesh should such a need arise.

The reproach that the Rakkhi Bahini was the hand-maiden of India to serve its interests was without foundation. There is no evidence that at any stage India contemplated the use of Rakkhi Bahini for its ends. Indian trainers drummed into the heads of JRB personnel that their loyalty was to the civil authority of the day. The ironic result of this indoctrination was that when Rakkhi Bahini personnel were integrated into the regular army after the assassination of Mujib in August 1975, they remained consistently loyal to the successor regimes. For instance, there were at least half a

dozen coup attempts against Zia and in none of them were the former Rakkhi Bahini men even remotely involved.[2]

This is not to say that the Rakkhi Bahini was a model of discipline in every respect. There was certainly an excessive use of force in carrying out tasks assigned to it. The Amnesty International Report on Torture and Impunity, published in 2000, mentions reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, particularly by the Rakkhi Bahini. It cites one case as an illustration: It concerns an 18-years old boy, Shahjahan, who allegedly died as a result of torture after being arrested by Rakkhi Bahini. The case received particular attention because it reached the Supreme Court in 1974 in the form of a habeas corpus petition in his behalf. Faced with limited jurisdiction, all that the Court could do was to recommend that the government set up a commission of enquiry to establish the truth. It would be fair, however, to point out that the widespread use of torture did not cease with the abolition of Rakkhi Bahini as a law enforcing agency.[3] It should also be noted that the Amnesty International did not accuse Rakkhi Bahini of indulging in rape, whereas a number of rapes of young women, including under-age girls, were committed by the police under the successor regimes, resulting sometimes in the death of the rape victims.

The major weakness of the Rakkhi Bahini in the long run was its close association with the Awami League. Since the local Awami League leaders were often the targets of various leftist groups, Rakkhi Bahini began by acting as their protector and ended up by taking orders from them. Mushtaque and Osmani for instance had Rakkhi Bahini units posted in their constituencies to enhance their hold over them.[4] As we shall see later, Rakkhi Bahini was utilised also by some prominent Awami League leaders to intimidate voters to vote for them during the 1973 elections. Thus misused, Rakkhi Bahini became gradually alienated from the people.

There was a great surge of feeling in the armed forces that the Rakkhi Bahini had been created as a counter-force to them. This was not so, for their functions were completely different. Rakkhi Bahini was set up as a law-enforcing agency; at no time was it issued with heavy weaponry like artillery, anti-tank guns or anti-aircraft guns to enable it to counter the armed forces. A malicious rumour was circulated that Rakkhi Bahini men were better paid and received more benefits than the armed forces personnel, although Rakkhi Bahini was treated at par with the armed forces so far as pay, rations and other benefits were concerned.

However, the perception in the armed forces that they were not entirely trusted by Mujib was not wholly unfounded. Mujib's experience with the Pakistani Army had left a mark on him. He felt that even Bengali officers and men belonging to the Pakistan armed forces had been

influenced to some extent by its culture which regarded politicians as a lesser breed of men. Which is why he did not give any encouragement to Bengali servicemen when he was approached by them to support their planned mutiny to achieve the independence of Bangladesh in the late 1960's. It was for this reason that he decided to retain the portfolio of defence in his hands instead of giving it to Osmani. Mujib appointed Shafiullah as Chief of Staff ignoring the seniority of Ziaur Rahman who was regarded by Mujib as inordinately ambitious, as evidenced by his first broadcast in March 1971 designating himself as Head of State of independent Bangladesh. Zia must have resented being downgraded in an organisation where rank means everything.

Mujib was deeply disappointed with his defence forces early on. He had succeeded in getting the Indian troops to withdraw from the soil of Bangladesh before his birthday on 17 March 1972. Yet he had to invite them back to the Chittagong Hill Tracts soon afterwards because our own troops were unable to mop up the remaining tribal insurgents there without Indian assistance.

Notes

1. The designation of Hajis, the Ghazis, and the Niazis for the three groups of Bengalis in the post-liberation period occurs in the reminiscences of a Pakistani official serving in East Bengal in 1971 (S. Alamdar Raza, *Dacca's Debacle*, Jung Publishers, Lahore, 1975, p. 97). Raza, who was held in the Cantonment in Dhaka prior to being sent to POW camp in India, writes that it was the Bengalis who called these three groups thus. Although I arrived in Dhaka only two days after Mujib himself, I do not recall these terms being used. It is quite possible that Pakistanis awaiting transportation to India might have coined them. In any case these designations are descriptive in a jocular sort of way, so I decided to use them.
2. Interview with Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Sabihuddin, Second-in-Command of the Rakkhi Bahini.
3. *The Star*, December 3, 2000.
4. Interview with Sabihuddin.

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THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM

The tasks facing the new government of Bangladesh were immense. After the ravages of nine months of war, the economic situation was worse than at any time in the history of the country. The level of commercial, industrial and other activities was perhaps 50 per cent below the low figures of 1970. The new government had no foreign exchange reserves, no overseas credit facilities and its financial resources were wholly inadequate. There was an acute shortage of liquidity owing to the destruction of bank notes by the Pakistanis before their surrender, combined with capital flight to West Pakistan. The damage to physical infrastructure was extensive. Ports were clogged with sunken vessels, key bridges had been blown up, railways and inland waterways had been severely disrupted.

To handle the daunting tasks of reconstruction and development an essentially provincial government had to be transformed into a national one to perform many of the functions of the central level. New institutions like central bank had to be established. This was not an easy job considering the fact that some senior civil servants had "disappeared" while under military custody in 1971 and many more were detained in West Pakistan.

Fortunately one of the biggest problems—the return of about ten million refugees in India—was largely solved by the refugees themselves. They left the refugee camps and trekked across the border to their homes. By the month of March 1972 the refugee camps were empty. Those who had property were able to resume ownership in most cases without difficulty; those who were landless peasants were able to go back to the normal patterns of sharing the crops. Among those whose rehabilitation proved troublesome were fishing communities who had lost their livelihood along with their boats and equipment.

Other problems, no less pressing, were less tractable. Some decisions could not be put off. Thus all abandoned properties of West Pakistanis—725 industrial enterprises and a large number of assorted commercial concerns—were taken over by the government by an Ordinance on 2 January, eight days before Mujib's arrival.

After Mujib became Prime Minister, he established a Planning Commission to advise him on basic policy directions in social and economic matters. He gave it more authority, far beyond what was enjoyed by it in united Pakistan. Mujib chose Dr. Nurul Islam to head it as Deputy Chairman with the rank of Minister. He and other three members—Rehman Sobhan, Mosharraf Hossain and Anisur Rahman—were all economists. They were academics with no executive or managerial experience. Their common denominator was that in the 1960's they had become close in varying degrees to Mujib when he was agitating for Six Points. Some of them had helped to publicise the desirability of "two economy" for Pakistan; Nurul Islam was chosen by Mujib to provide him with the economic input for a constitution based on Six Points. The composition of the Commission promoted harmony among its members but there was a downside. National planning involves a broad range of socio-economic issues; a planning agency, in consequence, should be an inter-disciplinary body to be effective. The Planning Commission, composed of like-minded academics, thus lacked creative tension in its deliberations. This often resulted in policy recommendations which did not take into account various points of view, especially of those who would have to execute them. As one of the planners later put it:

> In formulating policies the planners were thus guided by their own ideological predilections which undoubtedly shaped their perspective on the needs of the movement. Unlike career civil servants, who had to survive various regimes, the planners felt no compulsion to tailor their views to the felt needs of the leadership but framed their advice according to their beliefs and judgement. In giving expression to their own ideological preconceptions the planners became inevitably part of the dialectic within the new regime. Their policies and position put them into conflict with the established bureaucracy and those in the party and the bourgeoisie who were inimical to the policies proposed by the planners.[1]

In other words, the planners were driven more by ideology than by the realities of the post-liberation Bangladesh. It was all too clear that the urgent need of the moment was to revive the economy that had come to a wrenching halt. But the planners, or at least most of them, were obsessed by another consideration. They had been profoundly affected by the experience of Pakistan where the forces of the market had been given full freedom resulting in the domination of the economy by 22 business families, none of whom were Bengalis. "They believed that it was not possible to build a society (in Bangladesh) based on privilege where resources and

patronage would be channeled in the hands of the bourgeoisie," in the words of Rehman Sobhan.[2] A slogan was coined: "We will pay any price, we will endure any sacrifice to prevent the rise of 22 families in Bangladesh." This mantra of the Commission would lead it to propose a wholesale nationalisation of various sectors of the economy:

1) All banks excluding foreign ones.
2) Insurance companies except foreign ones.
3) Jute Mills.
4) Sugar Mills.
5) Textile Mills.
6) Major portion of Inland and Coastal Shipping.
7) Properties of all absentee owners with assets valued at Rs.1.5 million or more.
8) Air and ocean transportation.
9) Major portion of foreign trade.

The proposed size of the public sector, over 86 per cent of the industrial assets, would make it bigger than any other non-communist Asian country, with the exception of Burma. The Planning Commission, in making this comprehensive nationalisation proposal was not deterred by the failure of the Ministry of Industries even to manage the abandoned industries. There were also unresolved legal problems because of imprecision in the language of the Ordinance promulgated hastily.

It would be fair to say however that not all the planners ardently desired to nationalise Bengali enterprises owned or controlled by Bengalis or non-Bengalis like the Ispahanis who had settled in East Bengal and had identified their interests with the country by investing their capital wholly here in various industries. Nurul Islam, the head of the Planning Commission, for example, was a Harvard-trained orthodox economist; he was from Chittagong whose inhabitants had a long tradition of trading and an inborn gift for private enterprise. Unlike other planners who were either parlour Marxists or utopian socialists he was more down-to-earth in his approach to problems. But precisely for this reason he was inclined to follow a path of least resistance. He was well aware that he would feel isolated if he did not swim with the tide. The Planning Commission was practically besieged by some of the radical student leaders at this time to make sure that the planners did not deviate from the radical provisions of the Awami League Manifesto of 1970. The Manifesto had been written in the context of a united Pakistan. Although the context had changed, Nurul

Islam rationalised that he was bound by it and did not advise, as he could have done even in a private capacity as an economist who was liked and trusted by Mujib, about the disastrous consequences of a wholesale policy of nationalisation.

There can be little doubt that such an advice would have fallen on receptive ears. The Awami League had always been a party of the middle class. Mujib, its leader, had never been known to espouse socialism. It was only after the Agartala Trial that he accepted the 11-points of the student movement which had socialism as one its main points. In 1969-70 he embraced socialism not out of conviction but as a matter of practical politics. In the heady days after his release many people joined the Awami League-lawyers, businessmen etc.—because it seemed to be the party that would come into power after the next elections. The businessmen, in particular, had every reason to hope that in an autonomous East Bengal they would have an unprecedented opportunity to prosper without the interference of the central government or competition from the their business rivals in the other wing of Pakistan. After the liberation most of them expected that the rhetoric of socialism would be toned down, if not discarded, in favour of a realistic policy that stressed production. Some even entertained the hope that the abandoned properties would be auctioned off to the highest bidder to augment the financial resources of the government.

Mujib was under conflicting pressures from different interest groups within the Awami League and outside after he assumed power. Having been absent during the tumultuous nine months of the liberation war he had no proper appreciation of the longings of the various groups who were now clamouring for his attention. He could sense however that radical forces had emerged as important players on the political scene and they needed to be placated. Thus on 9 February 1972, he assured the workers that "a plan is being prepared whereby measures of nationalisation would be combined with new arrangements to ensure workers' participation in the management of industries." Mujib was in the habit of making populist statements of this sort to give the various elements of his party the impression that their interests would be protected. They were not meant as serious statements of policy.

The Planning Commission put Mujib on the spot. The Commission now argued that if the regime "sought to move towards socialism then it must realise that the dialectic of socialism demanded that the capitalist classes must not be permitted to expand their hold on the economy and must indeed in places have their presence curbed."[3]



Photo 16: Addressing a huge rally at Brigade Parade Ground, Calcutta on 6th February, 1972

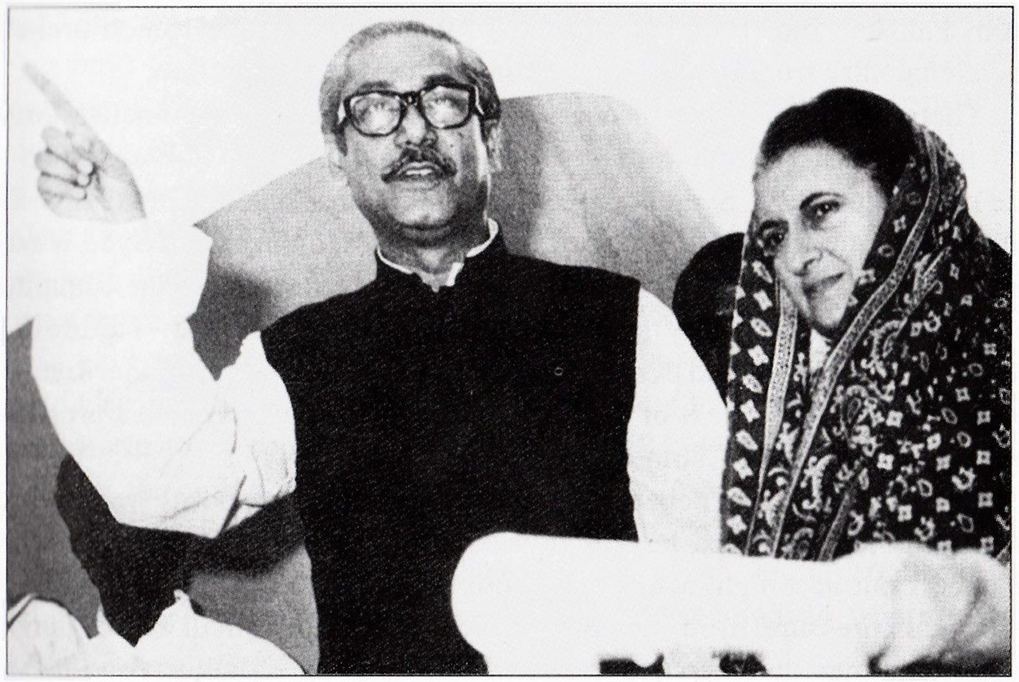


Photo 17: With Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Dhaka on 19th March, 1972

It would have been prudent for the Planning Commission to searchingly examine various models of development in the region before making any recommendation. There was no shortage of models. At one end there was the example of Burma on our doorstep which had followed the Burmese Road to Socialism; it had led this country from riches to rags. Farther afield, there was the example of Singapore, whose leadership had followed a pragmatic course and were on the verge of transforming their country from Third World to First.

The Planning Commission did not take into account the views of those who would have to execute the policy decisions. The Ministry of Industries, which had already been exposed to the difficulties of managing a wide array of abandoned industries had produced a paper on this subject in early February. On the basis of its experience it had suggested that only the large industrial units should be taken over by the state; the medium-sized units were to be under joint ownership with the private sector and the small units were to be sold off to the highest bidder. The proposal was rejected. In the view of the planners, not only should the "upper bourgeoisie"—their code-word for the entrepreneurial class—be denied access to the abandoned property but "their base for growth should be broken once and for all."

The planners had talked endlessly during Pakistan days arguing about the distribution of wealth then in the hands of West Pakistanis and very little about its generation. They had carried their intellectual baggage from Pakistan into Bangladesh which made them unable to comprehend the elementary truth that production must precede distribution.

There were extensive discussions on the subject of nationalisation in the inter-ministerial committee set up for this purpose. The members of the committee were: Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Kamal Hossain, M.R. Siddiqui and Nurul Islam of the Planning Commission. Syed Nazrul Islam, as the senior-most Cabinet Minister was the Chairman of the committee but he did not have any strong views in this matter. But Tajuddin, a convinced socialist and Kamal Hossain, a social liberal, made a strong case for a socialist vision of the leftist planners. The Committee's proposals were then sent to the Cabinet.

In the Cabinet the debate on the nationalisation proposal was intense. While the left-wing led by Tajuddin strongly endorsed it, the right-wing members put up a fight against it. Mujib held the balance. Mujib was under enormous pressure from the student radicals and the small but organised labour and they had the street power. Mujib was no economist and he was never given a menu of options of developmental patterns; nor did he have any appreciation of practical difficulties of managing nationalised industries.

He looked at this issue from an essentially political angle. Since a radical agrarian policy was impossible to implement in his middle-class, land-based Awami League party, Mujib opted to support the radical industrial policy instead.

This was not the end of the opposition to the nationalisation of Bengali-owned enterprises. M.R. Siddiqi, the Minister for Commerce, who happened to be the lone entrepreneur in a Cabinet composed mainly of land-owning lawyers, intended to continue his spirited campaign to block the proposal. But he had to go away for a tour abroad. He was promised that no final decision would be taken in his absence. The proponents of nationalisation took advantage of his absence to rush through the decision in favour of nationalisation in a Cabinet meeting on 23-24 March.[4]

Two days later, on 26 March, the first anniversary of the declaration of independence, Mujib read out over the national radio his announcement on nationalisation prepared by the planners:

> Having regard to the objective realities of our society, the old social order must be demolished in order to lay the foundations for a new society. We will build a society free from exploitation and injustice. Today on this historic day we move forward to implement the phased programme of the nationalisation of the key sector of the economy to which my Government is committed.

Mujib's speech mentioned a phased programme. In fact there was none. The nationalisation order went into effect without any attention being paid to the institutions that would be needed to implement the programme. Even Badruddin Umar, an unregenerate Stalinist, instead of welcoming this measure, complained that the government had "put the cart before the horse."[5]

But the left-leaning planners were not bothered with this. Some thirty years ago, their guru, the renowned Polish economist Oskar Lange, had written that a democratic government bent on socialisation by legal means would have to do so at one stroke, otherwise businessmen, facing expropriation, would throw the economy into chaos by milking their properties, permitting them to run down, or by deliberate sabotage.

When the policy of instant nationalisation was later adopted in his native country, Poland, it had at least a cadre-based party in control of the country, and there was also a considerable pool of managerial and technical skills to draw upon. This was not the case in Bangladesh where a vast majority of industries was owned and operated by West Pakistanis, with Biharis providing much of the technical skills at lower levels as mechanics, machinists etc.

So total chaos ensued. Inexperienced managers were hurriedly appointed to run these industries. There was a sharp drop in industrial production. The work force of the money-losing industries could not be reduced to cut costs for fear of labour unrest. Losses had to be covered by government subsidies. Inflation went out of control. And with dwindling exports of jute and other products foreign exchange reserves reached a dangerously low point. It did not take long for Bangladesh to be brought to the brink of economic disaster.

For a while the economy could limp along because of the crutch provided by foreign assistance and the United Nations Relief Organisation for Bangladesh (UNROB), which, apart from its relief effort, helped to rebuild the damaged infrastructure. Once this crutch was removed at the end of 1973, the collapse of the economy loomed ahead. Mujib lost his confidence in the planners as impractical academics and he replaced them by civil servants. But he never realised that the fundamental problem lay elsewhere. It was the system introduced by the planners-almost a carbon copy of the failed Burmese Road to Socialism—that was the root cause of the economic decline.

The achievement of political independence usually releases the enterprising spirit among the people and causes an economic upsurge. This had happened in both India and Pakistan. But it did not happen in Bangladesh because of the well-meant, but wrong-headed policies. Democracy cannot last for long in a country without a functioning economy. Within three years Mujib had to sacrifice parliamentary democracy for which had fought all his life in favour of an authoritarian single-party, presidential form of government.

Notes

1. Rehman Sobhan and Muzaffar Ahmed, *Public Enterprise in an Intermediate Regime*, Bangladesh Institute of International Studies, Dhaka, p.115.
2. Ibid.
3. Stanley A. Kochanek, *Patron-Client Politics and Business in Bangladesh*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1993, p.79.
4. Ibid, pp.79-80.
5. *The Holiday*, April 16, 1972.

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PROFITEERS OF INDEPENDENCE

We have seen how anti-social elements in Bangladesh had taken advantage of the vacuum of authority in the immediate aftermath of the liberation to profit from the situation. Their criminal activities were mainly limited to looting of shops, hijacking of cars and the like.

This initial outbreak of lawlessness was followed by a more systematic expropriation of properties belonging to the most vulnerable sections of the population like Biharis. Those who profited from their helplessness mostly belonged to or were closely connected with the ruling party, the Awami League.

Strictly speaking, Biharis were people who had migrated to East Pakistan from the Indian province of Bihar at the time of partition or thereafter. In course of time the nomenclature "Biharis" was loosely applied to other Urdu-speaking people from other parts of India. It was sometimes even applied to Urdu-speaking people from Calcutta, although it was the capital of united Bengal. After their migration non-Bengalis generally tended to live in separate enclaves and their interaction with the Bengalis was limited to the work-place. Their children were sent to schools where Urdu was the language of instruction. Having left their homes in India for Pakistan because of communal violence or lack of economic opportunities they showed little sympathy for the Bengali language movement, which was perceived by most of them to be instigated by Hindus or by India to undermine the unity of Pakistan. Only a small number of these immigrants showed an understanding for the aspirations of Bengalis or tried to integrate into the Bengali society.

Non-Bengali immigrants were rewarded by government officials, most of whom in senior positions in the provincial government were non-Bengalis themselves, for their loyalty to the ideology of Pakistan, in various ways. In the private sector which was mainly in the hand of West Pakistanis, Biharis were given better-paying skilled jobs in factories and mills. All this contributed to the widening of gap between the two communities.

The already strained relations between them were exacerbated after 1 March 1971 when Yahya announced the indefinite postponement of the National Assembly. Bengalis in Dhaka began venting their wrath on non-Bengalis. Violence soon spread to other towns of East Pakistan. There were some cases of brave action by Bengalis to give them protection. Under the circumstances they were few and far between. In Rajshahi, for instance, non-Bengali members of the teaching staff were saved by their Bengali colleagues by preventing the mobs from entering the campus of the Rajshahi University. A large number of panicky non-Bengalis left for West Pakistan days before the crackdown.

After the crackdown Biharis were armed by the military not only for their protection but to help the authorities in their pacification efforts. So Biharis became vulnerable again after the surrender of the Pakistani Army to the Joint Command. Although the Instrument of Surrender had provided for the protection of "ethnic minorities" the troops could not be everywhere to offer them the promised protection. Effective protection could however be provided only to neighbourhoods where they constituted a clear majority. In Dhaka itself Mirpur had Mohammadpur with their predominantly Bihari population remained unmolested, but not for long.

In late December 1971, the Bangladesh Army was ordered to comb these neighbourhoods to recover arms and to arrest collaborators. The residents of Mirpur were told to vacate their houses and assemble in an open space while the combing operation continued. It was planned to move them later to a temporary camp on the outskirts of Dhaka. This created unease among Biharis and some of them put up stiff resistance with arms in their possession. There were casualties on both sides in the exchange of fire. A civilian, Zahir Raihan, was also killed in the crossfire. He had apparently gone to Mirpur to enquire into the circumstances of the mass killing of 36 leading intellectuals and professionals of Dhaka just before the surrender; his brother, Shahidullah Kaiser, a political activist, had been among the victims of this 14 December carnage. It was not known at the time that this heinous crime had been perpetrated by Bengali collaborators and not by Biharis.

The death of Zahir Raihan, a promising film-maker, aroused strong feelings against the Bihari community. The subcontinent had a history of communual riots and it was not altogether surprising that bad feelings against Biharis should set off communal violence. There were massacres of Biharis in Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna by mobs.[1] The disturbing aspect of the riots in Dhaka was that their prime instigators were some student leaders who were motivated by greed.

They were unlike the student leaders such as Mujib and Tajuddin, who had been steeled in the struggles for the attainment of the rights of Bengalis and in the process had suffered long periods of privation and imprisonment. Student leaders who had emerged in the sixties had a relatively easy time. After their belated arrival in Calcutta the student leaders were more busy in intriguing against Tajuddin than in organising the youth for guerrilla warfare inside East Bengal. Upon their return to Dhaka very few of them could resist the temptation of amassing wealth at the expense of non-Bengalis.

The world press had shown great sympathy for Bangladesh as it struggled to cope with the myriad problems of a war-devastated land. But the handling of the Bihari issue came in for extensive criticism in the Western media, as well as by enlightened people abroad who had sided with the Bangladesh cause during the liberation war. Foreign correspondents in Dhaka were focused almost entirely on the treatment of Biharis and were training their binoculars on the detention camps to send eye-witness accounts of the utter squalor of their living conditions. To see what the condition in the camps were really like I went to one of the main camps where Major (later Maj. Gen.) Shafiullah was in charge. He was most sympathetic to their plight.

I was summoned to visit the Prime Minister generally two or three times a month. I mentioned to him the Bhihari question when I met him after a week or so following my visit to the Bihari camp. I showed him a sheaf of clippings from the world press in the hope that the bad coverage we were receiving would prompt him to issue at least a public statement to calm the situation. Before the commencement of the civil disobedience movement in March of last year he had called upon the people to respect the civil liberties of non-Bengalis, even though it was not always heeded. More significantly, within a few days of his triumphal return to Dhaka, he had taken the trouble of going to the Kurmitola Cantonment to invite Pakistani civilian internees lodged there to stay on in Bangladesh where, he assured them, they would be well treated. But this time he was unresponsive. Apparently some people around him, especially student leaders, had managed to convince him that the impulse of vengeance should not be checked so that we could get rid of the Bihari problem once and for all.

In the wake of the anti-Bihari sentiment whipped up mainly by some student leaders it was not only the Biharis but many other non-Bengalis who were dispossessed of their property. I know personally of one such case. The older brother of an Urdu-speaking classmate of mine in Calcutta had come to Dhaka after partition. His main source of income was rent

from a shopping arcade he had built. He was given an ultimatum by a well-connected person to sell the property to him at a fraction of its market value "or else." Faced with the alternative of losing his life or his property he naturally chose the latter.

Biharis were provided with their daily food rations by representatives of the International Committee Red Cross (ICRC). One day Ghazi Gholam Mustafa, Chairman of the Bangladesh Red Cross and the President of Dhaka District Awami League, came to visit me in my office. He was accompanied by Abdul Mannan, the Awami League labour leader. Mustafa's request was simple: The ICRC should not be allowed to distribute its rations directly to Biharis; as a matter of national honour. This should be done through our own Red Cross. I told him that we should be happy that the ICRC was disbursing its food rations to Biharis directly, for this would allow his hardpressed organisation to take care of numerous other relief needs. He complained that the ICRC people were CIA agents. I said that I could not accept the allegation without any proof. I felt I was on solid ground for refusing his unreasonable request; Gholam Mustafa had acquired by this time the dubious disticntion as *Kambalchor*, stealer of blankets provided to our Red Cross by relief agencies.

Many members of the largest minority group in Bangladesh, the Hindus, were also deprived of their property in the post-liberation period. The instrument by which this despoliation was carried out was the Vested Property Act, a new nomenclature for the Enemy Property Order of 1965 which was enacted following the short-lived war between India and Pakistan in September of that year. The official in charge of executing the Enemy Property Order told me how its name was changed. Soon after the surrender an Indian general noticed the signboard of the office dealing with the Enemy Property Order and asked his Bengali escorting official: "Who is the enemy?" The sardonic remark of the Indian general was duly reported to the higher-ups and the Enemy Property Order was reincarnated as the Vested Property Act. Only the label was changed; the content remained the same.

It should have been possible to modify some of the provisions of the Pakistani law, taking into account the fact that it was decreed in a different historical context, with the obvious intention of dispossessing the Hindu community and driving them out of their motherland. The out-migration of the Hindu minority, over five million, not only imposed unbearable suffering among them but also was a loss to the Bengali community as a whole by deterring the social-capital formation in Bangladesh. In the new

government of the post-liberation Bangladesh no one seems to have noticed that some major changes in the law were called for, considering the fact that secularism was one of the state principles. To some extent this omission may have been due to the paucity of competent officials in an overburdened government. But the possibility cannot be excluded that some people in the ruling circles wanted to take advantage of this Act by appropriating Hindu property not yet taken over during the Pakistani rule.

Even prominent Hindus who had been in the forefront of struggle for the rights of Bengalis were affected by the unjust application of the Vested Property Act. The case of Dhirendranath Dutta and his family, can be cited as an example. He had been the first Bengali parliamentarian to raise his voice in protest against the imposition of Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan. It was his bold stand in the Constituent Assembly in 1948 that prepared the ground for the language movement. In 1971, he refused to seek sanctuary in India after the crackdown because of his conviction that he should not leave his constituents to the mercy of the military while he sought safety. He was taken into military custody, along with his son, and brutally murdered. Their bodies were never recovered. During his lifetime he had donated the bulk of his landed property for the education and welfare of the inhabitants of his ancestral village in Brahmanbaria. Only a token rural property was willed by him for his family. It was grabbed by unscrupulous people under the pretext that it fell under the category of "vested property." His family members filed a case with the Subjudge Court of Brahmanbaria; the Court made the absurd demand that the family produce death certificate of Dhirendranath Dutta.[2]

Neither Mujib nor members of the old guard of the Awami League misused the Vested Property Act for their personal benefit. This cannot be said however of many Awami Leaguers of lesser rank. Mujib's brother-in-law, Serniabat, who had jumped on the Awami League bandwagon only two years ago, was one of the few Cabinet members who sought to benefit from the Vested Property Act. The Act was abused widely in rural Bangladesh by locally prominent Awami Leaguers and village *matbars* (To put things into perspective, it should be noted that the application of this Act had been harsher during Pakistan days and became harsher still during the Zia regime).

State administration of nationalised industries and foreign trade provided another source of enrichment to the new exploiting class in Bangladesh. Engels, co-founder with Karl Marx of scientific socialism, had shown some worries toward the end of his life that "the surplus

product" could end up in the pockets of a new possessing class even under a socialist system. In 1891 he wrote: "That is the sensitive point. So long as the possessing classes remain at the rudder, all nationalisation means not abolition of but only a change in the form of exploitation."

Engel's forebodings were realised in Bangladesh, like in many other countries adopting nationalisation as a panacea for economic difficulties. There was little interest in instituting a proper system of industrial management after nationalisation. Most high positions in the nationalised industries were filled by incompetent people with connections with the Awami League. There was no quota or norm for production. There was hardly any control or performance auditing of these enterprises. Not content with living on their salary, which was meager, many office holders of management positions, took advantage of the lax supervision to grow rich by various means. It became a common practice to set fire to the godowns and warehouses to hide the evidence of their misdeeds. Although a State Trading Corporation had been established to control foreign trading, this body lacked the know—how to handle its job. Import licenses were therefore freely given to licensed "indenting" or representing foreign suppliers associated with foreign aid projects and public sector industries. The commission earned by indenters was given in foreign exchange and kept abroad by them to evade income tax.

Extortion became yet another lucrative source for amassing money and power. Sheikh Moni was the pioneer in starting this Mafia-like activity in Bangladesh. He began his new career by appropriating the unspent funds provided by India during the liberation struggle for the Mujib Bahini, of which he was the self-designated "Marshal." He seized the Pasban Press in the Tejgaon Industrial Area, among other properties, and became the publisher of two daily newspapers: *The Bangladesh Times* in English and *Banglar Bani* in Bengali. He formed a youth organisation, Jubo League, which provided him with the musclemen he needed to enforce his will. He was apparently generous in dividing his loot among his followers and was thereby able to attract aspiring young men to his organisation. He was not interested in accumulating personal wealth, but in power.

Another Awami Leaguer to form his own private militia was Abdul Mannan, the labour leader. It was called Lal Bahini (Red Army). Mannan probably got his inspiration from Mao's Red Guards, for he launched his "purification" drive in cheap imitation of the Cultural Revolution then in full swing in China. On 30 April 1973, Mannan had the effrontery to send his men, distinctive in their red headbands, to raid the home of Ahmed

Fazlur Rahman, one of the co-accused with Mujib in the Agartala Trial. Fazlur Rahman was abducted and taken to the office of the Shramik League, the labour front of the Awami League. He was harshly questioned about his business activities and the source of his wealth. After his acquittal from military detention and jail in 1971 he had shown no interest in joining the government as a civil servant or as a political appointee. Instead he made his living by expanding his ownership of a petrol pump station to a chain of 13 and other small-scale business ventures. When Fazlur Rahman was taken away to a destination unknown to his distraught wife, she literally ran from her house to Mujib's residence close by to seek his help. Mujib was not in. But Begum Mujib told her not to worry. Fazlur Rahman was released as a result of Mujib's personal intervention. Fazlur Rahman then issued a statement to the effect that the Prime Minister had assured him that suitable action against Mannan would be taken for his illegal abduction and detention. Mannan was furious and held a public meeting at Baitul Mukarram where he threatened to kill Fazlur Rahman. Thereupon Fazlur Rahman filed a lawsuit against Mannan. When no action seemed to be taken against Mannan, Fazlur Rahman complained to his friends that he held Mujib personally responsible for what had happened. Characteristically, Mujib dropped in to visit Fazlur Rahman at his house to assure him that he had nothing to do with this affair.[3] It was only in January 1975 that Mannan was finally arrested on charges of "misappropriation of funds". This incident highlighted a fatal weakness in Mujib's character; his unwillingness or inability to check the blatant abuse of power and corrupt practices of his party people. In large part this was due to his loyalty to his associates and workers who had helped him through thick and thin over the years. Mujib believed that they deserved benefits and rewards for "their suffering to the cause of the nation." Politics of patronage is perhaps inherent in a democratic political system; Mujib's failing was that he made no conscious effort to limit the distribution of patronage in a sensible way.

In the case of Mannan it would not have been a risky decision for Mujib to let the law take its natural course. This might not have pleased some of the power-hungry Awami Leaguers, but it would have sent a powerful signal to them that law was no respecter of persons. It would have won him universal admiration and enhanced his authority. Mannan was arrested but was released on bail. This sent a wrong message to wrong-doers: Awami Leaguers would be spared from the Public Safety Act being applied to them.

Bhashani's NAP was not far off the mark when it stated in its 1973 Election Manifesto: "Pakistan's 22 families have become Bangladesh's 2000." The 22 families of Pakistan at least produced some wealth for the national economy; the 2000 *nouveau riche* families of Bangladesh were basically parasites who sucked the life-blood out of the already anaemic national economy.

Notes

1. A British Mission led by David Ennals a former Minister in the Labour Government, visited Bangladesh in April and May 1972. On 11 May Ennals stated that although he had seen refugees in Europe, Algeria, Syria and Lebanon, "I have never seen conditions so grim." His report was published in July. It mentions that it was only at Saidpur, a railway town, where the 400,000 Biharis considerably outnumbered the Bengalis that conditions were much better. Those who took an oath of allegiance to Bangladesh were being given Bengali lessons and signed on at the railway workshops. See *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, April 9-15, 1973, p.25822. Conditions showed some improvement in other areas in the summer of 1972, according to the *Daily Telegraph* of June 19, 1972.
2. Abul Barakat, S. Zaman, Azizur Rahman, Avijit Poddar, *Political Economy of the Vested Property Act in Rural Bangladesh.* Association of Land Reform and Development, Dhaka, 1997, pp.xi, xii.
3. Hasina Rahman, *Bangalir Mukti Sangram O Ahmed Fazlur Rahman*, pp.124-128.

45

THE OPPOSITION

Having won resoundingly in the 1970 general election and led the liberation struggle to a successful conclusion the Awami League's legitimacy to govern Bangladesh could not be disputed by other political groups. Right-wing religious parties had been totally discredited because of their support to Pakistan during the liberation struggle. Many of the middle-of-the-road moderate political leaders had also come under a cloud either on account of direct collaboration or because they had shown interest in contesting by-elections held by the Pakistani occupation authorities to replace Awami League parliamentarians who had left for India. In February 1972, the government published two lists of collaborators. In the first there were 15 names; in the second there were 23. These lists also included names of those who had chosen to stay in Pakistan rather than return to Bangladesh where they could face charges under the Collaborators Order. The only prominent political leader who emerged with unsullied reputation was Ataur Rahman Khan; he lacked however an organisation or grassroots support to form the nucleus of a serious opposition to the Awami League.

The leftist political parties were the only groups in the post-liberation period which had the following and the organisation to constitute an opposition. The allure of the leftist ideology was very strong in East Pakistan, as elsewhere in many parts of the developing world, in the decade preceding independence. Had the leftists been able to maintain some sort of unity they could have become a formidable political force in Bangladesh. But the rift between Moscow and Beijing in the early sixties had splintered the Communist Party into several factions. The mainstream Communist Party led by Moni Singh remained loyal to the Moscow line; so did a wing of the NAP led by Professor Muzaffar Ahmed. During the liberation war they worked in close harmony with the provisional government in Calcutta. Muzaffar tentatively floated the idea of a national government for Bangladesh before the return of Mujib, but the Awami League was not willing to consider sharing power with political parties which had been trounced in the 1970 general election. Although disappointed, NAP (Muzaffar) and the Communist Party supported the government and along with the

Awami League were considered to be the only three "patriotic" political parties in the country.

It was indeed difficult to think of opposition while Bangladesh was in an euphoric mood with its newly-won independence and Mujib was at the zenith of his popularity. The underground pro-Beijing Communist Parties nonetheless did not hesitate to come out in opposition to the Awami League rule. There were five of them: Purba Banglar Communist Party known as Matin-Alauddin group; Banglar Communist Party, known as Deben-Bahar group; Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) led by Toaha; East Pakistan Communist Party (M-L) led by Abdul Huq; and Purbo Banglar Sarbahara Party led by Siraj Sikdar. The doctrinal difference among them was minimal; there were some disagreement on how to fight their common enemy. The enemy was of course the new regime headed by Mujib which to them represented the petit bourgeois elements and not the downtrodden masses. One point on which there was common agreement was that the Indian intervention in December 1971 had hampered the revolutionary task of transforming the country into a real people's democracy; the unfinished revolution must therefore be carried forward to its logical conclusion. Unable to combine their strength in a common struggle, each group fought separately in areas under their influence. Rakkhi Bahini was used to counter their violent activities like the assassination of local Awami League leaders and attacks on police stations and bazars.

Mujib did his best to combine coercion with persuasion. In this he was to some extent successful with two underground leftist oppositionists, Abdul Matin and Toaha, both of whom he knew well from the language movement. After Matin was captured at Aricha, Mujib persuaded him not to engage in a lethal civil war and no action was taken against him. A secret meeting was arranged between Mujib and Toaha for a frank discussion of their political views. Mujib could not win him over to his side but offered all the same to help in the education of Toaha's daughter. Toaha gratefully accepted the offer and muted his opposition to Mujib. He remained however, in underground and surfaced only after Mujib's death. In 1977-78, he realised that his fight against Mujib had been a mistake. It had only helped to pave the way for a military ruler whose heavy hands on the triggers of power snuffed out the flickering flames of radical politics, first in the armed forces, then in the country as a whole.[1]

Constitutional opposition to Mujib's rule began to take definite shape towards the middle of 1972. Paradoxically, this opposition grew out of the disaffected ranks of the student front of the Awami League, the Students League. The prime mover in this was Sirajul Alam Khan, who along with Sheikh Moni, Tofael and Abdur Razzak had done everything possible to

block Tajuddin's efforts to form a government-in-exile and then had intrigued with RAW, the Indian Intelligence Service, to create Mujib Bahini outside the control of the Provisional Government, Siraj fell out with his other three colleagues in the Mujib Bahini after their return to Dhaka. Siraj had become disillusioned with them because they seemed to be more interested in enjoying the pleasures of power than in advancing the cause of "scientific socialism." Siraj had a significant number of followers in the student body of the Dhaka University. In early 1972 there was a meeting in the campus where speeches were made casting doubts on the Awami League's ability to introduce socialism in Bangladesh. Siraj was there. So was A.S.M. Rab, one of the "four khalifas" active in the students' movement of 1969-70, and he reportedly went as far as to say that a proven student leader would have to provide leadership for the establishment of socialism. When the split became inevitable both groups invited Mujib to their annual conference to be held at separate venues on the same day: 21 July 1972.

Abdur Razzak, who had been associated with Siraj since 1962 when they first began thinking of an armed struggle against the Ayub regime, became alarmed and went to see Mujib to get him to go to their annual conference. Mujib was reluctant. He said: "Since there are two groups within the Students League I won't attend any of their meetings. This is my decision. I won't go." Razzak argued that the current leaders of the Students League like Abdul Quddus Makhan or Nur-e-Alam Siddiqui "won't be able to hold the organisation together" unless Mujib graced the occasion with his presence. With this argument he was able to persuade Mujib to go to the annual conference of this faction of the Students League.[2]

Mujib was now seen to be openly favouring one group of the Students League headed by his nephew. The Rab-Siraj dissident group's growing popularity was soon demonstrated when it won decisive victories in the student unions in all the six universities and principal colleges of the country. It thus became a magnet for other discontented groups seeking alliance with it. The split in the Students League was followed by splits in other bodies affiliated to the Awami League: the AL Labour Front and the Mukti Joddha Sangsad (Association of Freedom Fighters).

On 31 October they coalesced to form a new party called Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), with Major M.A. Jalil as its President and Abdur Rab as its General Secretary. Major Jalil had been in charge of the Khulna sector. He claimed to have witnessed captured war booty being taken away to India by its troops. Some factories from the Khulna industrial area were said to have been dismantled and transported to India. He now regarded India as a predator country and not a friendly neighbour.[3] The exploitation of

Bangladesh by India, along with the establishment of "scientific socialism" became the major themes of the JSD. Food shortage and soaring prices provided the JSD and other opposition parties with issues to highlight as they prepared to contest the general election early next year.

Maulana Bhashani, nearing 90, had gone into seclusion immediately after the liberation. But the prospect of another election drew him back into the public arena. As a religious leader he could not resist the temptation to bring together several religious groups, banned to operate on their own because of their pro-Pakistan ideology, under his United Action Committee. As a peasant leader he sought to attract various Maoists into the fold. But it was an unstable mixture of opposites. The basis of their tenuous unity was a shared anti-Indian feeling.

Notes

1. Interview with Santosh Gupta, a journalist with links to the leftist groups, March 23, 1997.
2. Abdur Razzak's interview with the periodical *Meghna*, February 4, 1987.
3. During one of D.P. Dhar's visits to Bangladesh in early 1972 I asked him about the charges that India had taken away large quantities of arms, ammunition and stores. He said that some of the stores were needed for the Pakistani POWs in the Indian camps. He mentioned blankets and medicines by way of example. He did not say anything about arms and ammunition. However, Dixit, in his book *Liberation and Beyond*, (The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1999, p.145) says that Indian military advisers felt that "returning these weapons to Bangladesh would become the basis for Bangladesh's future dependence on the Pakistani weapons systems rooted in Pakistan's membership of military alliance arrangements with the US and others." The capture of war booty became one of the major complaints of the Bangladesh Army personnel. As for the charge that some factories, or parts thereof, were dismantled and sent from Khulna area to Calcutta, I could find no evidence that the Indian authorities were directly responsible for any such incident. If my memory serves me right, Dixit, the Indian Deputy High Commissioner, at one time asked me for cooperation in allowing an Awami Leaguer to appear as a witness at a court martial of an Indian officer accused of illegal activities of this kind of smuggling. But there was no eagerness on our side to cooperate in this matter. There were rumours that Marwari businessmen in Calcutta had entered into deals with some Awami Leaguers there to profit from the vacuum of authority in the Khulna area in the immediate aftermath of the liberation war.

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PAKISTAN-CHINA AXIS

As early as 12 December 1971, when the writing on the wall was already clear, Bhutto, with his usual bravado, declared in the Security Council:

> Take East Pakistan for five or ten years, we will have it back; we will fight to take it back; and we will get our country back.... East Pakistan belongs to Pakistan.

Bhutto's proprietary attitude towards Bangladesh was later reflected in the Constitution of Pakistan, promulgated in early 1973. While not listing "East Pakistan" as one of the existing territories of Pakistan, Article 3 of the Constitution stated that:

> The Constitution shall be appropriately amended so as to enable the people of the Province of East Pakistan, as and when foreign aggression in that Province and its effects are eliminated, to be represented in the affairs of the Federation.

Publicly at least, Bhutto remained committed to the recovery of the lost territory of "East Pakistan." Privately, he tried to establish contacts with Mujib through "back channels" to persuade him to maintain some "link" with Pakistan as part of confederation or Commonwealth of their own. One of the politicians used for this purpose was Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan, either to get out of the dilemma of Bhutto's own making or to drive a wedge between Bangladesh and India.[1] Mahmud Ali, formerly a left-wing politician, a poor fourth in his constituency in Sylhet for election to the National Assembly a year before, was made a State Minister in Bhutto's Cabinet, to advise the latter on Bangladesh developments and to maintain contacts with underground Communists unreconciled with the independence of Bangladesh and waging armed struggle against the Mujib regime. These contradictory strands of Bhutto's policy in regard to Bangladesh only exacerbated the settlement of outstanding problems between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

By not accepting the reality of Bangladesh, Pakistan unnecessarily delayed the solution of humanitarian issues arising out of the events of 1971. In Bangladesh there were some 250,000 Biharis who had opted to

go to Pakistan. Bangladesh declared its willingness to repatriate to Pakistan all of them and expressed the hope that this gesture would facilitate the return of Bengalis stranded in Pakistan. It proposed as a first step the repatriation of 10,000 Pakistanis in exchange for the repatriation of similar number of stranded Bengalis in Pakistan. The Pakistani reaction to this proposal was evasive and unconstructive. Pakistan had earlier turned down an ICRC proposal for an exchange of hardship cases (sick, crippled, aged) from each side.

The condition of Bengalis illegally detained in Pakistan began to deteriorate steadily. In July 1972, the Pakistan government asked the Bengali officials either to opt for Pakistan or Bangladesh. Almost all of them opted for Bangladesh, whereupon their services were terminated, but they were denied permission to leave. Their plight was described by the International Rescue Committee in their report for Winter 1972:

> They suffer from loss of civil liberties, shortages of food, harassment, loss of public health and educational facilities and sudden loss of their future.... Delay will be costly in human lives.

Bengalis belonging to the armed forces of Pakistan fared even worse; 39,000 of them (including family members) were herded in 15 camps. Their condition can be gauged from a report that 550 officers were been kept in one camp, Fort Sagai, which had accommodation for 200 persons of lower rank only.

An important part of Bhutto's calculations in regard to his reluctance to accept Biharis from Bangladesh had to do with the fact that he was a Sindhi. He was concerned that they would mainly concentrate in Karachi, which, since the partition had become a magnet for Muhajirs. In consequence, Sindhis themselves had been reduced to an insignificant minority in a city that used to be the capital of their province. Bhutto did not want to risk the displeasure of his Sindhi constituents by welcoming them to Pakistan.

As for Bengalis stranded in Pakistan, Bhutto treated them as hostages so as to blackmail Mujib into releasing Pakistani POWs after his failure to persuade Indira Gandhi to do so at their summit meeting in Simla at the end of June 1972. Indira Gandhi remained firm in her position that the release of Pakistan POWs could not be effected without the concurrence of Bangladesh.

Mujib had repeatedly asserted after his triumphal return to Dhaka that members of the armed forces of Pakistan who had committed heinous crimes during the nine months of liberation war must be punished as war criminals in accordance with international law. Their crimes were in

violation of the Geneva Conventions and other international instruments like the Genocide Convention to which Pakistan itself was a party. In the words of an editorial of a respected newspaper, *The New York Times*, some of the military personnel held in POW camps had "committed crimes against humanity unequalled since Hitler's time."[2]

Mujib claimed shortly after becoming head of government that as many as three million Bengalis had been killed by Pakistani occupying forces during the liberation war. This was no doubt a gross exaggeration; the correct figure is likely to be around a million.[3] But for a relatively short period that the war lasted even this figure is enormous. The shocking aspect of the behaviour of the occupying forces was not merely the wanton massacre of innocent civilians but the cruelty with which the killings were done. In addition, there were rapes of women on a scale unparalleled in modern history, until the Serb atrocities in Bosnia in the nineties.

The number of the prisoners to be charged with war crimes was relatively small: 195. While I was in Dhaka in the first half of 1972, I was peripherally involved in the preparations for their trial. Unfortunately, the investigating team was not only understaffed but underequipped. One of them complained to me that the team did not even have a tape recorder for their work. If only a part of the funds spent on sending envoys to solicit countries to accord recognition of Bangladesh, much of which was unproductive, had been used for investigative work in connection with war crimes trials, we should have been able to make considerable headway. No foreign consultants with experience in conducting war crimes trials were engaged. No one, to the best of my knowledge, was sent from Bangladesh to the POW camp in India to interrogate Pakistani prisoners there and gather evidence. As the Pakistani POWs had the right of correspondence with their family members Pakistani officials probably surmised that there was no likelihood of the war crimes trials taking place within months.

Pakistan soon reacted to the proposed trials of Pakistani POWs by saying that if these trials were to be held, it would find it impossible to continue with the restraint shown so far in regard to putting Bengalis on trial charged with offences of subversion, espionage and high treason. This may have had the effect of weakening Mujib's resolve to hold war crimes trials, especially after many foreign governments began to urge him not to be vindictive by putting them on the dock. A strong impulse for vengeance, not only in the immediate aftermath of wrongs but carried

over to the succeeding generations until they are avenged, is usually a characteristic of tribal societies. Thus among the Jews, originally an amalgam of twelve tribes, the sense of retributive justice is so strong that the passage of time has not lessened their determination to pursue the perpetrators of the Holocaust to the ends of the earth. Bengalis have never been a tribal society except in ancient times. Their minds generally tend to be focused on the present, rather than on the past or the future. Mujib understood the Bengali temperament very well. So instead of treating the war crimes issue as a matter of national honour to avenge the atrocities committed by the Pakistanis, he used it as a bargaining chip for negotiations with Pakistan.

J.N. Dixit has written that even before the Simla Summit in June-July 1972, P.N. Haksar "was successful in getting the consent of the Bangladesh Government to return the POWs to Pakistan. Mujibur Rahman on his own told Haksar that given the difficulties about collecting evidence he did not want to waste energy and time on holding war crimes trials."

If Mujib had really been serious about prosecuting war criminals he should have followed up on the recommendation of the International Commission of Jurists. In a study of the events in "East Pakistan" in 1971, published on 29 June 1972, the Commission recommended that if the Bangladesh Government wished to try Pakistani military officers and civilians for war crimes it should set up an international court, with a majority of judges from neutral countries. Mujib's reaction to the ICJ suggestion was that Bhutto was a clever lawyer and he could out-maneuver us in such a setting.[4]

Indeed, diplomacy had been Bhutto's forte and he used it to his maximum advantage whenever an opportunity offered. On the question of war crimes trials also he sought to block India from transferring the 195 war criminals from the custody of Bangladesh by resorting to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. In May 1973, Pakistan filed an application to the World Court arguing that since the alleged crimes were committed in a part of Pakistan according to established principles of international law only "a competent tribunal of Pakistan could have jurisdiction over this matter" and declared its readiness to constitute appropriate judicial tribunals for this purpose. Nothing came of it after India objected that the World Court had no jurisdiction and competence to adjudicate Pakistan's objection to the handing over of 195 alleged war criminals to Bangladesh. But Pakistan got some publicity mileage from this.

Bhutto also skillfully played the China card to deny Bangladesh entry into the United Nations. China and Pakistan had developed friendly relations since 1962. But there was no certainty that China would automatically oblige Pakistan by vetoing Bangladesh's application to join the United Nations. After all, the People's Republic of China had not been permitted to occupy its rightful seat in the United Nations for many years by the United States and its allies. How could the People's Republic of China, within a year of its own entry into the United Nations break faith with its principles and exercise its first veto to keep us out of our rightful place in the UN?

In 1971, China had aligned itself with the Yahya regime during the liberation struggle. The rationale for the Chinese attitude was explained in a letter from Premier Chou En Lai to Yahya on 13 April 1971:

> The Chinese Government holds that what is happening in Pakistan at present is purely an internal affair of Pakistan, which can only be settled by the Pakistani people themselves and which brooks no foreign interference whatsoever. Your Excellency may rest assured that should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese Government and people will, as always, firmly support the Pakistan Government and the people in their just struggle to safeguard state sovereignty and national independence.

The Indians had taken out an insurance policy in August of that year against a possible Chinese intervention by signing a Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union. China refrained from any direct intervention in December 1971 when Pakistan and India got enmeshed into a military conflict. Bhutto had been sent to China a month earlier by the Yahya regime to get a firm commitment of Chinese help in the event of a war with India but the Chinese stopped short of giving such a commitment.

Bhutto was in New York at the time of the humiliating surrender of Pakistani forces to the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Command. Before leaving for Pakistan he had a meeting with local Pakistanis at the Pakistan Mission to the United Nations. When someone asked him as to why the expected Chinese help had failed to materialise Bhutto was visibly irritated. He replied that China was not our *sosral* (home of the in-laws) that we can expect anything of them without giving anything in return. He said that the Chinese had expressed their dissatisfaction about Pakistan's silence over the invasion of Cambodia and the liquidation of the leftists in East Pakistan by Razakars armed by the Pakistan government.[5]

The Chinese likened Bangladesh to the Japanese puppet state of "Manchukuo" and lambasted Indian military presence in Bangladesh after

the liberation. In late January 1972 they decided to close down their mission in Dhaka and withdraw their staff to Beijing. Bangladesh allowed the Chinese Consul General and his staff to leave without demanding reciprocity.

The Pakistan Embassy at this time was headed by a Bengali, K.M. Kaiser; in addition to him there were several other Bengalis posted in that mission. It was in early May that they were allowed to leave for Bangladesh. Kaiser was received by Chou En Lai before his departure. This was significant because Kaiser was going to a country from which not all Indian troops had been withdrawn and where the Soviet Navy had been invited to establish its presence in connection with the clearance of the wreckage-infested port of Chittagong. During their meeting Chou En Lai expressed his view that in time relationship would develop between China and Bangladesh. He also said that the Chinese would consider importing jute from Bangladesh.

In the Foreign Office this gesture was taken to mean that while the Chinese were in no hurry to recognise Bangladesh they were at least interested in keeping lines of communication open with us. There were several countries which did not have diplomatic relations with China, but this did not prevent them from maintaining trade relations. There did not therefore seem to be any grounds for objection to accepting the Chinese offer to purchase our jute at better than the market price.

Kaiser reported to us in the Foreign Office that he had apprised the Prime Minister of the Chinese offer and that he regarded it as a positive development. The proposal was then forwarded to the Ministry of Commerce for further action. Rafikul Ameen of the Jute Marketing Board was selected by them to go to Hong Kong to meet a Chinese trade representative with an introductory letter from Kaiser. On the day before his departure Ameen called on me for any last-minute instructions. I asked him to confine himself to the jute transaction and not get involved in any political discussion. The next morning he visited me again to tell me that his trip had been cancelled. He did not know why.

Years later while researching for the biography of Mujib I went to his house where he was living in retirement. He was still bitter about the cancellation of his visit. He told me the following story: Kaiser had gone to a party a couple of nights before the proposed trip where he had more drinks than was good for him. He started to brag about being an old China hand; he claimed that he understood the Chinese better than anybody in Pakistan or Bangladesh. He had arranged for a "Kissinger-like" visit to

China by a Bengali official which would begin a new chapter in our relations with that ancient country. Kaiser's remarks were conveyed by someone present in the party to the Indians. The Indians got suspicious. Indira Gandhi directly rang up Mujib at night to implore him not to go ahead with the deal.[6]

When I asked Ameen to tell me further details about the deal, he told me that he was supposed to go to Bangkok for change of planes where he would be met by a Chinese official. He was given a password to use while greeting the Chinese official. From Bangkok he was to go Hong Kong where he would be received by another Chinese official. Here he would be provided with papers to enable him to go to Canton where the deal would be finalised. All this cloak-and-dagger nature of the visit was unknown to me. The Indians who probably knew more than I did must have got alarmed and not wishing to be unpleasantly surprised by another "Kissinger-like" operation, however minor, took up the matter at the highest level to quash it.

This incident took place shortly before I left for New York to take up the position of Bangladesh Observer to the United Nations. It was pre-arranged that I should stop over in Rangoon to hand over to the Burmese Foreign Office a letter from our Prime Minister to the Prime Minister of China requesting his support for our membership in the United Nations. The Burmese had agreed to deliver the letter to the Chinese Embassy for transmission to Beijing. When I called at the Burmese Foreign Ministry, as agreed, I was informed that the Chinese Embassy had refused to accept this letter. This was the first indication, but not yet a definite one, that the Chinese were not favourably inclined to our admission to the United Nations. Within a few days of my arrival in New York I got confirmation of the Chinese negative attitude from the British and Yugoslav missions. On 25 August, China vetoed our admission to the UN in the Security Council.

Could it be that the abrupt cancellation of Rafikul Ameen's visit, at the behest of India, with the result that Chinese officials, both at Bangkok and Hong Kong, were stood up, was perceived by Beijing as proof of their suspicion that Mujib was not a free agent and that Bangladesh was not a sovereign state? Did this incident contribute to the hardening of Chinese attitude to the point of vetoing our entry into the world body? These questions cannot be answered until the Chinese archives are opened, which is a remote possibility in a closed society.

Backed by a Chinese veto, Bhutto had little incentive to grant Bangladesh the recognition that Mujib had set as a condition for bilateral talks. It was

only in February 1974 that Bangladesh was recognised by Pakistan when Mujib agreed to go to Lahore to attend the Islamic Summit Conference hosted by Bhutto. The stage was thus set for China to lift its threat of veto. On 7 June 1974, after a unanimous vote in the Security Council to recommend our admission to the United Nations, the Chinese representative made a speech affirming that there had been traditional friendship between the Chinese people and the people of Bangladesh, and that the Chinese looked forward to the development of friendly relations with all the countries of the subcontinent. In September, Bangladesh formally became a member of the United Nations and took its seat in the General Assembly. In early 1975 a trade delegation from Bangladesh visited Canton and trade relations were established. But it was not until after the assassination of Mujib in August 1975 that the formalisation of diplomatic relations with China took place.

Notes

1. Sardar Shaukat Hyat Khan, *The Nation That Lost Its Soul*, Jung Publishers, Lahore, 1995.
2. *The New York Times*, August 6, 1971.
3. Curious as to how the figure of three million dead had been arrived at, I asked someone in the Prime Minister's office about this. I was told that this figure was taken from Pravda, the organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Ambassador, Yakov Malik, however, had said on 15 December 1971 in the Security Council that "hundreds of thousands of people" had perished in the liberation struggle. It seems to be a more realistic figure.
4. Conversation with Mujib in early July 1972.
5. *Pakistan Forum*, New York, January 1972.
6. When I questioned Rafikul Ameen as to how he could be certain that Indira Gandhi's telephone call had been responsible for the cancellation of his trip, he replied that Rafiqullah Choudhury, then Prime Minister's Private Secretary, had told him so.

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1973 GENERAL ELECTION

Mujib found no respite following his return to Dhaka from Europe where he had gone for medical treatment in the summer of 1972. What absorbed his attention was constitution-making to be followed by a general election. A 34-member Constitution Committee had been formed in April 1972 to draft the constitution for the new state. With the experience of Pakistan in mind Mujib was eager to have a constitution adopted at an early date. So the draft constitution was not subjected to public discussion. On 4 November it was adopted by the Constituent Assembly, composed of representatives who had been elected to the National Assembly of Pakistan from East Pakistan and those elected to the Provincial Assembly in the general election in 1970. The Constituent Assembly, dominated by Awami Leaguers, spent only three weeks to discuss the fundamental law of the land before adopting it.

The Constitution of Bangladesh, following the pattern of Commonwealth countries, provided for parliamentary democracy. Nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism were declared to be the fundamental principals of state policy. The citizens of Bangladesh were to be known as "Bangalees". The Constitution ignored a significant fact: the territory of Bangladesh also includes a compact geographical area along the border of Burma known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts whose inhabitants do not share the language and culture of the Bengali majority of the new state. Since one of the state principles was socialism, and the other was democracy, it stood to reason that the cultural identity of the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts should have been respected by granting them some measure of autonomy or special status. The second, and more serious, defect of the Constitution was that it failed to take into account the fact that Bangladesh had come into existence after a bitter struggle and conditions in the country were far from normal. Even in countries with long tradition of democracy it is customary to curtail civil liberties during war and other crisis situations. In the constitutions of the Commonwealth countries there is always a provision for dealing with emergency. In India, for instance, "President's rule may be imposed in case of war or domestic violence or

if the President "is satisfied that there is an imminent danger thereof". (Article 275). India being a federal state, provision has been made for the proclamation of emergency by a governor of a state and if the President "is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution" (Article 278). In the Constitution of Bangladesh there was no provision made for suspension of fundamental rights or for preventive detention.

In the circumstances of the post-independence period marked by perpetual unrest the Constitution was clearly an unrealistic document. The result of this well-meant but unsuitable Constitution was that amendment after amendment had to be introduced to deal with the realities of the situation in Bangladesh. The spirit of the Constitution was finally extinguished when the Fourth Amendment put an end to the parliamentary form of government and introduced a one-party state. Since political parties are the core of the democratic system, democracy itself was imperilled.

Part VII of the Constitution contained provisions for the holding of a national election to a unicameral parliament. An Election Commission was to be constituted as an independent body to conduct the election. To assure the impartiality of the holding of the general election the Election Commissioner was drawn from the judiciary, in accordance with a long-standing tradition in the subcontinent. Justice Idrees was named for this position. The date for the general election was fixed for 7 March 1973.

The announcement of the election date set the stage for electoral campaigning. Bhashani formed a seven-party Action Committee whose Charter of Demands included a call for the resignation of the government and the formation of an all-party government to ensure free and fair elections. "Go to the polls and prove your worth," was Mujib's rejoinder. He pointed out that parties who were clamouring for an all-party government had the security money for their candidates forfeited in the last elections. He assured his critics that the upcoming elections would be absolutely free.[1]

Early in January 1973 "National Professor" Razzaque called on Mujib who had great respect for his wisdom. Razzaque told him that because of Mujib's great popularity Awami League would no doubt be victorious. Since democracy was Mujib's cherished goal it might be a good idea for the Awami League not to try to secure a landslide victory of the type it got in the 1970 elections. He argued that democracy could only thrive if other political parties were represented in the new Parliament; their loyal opposition in the arena of Parliament would help to nurture democracy in Bangladesh. Mujib listened patiently to Razzaque but was not convinced

by his suggestion that the Awami League should allow opposition candidates to win in some constituencies either by not putting up AL candidates or by not contesting in them vigorously. Razzaque's impression was that Mujib desperately wanted to prove that he was as popular with the masses as when he was demanding Six Points for East Bengal in 1970.[2]

What Professor Razzaque suggested was a variation of an experiment Kamal Ataturk had attempted to do in his country to encourage some measure of pluralism to strengthen the foundations of the Turkish Republic. It did not work in Turkey and it would not have worked in Bangladesh. Democracy cannot be nurtured by an artificially-created opposition.

In fact here was no need in Bangladesh for a cosmetic opposition. Despite Mujib's enormous personal popularity, slowly and surely it was becoming obvious that the Awami League was not going to sweep the polls. A store of resentment had built up among the electorate against the Awami League and it was bound to be reflected in the elections. The opposition parties like Bhashani's NAP and the JSD were drawing large crowds at their meetings. Their message that the Awami League misrule was responsible for the rapid decline in the economy and increasing hardship for the common people was finding resonance with a lot of people.

Knowing Mujib's keen desire for a landslide victory, the Awami League bigwigs set their minds to secure it by any means, fair or foul. An early indication of this was provided on 31 January when a peaceful hartal was organised by Sheikh Moni's Jubo League and Jatiyo Shramik League to warn maligners of Sheikh Mujib.[3] Even if Mujib had some inkling of the irregular methods to be used by his followers to assure an Awami League landslide victory, he appears to have turned a blind eye on them.

Resort to unfair practices seems to have started from the day of the filing of nomination papers, 5 February. It was announced on the following day that for six seats the Awami League had no contestants; two of them were seats where Mujib himself was the candidate. It was alleged by some parties that except in the case of Mujib's seats, threats of life, kidnapping and other forms of intimidation were used to prevent the candidates from coming to the office of the Returning Officer to file their nomination papers. Some opposition leaders demanded refixation of the date for filing nomination papers. Abdur Rab of the JSD even challenged the neutrality of the Chief Election Commissioner and demanded his resignation.[4]

The ruling party had the advantage of the official facilities available to it. For example, Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers freely made use of

government helicopters for moving around while the opposition candidates had to depend on whatever transport they could muster from their own resources or borrow from their supporters. Some Awami League candidates even sought to enlist the help of the Rakkhi Bahini for electioneering purposes.

To illustrate the blatant abuse of Rakkhi Bahini as an instrument of coercion in the elections it will suffice to cite the case of Abdus Samad Azad, who was contesting against a formidable candidate, Suranjit Sengupta. At this time I was in New York where our office used to get regular telex messages from Dhaka showing current voting counts. Azad was trailing far behind Suranjit Sengupta. Then suddenly Azad was declared to be the winner within a day or two. I was intrigued by this miraculous turnaround and since then I have tried to find out from a variety of sources how he managed to turn a sure defeat into a victory.

It is an interesting case study of how an Awami League candidate who lost the vote but still won the count. The Awami League central leadership had made "a prestige issue" to defeat prominent opposition candidates like Ataur Rahman Khan, Mashiur Rahman, M.A. Jalil, Shahjahan Siraj, Rashed Khan Menon, Muzaffar Ahmed and Suranjit Sengupta. Had they been elected it would have been difficult to manage the Parliament; the Awami League wanted a tame Parliament. Suranjit Sengupta had won an impressive majority from his Sylhet Constituency in the provincial assembly in the 1970 election; he had shown that he could be independent by his spirited criticism of the draft Constitution in the Constituent Assembly. Besides, it was considered important that a senior Minister like Azad should not lose his seat. Azad was once a pronounced leftist and was now a candidate from a mass secular party. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to take a deplorable communual line to garner Muslim votes: "in company with the religious leaders (Imam) he tried to woo Muslim voters with the saying: "I am a Muslim and a member of your faith. Please vote for me."[5] Since this constituency had also a sizable number of Hindus, Azad enlisted the help of Monoranjan Dhar and circulated leaflets in his name. When, inspite of all his efforts, things did not seem to be going well with his campaign, he started going to the polling stations accompanied by Rakkhi Bahini personnel to intimidate voters. But all this was of no avail. He still lost the vote. Syed Abul Maksud, biographer of Maulana Bhashani, gives the following account of what happened next:

> On the election day, March 7th, there took place a shameful and ludicrous occurrence. From 5 o'clock onwards election results started to pour in at the Central Control Room from various regions of the country. Hundreds of officials on duty and journalists were present at this place. At roughly 9 o'clock in the evening it became clear that these candidates had been elected: Aleem al Razi, Abdur Rahman, Mashiur Rahman (contesting from the jail), Rashed Khan Menon and Suranjit Sengupta from the NAP; Shahjahan Siraj, M.A. Jalil and Abdus Sattar from the JSD. Also elected were Professor Muzaffar Ahmed and Mushtaque Ahmed Choudhury from the NAP and Ataur Rahman Khan from the Jatiyo League. All of them were leading by big margins. Some of them were even unofficially declared to have won by the TV. Around 10 o'clock telephone calls were received from the highest quarters ordering the postponement of the release of the final election results.[6]

Helicopters were then mobilised in great haste to fly out to at least half a dozen constituencies and "entire ballot boxes were removed and replaced with new ones."[7]

The brazen vote-rigging in some of these constituencies could not have gone unnoticed. It was well-known, for instance, that great resentment prevailed in the cantonments against the Awami League for a variety of reasons, including the perception among servicemen that Rakkhi Bahini was being given preferential treatment. The JSD, which was headed by several army officers who had fought with distinction in the liberation war, was widely expected to win in these areas. But this was not the case.

Unlike the 1970 elections, the 1973 elections were not observed with eagle eyes by Western journalists. To be sure, there were Indian journalists in Dhaka but they did not want to give adverse publicity about the vote frauds when the Indo-Bangladesh amity was in full bloom.

However, several months later an Indian free-lance writer named Basant Chatterji visited Bangladesh in search of material for a book. While on a trip to Santosh to talk to Bhashani he had a long chat with a *rikshawallah* (three-wheel cycle driver) about the situation in Bangladesh. He complained that in 1970 elections the Awami League leaders "made promises that they would get us rice at one taka a *seer*. But those promises are now forgotten." When Basant Chatterji remarked that the Awami League had won the second elections too, the rikshawallah said: "Allah alone knows how they did it. At least here, in Tangail, not even twenty in a hundred voted for it." "...Maybe not in Tangail, but in the country as a whole, people certainly voted for it," rejoined the Indian writer.[8]

He was right. In the war-torn Bangladesh there was no public outcry about the vote frauds because there was no doubt that the Awami League would have won an absolute majority without having to resort to gross irregularities in selected constituencies. So the legitimacy of the Awami

League to govern Bangladesh was not questioned by the general public. There was also the general impression that the candidates of all the parties had indulged in electoral irregularities: Anecdotes abounded where dead voters managed to cast their votes in the election unhindered, father's names were conveniently changed to suit impersonation in voting, absentee voters were well proxied, votes were already hurled in the ballot boxes before the actual voters could turn-up, methods were discovered to erase the stamp of indelible ink from the thumb to cast fake votes from one polling booth to another and other obnoxious mechanisms of filling the ballot boxes were employed.[9] Some of these were time-honoured methods going back to British days. What was qualitatively different in the 1973 elections was the direct involvement of the government machinery in the manipulation of votes in favour of the ruling party in at least 15 constituencies.

The vote-rigging by the Awami League regime in a limited number of constituencies was done (a) to keep out of Parliament candidates who might give trouble to the ruling party there and (b) to make sure that important Ministers like Mushtaque, Azad and Abdul Mannan did not lose their seats.

The final result of the general election, including the reserved seats for women (unelected), was as follows:

Awami League	306
JSD	2
Bangladesh Jatiyo League	1
Independent	6

The Awami League could now look forward to working in a Parliament which it would be able to control unchallenged.

The candidates who had won the vote but lost the election because of the manufactured vote count had every reason to feel bitter but not all of them reacted publicly against the government for indulging in fraudulent practices.

Pro-Moscow (NAP-M) did not want to make too much fuss over election results so long as it was in agreement with the Awami League on broad policy issues. Its hope was "to build up an independent mass support and make a bid to take power when (and if) the present government failed its people at home and its allies abroad."[10] On the other hand, the JSD had no reason to temper its outrage over the vote-rigging. Seeing no future in

making its influence felt on the political scene by parliamentary means, it felt justified in embarking on a path of aggressive confrontation with the Mujib regime.

Notes

1. *The Bangladesh Observer*, January 4, 1973.
2. Conversation with Prof. Abdur Razzaque, Winter of 1995-1996.
3. *The Bangladesh Observer*, February 1, 1973.
4. Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, 1983, p. 169.
5. Shamsul Huda Harun, *Bangladesh Voting Behaviour 1973*, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, 1986, p.192.
6. Syed Abul Maksud, *Bhashani,* Dhaka, 1986, pp.480-481.
7. Moudud Ahmed, op.cit., p.171.
8. Basant Chatterjee, *Inside Bangladesh Today,* S. Chand & Co., New Delhi 1973, pp.68-69.
9. Shamsul Huda Harun, op. cit., p.193.
10. S.M. Ali, *After the Dark Night,* The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1994, p.97.

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RADICALISATION OF POLITICS AFTER ELECTION

The parliamentary form of government practiced in the Commonwealth countries is based on the model of British Parliament, "the mother of Parliaments." It is generally a two-party system, but where this is not practicable, a multi-party system. This enables the political parties to articulate public opinion of their constituents on major issues and voice their grievances in the parliamentary arena.

It was therefore understandable that opposition political parties, especially the JSD which seemed to have the best electoral prospects, should have felt frustrated and angry at being virtually condemned to political wilderness for five years at the very least because of some electoral frauds perpetrated by the ruling party with the help of the government machinery. With only a minuscule number of opposition candidates represented in Parliament, the Awami League faced only token opposition in Parliament.

Now that the key opposition political figures of the radical political groups had been shut out of Parliament their only recourse of expressing their feelings was through street action and other acts of violence. The bitterness of the JSD and leftist groups was not assuaged by the fact that the by-election for four seats held two months later were free and fair. Indeed, the results of these by-elections announced on 30 May—2 seats won by the Awami League, 1 by JSD and 1 by an independent candidate—only served to emphasise that had the March elections been equally fair, the Awami League would have won with a comfortable majority and the opposition members would have been represented in Parliament in sufficient numbers to constitute a respectable opposition. This could have established a good parliamentary tradition needed for national stability. The absence of an opposition, as we will see in the following chapters, enabled Awami League MP's to give near-dictatorial power to Mujib in 1974-75.

Mujib could have maintained a high level of stability only by putting a halt to the process of economic decline set in motion by the nationalisation

measures. For 16 months since then, the downward spiral had been unrelenting. Here are some of the highlights of the economic plunge in 1972-73:

1. GDP was down by 14 per cent.
2. Per capita GDP was down by 1/5th.
3. Price level was almost double.
4. Food production was 99 lakh tons as compared with 111 lakhs in 1969-70.
5. Development outlay was less than Tk. 400 crores against budgeted Tk. 501 crores.
6. Export earnings were Tk. 300 crores against Tk. 430 crores expected.
7. Non-food imports were for Tk. 400 crores against required Tk. 600 crores.
8. Food grain imports were 28 lakhs tons costing Tk. 266 crores out of which Tk. 111 crores were paid from our resources.
9. Industrial production was 30 per cent less than in 1970-71.
10. Increase in money supply amounted to Tk. 322 crores out of which Nationalised Sector accounted for Tk. 187 crores.

This sorry state of affairs created favourable climate for the opposition parties in the post-election period. Maulana Bhashani, not surprisingly, was the first politician to try to exploit the public dissatisfaction. On 14 May he addressed a public meeting in Dhaka to denounce the government for its failures. Next day he went on a hunger strike to protest against the high prices of daily necessities. Mujib went to call on him at his bedside but the Maulana was not placated. The NAP (Bhashani) called for a hartal on 22 May which was widely observed. On the following day, however, he gave up his hunger strike at the urging of other opposition political leaders concerned about his life.

In this situation Communist groups were ideally placed to promote their social goals by launching armed struggle in the countryside. But communist movement in Bangladesh, as elsewhere in the Third World, was suffering from the handicap of lack of unity of purpose following the ideological split between Moscow and Beijing in the 1960's. Pro-Moscow Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the NAP (Muzaffar)—did not want to create serious difficulties for the Mujib regime. Indeed, they still hoped that Mujib would invite them to join the government or at least to

form a united front with the Awami League. Mujib treated them for the time being as "patriotic" parties but refrained from including them in a national government or even to form a united front with them.

Pro-Beijing Communist groups were hopelessly divided, having apparently received no directions from China on how to conduct their struggle and for what objectives. Lacking a unified command structure they carried on their armed harassment of the regime autonomously in different parts of the country, animated mainly by their common dislike of pro-Indian and pro-Soviet stance of the Awami League government. From June onwards there were stories in the newspapers every day about attacks on the police stations and other symbols of authority. Even in the Chittagong Hill Tracts an armed group called Shanti Bahini (Peace Force) stepped up its activities around this time. Shanti Bahini had come into existence earlier in the year in reaction to alleged depredations of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and police units in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. As they ransacked houses of hill peoples in search of Razakars and hidden weapons it was alleged that their property had been stolen and many women raped. Thousands of young men joined the ranks of the Shanti Bahini when the complaints of the local people apparently went unheeded by Awami League political leaders and government officials in Dhaka.[1]

Mujib was far from indifferent to the problem of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the beginning of his administration. In the autumn of 1972, when Tridiv Roy, Chief of the Chakma tribe, was sent to New York as the leader of the Pakistan delegation to the United Nations, General Assembly, Mujib asked Roy's mother to go to the United States to persuade him to renounce his association with Pakistan and come back to Bangladesh. I was also instructed him to contact him and try to entice him to his homeland by offering an unspecified high position. He agreed to meet me for lunch. He obviously did so with the knowledge of his superiors in Pakistan. For while he remained uncommitted on the offer made to him, he tried to probe our intentions in regard to Pakistani POWs and outlook for relations with Bangladesh. Unbeknown to both his mother and myself, Tridiv Roy had become romantically involved with a European lady whom he later married. This may have been one of the compelling reasons for Tridiv Roy to turn down the offer. After this abortive attempt to entice Tridiv Roy, Mujib seems to have neglected to allay the fears and anxieties of the tribal people of the CHT. Mujib failed to include any representative from this region in his Cabinet who could have made Mujib cognisant of the rising tide of discontentment there.[2]

Mujib's response to the growing radicalisation of the political movement was to co-opt the two leftist pro-Moscow parries—the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the NAP (Muzaffar) by forming a People's Unity Front (*Gono Oikko Jote*) in September. The Front had a Central Committee composed of 13 AL, 5 NAP and 5 CPB members. At the district level, NAP/CPB members were supposed to be represented in relief committees but local AL vested interest prevented them from taking part in them.

In the following month Mujib released some 40,000 people held in prison on charges of collaboration. It has been suggested that the general amnesty was granted to them in the hope that they would counteract the activities of radical leftists up in arms against the government.[3] If so, it proved to be a futile gesture, for they remained unreconciled to the regime. A more likely explanation for this act of clemency is that the task of preparing cases against the alleged collaborators was too burdensome for the understaffed and hardpressed law enforcement agencies.

The JSD, the largest opposition party, was not yet geared for an underground struggle. It was through public meetings that it sought to arouse feelings against the government among the people. On 17 March 1974, the birthday of Mujib, it held a large public meeting in Dhaka. A programme of "direct action" was announced here against "the agents of exploiters in order to bring an end to the repression of the government." This included *gherao* of the Chairman of the Red Cross, Chairman of the Mahalla Relief Committees, the State Trading Corporation, Freedom Fighters Welfare Trust, the Planning Commission and other government offices. To start with, JSD leaders led a march immediately after the conclusion of the meeting to the residence of the Home Minister, ostensibly to present a memorandum. The demonstrators began to pelt the police guarding the residence. When the police was unable to control the unruly crowd Rakkhi Bahini was called in. Rakkhi Bahini resorted to firearms. According to the official figure there were six dead. The JSD and some independent observers claimed that the number of dead was at least twice as many. 20 of the demonstrators were arrested. Among them were Major Jalil and Abdur Rab, the two top office holders of the JSD.

The Awami League immediately accused the JSD of being Sino-American agents bent upon destructive activities to undermine the regime. The very next day the Awami League organised a demonstration against "the enemies of independence." Armed with lathis AL demonstrators proceeded to the JSD central office and set it on fire. The office of *the*

Janakantha, the organ of the JSD, was taken over by the government and Al-Mahmud, its Editor, was arrested. In the next few days hundreds of JSD members were taken into custody. The JSD was in effect paralysed by these stern measures. One result of the government action against the JSD was to drive some of its more militant members underground. They must have felt that after the passing of the Special Powers Act in February 1974 which gave the government wide powers to suppress individual liberty and freedom of press and the license given to the strongmen of the ruling party to resort to hooliganism against opposition parties, revolutionary politics was the only outlet left for expressing dissent.[4]

The Awami League was plagued with internal rivalries. Jockeying for influence was rampant. Only with the magnetic personality of Mujib was it possible to maintain a façade of unity. Nowhere was factionalism more acute than in the student wing of the Awami League, the Students' League. One faction was headed by Abdur Razzak and Tofael Ahmed; the other was led by Sheikh Moni. In April, while Mujib was away in Moscow for medical treatment, the tension between them led to the killing of seven students in Surja Sen Hall of the Dhaka University. The university was closed down for two months. Similar closures took place in the other two universities of Chittagong and Rajshahi following violent incidents there.

Notes

1. Pradipta Khisa, *Parbatya Chottogramer Samasya*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 1999, pp.47-48.
2. See also *The Times* (London), December 20, 1972 which carried a story about Mujib's attempt to entice Tridiv Roy to Bangladesh.
3. Talukdar Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath*, p.166.
4. Conversations with Akhlaqur Rahman, Winter 1991-92.

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TRIPARTITE MEETING IN DELHI

When Mujib formed a new Cabinet following the 1973 elections, the most significant change was the transfer of the foreign affairs portfolio from Abdus Samad Azad to Dr. Kamal Hossain. Azad was assigned to the relatively unimportant job for Minister of Agriculture.

Kamal Hossain's assumption of office as Foreign Minister signalled a shift in the direction of foreign relations. Hitherto the foreign policy of Bangladesh was mainly concerned with India, and to a lesser extent with the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe. It bears repetition that Azad had virtually been imposed on Bangladesh by India only days before the return of Mujib.

Bangladesh had now to reach out beyond its immediate neighbours and forge new links with other countries. By the time of the 1973 elections Bangladesh had been recognised by almost all the countries of Europe, North and South America. Recognition had been granted by all the Asian countries east of Bangladesh except China and South Viet Nam. But to the west of Bangladesh, the only Muslim countries that had recognised it were Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and South Yemen. In Africa only 18 of the 41 independent countries had given recognition to Bangladesh; Many of these countries were fearful that the example of Bangladesh might fuel secessionist tendencies in their countries plagued with tribal and religious antagonisms. Admission of Bangladesh to the United Nations, which was dear to the heart of Mujib, was still problematic: China, a permanent member of the Security Council, was adamant that the question of prisoners of war must first be resolved between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan before the admission of Bangladesh in the United Nations, could even be considered.

A settlement between the three countries hinged on five interrelated questions: (1) the repatriation of Pakistan POW's and civilian internees; (2) the proposed trial of 195 Pakistani POWs on charges of war crimes; (3) the repatriation of Bengalis in Pakistan; (4) the future of non-Bengalis in Bangladesh who had opted for Pakistan; (5) recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan.

To discuss these questions Kamal Hossain paid a visit to New Delhi on 13 April for four days of talks with his Indian counterpart, Sardar

Swaran Singh. At the conclusion of their meetings a joint declaration was issued by the two governments in which they expressed their feeling that Pakistan's persistent hostility towards Bangladesh "has stood in the way of negotiations among all the three countries on the basis of sovereign equality of each." The two governments "are ready to seek a solution to all humanitarian problems through simultaneous repatriation of the Pakistani prisoners of raw and civilian internees, except those required by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for trial on criminal charges, the repatriation of Bangalees forcibly detained in Pakistan, and the repatriation of Pakistanis in Bangladesh, i.e., all non-Bengalies who have opted for repatriation to Pakistan."

On the same day Kamal Hossain announced that 195 of the POWs would be tried for war crimes. They were expected to appear before the tribunal by the end of May 1973. On 20 April, Pakistan contested the right of Bangladesh to try any of the prisoners, threatened to put on trial a number of Bengalis in Pakistan for alleged acts of subversion, espionage or high treason; and asserted that it had no obligation to receive non-Bengalis who had opted for Pakistan. However, Pakistan invited Indian representatives to Islamabad as a follow-up to the "Simla Agreement."

On 24 July, talks opened in Rawalpindi between the Pakistani and Indian delegations, respectively headed by Aziz Ahmed and P.N. Haksar. There were intense negotiations. An agreement was finally reached on 28 August. Bangladesh, although not a participant was kept fully informed about the progress of the talks and consulted on issues concerning Bangladesh and agreement that was reached by India and Pakistan had the concurrence of Bangladesh. It was agreed that (1) the POWs and civilian internees would be repatriated as quickly as possible; (2) all Bengalis in Pakistan would be repatriated simultaneously; (3) Pakistan would receive a "substantial number" of non-Bengalies from Bangladesh; (4) No trials of the 195 POWs would take place during the entire period of repatriation.

With the assistance of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees and Western countries the process of repatriation commenced on 19 September. By the first week of October 4,500 Bengalis and 4,000 non-Bengalis had been repatriated. The Bengalis who were repatriated during this period were civil servants and armed forces personnel, along with their families. 8,360 Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees in India were taken by train to Pakistan border during this period; an additional 12,600 were repatriated by the end of October.

The repatriation of Biharis from Pakistan remained the most difficult issue. Pakistan was not willing to accept more than 70,000 of them

arguing that it was unable to absorb a greater number without causing serious internal social and political disruption, especially in Sind. In October Mujib indicated that Bangladesh would ask for foreign aid for resettling Biharis who were denied entry into Pakistan despite the fact that they considered themselves to be Pakistanis. He also toyed with the idea of resettling them in an island with the cooperation of the international community. Nothing came of it.

The Delhi Agreement of July 1973 had envisaged a trilateral meeting to settle the question of POWs on the basis of sovereign equality, which meant formal recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan. However, Bhutto went on dragging his feet on this matter despite an authority given to him by the Pakistan National Assembly that month to do so "at the appropriate time."

It was largely at the initiative of Somalia that the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan was finally achieved in the middle of February 1974 when the Foreign Ministers of Islamic countries arrived in Lahore in connection with making final arrangements for the Islamic Summit Conference in the last week of February. It had become evident to them that without the participation of Bangladesh, the second largest Muslim country in terms of population, the Summit Conference would not be considered a success. On a proposal by Somalia it was decided to send a special mission to Dhaka to persuade Mujib to attend the Summit Conference. The mission was authorised to offer Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh in exchange for dropping war crimes trials.

The mission flew to Dhaka on 21 February for talks with Mujib. It did not take much persuasion for Mujib to appreciate the advantage of joining the Islamic Summit Conference. After all, Bangladesh was strategically placed to serve as a bridge between the vast belt of Muslim countries straddling West Asia and North Africa and Muslim countries of South East Asia like Malaysia and Indonesia. But on the question of 195 POWs accused of war crimes Mujib was not yet prepared to make any concessions. He told the mission that although "we are anxious to attend the Summit we will not attend under pressure." He said he could not give any assurance on the matter of the 195 accused POWs. Addressing the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister who was leading the mission, Mujib said that he would certainly attend the Summit if it were held in his country. He asked, "Have you come with recognition? With recognition I am ready to join." He reproached Pakistan of talking only about the 195 POWs but not about other questions like the repatriation of Pakistanis, assets and liabilities. As to relations with Pakistan he said, "We should be friendly. We should have normal peaceful relations. We can forget and forgive on the basis of sovereign equality."



Photo 18: With Algerian President Houary Boumedine and Prime Minister Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto at the Islamic Summit Conference, Lahore (1974)

After a long day of discussions four members of the mission flew back to Lahore to report on the results of the talks. In the same afternoon, only hours before the formal opening of the Conference, Bhutto announced the recognition of Bangladesh in a speech televised to his countrymen. He told them that he had done so "with a heavy heart" since it was the unanimous opinion of the Muslim leaders that recognition was necessary to bring about a reconciliation between the peoples of Bangladesh and Pakistan. Immediately after Bhutto's speech Mujib held a press conference in

Dhaka to announce his government's decision to accord recognition to Pakistan. He added that this mutual recognition was not linked to the dropping of war crimes trials.

On 23 February Mujib flew to Lahore in the personal aircraft of President Boumedine of Algeria. Arrangements made for Mujib's reception were immaculate. Bangladesh anthem was played for the first time in Pakistan as Mujib landed at the Lahore Airport. On the tarmac Mujib embraced Bhutto. General Tikka Khan, now Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army, saluted him smartly and bowed low as they shook hands. When the ceremonies were over Mujib looked in the direction of the crowd some distance away. Suddenly he headed towards someone in the crowd. They remained locked in an embrace for some time and both of them broke into sobs. Disengaging himself Mujib then turned to the newsmen around him and said, "Look, here is the jailer who saved my life from the conspiracy to kill me inside the jail."[1] On his way to the Guest House Mujib was deeply moved by the affection shown him by thousands of cheering Pakistanis who had lined his route to get a glimpse of him. Mujib had not expected to be greeted so warmly by the populace of Lahore.

Soon after his return from Lahore Mujib became seriously ill. He had fits of coughing and he vomited blood. Dr. Nurul Islam, his personal physician, became alarmed when Mujib did not respond to the treatment prescribed for him. It was felt that he might need surgery, but no surgeon with specialisation to perform a lung operation was available in Bangladesh. At this point the Soviet Union offered to treat Mujib in Moscow. On 19 March, Mujib flew to Moscow with a large entourage including his family members. He stayed in Moscow for 21 days and recovered from his ailment without surgery. The Soviet leadership was concerned not only about Mujib's health but about the future of Soviet-Bangladesh relations. It had not escaped their notice that the economic situation in Bangladesh had deteriorated so much that it might become increasingly dependent on Western aid. The Soviet leaders, Brezhnev and Kosygin, told Mujib that they understood that objective conditions might oblige Bangladesh to seek more aid from Western countries and sought reassurance that this aid-dependence would not be to the detriment of their friendly relationship with Bangladesh.

While Mujib was in Moscow tripartite talks between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were being held in New Delhi at the level of Foreign Ministers. For Pakistan the most pressing issue was the return of 195 POWs held in India for alleged war crimes. For Bangladesh it was the

repatriation of Biharis to Pakistan. Pakistan agreed to take back only those non-Bengalis who had domicile in West Pakistan or were employed by the central government. Bangladesh had been under tremendous pressure for some time by Western powers to be magnanimous and release the 195 POWs. Mujib, who was kept informed about the progress of the talks in New Delhi by special couriers, agreed to grant clemency to them only if Pakistan regretted and condemned atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army during March-December 1971 (The Report of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission, set up to enquire into the circumstances of the surrender of Pakistan Army in December 1971, later recommended that a high-powered Court of Enquiry should examine allegations of atrocities which had brought a bad name to the Pakistan Army and if true, to try those who had indulged in these atrocities. In the Supplementary Report, prepared after the return of the POWs and the recognition of Bangladesh it was suggested that "the Dacca authorities" should be requested to forward to the Court of Enquiry whatever evidence may be available against them. The Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report was kept secret for many years and its recommendations in respect of the atrocities were never followed up).

Returning to Dhaka from the unseasonably cold Moscow Mujib stopped over for three days in New Delhi sweltering in the summer heat. The purpose of the stopover was to formally endorse the tripartite agreement not to hold war crimes trials. Mrs. Gandhi came to the Palam Airport to greet him personally. There were also many press reporters eager to put questions to him. Indira Gandhi rebuked them saying: "Don't you see he is recovering from a serious illness and needs rest?"[2] Arriving in Dhaka, however, Mujib held a press conference. On 12 April, he expressed satisfaction at the results of the Delhi Conference. But he added that there were other matters which needed to be resolved, such as the questions of assets and liabilities and the repatriation of additional categories of non-Bengalis.

Notes

1. A.Z.M. Haider, 'Rise of a Titan: Bangabandhu—A Leader Without of Parallel', article in *Dhaka Courier*, 15.10.1993, p.29.
2. Conversation with Syed Najmuddin Hashem, Winter 1995.

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MENDING FENCES WITH INDIA

It has been said that foreign policy begins at the frontiers. Bangladesh has only two immediate neighbours: India and Burma. Bangladesh has a very short border with Burma. Almost all the border problems with Burma like the demarcation of border and border trade had been settled during undivided Pakistan. The position with India, with which Bangladesh shares a very long border, was entirely different. This border had been delineated by Sir Cyril Radcliffe in 1947 at the time of partition of British India. Prepared in a great hurry, the Radcliffe Award was in parts self-contradictory and in other parts contained imprecision which could only be rectified through "political arrangements" by the two successor states of the British Raj. In the post-independence climate of mutual distrust between India and Pakistan the progress towards the resolution of disputes was painfully slow. After the birth of Bangladesh the issues that remained to be resolved with India were the following:

1. **Enclaves**: These had originated as a result of a truce at the conclusion of a war between the Mughal Empire and the Kingdom of Cooch Behar near the foothills of the Himalayas. The two sides agreed to retain the territories held by them with the result that a number of enclaves came into being. After the division of British India there were 95 Pakistani enclaves in West Bengal (India) and 12 Indian enclaves in East Bengal (Pakistan), since the Radcliffe Award did not want to concern itself with the princely states like Cooch Behar. This crazy quilt of borders disrupted trade and routine movement of people when the passport system was introduced in the early 1950's. At the time of partition the majority of the population on both sides of the border were Muslims, but the composition began to change when Hindu refugees from East Bengal started to move into the Indian enclaves. Thus the question of enclaves became a highly emotional issue in West Bengal. In September 1958, Nehru and Feroze Khan Noon made an agreement that the enclave of Berubari should be equally divided between the two countries. It

was immediately opposed by West Bengal on the ground that it had not been consulted. After Ayub assumed power Nehru asked him to consider other alternatives to the transfer of Berubari. But no agreement could be reached by the two countries.

2. **Border Disputes**: These disputes arose mainly over differing interpretations of the Radcliffe Award. Soon after partition Pakistan and India agreed to seek the help of a Swedish jurist, Bagge, to arbitrate their respective claims. No sooner had the Bagge Tribunal come out with its award there were fresh disagreements over its interpretation. The disagreements centered around a section of the border with Assam in the Surma Valley sector and some sectors of the border with Tripura. In 1953 the parties agreed that a greater freedom of movement between East Pakistan and India would be desirable. But on account of unresolved status of these border areas there were several incidents, such as over the right of Bengali villagers to harvest rice crops on an islet in the Surma river.

3. **Border Trade and Smuggling**: Along the 2,600 mile long porous border between India and Pakistan there had always been a certain amount of legitimate border trade and also some illicit smuggling. One of the principal tasks of the East Pakistan Rifles was to control smuggling. With the emergence of Bangladesh smuggling across the border increased dramatically. The one-directional smuggling from India, according to Akhlaqur Rahman, a well-known Bengali economist, was mainly due to the artificial fixation of one-to-one exchange ratio between the Taka and Indian Rupee. By early 1974 there was a yawning gap between the official and the free market rate of exchange, which "rendered the entire one-way smuggling highly profitable for the Indian smugglers."[1] There was a growing belief among the people that India was dumping its substandard goods both through normal trade and smuggling. India was also accused of smuggling out quality jute out of Bangladesh creating "an unprecedented buoyancy in India's jute trade and corresponding fall in Bangladesh's." A whispering campaign was launched by the Opposition that all this was part of an Indian conspiracy to cripple the economy of Bangladesh with the sinister objective to reduce it to the status of a protectorate like Sikkim.

4. **Farakka Barrage**: In January 1961, the Indian Government announced its decision to build a barrage across the Ganges at

Farakka in the district of Murshidabad in West Bengal. Its purpose was to divert a portion of the flow of the Ganges to flush out the lower reaches of the Hoogly and "save" the Port of Calcutta endangered by siltation. The problem of the deterioration of the Hoogly was not new and had become a matter of concern even during the British rule. The problem became worse after the independence of India when dams were built by India on Damodar and Rupnarayan rivers under the Damodar Valley Project. The dams reduced the volume and velocity of the flow of these rivers, thereby taking away the flushing action of the Hoogly river. The Indian Government set up an expert committee chaired by Man Singh to investigate the problem of the Port of Calcutta. The committee examined various solutions like dredging, an alternative port, a ship canal to link Calcutta with Diamond Harbour as well as a barrage on the Ganges. In 1952, the committee recommended in favour of the construction of a barrage at Farakka. India appears to have anticipated Pakistan's concern about the downstream economic and ecological consequences of the Farakka Barrage. Therefore, in 1956, it withdrew from the Barcelona Convention and the Statute of 1921 on the Regime of Navigable Waterways of International Concern, which provide among other things that "No State is allowed to alter the natural condition of the territory of a neighbouring State."

When Pakistan protested that the Farakka Barrage could leave East Pakistan with insufficient water, it was agreed that experts of the two countries should exchange data for the use of the common rivers; this was to be followed by ministerial level meetings. In 1963, Pakistan proposed a ministerial level meeting as soon as possible. India did not reply and it took Pakistan two years to send a routine reminder. It was sent in May 1965 and India conveyed its agreement to such a meeting in August. A month later war broke out between the two countries over Kashmir. In March 1966, the two Foreign Ministers had their first meeting to deal with their various bilateral problems; Bhutto insisted on giving priority to the Kashmir question to the exclusion of all other problems. The result was that the Farakka issue was not discussed at all. Pakistan was in a state of political turmoil in the following four years and no progress was possible.

The liberation of Bangladesh created propitious conditions for the sharing of the Ganges waters on an equitable basis. On 12 May 1973, Mujib flew to Delhi for extensive talks with Indira Gandhi on these bilateral matters and economic cooperation. On the *border question* Mujib had to undo some of the harm caused to East Bengal during the Ayub regime when Pakistan gave some concessions to India in the eastern region to get advantages for the border with India in the western region. At the Delhi meeting Mujib was able to secure some territorial gains in the disputed border areas. Under the terms of agreement Bangladesh retained its de facto possession of Ashulong in the Tripura sector and got the possession of Patharia forest and a village in the Sylhet sector. As regards *enclaves*, Bangladesh conceded the southern part of Berubari, which was in de facto control of India even during the Pakistan days, and some neighbouring enclaves in exchange of which Bangladesh retained the Dahagram and Angorputa enclaves; in addition, India agreed to lease in perpetuity an area near Tinbigha to connect Dahagram with the mainland of Bangladesh.[2] Buoyed by a quick and favourable settlement of the border question, Mujib suddenly launched an initiative of his own, which was not part of the brief prepared for him by the Foreign Office. Mujib told Indira Gandhi and her advisers that India was a big country with a big heart: Surely it should be possible for India to concede some territory containing a hill station in the Himalayas or in the Garo Hills. The entire Indian delegation was stunned by this unexpected and extraordinary proposal. There was an awkward pause. Then the Indian side changed the subject.[3]

The issue of *smuggling* was discussed at the Delhi Meeting as a matter of urgency. After independence the inter-wing trade between the two parts of Pakistan had to be replaced by a new pattern. The lower cost of transportation and the competitive disadvantage of our exports to India at the official rate of exchange created ideal conditions for smuggling across the border. It was economy of Bangladesh that suffered as a result and the public opinion blamed the unscrupulous Marwari traders on the Indian side as well as the Mujib regime for not doing anything to stop the smuggling. For Mujib this was a sensitive issue. Mujib argued that the clandestine trade and smuggling hurt the interests of both sides and they must do everything possible to stop the smuggling. At one point Mujib lost his composure and bluntly told the Indians: "Unless you stop the smuggling there will be no friendship." Taken back by this outburst they preferred not to argue with him. The Joint Declaration acknowledged the gravity of the problem and proposed to set up a joint ministerial committee to deal with the matter of illicit trade.[4]

The most important issue discussed during the Delhi talks was the question of *Farakka Barrage* which was due to be commissioned before the end of the year. It was evident that the question of sharing the waters of the common rivers like the Ganges had two aspects: technical and political. It had therefore been agreed even during Pakistan days that ministerial level talks would take place only after experts on both sides had exchanged data on the flow of water and made joint surveys of river banks. Not much progress had been made towards a meaningful resolution of the dispute by the time of the struggle for independence of Bangladesh because of mutual distrust.

Following the summit meeting between Mujib and Indira Gandhi in Dhaka in March 1972 a treaty of friendship was signed by the two countries which provided for bilateral cooperation on common rivers. Joint Rivers Commission was established to examine the technical aspects anew in an atmosphere of amity and goodwill. It was expected that the experts on both sides would be more flexible and show more understanding for each other's point of view. Unfortunately this was not the case.

Our representative on the JRC was B.M. Abbas. As the head of WAPDA in East Pakistan he had handled the technical part of the Farakka issue. He was one of the few high official in East Pakistan who had the reputation of being pro-Pakistani, although he seemed to have been regarded by senior officials in Pakistan as incompetent.[5] His anti-Indian sentiment persisted even after the independence of Bangladesh. Tajuddin repeatedly asked him to change his "attitude."[6] But as Tajuddin was not in charge of water affairs Abbas could afford to ignore him. It was Mushtaque who was the Minister for Power, Flood Control and Irrigation and he shared the anti-Indian bias of Abbas.

Mujib seems to have realised that their obstructive stance was an obstacle towards reaching a settlement on the Farakka question. Before leaving for Delhi he took care to drop both of them from the negotiating team. In March, two months before the Delhi talks, Mushtaque was relieved of his responsibilities as Minister in charge of water resources and shifted to the Commerce Ministry in the Cabinet. As Commerce Minister he was part of Mujib's entourage in Delhi but he had nothing to do with Farakka; he was not even consulted on this matter. Abbas could not be replaced so easily; he was a technician and he had groomed no one as his deputy. Mujib simply did not include him as a member of the delegation.

Mujib made Kamal Hossain the lead negotiator on the Farakka issue. He knew it was a tough task, for the problem had not been dealt with in

the JRC. Apparently, Mushtaque had "directed that it be kept out of the JRC."[7] Presumably Mushtaque was interested in "prolonging the dispute to further his own political career" as the leader of the right-wing faction within Mujib's Cabinet.[8]

Mujib did not have the patience to go into technical details of the Farakka problem. But he understood the essence of the problem. In a language reminiscent of biblical parables, he compared the situation with that of a family for whom only one cup of milk was available and the problem was how to distribute it among the needy family members. One solution was of course to augment the supply of milk. The Joint Declaration at the conclusion of the talks expressed it in the following words:

> The two Prime Ministers took note of the fact that the Farakka Barrage Project would be commissioned before the end of 1974. They recognised that during the periods of minimum flow in the Ganga there might not be enough water to meet the needs of the Calcutta Port and full requirements of Bangladesh and, therefore, the fair weather flow of the Ganga in the lean months would have to be augmented to meet the requirements of the two countries. It was agreed that the problems should be approached with understanding so that the interests of both the countries are reconciled and the difficulties removed in a spirit of friendship and cooperation.

The question of augmentation was referred to the JRC, so that it should study "the optimal utilisation of the water resources of the region" and "make suitable recommendations to meet the requirements of both the countries." Abbas was "dismayed" by this development.

He found a way out to continue his obstructive tactics. A.R. Serniabat, Mujib's brother-in-law, had replaced Mushtaque as Water Minister, but he was new at the job and had not mastered the intricacies of the Farakka issue. Abbas felt free to bypass him and approached Mujib directly and got his consent to the idea that Bangladesh should propose the construction of storage reservoirs on the tributaries of the Ganges in Nepal. When the JRC met to discuss the question of augmentation, Abbas argued for the Nepal option.[9] It was non-starter so far as the Indian side was concerned, given India's sour relations with Nepal over the years. India countered with the concept of transferring surplus water from the Brahmaputra. With each side insisting on its stand, the JRC meetings become a dialogue of the deaf.

While the JRC remained stalemated on the question of augmentation, it was agreed that the two Water Ministers, Serniabat and Jagjivan Ram,

should meet in Dhaka in February 1975 to discuss the question of how to share the existing dry season flow of the Ganges. The matter of allocation had become urgent in view of India's intention to test the feeder canal before its impending commissioning. Just before the ministerial meeting Abbas prepared a seven-point note for the President. Mujib had just become President with near-dictatorial powers. In his note Abbas pointed out that as the proposed "test" run meant commissioning of the Farakka Barrage, an allocation of water should be agreed upon before the canal was run and that we should not agree to any joint studies. Abbas handed the note personally to Mujib in the presence of Serniabat and other senior Ministers. Mujib glanced through the note and in an annoyed tone remarked in Bengali, "You technical people always create difficulties." Then he said that he had agreed to the running of the Farakka canal as well as about the joint study of the effects.[10]

Finally, on 18 April 1975, India and Bangladesh reached an agreement on quantities of water to be shared by them for 40 days of "lean period" from 21 April to 31 May. Under this interim agreement, "India received only the fraction of water it wanted, but Bangladesh did concede that the barrage should be operated."[11] One should remember that the barrage was already a fact on the ground and the most that Mujib could do was to secure the maximum advantage he could get under the circumstances. This is what he did but before any permanent arrangement could be made he was killed and his government overthrown in a coup.

The history of the Farakka dispute is full of missed opportunities, both during the Pakistan period and during the Mujib regime. The most significant failure of the Mujib regime was that it missed the opportunity to get the World Bank involved in the settlement of the dispute. A month before the ministerial meeting in Dhaka, Leonard Weiss, the World Bank representative in Bangladesh, conveyed a message from Robert McNamara, the President of the World Bank, that he was ready to help if requested by the parties to the dispute and that the World Bank role would extend beyond mediation and include technical assistance for the optimum use of the waters. According to Abbas, he took the message to Mujib but he did not show any interest in it.[12] What he leaves unmentioned is what his own views were and what he recommended to Mujib. Judging from the record of Abbas in the Ganges Waters dispute he could not have been favourably disposed towards any comprehensive involvement of the World Bank in the dispute. He had always striven to retain the control of the matter in his hands and he would certainly have lost it if the World Bank, with all its expertise and financial resources, would have come in to help.

The World Bank had been eminently successful in finding an engineering solution to what had become an ugly political dispute between India and Pakistan over the use of the Indus waters. The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 negotiated under the auspices of the World Bank has stood the test of time. Even when the two countries were engaged in armed conflict—in 1965 and in 1971—they did not breach the agreement. Alexei Kosygin, the Soviet Premier, had in fact urged India, as early as July 1968, to settle the Farakka dispute on the line of the Indus Waters Treaty. In India itself Jayprakash Narayan and some others, spoke out in favour of an Indus—like settlement. But India, in the context of its feud with Pakistan, did not like the proposal. Nor did Pakistan show any interest in it, no doubt because it did not relish the prospect of a large-scale diversion of World Bank resources to the eastern wing. However, in the changed post-independence political climate, India might not have reacted negatively to such an idea, if Mujib himself had made this request.[13]

Notes

1. See Akhlaqur Rahman's article, "Indo-Bangladesh Economic Relations," *Holiday*, 17-3-1974.
2. The implementation of the Tin Bigha Corridor Agreement got delayed on account of India's constitutional and procedural problems. It was eventually handed over to Bangladesh in 1992.
3. Fakhruddin Ahmed, *Critical Times: Memoirs of a South Asian Diplomat*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1994, p.111.
4. Ibid. p.112.
5. See *Darbar-e-Zahur*, a collection of articles by Zahur Hossain Choudhury, Lalan Prakashan, Dhaka, 1985, p.150, where he writes:

   "While discussions on Farakka between the two countries continued, India went ahead with the construction of the barrage. Janab Syed Jafri, the Secretary of Industries, was a leader of the Pakistani delegation in one of these talks. I went to Pindi shortly afterwards and said to a Bengali officer I met there: "Did you notice how little they (West Pakistanis) care about East Bengal?, We have a water expert like Abbas, yet they select someone like Syed Jafri who hasn't spent even one month in East Bengal to lead the delegation." He replied, "Don't talk about the WAPDA expert. He didn't do his homework and couldn't give proper answers to the questions posed by Indian experts." So I went see Jafri Saheb whom I happened to know well. Using some choice epithets in his chaste Lucknow Urdu about our expert, what he said can be summed up in his words: "*Expert ek dam anparh hai*. (Your expert is totally ignorant)." In fairness to Abbas, it should be noted that there was meager hydrological database at this time. At the independence of Pakistan there was not a single discharge observation station on the major rivers of East Bengal except one at the Hardinge Railway Bridge for a limited purpose.
6. B.M. Abbas, *The Ganges Waters Dispute,* The University Press Limited, Dhaka 1982, p.37.
7. Ben Crowe, *Sharing the Ganges,* The University Press Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh Edition, Dhaka, 1997, p.103.
8. Ibid, p.104.
9. B.M. Abbas, op. cit. p.37.
10. *Ibid.* p.40.
11. Ben Crowe, op. cit. p.38.
12. B.M. Abbas, op. cit. p.38.
13. In 1973, on the occasion of the World Bank meeting in Nairobi, McNamara sounded Dr. Nurul Islam about solving the Farraka dispute with the World Bank assistance. Islam discussed the proposal with D.P. Dhar, who thought that the two countries had the necessary expertise to solve the dispute without World Bank involvement.

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BHUTTO'S STATE VISIT AND AFTER

The stage was set for Bhutto to visit Bangladesh during the Islamic Summit Conference in early 1974. On 13 June, Kamal Hossain, the Foreign Minister, announced in Parliament that Bhutto would be coming for a state visit to Dhaka towards the end of the month. Bhutto's last visit to Dhaka was in March 1971; he had then witnessed the brutal crackdown and had publicly approved it. Now he would be returning to the capital of Bangladesh that he had vowed to prevent from becoming a reality.

Only two months earlier, in April 1974, Mujib had received a letter from a man claiming to be a doctor in the medical corps of the Pakistan Army. Post-marked from London, it related a strange story: Pakistan authorities had asked the doctor to prepare a deadly virus. It was to be injected into Mujib's body while he embraced or shook hands with Bhutto during the Islamic Conference. As a good Muslim the doctor had declined to carry out his assignment. But having heard that Mujib had fallen seriously ill after his return from Lahore, he felt conscience-bound to warn Mujib about this plot. It was quite possible that someone else might have done the job originally assigned to him. He ended the letter by praying for Mujib's full recovery.[1] The letter was most probably a hoax perpetrated by a provocateur. Even if Mujib did not fully believe the story, he must have found the content of the letter disturbing, given his past experience with the power elite of Pakistan, in particular the ISI.

Bhutto's visit could not have come at a worse time for Mujib. Early floods had damaged rice crops in some regions. The treasury was almost empty; there was little foreign exchange to import foodgrains to make up for the expected shortfall. The economy of Pakistan had also been badly shaken by the wrong-headed "socialist" policies of Bhutto, but Pakistan was far from bankrupt. Remittances from Pakistanis who had found employment in large numbers in the Middle East in the wake of the phenomenal 1973 oil price rise had built up a healthy foreign exchange reserve and Pakistan had a bumper harvest. It was tempting for Bhutto to want to show off the relative prosperity of Pakistan to Mujib who had won the war but had failed to create a "Sonar Bangla" he had promised to his people.

To prepare for his state visit, Bhutto sent an advance team of government officials, including intelligence personnel, bearing gifts for their contacts in Bangladesh. They gave nicely-packaged Basmati rice to bureaucrats while political figures belonging to Islamist parties—Muslim League, Jamaat-e-Islam, Nizam-e-Islam—were given, according to some reports, outright cash.

On 27 June, Bhutto arrived at the Tejgaon airport for a three-day visit. He was accompanied by a large entourage. They numbered, including those already in Dhaka, over hundred people. Bhutto wore a resplendent uniform with a gold collar band of the supreme leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) as he got down from his plane. He was given a reception worthy of an important visiting Head of the State, with the diplomatic corps lined up on the tarmac for the occasion. One notable absentee from the line-up was Subimal Dutt, India's first High Commissioner to Bangladesh. He was one of the rare people who believed in and practiced the Bengali ideal of "simple living and high thinking." Only days before Bhutto's visit he had relinquished his position, saying to his deputy, "I do not wish to be in a position where I have to receive this fellow Bhutto at the airport and shake his hands drenched with the blood of the people of Bangladesh."[2]

Large crowds lined both sides of the road from the airport to the city. There were almost as many Biharis as there were Bengalis in the crowds and they were in an ugly mood. Bengalis either belonged to or were incited by the Opposition to protest their hard living conditions; Biharis were probably hoping to influence Bhutto to allow them to go to Pakistan to settle there. The pace of the motorcade was slow as it waded through throngs shouting pro-Bhutto and anti-Mujib slogans. The car of the Indian High Commission was vandalised. Even the Pakistanis, amazed by the size of the crowds showing their support of Bhutto, began to fear for their personal safety as security arrangements broke down.[3] The chancelleries of the world took note of these events from the reports of their diplomatic missions in Dhaka.

Mujib was distressed by the spectacle of unseemly behaviour of the crowds and annoyed with the incompetence of his own intelligence service which had failed to warn him of any possible embarrassing situation during the Bhutto visit. Quite understandably he was not his usual affable self when he met Bhutto for their first private meeting. Bhutto did not help matters by suggesting a change in his programme. Bhutto wanted the proposed visit to the National Martyrs Memorial to be taken off his programme. This may be explained by his worry about the

reaction of the Pakistani Army to his laying a wreath at a memorial for those who had died while fighting Pakistan armed forces. Mujib told Bhutto firmly but politely that a visit to the Martyrs Memorial was a standard item in the programme of a visiting Head of State and if Bhutto did not wish to go there, he (Mujib) would rather have the rest of the programme cancelled. Bhutto thereupon did not insist on a change of programme.[4]

Mujib could no longer trust the police force to carry out politically sensitive tasks. He entrusted his party people to make sure that Bhutto did not have the satisfaction of being greeted by a friendly crowd at Savar. So Bhutto had to face a hostile crowd shouting "Murderer Bhutto, Go Back" when he arrived to lay a wreath at the Martyrs Memorial.

From the substantive point of view, Bhutto's visit was devoid of any results. After the reception he got from the crowds on the first day Bhutto might have felt that he held the upper hand in his dealings with Mujib. He took a hard line. On the question of assets and liabilities, Bhutto took the position that he did not know that this matter would be raised and he had therefore not brought with him any financial experts. Bhutto remained indifferent to the plight of Biharis so eager to go to Pakistan and even ignored the commitments made at the Delhi talks. Bangladesh, unlike Pakistan, had failed to send an advance team to Islamabad to discuss the agenda for the talks in Dhaka and this enabled the Pakistan delegation to dodge the issue of assets and liabilities.

The futile discussions thus reached their end and it was time for Bhutto to return to Pakistan. In stark contrast to his first day of visit, the road to the airport was almost empty on the day of his return journey. Rakkhi Bahini had been instructed by Mujib to see to it that there should be no repetition of what had taken place on the day of his arrival. Rakkhi Bahhini did the job well.

Rakkhi Bahini was withdrawn from the streets of Dhaka after Bhutto's departure. This provided with an opportunity for the Opposition to show their strength. On 29 June, in his capacity as the leader of the 6-Party United Front, Bhashani marched in front of a protest demonstration. It was forced to disperse. At night the police raided the house of Mashiur Rahman (Jadu Mian) where Bhashani was staying. Bhashani was taken away to Santosh in Tangail where he was interned in his own home. Bhashani's political orientation after the liberation had taken a decided turn towards the right. In Pakistan Bhashani had surrounded himself with advisers with leftist leanings. Of late, however, his political stock-in-trade

had become anti-Indianism which made him a magnet for all sorts of Islamist elements and opportunists like Mashiur Rahman. A word about Mashiur Rahman: Soon after the start of the war of liberation he left for India to join Bhashani there. Then he voluntarily crossed the border under mysterious circumstances to collaborate with the Pakistan armed forces. He was arrested as a collaborator after independence. But like other collaborators he was later released under general amnesty. He was to become the closest adviser of Bhashani.

Bhutto's visit had given Mujib a jolt of reality. At a Cabinet meeting around this time Mujib opened the proceedings with a startling statement: "The state of disorder in the country has reached a point beyond my control. You take over and run the country as best as you can." The senior members of the Cabinet looked at each other searching for an answer. There was total silence for a while. Then Mufiz Chowdhury, Minister for Power, who had joined the Awami League only in the late 1960's spoke up: "Sir, you cannot suddenly give up your responsibilities as Prime Minister. You should designate someone as your deputy and then hand over your functions to him. In India Mahatma Gandhi had done a good thing by choosing Nehru. You should do something similar here." He then pointed towards Syed Nazrul Islam and Tajunddin Ahmed. Manaranjan Dhar, the Law Minister, also spoke in the same vein. When the Cabinet meeting was over, Tajuddin asked Mufiz Chowdhury, "Did you really expect him to resign?"[5]

On 6 July, Mujib presided over an extraordinary meeting of the top Awami Leaguers and AL members of Parliament. The meeting was called to consider what should be done to check the slide to anarchy. It was evident that the breakdown of the law and order in the country was making the life of the ordinary people unbearable and destroying the economy. It was felt that existing law did not provide sufficient deterrent to vicious wrongdoers; draconian measures would have to be taken against serious offenders. It was therefore recommended that an example should be made of them by executing them by firing squads. At the same time, administration would have to be made more efficient by purging it of corrupt elements. At around 7 o'clock in the evening all Cabinet members present at this meeting were handed pre-typed letters of resignation to sign. On the following morning it was announced that six Ministers and three State Ministers had resigned. Those who were thus summarily removed from the Cabinet were: Shamsul Haque, Mollah Jalaluddin, General (Retd.) Osmani, Mufiz Chowdhury, Amirul Islam, Abdul Malek and Begum Nur

Jahan Murshed.[6] It was noted by cynics that a disproportionate number of them were close to Tajuddin.

Following this decision taken at the high-level meeting of the Awami League, Parliament passed the Special Powers Act, 1974, a fortnight later. It provided for death for serious offenders convicted of sabotage, black marketing, hoarding, counterfeiting of currency notes, sale of adulterated food and smuggling. Even any attempt at or abetting of such offences was made punishable by death. There would be no bail for a person accused of these serious crimes. Special tribunals would be created for the trial of these people. For those convicted of these crimes death sentences could be carried out by firing squads.

Syed Najmuddin Hashem, who was looking after foreign publicity, brought to Mujib's attention press reaction to this law. Some of the foreign newspapers were somewhat critical of Mujib's undemocratic impulses. Mujib asked Hashem for his own views. Hashem replied: "I would like to see corrupt businessmen, politicians, bureaucrats and border guards to be hanged by pairs publicly in the Race Course. The whole world would then know that revolutionary justice was being carried out." With a pained looked in his eyes, Mujib said, "How can I ever knowingly take the life of a Bangalee no matter how heinous his offence is?" This was vintage Mujib. No one was ever hanged or put before a firing squad for corruption or any serious economic crime.[7]

Notes

1. M.A. Wazed Miah, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibke Niye Kichhu Ghotona O Bangladesh,* pp.178-179.
2. J.N. Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond,* p.189.
3. Interview with Yusuf Buch, Pakistan's Minister of Information and member of Bhutto's entourage.
4. Ibid.
5. Mafiz Chowdhury, *Bangabandhur Mantrisabhay*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1991, p.110.
6. Ibid, p.111.
7. Syed Najmuddin Hashem, *Ashleshar Rakkhashi Belay*, p.118.

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THE FAMINE OF 1974

In the past three hundred years Bengal has been hit by three large-scale famines: the first was in 1770, thirteen years after the Battle of Plassey, which wiped out a third of the population; the second was the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 with an official death toll of 1.5 million; and the third occurred in 1974, two years after the independence of Bangladesh, which is estimated to have resulted in the death of around a million, that is, nearly as many who had died in the war of liberation.[1]

What caused the famine 1974, so soon after independence? There is no doubt that the severe floods of that year, from the end of June to the beginning of September, which damaged part of the *aus* crop (harvested in July-August) and the *aman* crop (sown in July-September) set off forces that led to the famine. There was a genuine fear that there would be a food shortage. Unscrupulous traders took advantage of the situation by hoarding in the expectation of making quick profits out of the misery of the people. There was a 21 per cent increase in the average price of rice in a few weeks from July to August; in some of the most flood-affected areas the price rise doubled in the three months between July and October.

Yet it would be incorrect to attribute the famine wholly, or even mainly, to floods. Statistics collected by Alamgir *et al* and quoted in the classic work of Amartya Sen, "Poverty and Famines," show that despite severe floods of 1974, production of rice that year was higher than in any single year during the 1971-1975 period. The Nobel-Prize-winning economist therefore argues that "whatever the Bangladesh famine of 1974 might have been, it wasn't a FAD (food availability decline) famine."[2]

Likewise, Martin Ravallion, a World Bank economist who specialises in poverty, traces the progression of the 1974 famine this way: Severe flooding disrupted rice planting that threw landless rural labourers out of work. Then false fears of shortages doubled rice price in a few weeks. For the poor, who spend more than three-quarters of their wages on food, the blow was catastrophic. "Almost everything the government did made things worse."[3]

Recognising the gravity of the situation, Mujib ordered the armed forces in early July to seal borders to stop smuggling. He also asked them to apprehend hoarders internally. It gave the Army its first taste of power since independence. Sealing of borders appears to have been an unnecessary step. It is true that in normal times there was been considerable smuggling of rice into India because of the taka-rupee disparity in the free market rate of exchange as opposed to the official rate where the two currencies were at par. But there could not have been much incentive for smuggling when "the relative price of rice in Bangladesh vis-à-vis India rose sharply" after the start of the famine, as Amartya Sen has noted.[4] As for the use of the Army to take action against hoarders, it proved to be a fiasco. Army officers engaged in this operation showed an excess of zeal against alleged hoarders who were either Awami Leaguers or enjoyed their protection. As already mentioned the Army personnel nursed grievances against the Mujib regime for giving them a step-motherly treatment in relation to the Rakkhi Bahini, which was regarded by them as a kind of private army of the regime. Mujib had to give protection to his arrested partymen, under pressure of his party colleagues, even when they were patently guilty. In the process, the regular Army gained some popularity for doing the right thing, although for the wrong reasons.

There have been recurrent famines through the history of the subcontinent. As early as fourth century B.C., Kautilya, in his treatise on statecraft, *Arthashastra*, advised: "During famine the king should make a store of foodstuffs and show his favour to the people." The government had not built food reserves as a cushion against famine. The other alternative was to import foodstuffs from food-surplus countries or get food aid from them. The foreign exchange reserve was so low that the government could not afford to import food. At one stage, Australia had offered foodstuffs on a grant basis but on condition that Bangladesh would have to bear the cost of shipping. The offer had to be declined.[5] The United States had been traditionally the biggest giver of food aid. But in 1974 it imposed a food embargo on Bangladesh, ostensibly because PL 480 food aid recipients were not allowed to trade with countries like Cuba placed on the American blacklist. Bangladesh had made an agreement with Cuba to sell jute to that country. In September, at the height of the famine, the American Ambassador called on Dr. Nurul Islam of the Planning Commission, to ask Bangladesh to cease exports of jute to Cuba if it wanted a resumption of food aid. Cuba was sympathetic to the plight of Bangladesh and released it from its contractual obligation. The last shipments of jute for

Cuba left the shores of Bangladesh in the following month. But because of procedural delays US food aid was not received until after the famine was over.[6] Speculation was rife that the underlying American motive was to destabilise the Mujib regime. If so, the United States showed heartless indifference to starving millions of Bengalis. "A couple of thousand tons of foodgrains targeted in the famine districts would have made all the difference," a US official in Dhaka has been quoted as saying. The three most famine-stricken districts were: Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rangpur. Rangpur was the worst "famine district" in terms of mortality where according to one estimate, "80 to 100,000 persons died of starvation and malnutrition in 2-3 months."[7]

As the starving multitudes from the famine-stricken northern districts streamed into Dhaka in search of odd jobs or alms, makeshift camps were set up on the outskirts of the capital; some lived on the platforms of the railway station. The current famine conditions attracted a number of foreign journalists. Some of them had been encouraged by the government to report on the situation in the hope that this would put pressure on the Western countries to offer generous aid for the famine victims. What they reported was the opposite of what the government had hoped for. The theme of their reportage was that the current famine was only partially due to natural cause; it was due mainly to government ineptitude and indifference. Here is a sampling of world press coverage on the famine in Bangladesh:

> Most Bangladeshis are eating less than they did before independence (down from an average 15.4 ounces daily to 12.9. Nearly half of them no longer eat the minimum supposedly needed to stay alive. In spite of the bumper crop this year, the price keeps going up anyway. Claire Sterling, *The Atlantic*, September, 1974.
>
> A stone's throw from the Intercontinental Hotel where rich young Bangladeshis are happy to pay nearly £ 1 for a tin of lager (beer) from Singapore, there is an open space where an industrial bank is to be build. It is awash with mud and ordure and nearly 1,000 people exist thee living in thatched shakes battered by monsoon rains, hungry, with scabies and T.B. at epidemic levels and completely without hope. Christopher Dobson, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 28 July 1974.
>
> Now, while civil servants, their pay frozen since 1970, spend their entire salary on food, the poor starve. It is a moment for strong government. But as the storm gathers Sheikh Mujib retreats further and further into a world of self-serving make—believe—a world in which his people still love him, the Pakistan's are to blame, the outside world will come to his aid and Bangladesh will emerge triumphant. But the international

community has grown impatient with Bangladesh, is tiring of its toy. Exhausted by the terrible truth that most of the relief operation of the last 32 months has been in vain, relief workers, embassy staff and UN officials turn on the Government and the people. Unmindful of the oppression of the past, they treat the Bengali with the arrogance of despair. They speak with contempt of the inefficient, and with impotent anger at the corrupt. Jonathan Dimbleby, *New Statesman*, 27 September 1974.

"Our leaders are heartless," said a middle-aged street peddler in Dacca, the capital city. "They are stealing the relief goods." The government is not winning any friends among the malnourished poor who have streamed into Dacca over the past month or two. But the government seems determined to keep them off the streets and has rounded up quite a few at gun point and taken them to camps. Once locked into a camp, the people say they cannot get out again. At a school which had been transformed into such a camp, the people spoke of being in a concentration camp. "What kind of an independent country is this where they keep people caged up?," asked an angry man at this camp. Daniel Sutherland, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 October 1974.

Tales of corruption and visible evidence of it abound in Dacca. A former official has said that one out of 7 tins of baby food and one out of 13 blankets reach the poor. Allegations are voiced against Gazi Gholam Mustafa, head of the Bangladesh Red Crescent and chairman of the Dacca city branch of the Awami League, and against members of Sheikh Mujib's family and senior officials in the Industries, Commerce and Communications Ministers. Bribes are paid to the Awami Leaguers to ease the path of businessmen in search of permits as well as to recover abandoned property. An elderly non-Bengali who returned here recently from India and had the approval of Sheikh Mujib to reopen his pharmaceutical plant was ordered to pay $30,000 by the Sheikh Mujib's nephew, who had taken over the building. Recently 70 Bengali economists, writers and lawyers, headed by Dr. Anisur Rahman, a distinguished former member of the Planning Commission, issued a statement saying that the recent famine was man-made and "the direct result of political and economic laissez-faire by a class of people who were given to shameless plunder, exploitation, terrorisation, flattery, fraudulence and misrule." The statement said that the Government "is clearly dominated by and is representative of smugglers and profiteers."

Bernard Weintraub, *The New York Times*, 13 December 1974.

This was not all. A few months afterwards, I remember having read an article in the Magazine Section of the Sunday edition of *The New York Times*, in which the author argued that some countries which were beyond all help should subjected to triage and jettisoned. The word "triage"

comes from the French verb "trier," which means "to sort." It came into general usage during the First World War when battle casualties were divided into three categories: first, minor casualties who required minimal treatment and could be returned to front-line duty; second, those who needed treatment at base hospital and could be returned to active duty at the front or assigned to desk jobs in the rear; and third, severely wounded soldiers considered expendable and denied treatment. The rationale of triage, according to this article, should be applied to some Third World countries in view of the world-wide food crisis. Available food surplus should be given to countries (e.g. Pakistan), which, if helped out, could recover and become food-viable, while countries like Bangladesh which were not worth rescuing, should be denied aid. This crude concept of triage had been given currency by Williams Paddock in his book, *Famine 1975*. Fortunately, after the success of the Green Revolution, the concept of triage became discredited.

Mujib himself came to the conclusion that he would have to give up his business—as-usual approach to administration and take new initiatives. He began to rely on more competent people to improve the lot of the ordinary people. Among the people he brought into his Cabinet was Abdul Momen as Food Minister. New to his job, he applied common sense rather than book-learning to manage the food crisis. He gave up inter-district cordoning, favoured by the bureaucracy in blind imitation of the inter-provincial cordoning practiced during the 1943 Famine. The abolition of cordoning reduced the incentive to smuggling within the country and the profiteering associated with it. By the end of 1974 the famine was almost over and there were hopeful signs of recovery.

Black marketeers, hoarders and smugglers had made a lot of money during the famine. To wipe out much of the "black money" held by them it was decided in early 1975 to demonetize 100-taka currency notes. This had to be done in such great secrecy that apart from Mujib only the Governor of Bangladesh Bank and his deputy, the Finance Minister and the Finance Secretary, knew about the decision. Later, the Vice President was also informed. This decision was such a closely guarded secret that even Abdur Rahim, Mujib's Secretary, had no inkling about it until Sunday, 6 April, the day before the announcement of the decision. To prevent any leaks, Mujib's office was sealed from outside contacts until the next morning. In a surprise action of this kind, it was inevitable that a number of innocent people would suffer some loss. Among them was Begum Mujib who happened to be in Tungipara during this period. Like many old-fashioned people, she had kept her savings in the folds of her saris in her locked

almirah. She was understandably cross with her husband for not telling her about the impending demonetisation. This money was found in her almirah when an inventory was taken of the belongings of Mujib and his family members after their murder four months later.

Notes

1. The official figure of death for the 1974 famine is 26,000. In his 1980 study of this famine, M. Alamgir of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies suggests the mortality figure as around one million between August 1974 and January 1975 and a further half a million in the year following (see Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, page 134, Note 5). As for the numbers of Bengalis killed in the course of the liberation war, the figure of 3 million mentioned by Mujib to David Frost in January 1972 was a gross overstatement. This figure was picked up by him from an article in *Pravda*, the organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. A more realistic figure was suggested by Ambassador Malik, the Soviet Permanent Representative to the UN, in his speech in the Security Council of 15 December 1971. He spoke about "hundreds of thousands of people" who perished in the liberation war, implying that the number of dead was in six figures, that is, less than a million.
2. Amartya Sen, op. cit. p.141.
3. Quoted in *the New York Times*, January 17, 1997.
4. Amartya Sen, op. cit. p.138, note 13.
5. Interview with Abdul Momen, Food Minister in 1974-75.
6. Interview with Dr. Nurul Islam, Winter 2001.
7. Amartya Sen, op. cit. p.134.

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ADMISSION OF BANGLADESH TO THE UNITED NATIONS

China had opposed the membership of Bangladesh in the UN mainly on the ground that over 93,000 Pakistani POWs and civilians held in Indian camps had not been repatriated "in violation of relevant UN resolutions." By April 1974, however, the repatriation of Pakistanis had almost been completed. There was therefore no longer any excuse for the Chinese to block the admission of Bangladesh to the UN.

Nevertheless, the Chinese sent a message through our Embassy in Belgrade that while they looked forward to developing friendly relationship with us they would appreciate it if we could postpone applying for UN membership for a couple of months and expressed the hope that in the intervening period Mujib-Bhutto talks scheduled for June would have a satisfactory outcome. It was apparent that this request had been made to please Pakistan which still wanted to exploit the membership issue as a bargaining counter in its negotiations with Bangladesh. The agenda for Mujib-Bhutto talks included the thorny questions of the division of assets and the repatriation of non-Bengalis, nearly all of them Biharis, to Pakistan. Bangladesh had no interest in linking the question of UN admission with its relations with Pakistan. Bangladesh therefore politely turned down China's request. For a few days there was an air of uncertainty about the Chinese attitude should we press for a Security Council meeting to consider our request for UN membership. Thankfully, the Egyptians devised a "face-saving" formula acceptable to the Chinese: Consideration of Bangladesh admission to the UN by the Security Council would be deferred but only for ten days. Having thus successfully de-linked the question of admission with that of our relations with Pakistan, we were in a position to approach the President of the Security Council to set a date for its meeting on 10 June. On that day the UN Security Council unanimously recommended to the General Assembly the admission of Bangladesh to the United Nations, three weeks before Bhutto's visit to Dhaka for talks with Mujib.

When the General Assembly convened in September for its regular annual session it routinely approved the Security Council recommendation



Photo 19: Addressing the UN General Assembly in Bangla on 25th September, 1974

and Bangladesh formally became a member of the world body. On 23 September Mujib flew to New York to address the General Assembly. His speech was in Bengali.[1]

New York at this time had the second biggest Bengali community abroad, London being the first. The Bangladesh League of America, with its chapters in the United States and Canada, had been very active during the nine months of the liberation struggle; through its extensive network in North America it helped to arouse the opinion of the Americans in favour of the Bangladesh cause. But the Bengalis in New York had been fed for months on a steady diet of allegations of Awami League misrule in the news items and commentaries of the local press, supplemented by their own communications with their folks back home. Nearly three-quarters of Bengalis were Sylhetis, that is, from a district that was one of the most hard-hit famine areas. Under normal conditions, it was to be expected that they would be overjoyed to see their national leader for whose release from Pakistani imprisonment they had so ardently campaigned. But these

were not normal times. So, instead of holding a reception for him, they addressed a letter to him, which reads in part as follows:

> Dear Mr. Prime Minister, we are fully aware of the shattering problems with which Bangladesh was born. We never expected a Bangladesh full of milk and honey, not overnight. On the other hand, we never expected to find Bangladesh in its present appalling state, particularly so, because a major part of the responsibility for the present situation in Bangladesh can be allegedly attributed to the unscrupulous activities of a few people in the Government. Moreover, these national pests are rampaging the country for the last three years without any check and, in some cases, reportedly with the blessing of the Government. Their numbers are growing every day and in no time the country will be owned by a bunch of hoodlums and you, Bangabandhu, behind whom the entire nation rallied one day with high hopes and aspirations, will be presiding over their heinous activities. We are deeply concerned about the current state of affairs in our country and we would like to take this opportunity to express our concerns.[2]

The President of the United States, the host country of the United Nations, had invited Mujib to visit him in Washington. Mujib's main interest was to find out American response to the request made by Bangladesh for urgent food assistance. But Mujib did not have to wait that long. Just before his departure for Washington, Secretary of State Kissinger came to meet Mujib. Arriving half an hour late, for which there was no apology or explanation, Kissinger informed Mujib that the United States would give Bangladesh



Photo 20: With US President Gerald Ford at the White House (1974)

half of the amount respected by it. Kissinger had once labeled Bangladesh as "an international basket case," implying that this new nation would be forever dependent on foreign assistance. Mujib had no desire to appear as a supplicant to Kissinger. At one point during their conversation Mujib remarked that while his country was going through a difficult period it had a bright future. He said that there was a distinct possibility of discovery of rich oil reserves in Bangladesh. Foreign oil companies had shown great interest in prospecting for petroleum in the offshore waters of Bangladesh. Kissinger responded in a tone of mock seriousness: "Then Mr. Prime Minister, we'll be coming to you to help us with our oil needs."[3]

Meanwhile, with the quadrupling of oil prices in the wake of the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East and the foreign exchange reserves of Bangladesh at an all-time low, it was Bangladesh that was desperately searching for countries that would fill its oil needs at a fair price. This was the main reason why Mujib made a state visit to Iraq on his way back to Dhaka. Iraq was an oil-rich country, with petroleum reserves estimated to be the second largest in the world. Only Saudi Arabia had greater reserves than Iraq, but the rulers of Saudi Arabia, belonging to the fundamentalist Wahabbi sect of Islam, did not approve of secularism practiced in Bangladesh. Iraq, on the other hand, was a proponent of Arab nationalism and was proud to be the only Middle-East Arab oil-rich country with a secular outlook. In the four days that Mujib was in Iraq cooperation agreements were signed with Iraq; more importantly, Bangladesh obtained oil from Iraq at a concessional price. On 7 October Mujib returned to Dhaka.

Notes

1. Bangla is neither a working nor on official language of the UN. But heads of governments/states are allowed to use their national language in the General Assembly provided they make arrangements for their translation into official languages: English, French, Russian, Spanish and Chinese.
2. A copy of this letter was provided to me for information by the Bangladesh League of America.
3. Faruq Chowdhury, Foreign Office, who was present in New Delhi when Mujib arrived there.

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MUJIB'S SECOND REVOLUTION

During his visit abroad in the autumn of 1974 Mujib had plenty of time to brood over the recent misfortunes of Bangladesh. By this time he was thoroughly disenchanted with the corruption and selfishness of the middle class, which formed the backbone of the Awami League. From his private conversation in New York, it was clear that he was already gravitating towards the view that a new approach to the problems of governance was absolutely necessary. He was heard to say that *exceptional times required exceptional measures*.

It is difficult to say whether the influence of Sheikh Moni played an important part in his thinking. For quite some time Moni had openly advocated the "rule of Mujib, not the rule of law." After Mujib left the country for his trip to New York, Moni stepped up his rhetoric to do away with the parliamentary form of government in his speeches to the Jubo League and his newspaper, *Banglar Bani*. By putting Mujib on a pedestal as the supreme leader, Moni might have thought, he would be able to enhance his own power. He was not the only man to want Mujib to be endowed with near-dictatorial power. Mansur Ali, the Home Minister was in favour of some form of authoritarian government to prevent the slide into anarchy. He wanted to curb the judiciary which frequently allowed seemingly guilty people to go free for lack of fool-proof evidence and other technicalities. Mujib would appear to have become receptive to the idea of a radical change only after the 1974 famine. According to Abdur Razzak, it was only then that he became convinced of the need for a "breakthrough" in order to build an "exploitation-free" society.[1]

Tajuddin had also been disheartened by the performance of Awami League in power. When he passed through New York shortly after Mujib's visit, I had the opportunity of talking to him alone during lunch at home and later, when I drove him to the airport. Normally a reserved person, he did not hide his bitterness about the way things had gone wrong in Bangladesh. So I was not surprised when I read in the newspaper that upon his arrival in Dhaka he had publicly blamed the government for the economic crisis

in the country. Wazed Miah, Mujib's son-in-law, recalls that Mushtaque telephoned him shortly thereafter to invite him to his house for a chat. When he arrived at Mushtaque's house it was clear to him that the sole purpose his invitation was to complain about Tajuddin's remarks. Mushtaque told him that Tajuddin had no right as a Cabinet Minister to criticise the policies of the government. He must resign and if he does not do so he should be forced out of the government.[2] Mushtaque was not the only Awami Leaguer to want to get rid of him. On 26 October Tajuddin resigned and retired to lead a quiet life.

Tajuddin's world-view, shaped in part by his experience during the liberation war, was unfavourable to the United States. The man he disliked most in the Nixon administration was Henry Kissinger. Tajuddin's departure therefore created a more suitable atmosphere for the visit of Kissinger two days later. At the end of two-hour meeting with Mujib, Kissinger told the newsmen that Mujib was "a man of vast conception." One can only surmise that Mujib had given some idea of far-reaching changes in the governmental structure he was contemplating. None of the leaders of the successor states of the British Raj had even remotely considered any basic change of the administrative system they had inherited from their colonial rulers.

Mujib had watched for some time how various political parties and groups representing narrow interests were tearing apart the fabric of the society. He had began to toy with the idea of a single-party system on the Tanzanian model. Certain it is that of all the leaders of the Third world, Mujib admired most Julius Nyerere, the President of Tanzania. Mujib had met him several times during the conferences of the Commonwealth and Non-aligned nations. Mujib was impressed by his simplicity, devotion to his people and breadth of vision. He was the first leader of a Commonwealth country to replace the colonial system of administration with a system which he felt would be in consonance with African tradition. He had also introduced a single-party system. As a democrat Nyerere tried to solve the problem of how democracy could operate within a one-party state by introducing a unique form of election. Rival candidates from the single-party system would be allowed to contest each constituency. By this means, Nyerere hoped to ensure that national reconstruction would proceed without the delays and divisions inherent in a multi-party system. But even as late as November Mujib made no attempt to discuss his plan with his most senior colleagues like Syed Nazrul Islam and A.H.M. Kamaruzzaman. Meanwhile Sheikh Moni and some middle-level leaders kept prodding Mujib not to delay the introduction of a new system. Wazed Miah was

present when they pressed Mujib to amend the Constitution to make him President for life. He writes:

> One evening in the middle of November [1974] Bangabandhu was watching TV in the lobby outside his bedroom. I was there with my mother-in-law and Hasina. At some point several middle-aged and young leaders of the Jubo League and the Awami League arrived. After some small talk one of them said: 'Leader, it does not seem proper to us that you, the Father of the Nation, should be Prime Minister while someone else should hold the position of highest honour as President. So we respectfully appeal to you that you amend the Constitution to make you the President.' All the others present on the occasion strongly supported the proposal. 'Well, I'll consider it," Bangabandhu replied. About a week later, these same leaders brought this proposal to Bangabandhu: 'Leader, you should not only be President, we would like to see you declared as President for life.' Bangabandhu said: 'It is not only unseemly but unconstitutional to elect anyone as life-long President. Therefore this will not be done.'[3]

From the context it is hard to escape the conclusion that these proposals were made by Sheikh Moni or someone else authorised by him. Mujib was not interested in just becoming President. His thinking went beyond restructuring of the government; his ultimate objective was the transformation of society itself. He would call it "second revolution", but unlike the first, which was a national revolution, the second would be a social revolution and it would be a revolution from above. The administration would have to be decentralised and the judicial system simplified. Co-operatives would have to be introduced to improve the lot of villagers. A presidential form of government would replace the parliamentary form of government to signify a break with the past.

On 28 December, following the killing of three Awami Leaguers, one of whom was a member of Parliament, during Eid prayer, a state of emergency was proclaimed. The state of emergency provided a suitable backdrop for the introduction of the "second revolution." Up to the end of December Mujib had shared his thoughts only with a narrow group of his partymen. However, to carry out a switch from the existing system to a presidential form he would have to convince the Awami League Parliamentary Party of the need to push through a constitutional amendment in Parliament to institutionalise his vision of a just society. So Mujib convened a meeting of the Awami League Parliamentarians on 19 January 1975. Mujib explained to them why, in his view, a change in the system of government had become imperative. Not all MPs were convinced. Many of them were

uneasy about giving Mujib the formal authority to widen his power to such an extent. Some feared that the inclusion of outsiders in a single party would lessen their importance. Mujib did not expect that his vision would be so hard to sell to his party men. In the end he overcame their scruples by threatening to resign: "I want to know whether you wish me to be your leader or not ?" After three days of meetings the Awami League Parliamentary Party authorised Mujib to "take such measures as may be necessary to solve the problems" of the country.

The Awami League had more than the required majority to pass a constitutional amendment. On 25 January, the Fourth Amendment was adopted by Parliament within an hour. There was no debate. This amendment nullified the spirit of the Constitution adopted soon after independence. Immediately after the Fourth Amendment was rushed through Parliament Mujib took the oath of office of President. It was administered by the Speaker of Parliament.

Mujib then made a rambling, off-the-cuff, highly emotional speech in Parliament to justify the fundamental change in the Constitution. He began his speech by recalling that when the Constitution was first adopted he had said it would only be amended if it was considered necessary for the economic emancipation of the people. Bangladesh had become independent through an armed revolution. Nobody who had come to power in such a manner had ever granted complete freedom to other political parties and groups. But Awami League had done so. And what had been the result ? Some had used illegally collected arms to kill Awami League political workers and MPs. Bangladesh had become a hotbed of international intrigue, with paid agents of foreign powers operating freely. Turning to the problem of corruption, he said: "it is not the Bengali peasants nor the Bengali workers who are engaged in corrupt dealings." It was intolerable that even the aid given by friendly countries, should be diverted by these corrupt people for their personal enrichment. He was promise-bound to eradicate them. He then proceeded to deal with a subject that no politician of the subcontinent had dared to talk about publicly: "Our population is increasing at the rate of 30 lakhs every year. We have no option but to do population planning ... Population measures will have to be combined with increase in production." The country must become self-reliant. "A man who lives by begging has no honour. I don't want to be the leader of a beggar nation. That is why I want my country to be self-sufficient. For this we'll have to be disciplined and work hard." The climax of his speech was: "we'll not attain success simply by a change of system. Just as you fought selflessly during the struggle for independence ... you must struggle

now against injustice, against corruption. Otherwise it will be all in vain... Inshallah, we'll be successful."

It was the best speech Mujib ever made in his years of power because it came straight from his heart. Mujib's vision now had to be translated into a concrete plan of action. Just as he had done in the case of his Six Points, he turned to a civil servant, Dr. A. Sattar, to produce a paper setting out the organisational outline of the single-party state envisioned by Mujib. Monoranjan Dhar, the Minister for Law, gave it the legal shape.

The Fourth Amendment had authorised the new President, "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation" to form one national party and suspend the activities of all other political parties. On 24 February, Mujib declared the formation of this party. It was called Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BAKSAL). Two political parties—the NAP (Muzaffar) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh—joined it. Bhashani did not join it but backed the "second revolution" as a "good step." His support came after Mujib had promised a substantial sum of money for a pet project of the Maulana: an Islamic University at Santosh.

On March 26, the Independence Day, Mujib unveiled the sweeping changes in the way the country was to be governed:

1. Since the existing 19 districts were too big they would be broken up and their 61 subdivisions would become new districts. Each one of them would have an Administrative Council comprised of representatives of the people, from BAKSAL and government officials and headed by a Governor. The units of the Army, BDR, Rakkhi Bahini, and the Police posted in the districts would come under the control of the Governor.
2. Courts and tribunals would be set up at the level of thanas, the lowest administrative unit, in order to make it easier for the people to get justice.
3. In the capital city of Dhaka the bureaucratic system would be replaced by a "people oriented" one.
4. Compulsory multi-purpose co-operatives would be set up in every village within five years. All government aid would be channelled through them. The ownership of land would continue in its present form but its produce would be divided in three parts: one for the owner, one for the co-operative, and one for the government.

He then named the 13-member Executive Committee, 113-member Central Committee and leaders of the five fronts of the new party: labour,

peasants, students, youth and women. With one exception, all members of the Executive Committee were from Awami League. In the Central Committee 105 out of 115 members were former Awami Leaguers. All the heads of the five front organisations were chosen from the former Awami League or affiliated bodies. In the new system the Governor was the pivotal figure in the district. Here too the former Awami Leaguers constituted the overwhelming majority. The general impression therefore was that the new party, BAKSAL, was Awami League under another name. Those who had expected that new faces would appear in leading positions in the new party were disappointed when only former Awami Leaguers were given prominent positions in BAKSAL.

Several leading members of the intelligentsia—Shaukat Osman, Kabir Choudhury, Begum Sufia Kamal—who had supported Mujib in the past pointedly declined to join BAKSAL. On the other hand, there was no lack of people willing to jump on the BAKSAL bandwagon to advance their careers. The new party was open to civil and military officers also; some joined voluntarily and some were simply drafted without their explicit consent. Integration of the party with the government did not improve the morale of the civil service.

On 10 June, all daily newspapers, with the exception of four, were closed down. The newspapers that were permitted to publish were: two government-owned newspapers, *The Bangladesh Observer* (English) and *Dainik Bangla* (Bengali) and two privately-owned, *Ittefaq*, once close to the Awami League and *The Bangladesh Times*, founded by Sheikh Moni only a year earlier.

The new system introduced by Mujib seemed ready to go off to a good start, despite some misgivings among the intelligentsia, because of the improvement of the general situation of the country. There was no longer any worry of another famine or critical food shortage. The harvest of boro, the winter crop, had been good; food supplies from other countries were adequate to make up for any deficit. The demonetisation of 100-taka currency notes dampened inflationary pressure by reducing the money supply.[3] Between January and June 1975, the price of rice, the main staple food, came down from Tk.8 to Tk.5.50 per *seer*. Mustard oil, the favourite cooking oil of Bengalis, declined from Tk.41.08 to Tk.30.37 per *seer*. Even the price of kerosene, an imported item, declined somewhat. Mujib had been beset by myriad domestic problems only a year before. In mid-1975 he had every reason to feel that the measures he had taken since the terrible famine of the previous year had been justified by the results.

Notes

1. Interview with Abdur Razzak in *Weekly Meghna*, 4 February, 1987
2. M.A. Wazed Miah, *Bangobandhu Sheikh Mujibke Ghire Kichhu Ghatana O Bangladesh*, pp.197-8
3. For the success of much-needed monetary measures credit must be given to Naziruddin Ahmed, personally selected by Mujib for the post of Governor of Bangladesh Bank in October 1974. In addition to demonitisation and devaluation, he was responsible for the tightening of credit to money-losing nationalised enterprises.

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SIRAJ SIKDAR

Siraj Sikdar, leader of the underground Sarbahara Party, was shot and killed by the police on 2 January 1975, the day after his arrest, while allegedly trying to escape. The death of a dangerous opponent to the regime while under police custody gave rise to rumours that Mujib himself had ordered the elimination of Siraj Sikdar. Since this is the only case where Mujib has been suspected of being directly responsible for the death of a political opponent it bears examination whether the general perception of his guilt has any basis.

Siraj Sikdar was only 32 years old when he died. Born in Barisal, he took his Intermediate of Science degree from Rajmohan College there. As a college student he joined the left-leaning Students Union. In 1967 he entered government service after graduating from the Engineering College. He left his job after a year and accepted a teaching position at the Teachers Training Institute. For reasons that are not entirely clear he quarreled with his father and left the house. It was at this time that he got caught up in the political convulsions of the period and decided to lead the life of a revolutionary. He joined the Communist Party. He rejected the notion of going to India when the war of liberation started and formed the East Bengal Sarbahara (Proletarian) Party in June 1971. Sikdar argued that while East Pakistan was a colony of West Pakistan and must be liberated, it must not become a colony of India. After liberation he espoused the view that Bangladesh had indeed become subservient to India and called for the overthrow of the Mujib regime by force.[1]

He claimed to be a Marxist but his philosophy was more akin to nihilism, a doctrine which holds that conditions in social organisation are so bad as to make its destruction desirable by terrorism and assassination. To an anarchist violence is a tool of social change and there is no need for a constructive programme until the overthrow of existing social order has been achieved.

Siraj Sikdar had a magnetic personality and was able to attract both men and women. In his relatively brief life of 32 years, some of which was spent on the run and in hiding, he had found time to get married three

times. Among the people who had joined his party was a well-known freedom fighter—Lt. Col. Ziauddin—after having been forced to leave the army in 1973 because of his radical views. Even Bhashani gave him importance by declaring support for a strike Sikdar had called for two weeks before his death. Undoubtedly Sikdar had become the most troublesome underground fighter against the Mujib regime.

Although Sikdar apparently had no difficulty in getting people to join his party, many of them soon found out that it was hard to work with him. He was autocratic and could not tolerate dissent. He was known to have ordered the liquidation of several comrades of his own party because they did not readily agree with him on the general line or on tactical matters. His arrogance was the main reason why the Central Committee of the Sarbahara Party had been reduced to one member—himself, by the end of 1974. Out of the original five members two had been expelled, one was in prison and one demoted for alleged incompetence.[2]

Very few people knew where Sikdar was living. In December 1974, one of them wrote an unsigned letter to the authorities giving a description of his physical appearance as well as the address of his "shelter" in Chittagong, not in the expectation of getting a reward and almost certainly out of violent dislike for him. Among the people who knew about his whereabouts were four women: Sikdar's newly-married wife, his divorced wife Jahanara Hakim and two other female workers who did menial work. The letter was reportedly written in neat handwriting suggesting it was the handiwork of a woman. Suspicion naturally falls on Jahanara Hakim but the possibility that it was written by one of Sikdar's disaffected associates cannot be excluded.[3]

The police did not raid Sikdar's shelter probably because they wanted to avoid any armed confrontation. Instead they staked out the house and waited for him to come out. When he actually left the shelter, contrary to his own instructions to his underground followers not to be seen outside during daylight hours, an intelligence officer in civilian clothes tracked him until the police were able to arrest him. He was taken to the Double Mooring Thana immediately and the Police Headquarters in Dhaka was informed. Instructions were given from Dhaka to send Sikdar to Dhaka by the earliest available flight. Accordingly he was taken to the airport blindfolded and handcuffed and placed in the first row of seats behind the pilot's cabin. Passengers of the first row had to be unceremoniously offloaded to make room for Siraj Sikdar and his police escort.[4] The plane landed at Dhaka Airport around 7:30 p.m.

The news about Sikdar's capture and arrival in Dhaka was given to Mujib by E.A. Choudhury, Deputy Inspector General of Police, personally. The question of how to handle the Sikdar matter was then discussed in Mujib's office at Gonobhaban in the evening. Apart from Choudhury, Mansur Ali, the Home Minister and Nurul Islam, a high police official, were present at this meeting. They all felt that it would not be safe to keep him in police custody. So, he was removed from the custody of Special Branch at Malibagh to Rakkhi Bahini control in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.[5]

In his biography of Siraj Sikdar, Munir Morshed asserts that Sikdar was taken to see Mujib around 10 o'clock at night. Without offering him a seat Mujib questioned him about his arms cache. There followed a sharp exchange of words between them and Mujib ordered that Sikdar be taken away. It was then that he was put in the custody of Rakkhi Bahini at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. The problem with this account is that it seems to contradict the time-line given by E.A. Choudhury. According to him Sikdar was transferred to Rakkhi Bahini custody earlier in the evening. The author has failed to provide any source for this important information and no one in Mujib's office in a position to know about this alleged encounter has confirmed it.

As Mujib's newly-appointed Secretary, Rahim was ideally placed to know about this even if he had left the office for home earlier that evening. He did not mention anything about this incident in his diary. What he has recorded is that Mesbahuddin, Director of National Security, had a meeting with Mujib the next morning where he (Rahim) was present. Mesbahuddin emphasised that the Sikdar case should be handled in accordance with the law. Mujib said "leave it to me" in English.[6] There is no reason to believe that Mujib's remark had any sinister implications. After all, Sikdar was a repository of vital information and Mujib was not anxious to put Sikdar on trial until he had revealed some of this information, if not all. This may be the reason why Superintendent of Police Mahboob was put in charge of interrogating Sikdar. It was not a good choice. Mahboob did not have the reputation of treating those whom he considered to be enemies of the people in civil manner as prescribed by the law.

Under severe interrogation Sikdar apparently broke down and agreed to lead the police to the place where he had an arms cache. According to the government version, he led the police to a spot in Savar where arms were hidden. He was shot dead while he tried to escape by jumping from the police van.

Sikdar's body was handed over to his parents for burial. They did not express any suspicion about the circumstances of his death. In fact, within days of his burial Sikdar's sister Shamim, a budding sculptor, held an exhibition of her works in Dhaka where a bust of Mujib made by her was given pride of place. It was much later that she began to say that her brother was deliberately killed by the police in cold blood and demanded an investigation.

By that time some members of the intelligentsia strongly suspected that Mujib had ordered the death of Siraj Sikdar. The apparent basis of their belief was Mujib's speech in Parliament on 25th January 1975 in the course of which Mujib had said: "Where is Siraj Sikdar?" in an elated tone. The sound bite "Where is Siraj Sikdar?" was taken by them as an admission by Mujib of his responsibility in the murder of Siraj Sikdar. They do not appear to have bothered to examine the context in which Mujib had used this phrase. Mujib's speech, lasting an hour and half, was extempore without the help of any notes. To put this phrase in context it is necessary to have a close look at the relevant passage of his speech:

> No country has ever forgiven those who have opposed the Revolution by collaborating with the enemy and killed their own people. We did so. I told them: love your people, work for your country and accept the fact of independence. Stay here! But many of them did not change [their ways]. They continue to accept money from foreign sources and conspire against the independence of Bangladesh. They think I know nothing. Those who kill people at night like bandits may think that no one will be able to catch them. *Where is Siraj Sikdar*? If he can be caught, if his followers can be caught, we can also catch an official who takes bribes. Can we not find out who secretly receives money from foreigners ? Can we not apprehend those who are engaged in looting of property? Can we not uncover the hoarders? Or those who do black-marketing? Of course we can. [emphasis added].

No fair-minded person reading this passage can still believe that Mujib was taking credit for the death of Sikdar. The whole point of this portion of his speech was simply this: if a formidable underground operator like Siraj Sikdar could be caught, other anti-social and anti-national elements, be they black-marketeers, looters, hoarders or murderers, would not escape the long arm of the law.

It is, however, clear from Mujib's remark to the Chief of National Security Mesbahuddin ("leave it to me") that he was not in a hurry to put Siraj Sikdar on trial. It was not because the case against Sikdar was weak; indeed, there was plenty of evidence against him. But it would not have

suited Mujib to bring charges against him in a court of law so soon after the devastations of the famine. This would have given Sikdar a chance to use the court as a platform to point the finger at the Mujib regime for the miseries of the people. The wheels of justice could be set in motion at a later, more opportune, date. In the meantime, his interrogation under detention could yield a harvest of invaluable information.

Mujib was a consummate politician. He knew from his personal experience the danger of making a martyr out of a political adversary. It does not stand to reason therefore that Mujib was somehow directly responsible for Siraj Sikdar's death. If he died under police custody, as he did, it must be because he made an attempt at escape or because police officers guarding Siraj Sikdar wanted him to be killed either out of excess of zeal or because they did not want a trial. One possible reason for this could be that in an open trial Sikdar could claim that he had been tortured and it would have implicated the police officer or officers involved in his interrogation.

According to Sheikh Hasina, Mujib's daughter, who claims to have been in the house when the news of Siraj Sikdar's death was brought to her father by the police, he was "furious" and told them: "Why could you not save him?"[6] I heard a slightly different version from a trustworthy person. Mujib was more upset than angry when he heard the news and rebuked them: "*Tora okay mere felli* !" (Did you have to kill him).

Whichever version is more correct, the common element between them is that Mujib was not only completely surprised by the news of Siraj Sikdar's death in police custody but expressed his disapproval of their handling of the prisoner and held them accountable for his death. But Mujib being Mujib, he would not have wanted to expose his loyal officials to an embarrassing enquiry and in the process ruin their careers. He would rather have a cloud of suspicion hanging over his head.[7]

Notes

1. Munir Ahmed, *Siraj Sikdar O' Purbabanglar Sarbahara Party*, Dhaka, 1997.
2. See "*Siraj Sikdar Hatyar Nepathya Kahini*", *Weekly Jagaran*, London, 15.2.1981.
3. Ibid.
4. Munir Ahmed, op. cit., p.96.
5. Conversation with E.A. Choudhury.

6. Sheikh Hasina's full statement, made in an interview with Farhad Mazhar, quoted in Munir Ahmed's book, is given below:

   "I know [what happened] because I live in this house. Siraj Sikdar should not have died the way he did. My father never wanted this. For it was necessary that Siraj Sikdar should remain alive. Had he remained alive much of their plans and programmes would have come to light. I say that those who killed him did not want real facts to be revealed. There was an official press release from the police about how he died. As far as I understand there was no such plan. I remember that when the news of his death arrived my father was extremely furious. He said, 'why could you not save him?'"

7. Police Superintendent Mahboob is in a unique position to throw considerable light on the mysterious death of Siraj Sikdar. By virtue of his official position at that time he must have known a good deal as to the circumstances of Sikdar's death. With some difficulty I was able to contact him through an intermediary and requested him for an interview. I told him that I wanted to talk to him in connection with a biography of Sheikh Mujib. He agreed but failed to turn up at the appointed time and place. Was it because he suspected that I might question him in detail about Siraj Sikdar case and his role in it?

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FAMILY LIFE

Some young people made their mark in politics in East Pakistan and then disappeared from the scene. This was usually because the demands of making a living and family had to take precedence. Almost none of them came from an affluent background and lacked the resources and family network to support them for an extended period. Their struggle was often hard and prospects for change in the established order seemed remote.

Mujib had witnessed the fate of one such person at close quarters. Shamsul Huq was a rising student leader and seemed destined for a brilliant political career. But privations of daily life without a steady source of income and hardship of imprisonment began to take toll on his family life. There was constant bickering with his wife who had expected a normal life of middle class comfort. As their relations went sour he began to lose mental balance. He could no longer function in politics and had to be dropped from party hierarchy by his colleagues in the Awami League.

Mujib had every reason to feel lucky in his domestic life. He was married to his cousin Fazilatunnisa. Members of the Sheikh clan usually married within their extended family and Mujib's marriage was no exception. Their marriage was solemnised when both of them were minors. She was therefore much too young to have had any say in the choice of his career. When Mujib went to jail for the first time in Pakistan during the 1948 language movement she was living in their village home. It was only in 1953 that she joined him in Dhaka. Mujib was then living in the cramped quarters of a house in a section of old Dhaka called Armanitola. It was so named because Armenian merchants used to live there many years ago. By the time she arrived there it was a Bengali neighbourhood with a sprinkling of Ismailis, followers of the Agha Khan. A cousin of theirs, Monimul Huq Khoka, was also living with them.[1]

Next year, following the United Front victory in the provincial elections Mujib became a Cabinet Minister and they moved to their official residence, a spacious bungalow in Ramna with ample grounds. Mujib did not stay here long; he had to vacate it when he decided to give up his Cabinet position to devote himself fulltime to party work.

In 1961 he built his own house in the newly-developed Dhanmondi residential area. It was a one-story building, with two bedrooms and a living room. Political activity was at a low ebb in the early years of Ayub's military rule and Mujib welcomed the offer made to him by Yusuf Haroon to manage the Dhaka office of the Alpha Insurance Company. He had at last a steady income and by 1966 he was able to add another story to the building. The family had grown by another member, a son named Russel after the British philosopher Bertrand Russel. The family now moved to the upper floor and the lower floor was mainly used for receiving visitors, holding meetings with associates and other political work. A room was used as library and in another room there was enough space for tables, typewriter and mimeograph machine for preparing political materials. Many restrictions on political life imposed by Ayub Khan had been lifted by the mid-sixtees. It was at this time that Mujib formulated his Six Points.

Mujib's family resided in the house until the military crackdown of 25-26 March 1971. Following Mujib's arrest, Begum and the children had to find an alternative accommodation. After Mujib's return from Pakistani captivity the house had to be extensively repaired and renovated. "Everything in this house had the loving touch of my mother," says Sheikh Hasina. For Begum Mujib it was more than a house, it was home. She was so attached to it that she adamantly refused to move to the newly-constructed Gonobhaban for the use of the President after Mujib became the Head of the State in January 1975. The presidential compound would have offered much better protection for embattled Mujib in the wake of the famine and other difficulties. But she was so firm in her resolve that no one dared to question it. Thus fate took its course.

Rahim, Mujib's Secretary, had the opportunity to get to know the first lady and other members of the family when he accompanied them to Moscow where Mujib was invited by the Soviet government for treatment of a serious medical condition in the spring of 1974. Having observed her closely and her interaction with other members of the family, he marvelled at the transformation of "a simple ordinary village girl" into a formidable matron. In his diary he wrote:

> Begum Sheikh was simple and unpretentious in her ways. She was clumsy in her speech. But I had the impression that she exercised an enormous influence on her family. Everybody seemed to depend on her. Even Sheikh Saheb! This might have been due to the helter-skelter life led by Sheikh Saheb. Almost half of his political life [in Pakistan] had been spent behind the iron doors of the prison. All this time it was Begum Sheikh who had to look after their children. Sheikh Saheb was

> unable to provide much for his family. His friends and well-wishers helped the family in many ways, especially financially. Some did it in the hope of future gains and others without selfish motives. I think it was largely due to her good sense and wisdom that the family did not confront serious problems. She had very little formal education but there are very few women who could match her worldly wisdom, skills and shrewdness. That is how she was able to hold the family so firmly in her grips.

Although her life centered around her family she could on rare occasions venture beyond family concerns to take a stand on political questions if she felt that it was necessary in the interest of her husband's image. A case in point: In February 1969 while Mujib was being held in Kurmitola Cantonment in connection with the Agartala Case, he received an invitation from the govern-ment to go to Islamabad to take part in the Round Table Conference of political leaders. Ayub was in serious political difficulties at that time with almost daily demonstrations against his regime in his home base in West Pakistan as well as East Pakistan. Senior Awami League leaders, with the notable exception of Tajuddin, were in favour of Mujib going to the RTC on parole. Since Mujib was an under-trial prisoner, he could legally be released only after he had applied for a grant of parole. When Begum Mujib learned that her husband had in fact applied for parole she was upset. To her it did not seem right that he should be released on parole while all others accused of the same crime would continue to remain in military confinement. Influenced to a great extent by her attitude Mujib told the tribunal that he would not accept parole to attend the Round Table Conference unless and until the Agartola Case was unconditionally withdrawn.

After liberation Begum Mujib does not appear to have tried to influence her husband on political matters. This was not surprising because matters of state were beyond her ability to comprehend.[2] She could, and did, occasionally sway Mujib on choice of people around him. For some reasons she formed an intense dislike for Nuruddin who had introduced Mujib to Suhrawardy as a promising political worker and thereby launched his political career. He was barred from access to Mujib.[3] And her strong attachment to her extended family played a considerable role in the elevation of Syed Hossain, Mujib's brother-in-law, from an humble section officer to the post of Additional Establishment Secretary, in which capacity he could make decisions on personnel matters arbitrarily because no one dared to question his decisions, however outrageous. He used his position as a close relative of Mujib, the Father of the Nation, with impunity.

Since the education of Mujib's children had somewhat been neglected during his years of struggle, it was suggested to him by some of his friends and advisers that Kamal, his eldest son, should be sent abroad for his studies. Begum Mujib was not receptive to this idea because she did not like the thought of parting with Kamal so soon. Instead of Kamal, his younger brother was sent to the Sandhurst military academy in England. But he got so homesick that halfway through his course he wanted to come back to Dhaka: "I find it very hard to live so far away from my mother." Jamal agreed to continue his Sandhurst course only on the condition that his brother-in-law Wazed Miah would arrange for him to marry the daughter of a colleague of Wazed with whom he (Jamal) had fallen in love.

Since Begum Mujib was unwilling to part with both of her sons Kamal entered the University of Dhaka. He wanted to do well in his studies but as he was not particularly bright or intelligent he took private lessons from one of the best students in his class. He was keen to integrate with his fellow-students. He was an extrovert and had passion for amateur theatricals. Outside the university campus he led an active social life. He patronised the Abahani Sports Club and persuaded his father to make generous provisions for this club.[4] He developed a small following who were willing to do his bidding. Kamal rarely saw his father as he was growing up. Mujib related this poignant story about Kamal as a child:

> When Kamal was still in his mother's lap (*Mayer Kole*) I was in and out of prison so frequently that my son did not see me much, nor was I able to get to know him well. When he was two and a half years old, I was reading a newspaper and I noticed Hasina and Kamal playing on the stairs. All of a sudden I heard Kamal telling Hasina: 'Hasu Apa, Hasu Apa, Can I also call your daddy my daddy?'

Tears welled up in Mujib's eyes as he told the story. It was only after independence that Mujib did not have to worry about going to prison and being away from his family for an extended period. But even then he was unable to spend quality time with his children. He left for his office early in the morning and returned home late in the evening. Rehana, his youngest daughter longing for his company, once angrily complained to him about devoting too much time to politics. He would reply: "I have to look after seventy five million people. You are just one of them." This kind of talk would make her even more angry and she would say, "I don't want to share you with other people."[5]

Kamal was old enough to realise the importance of the work of his father and he did not want to impose on his time to get his attention. But

the desire to please his father by deeds was strong in him and this was to lead him to serious trouble.

Kamal always had an impetuous and adventurous streak in his character. When Mujib's family had to move to another house to live in following military crackdown of March 1971, military guards were placed around it. Kamal made a daring escape to Calcutta. His example was later followed by Jamal.

Given his temperament Kamal became involved in vigilante type of operations with his followers against opponents of the Mujib regime after the liberation. Rumours abounded that Kamal was engaged in undesirable, even criminal, activities like hijacking and robberies.

On the night of 15-16 December 1974, Kamal had gone out with his followers to remove posters and graffiti against the Mujib regime. The armed police were also out on a show of force against miscreants. They mistook Kamal and his party as miscreants and opened fire on them. Kamal was seriously injured and taken to the hospital. Rahim, soon to become Mujib's Secretary, was then Inspector General of Police. This is what he recorded about this incident in his diary:

> There were rumours that Kamal had gone out to loot a bank. And some said that Sergeant Quddus (a member of the Superintendent of Police Mahboob's Special Force) had deliberately shot Kamal. Kamal had gone out on patrol to take action against miscreants. But with the police, Rakkhi Bahini, and armed force around why did Kamal have to go out to confront the miscreants with his own private army? It is difficult to find a satisfactory answer to this question. Having heard that Kamal had been taken to the hospital and his condition was not satisfactory I went to Bangabandhu's house around 11 o'clock (after attending the Victory Day parade). I was then I.G. of Police. With me went the Chief of the National Intelligence Service Mesbahuddin and the D.I.G. of Special Branch Choudhury. When I expressed my sorrow and apologised for the incompetence of the police and asked for his forgiveness, he immediately said: "Why do you have to feel sorry? Even if he had been killed I would not have been sorry. Who had told him to go out in the middle of the night to combat miscreants? Whatever has happened is only for the good. I haven't even gone to the hospital to visit him. Who do you take me for? A Monem Khan?" We all felt reassured. But why then a sudden change of mind? Two days later Bangabandhu went to the hospital to see his son. Perhaps because every father feels love for his son and cannot abandon him, no matter what sin he has committed.

While Kamal was lying in the hospital many prominent people visited him there. Among them was Janab Mohammedullah (then Speaker of

Parliament). Mohammedullah, according to Rahim, told him; "Kamal, my son, you are a good boy. So why did you get yourself involved in this mess? Your father and mother expect so much of you. Don't you think you should have spared them all this pain?"Although Kamal was still unwell he lost his temper and said: "Uncle, if the only purpose of your visit is to give me advice, please don't bother to visit me any more." Mohammedullah was hurt by this remark. Kamal was a hot-tempered young man. After 15 August 1975 Farashuddin, who had been Assistant Private Secretary to Mujib, told Rahim a story about Kamal's hot temper:

> Traffic police once stopped him [Kamal] near Farm Gate. Then he got out of the car, took out the belt from his waist and beat him up. The policeman was too afraid to complain. The Inspector General of Police knew about this incident but did not bring it to my attention.

Mujib was not unaware of the negative side of his closeness to his family. Rahim noted in his diary that he sometimes would express his exasperation with his family: "My work is suffering on account of them. I am losing touch with my people." Despite this realisation he seems to have become dependent on his immediate and extended family as difficulties began to accumulate, especially after the 1974 famine. In late 1974, he consciously chose to turn his back on the democratic process and introduced an authoritarian one-party rule. Since many of the old time party leaders were uneasy about this and perhaps suspicious of the new system, Mujib needed emotional reinforcement to sustain his resolve. He got it from his extended family, some of whom had their own reasons: their blood ties or connection with Mujib by marriage would place them in an advantageous position to acquire more power, money or prestige.

In July 1975 Mujib's two sons (Kamal and Jamal) got married to brides of their choosing. Marriage is a major event in a Bengali family and it is celebrated in an atmosphere of great rejoicing in the presence of a great number of people, members of the family and friends. The only marriage that had taken place in the Mujib family was that of Hasina, the eldest daughter. Mujib was in jail at that time and the marriage had to be solemnised in a simple ceremony without ostentation. So Begum Mujib wanted the marriage of their two sons to take place in a befitting manner. Their marriages took place in the President's official residence. Mujib could not ignore his wife's wish for a big wedding but he made a condition: Guests would be invited for "blessings only" and no presents.[6] This was a departure from the norm but he set a good precedent.

1975 was a year of recovery. Things were getting better, albeit slowly. But Mujib's personal image had not recovered with the intelligentsia,

after his attempt to concentrate extraordinary power in his hands in the new one-party system of government. Even after amassing so much power he was not personally domineering and very few believed that he could behave as an autocrat. What many of them could not stomach was the growing influence of his family members behind the scenes. Whispers were heard that it was they who formed Mujib's inner circle, not the party hierarchy, in the new dispensation.

Several days after the coup of 15 August 1975, when Rahim was no longer President's Secretary, he had a meeting with Shah Alam, nicknamed Manju, an old friend of Mujib and his family. Rahim considered him to be one of the few friends of Mujib who did not seek to benefit from his rise to power. Once or twice he had tried to suggest to Mujib how to regain his lost popularity. But he gave up his effort when he saw that his views on this delicate subject were not welcomed. This had also been the case with a few other people; they found themselves shunned by the family. Manju was fortunate to have escaped their fate. Hence, he had a glimpse of what was going on in the inner-circle. Rahim wrote in his diary:

> I was dumbfounded to learn that there were plans for major changes in the Cabinet on 20th August: Sheikh Moni would become Home Minister, Serniabat would be named Prime Minister, etc. Mujib, of course never talked to me about such changes... I got the impression that the pressure of the family made him do things that were not in line with his way of thinking and his conscience.[7]

The senior party members must have viewed this development with some unease and disquiet. But even if they were unhappy they were also too loyal to Mujib to question his leadership style or method of working. Against all odds he had led them from victory to victory. Mujib had no reason to worry that they would desert or work against him now. But he had misjudged one man: Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed.

Notes

1. Moinul Huq Khoka, *Bangabandhu Tar Paribar O Ami,* Sahitya Prokash, Dhaka, 2000, pp.29-30.
2. For instance: Mujib had not told his wife about his intention to introduce one-party system of government with himself as President. She came to know about it either through radio or television on the day the Constitution was amended and Mujib took oath of office of President in Parliament itself immediately afterwards. She was furious with her husband for keeping her in the dark about this. He merely smiled and said, "I can't tell you everything about matters of the state." See Wazed Miah, *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibke Ghire Kicchu Ghatana O Bangladesh*, p.219.
3. Rahim's diary.
4. Ibid.
5. Abdul Wahed Talukdar (ed.), *Bangabandhur Smritikatha*, Kakali Prakashani, Dhaka, 1996, p.45.
6. A.K. Naziruddin Ahmed, then Governor of Bangladesh Bank.
7. I have tried to verify this extraordinary remark from sources familiar with the period, but without success. Rahim, who passed away before I started writing Mujib's biography, appeared to have accepted it at face value.

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THE END OF THE MUJIB REGIME

From the beginning of his rule Mujib had to confront the extreme leftists intent on transforming society on the Chinese model by terrorism and armed struggle. By the time Mujib launched his "Second Revolution" the leftist threat had been largely contained.

What was not apparently visible to Mujib and therefore virtually ignored by him was the likelihood of a deadlier threat from a better-armed and better-organised body of men—the Army. Because of his own experience with the Pakistan Army, Mujib had kept the portfolio of defence in his hands rather than entrust it to someone like Osmani, an ex-military officer. With no threat to Bangladesh on the horizon from across the border the armed forces seemed to have one primary function: ceremonial work like parade on the National Day, mounting guard of honour for visiting dignitaries and the like. Mujib was far too busy with other things to spend much time on defence. The defence personnel felt that Mujib did not care much about their welfare. Their perception that Mujib neglected them began when Rakkhi Bahini was created in February 1972 to fight the leftist insurgency and help in the restoration of law and order in the countryside. There was a feeling among the armed forces that the Rakkhi Bahini was a parallel force to act as a counter-weight to the Army and was being given preferential treatment. When Mujib sent his second son Jamal, to receive military training at Sandhurst in England, it was whispered that upon his return to Bangladesh he would join their ranks for the sole purpose of keeping a watch over them on behalf of his father. Not surprisingly the cantonments voted overwhelmingly for opposition candidates during the 1973 elections.

At the end of January 1974 there occurred an incident which provided a vivid example of disgruntlement and indiscipline prevailing in the Army. There was a wedding reception in the Ladies Club. Among those present on the occasion were Major Shariful Huq, better known as Dalim, and his wife as well as a son of Ghazi Gholam Mustafa. The latter is said to have insulted Dalim's wife, whereupon Dalim beat him up. Ghazi Gholam Mustafa's bully boys soon appeared at the scene and according some witnesses gheraoed the couple. Ghazi himself came to know about

the incident and took both of them to Mujib's residence for a settlement of the matter. Mujib was personally acquainted with the family of Dalim and Ghazi was a friend of Mujib since the mid-1950's. Mujib calmed the two parties down and as a gesture of reconciliation made them shake hands and partake of sweets. This should have been the end of the matter but it was not. Dalim went back to the cantonment and without informing his superiors gathered some officers and men to drive down in a truck to the house of Ghazi and ransacked it. This was a grave offence and GHQ made the following recommendation: "The officers who had taken law into their own hands could not be allowed to go unpunished." Soon after this there was another unrelated incident of indiscipline in Comilla of a serious nature. These two incidents led to the retirement/dismissal of 22 officers. Their future uncertain, they would become candidates for a conspiracy against Mujib. Only Dalim, because of his closeness to the Mujib family was given business opportunities to make a living.

The unrest that was brewing in the Army began to take shape in the form of a conspiracy in the middle of 1974 while famine was raging in the country. As the situation worsened, Mujib ordered the Army to begin "Operation Clean-up" against anti-social elements. For some military officers this was a heady experience. They had never before been given a chance to exercise almost unbridled power and they went about their job with great gusto.

Major Farook Rahman of the Bengal Lancers was assigned the task of clearing up a bandit—infested area south of Narayanganj industrial complex. Given their animus against the Awami League it was not surprising that some officers including Major Farook Rahman selectively targeted those who belonged to the party and their supporters. "Every time we caught a chap he turned out to be either an Awami Leaguer or a very staunch Awami League supporter. They were getting protection from the top and we were getting a shelling for doing our job," recalled Farook later. He was referring to a general order he had received in writing that should he arrest anyone he would be acting on his responsibility and it was he, not his superior officers, who would be answerable if anything went wrong.[1] To Farook it could mean only one thing: Hands off the Awami League.

Young officers talked and talked about the sorry state of affairs in the Army and in the country. But there was only one officer who took the initiative to do something about it. He was Major Farook Rahman. He developed an ingenious plan of action. Since Mujib was in the habit of using helicopters to travel outside the capital Farook thought that the most convenient way of killing Mujib would be to do it in the flying craft itself

when he was not surrounded by bodyguards. He discussed the plan with some fellow conspirators, one of whom was an air force sergeant serving as flight controller. The plot was never tried out.[2] Even if the plot had succeeded and his body dumped into a river, as planned, Mujib could simply be replaced by another leader or by a collective leadership of the party. For the plan to succeed the conspirators must have the backing of a nationally known political or military leader. Farook realised he would need more time to develop a plan to accomplish his objective.

In mid-March Farook's brother-in-law, Major Khondaker Rashid, arrived in Dhaka after completing his Gunnery Staff Course in India. The two officers were married to two sisters and were close to each other. Farook took him into confidence and initiated him into the conspiracy. Rashid could be of great help because he had political savvy which Farook lacked and furthermore, Rashid had good connections which could be useful. However, there was a snag: Rashid was due to be posted to Jessore in the Gunnery School there. But this was overcome with the assistance of unsuspecting Shafat Jamil, the Brigade Commander of Dhaka. Rashid's posting order was changed; he was appointed commanding officer of the 2nd Field Artillery in Dhaka.

With so much discontent in the defence services there was a good deal of speculation in the diplomatic corps about a possible coup d'etat by the military. No diplomatic mission was more watchful than the Indian High Commission about a possible plot. Indira Gandhi became so alarmed by persistent reports of a plot in the making that she sent R.N Kaw, the RAW intelligence chief, to Dhaka to warn Mujib. In a taped interview to Pupul Jayaker, the biographer of Indira Gandhi, Kaw said: "We were walking in the garden. I told Mujib that we had information about a plot against him, but he was in a state of euphoria. 'Nothing can happen to me, 'he said. 'They are my people.' This even though I gave him details of the definite information we had received."[3] Reports also reached Kaw that "the plot was being masterminded by forces outside the country.[4]

In March 1975, Kaw received further information that artillery was involved in the plot against Mujib. Rashid, commanding the 2nd Field Artillery, had at his disposal 18 howitzers and 600 men. Together with 800 troops and the entire tank force of the Bengal Lancers where Farook was second-in-command, the combined strength provided enough men, firepower and mobility to mount a strike against Mujib and members of his family who were also his close associates, with a high probability of success, provided of course that surprise could be achieved.

Still, Farook and Rashid had to find a nationally-known figure as a nominal leader to head the conspiracy. Without such a person the venture,

even if initially successful, could be jeopardised if it was not accepted by the people internally and externally by the international community. Major General Zia was their natural choice for several reasons. Zia had become a household name after his declaration of independence from Chittagong in March 1971. Afterwards he commanded the Z-force in the liberation war in an important sector. It was expected that Mujib would name him Chief of Army Staff. But he was superseded by Major Shafiullah, who was a batchmate but junior to Zia, because Mujib distrusted him as being too ambitious. This became a blessing in disguise for Zia, since no one could hold him responsible for the state of affairs in the Army. Farook and Rashid had no doubt that Zia was likely to hold a grudge against Mujib and might be receptive to their proposal to lead the plot.

Farook found some excuse to see Zia on the evening of 20 March. Farook had to be cautious. He had to state the reasons for his visit in a roundabout way. According to Farook: "Actually we came around it by saying that [there is] a lot of corruption, everything is going wrong, the country requires a change..."

"Yes, yes, let us go outside and talk in the lawn," said Zia.

When they went up to the lawn Farook came straight to the point: "We are professional soldiers, we serve the country, we don't serve any individual. The Army, the civil service, the Government, everybody is going down the drain. We have to change it. We, the junior officers have already worked it out. We want your support and your leadership."

"I am sorry, I would not like to get involved in anything like that. If you want to do something, the junior officers should do it themselves," Zia answered.

Zia did not report the conversation either to the Army Chief of Staff or to the President. But he told his ADC that he did not want to see Farook again and any request for an interview should be denied.[5]

It did not come as a total surprise that Zia should be careful and non-committal. It was a disappointment. But Rashid had a fall-back plan as an alternative. This was to approach Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed, who was known to be vehemently opposed to the BAKSAL idea, due to materialise in June to be followed by the decentralisation of administration in mid-August. It was vital that killing of Mujib and the overthrow of his regime should take place before the decentralisation took effect. Once the 60 district governors and BAKSAL secretaries, mostly handpicked by Mujib and his kitchen cabinet (mainly family members), were in place, all Rakkhi Bahini, police and army units in the districts, would be directly under their control. The conspirators had no way of knowing whether they

would passively accept the outcome of the coup or whether in their self-interest they would try to smother it by moving against them before the coup leaders could consolidate their positions.

The conspirators were so sure that Mushtaque would agree to be on board that no effort was made to contact him until a few days before the coup attempt. Khondakar Mushtaque and Khondakar Rashid shared the same family name. Khondakars are descendants of *peers*, that is, holy men and they came from neighbouring villages in Comilla. There was an advantage in approaching Mushtaque at such a late hour. The smaller the number of conspirators at the planning stage, the better are the chances of preventing any leak. The intelligence services in Dhaka, both civil and military, continued to remain in the dark.

Meanwhile there was no doubt in Indira Gandhi's mind that conspirators were busy planning the overthrow of Mujib; it was merely a question of who exactly they were and when they would strike. In late April 1975 when both she and Mujib were in Kingston, Jamaica, for the Commonwealth Conference, she informed Mujib that "something was happening in Bangladesh." Mujib said: "What is your proof ?" "I (Indira Gandhi) could only say; Please be careful. I think something terrible is going to happen." "No, no," he said. "They're all my children."[6]

Despite Mujib's first impulse to reject any suggestion that any Bengali would raise his hand to strike him down, he appears to have had a delayed reaction. About a fortnight later, on Wednesday 14 May, Rahim made this entry in his diary: "Yesterday as soon as Bangabandhu stepped into his office he complained rather angrily about laxity of arrangements for his personal security and in Bangabhaban. Everything must be done to improve the situation in this respect." And Rahim added his own comment: "Actually there are many faults in the security arrangements. The main reason is that it is impossible to make comprehensive security arrangements in his present house. He refuses to go to reside in Bangabhaban or Gonobhaban."

In the following days several meetings were held to consider various ways of beefing up security for Mujib, but without any sense of urgency.

The two brothers-in-law Farook and Rashid concluded that the most convenient time and date for carrying out the coup d'etat would be in the early hours of 15 August. The armoured and artillery units under their commands would then be carrying out joint night exercise, routinely held every fortnight in a relatively deserted area north of the capital at Balurghat, the site of the present-day Zia International Airport. All they had to do was to convert their military exercise into actual operation by moving in the dead of night into the government quarters of the capital.

The time had now come for a face-to-face meeting with Mushtaque to win him over to their conspiracy. At 7 p.m. on 2 August Rashid went to see Mushtaque at his house. He had to be careful. Dressed in civilian clothes so as not to be easily recognised he took the precaution of carrying with him an application for a permit to buy a motor cycle to provide an excuse for meeting the Commerce Minister. Their meeting lasted almost two hours. Rashid had to find out how strongly Mushtaque felt about the current political situation. When it was clear that Mushtaque did not expect "progress under Mujib's leadership," Rashid felt bold enough to ask a direct question: "Will there be a justification at this stage if somebody takes a decision to remove Mujib by force?" Mushtaque answered: "Well, probably for the country's interest it is a good thing."

Now that Mushtaque was inclined in principle to support the objectives of the conspirators, further meetings were held between the two on the 11th, 13th and 14th. At these meetings they discussed how Mujib was "to be removed by force from the power and [that] it may lead to a killing of Sheikh Mujib," in Rashid's words. The actual date of the coup was not revealed to Mushtaque. So they were reassured to learn from Mushtaque that he had no plans to go outside Dhaka in the immediate future. He would be sorely needed to form a government after the coup.

It was also Rashid's idea to recruit ex-Army officers who had been forced to retire after the Dalim incident of the previous year. Dalim was contacted on the 13th. He was willing to join the plot. Dalim, on his part, brought in two retired Majors to the side of conspirators—Noor and Shahriar.

These three retired majors were asked to come to the exercise ground at 10:30 p.m. on the evening of Thursday, 14 August to be briefed for the operation due to commence that very night. They arrived half an hour late but they brought with them two new initiates: Retired Major Pasha and Major Huda, a serving officer who happened to be a friend of Dalim. Rashid took them to the tank garage where Farook, bent over a table-top, was examining a tourist map of Dhaka and its environs. Farook explained to them broad features of the operation and asked them whether they would volunteer to join. Unanimously, they replied in the affirmative.

The conspirators, all of them holding grudge against Mujib for one reason or another, were now like a coiled spring, ready to pounce on their assigned targets: Sheikh Mujib, Serniabat and Sheikh Moni. The most difficult task was the neutralisation of the Rakkhi Bahini in their barracks in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka itself. It was reserved for Farook himself.

At around the same time Sheikh Moni was in Mujib's house where the two of them remained closeted in the bedroom for a long time, with no



Photo 21: In a jovial mood amidst children, celebrating his last birthday (assassinated on 15th August, 1975) at the Ganobhaban Mall on 17th March, 1975

premonition of the mortal danger they would have to face within hours. We will never know what they talked about. Was it about the "historic and unforgettable" reception that had been planned to honour Mujib in the University of Dhaka the next day? This may well have been the case, for we know that Mujib had been troubled by three grenade explosions shortly before noon that day in the vicinity of the university. No one had been killed or injured but there had been considerable material damage. Naturally there were suspicions that the purpose of the perpetrators, thought to be leftist extremists, was to mar the celebrations. Mujib was so dissatisfied with the security arrangements of the police that in the afternoon he sent for Colonel (later Major General) Sabihuddin, the acting chief of the Rakkhi Bahini, Nuruzzaman having gone abroad to attend a short course in the United States, only a few days ago. Even Sabihuddin had gone to Bogra.[7]

Security of Mujib's residence at this time was provided by a hotchpotch of three diverse groups. First, within the house itself there were a handful of men under Mujib's long-time personal bodyguard, Mohiuddin, stationed on the ground floor and the veranda. Then there were a few policemen with handguns inside the compound. Finally, there was a third ring of soldiers from the regular army. They were the only guards capable of offering serious resistance against plotters equipped with heavy weapons. Until the 2nd of August this group was manned by Lancers. Then they were replaced by soldiers from the 1st. Field Artillery based in Comilla. Farook had no authority over them. However some of the plotters like Huda had been officers of this unit before being forcibly retired. An accomplice was found among them, one Subedar Major by the name of Abdul Wahab Jowardar. Before midnight he asked them to hand over their ammunition to him in exchange for new ammunition to be issued to them shortly.[8] Accustomed to obeying orders, they complied. Thus they were deprived of the means to protect Mujib and his household when the assault took place shortly thereafter.

Roughly an hour later that night the strike teams proceeded to their appointed target areas. Farook's tank column was in the lead. They had to go past the Cantonment check post, but the sentries failed to ask them why they were moving into the city limits without special permission. Farook's primary task was to neutralise the 3500 Rakkhi Bahini men in their barracks located halfway between the Cantonment and Mujib's residence. Most of his tanks had dropped out for one reason or the other by the time he arrived at the Rakkhi Bahini garrison. Furthermore, Farook had no ammunition for his tanks. But he was able to bluff the Rakkhi

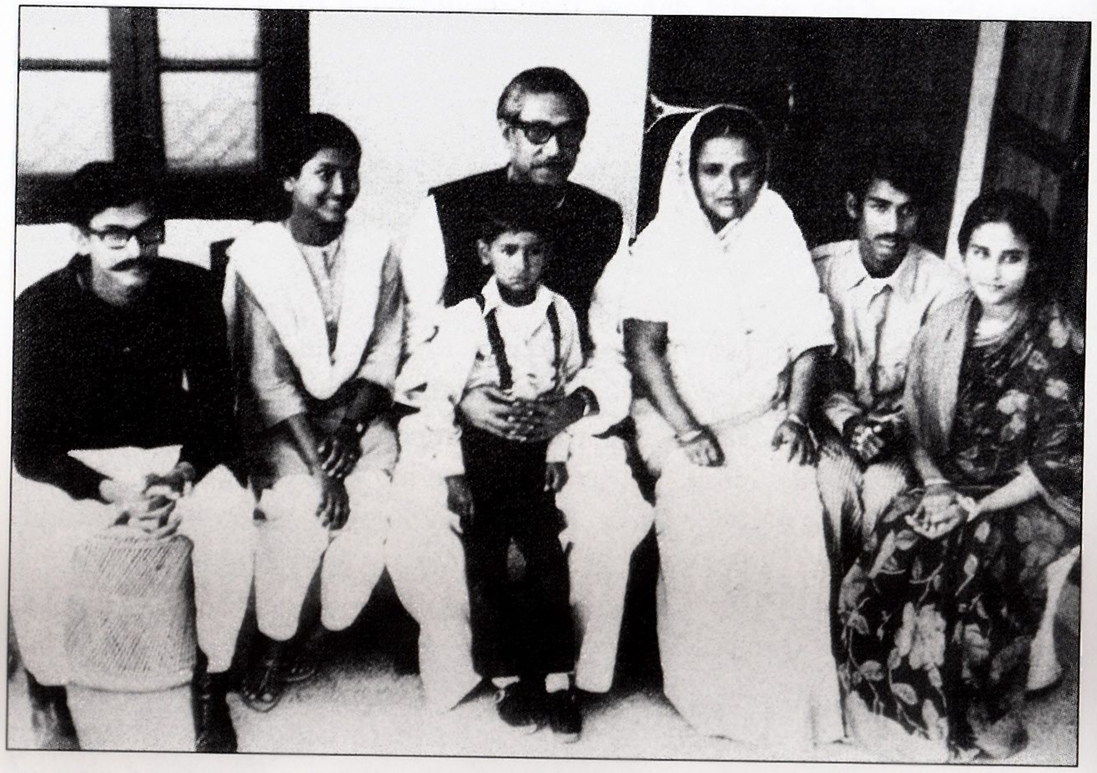


Photo 22: Mujib with his family

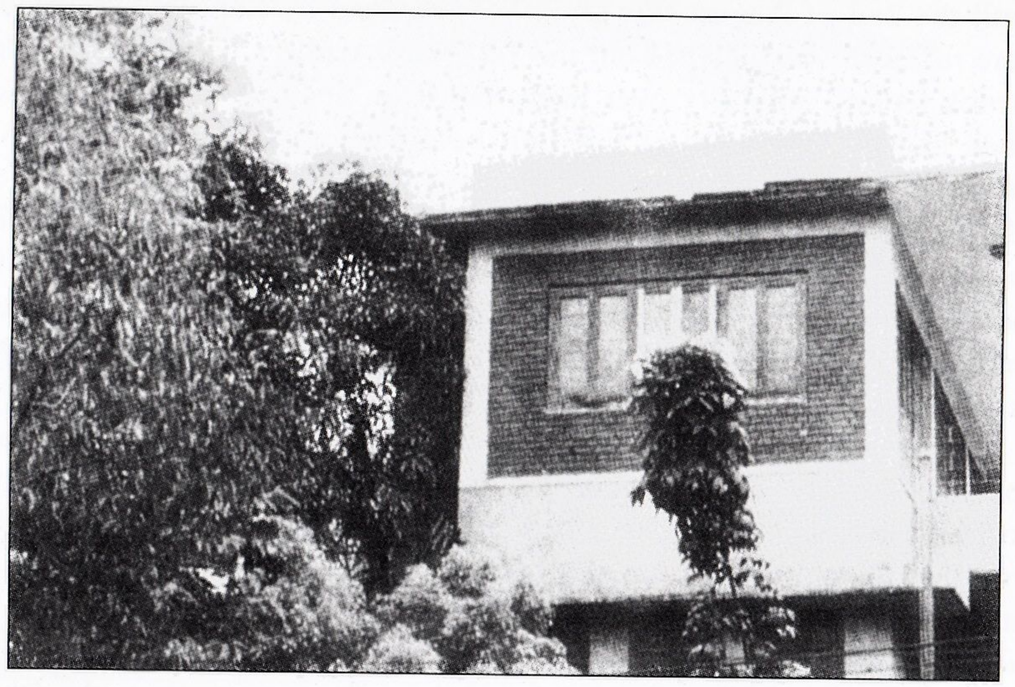


Photo 23: Mujib's residence at Dhanmondi Road No. 32

Bahini arrayed in front of their barracks into believing that they were hopelessly outgunned and must submit to his authority. Leaving a tank to guard them, after they agreed to his conditions, he moved ahead towards Mujib's house.

Other strike forces proceeded by way of Mohakhali to their destinations: Serniabat's house on Minto Road and the Radio station close by. The first house to be attacked was that of Serniabat. He managed to telephone Mujib to warn him that armed miscreants were attacking his house. Realising the gravity of the situation Mujib hurriedly telephoned the duty officers downstairs to put him in touch with the Police Superintendent Mahboob in charge of the Special Police Force, numbering 600 men. Because of the lateness of the hour, the call was made to his residence. The telephone was in the room, while he was downstairs in the drawing room, discussing arrangements of the forthcoming marriage of his niece, with some relatives. So the call remained unanswered. Impatiently Mujib came down to enquire. It was at this point that the first shots were fired in the direction of the house. Some windows were shattered and one bullet hit the security officer standing beside Mujib. He tried to give him first-aid but when he saw that the wound was not serious he rushed back to his bedroom to telephone Shafiullah and some others on the direct line to ask for help. Shafiullah and the Dhaka Brigade Commander Colonel Shafat Jamil had been trying to piece together over the telephone fragmentary reports about the movements of some units without authorisation out of the cantonment just before Mujib's call came through. Shafiullah said, "We are doing something" and begged Mujib to get out of the house if he could.

Meanwhile Kamal, having heard the gunfire, got dressed up in a hurry and came downstairs. By this time security guards from inside the compound had fired back at the attackers, killing one and severely wounding two others. Enraged attackers, led by Majors Huda, Noor and Mohiuddin then opened up with all their weapons and forced their way into the house. When Kamal saw the black-uniformed Lancers he assumed that they were reinforcements sent from the Army headquarters. As Kamal identified himself and welcomed them, he was gunned down instantly. The killers then went on a rampage and shot dead every member of the family: Mujib and his wife, their three sons, two newly-married daughters-in-law, and his brother Nasser. Mujib himself was killed at the turn of the stairs as he asked them, "What do you want?" The only members of the Mujib family to escape death were Mujib's two daughters—Hasina and Rehana who happened to be away in Europe.

In Serniabat's house he and several members of the household were killed as well as a house guest. Hasnat, Serniabat's son, managed to escape by hiding in the loft near the roof, while some of his children were killed in the drawing room. At Sheikh Moni's house both he and his wife were shot. They did not die on the spot but were so critically injured that they expired shortly after being taken to the Medical College Hospital. The dead and injured members of the Serniabat household were bought to the hospital around the same time. A little while later injured servants from the residence of Mujib also arrived at the hospital. They told harrowing tales of how each and every member of the Mujib family had been hunted down and killed. The news of the carnage spread rapidly in the neighborhood.

Thousands of people started to converge on the hospital and demanded that the dead bodies be handed over to them. They wanted to carry them in a procession through the streets of Dhaka as a mark of mourning before their funeral. This may well have led to the turn of the tide against the plotters by creating a surge of sympathy for the Mujib family and revulsion against their brutal killers. But the moment was not seized because none of the front leaders of the ruling party was there to exploit the situation.[9] Where were they? We know something about the movement of at least one leader: Tofael Ahmed. He had shown considerable ability to mobilise a movement for the release of Mujib during 1969. But he was cowering in his home when his skills as an agitator were most needed to turn private grief of thousands of ordinary people into public fury.[10]

Fortune, it is said, only smiles on the brave. On this day it was the young plotters who acted with boldness and determination with less than five hundred men at their disposal. They sent troops to the scene before the number of demonstrators could swell and become unmanageable. Leaderless, the crowd melted away. Corpses could now be safely consigned to the morgue out of sight of the general public.

The service chiefs were then rounded up by Dalim and his men and escorted to meet Mushtaque. He greeted Shafiullah affably with these words: "Congratulations. Your troops have done an excellent job. Now do the rest." Shafiullah asked, "What rest?" and received this answer: "You should know it better."

Identically-worded statements were handed to them, as well as to the acting chief of the Rakkhi Bahini and the Inspector General of Police to announce over the radio their pledge of allegiance to the new government and they did as they were told.

Martial Law had earlier been proclaimed and curfew imposed for an indefinite period. But as the 15th happened to be Friday the curfew had to

be lifted for an hour and a half to allow people to go the mosque to offer their Jumma prayers. Many must have prayed for Mujib's soul, for he was personally well-liked even by a large number of those who disagreed with his policies and thought he was no longer the right man to lead the country. Mushtaque and the young rebel officers had been nervous whether this window of opportunity would be used by the party leaders to try to rally the party faithful, but nothing happened. The party hierarchy, or what was left of it, were too confused and demoralised even to consult among themselves as to what should be done. By their inaction, they accepted the *fait accompli*.

The conspirators took full advantage of the confusion in the leadership and the ranks of the ruling party. As soon as the Jumma prayers were over they sent out jeep-loads of armed men along with an emissary to invite a number of Cabinet Ministers of the Mujib regime to join the new government, excluding of course those who were considered to be the inner circle of Mujib. Some agreed to join out of fear for their lives, some probably because they thought they could bring a moderating influence in the new government. Among them were two Hindus, Monoranjan Dhar and Phani Bhushan Mazumder. No doubt there were some among them who were happy to be able to retain their ministerial jobs in the post-Mujib regime. Mushtaque was thus in a position to announce the names of his Council of Ministers that very afternoon. There were eleven of them, all civilians. The formation of an all-civilian government headed by a very senior Awami Leaguer and containing some of the well-known figures of the previous government gave a false appearance of continuity and made it easier for the people to reconcile themselves to the new regime.

A little while later Mushtaque was sworn in as President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in a simple ceremony attended by the service chiefs and high military and civil officials. In their first broadcasts the rebel officers had announced a change of the name of the country to Islamic Republic of Bangladesh. Mushtaque disregarded this designation because he was intelligent enough to realise that to take his oath of office under a designation other than the People's Republic of Bangladesh would introduce a jarring note of discontinuity which would not only be internally divisive but make it difficult for the new regime to get speedy recognition by the international community. Within days Mushtaque's government would be recognised by all countries of the world, Pakistan being the first and India the last.

In the evening Mushtaque addressed the nation. He said that he had to take over as President "for the historic need of the country" and praised

the "patriotic armed forces [who] have come forward heroically for the success of the step."

As Mushtaque spoke, corpses of Mujib and his family members lay scattered all over the house. Just before dawn of the following day, the 16th, all of the bodies, except one, were collected by a special detachment of the Supply Battalion and transported to the Banani Cemetery for burial in unmarked graves. The exception was that of Mujib's body because the new rulers did not want to take the risk of his burial site becoming a place of pilgrimage. It was therefore decided that he would be buried at his native village of Tungipara in the family graveyard far from the teeming masses of Dhaka.

On the next day at 1 p.m. Brigadier Abdur Rauf, the Director General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), held a meeting of his officers to brief them about the decision to take Mujib's mortal remains to Tungipara for burial. He asked for a volunteer for this task. No one volunteered. So the DGFI ordered his adjutant, Major Haider Ali, to perform this responsibility. He was told that the local officials had already been alerted. All he would have to do was to hand over the body to an adult male relative and supervise the burial. 14 soldiers would accompany him for security purpose. At the helipad the pilot warned the Major that the job should be completed within two hours since it was dangerous to fly the helicopter after nightfall. When it landed at Tungipara the village had a deserted appearance. There were no males to be seen anywhere. The last time they had seen the military in strength was in the spring of 1971 when Pakistani troops had come on a mission to burn down Mujib's ancestral home and terrorise the local population. Probably they expected a repetition of their 1971 experience and did not want to take a chance. After a short search they found an old man by the name of Mosharraf Hossain who happened to be distantly related to Mujib. After the lid of the coffin was lifted he formally identified the body as that of Mujib and it was officially handed over to him. Meanwhile, a number of people ventured out of their hiding places and appeared on the scene.

The Major was anxious to get over with the burial of Mujib without delay. He asked the local police officer to fetch the imam of the village mosque. When he arrived the Major told him to bury the corpse immediately. The imam of course knew by then whose corpse it was and he asked a simple question: "Is this a corpse of a Muslim? If so, it can only be buried after a purifying bath and *janaza* (the final funeral rites)" The military officer firmly told him to forget about these niceties and go ahead with the burial. The imam conceded that an exception could be made in the

case of a *Shahid* (Martyr): "Is he then a *Shahid*?" The military officer understood the significance of the loaded question, for a *Shahid* is a Muslim who has died fighting for his belief and is buried unwashed so that his wounds should testify to his martyrdom on the Day of Judgment.

The Major therefore relented but insisted that the burial rites be performed expeditiously. So, a bucket from a cow-shed next door had to be used to fetch water from a tubewell for the purifying bath. The only soap that was available for this purpose in the village store was a cheap laundry soap. There was no clean white cloth to be found anywhere in this village. The local police officer suggested that some saris donated by Mujib to a nearby Red Cross hospital could be used for his shroud. "We have no objection. You can bring anything you like. But you are to complete the bloody burial business quickly," the Major answered in military English in which every sentence is liberally sprinkled with the all-purpose word "bloody." Three saris were procured from the hospital. Their red borders were trimmed with a razor blade to make a makeshift white shroud. There was no time to stitch the pieces together. There followed a hurried *janaza*, in which some 25 people took part. Mujib's body was then lowered to the grave beside that of his father. The Major and his military escort were able to fly out well before dusk so as to arrive safely in Dhaka before nightfall.

Thus ended the life of Sheikh Mujib—the man who was the Father of the Nation.

Notes

1. Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood*, p.47.
2. Ibid, p.50.
3. Pupul Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, Pantheon Books, New York,1988, p.220.
4. Ibid, p.220.

   There could be two possible "forces outside the country" behind any plot to overthrow the Mujib regime: The United States and Pakistan. It was Lawrence Lifschutz who first attempted to investigate US involvement in the plot, taking advantage of the Freedom of Information Act, which during the Carter years, sought to introduce greater transparency in the working of the American government. During this period American officials also became more accessible to scholars seeking information. Based on the findings of Lifschutz and his own research, Christopher Hitchens, a liberal

historian of contemporary affairs, has summarised American role in 1974-75 in these words: "The United States Ambassador in Dacca, Davis Eugene Booster, was aware that a coup was being discussed [by military officers]. He was also aware of the highly controversial hearing in Washington, which had unveiled high-level official wrongdoing and ruined the career of many a careless foreign service officer. He ordered that all contacts between his embassy and the mutinous officers be terminated." (see Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, Paperback edition, published by Verso in London and New York, 2002, p.52.) Hitchens in the preceding pages refers to the "destabilising diplomacy" of the United States, which may have indirectly contributed to creating conditions for the success of the coup. But there is no evidence of direct American involvement so far.

As for a possible Pakistan link with a conspiracy to overthrow the Mujib regime, it may be noted that Stanley Wolpert, while researching materials for his biography of Bhutto, came across a letter in Bhutto's private archives, which showed some interest in fomenting trouble for Mujib. This letter from Abdul Haq, sent through Mahmud Ali, reached Bhutto on 16 January 1975, was an appeal for "funds, arms and wireless instruments" to use against the "puppet Mujib clique ... today totally divorced from the people." Although Bhutto minuted on its margin "Important," authorising help for this "honest man," there is no evidence that any action was taken on it. (see Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*, p.248) At any rate, Abdul Huq, leader of the minuscule Marxist-Leninist Party, had no connection with the military conspirators who carried out the coup. The conclusion, on the basis of current evidence, is inescapable that the plot against Mujib was essentially indigenous.

5. TV Interview of Majors Farook and Rashid by Anthony Mascarenhas ITV, (London), on 2 August 1976.
6. Interview with Indira Gandhi by Mary C. Carras, Associate Professor of Political Science, Rutgers University, USA. Quoted in Jyoti SenGupta, *Bangladesh in Blood and Tears*, Naya Prakash, Calcutta, 1981, p.91.
7. Rahim's Diary.
8. Verdict of the Mujib Murder Trial. Testimony of Prosecution Witness No. 5: Subedar Gani,1998.
9. Eye Witness account of Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, younger brother of Sheikh Moni, in *Bangabandhur Hatyer Dalil*, edited by Professor Rafiqul Islam, Dhaka, 1996, pp.70-74.
10. See Professor Abu Sayeed, *Bangabandhur Hatyakando: Facts and Documents*, Gyan Kosh, Dhaka, 1994. pp.131-132.

PART V

CONCLUSION

Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy.

F. Scott Fitzgerald in his notebook

I am still puzzled as to how far the individual counts; a lot, I fancy, if he pushes the right way.

T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia")
in a letter to a friend, May 1930

History is ruthless to him who is without ruthlessness.

A Turkish saying that Kamal Ataturk
was fond of quoting

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REFLECTIONS ON A TRAGIC HERO

The Oxford English Dictionary defines hero as "a man who exhibits extraordinary bravery, firmness or greatness of soul in connexion with any pursuit, work or enterprise; a man admired and venerated for his achievements and noble qualities."

Che Guevara, who loved humanity more than personal safety, defines hero as applied to a politician in these words: "The decisive moment in a man's life is when he decides to confront death. If he confronts it, he will be a hero whether he succeeds or not. He can be a good or bad politician, but if he does not confront death he will never be more than a politician." Mujib had the attributes to fit both the definitions:

First, his courage. Mujib was the only politician in the subcontinent to be tried for alleged crimes on charges that carried death penalty. Not once but twice. In the first one, the Agartala Conspiracy Trial, he was set free only because popular uprising against the Ayub regime obliged it to set him free. In the second one, which was held in secret in West Pakistan while the liberation war was going on, he was sentenced to death by hanging but the execution was not carried out because of the defeat and surrender of the Pakistan armed forces in Dhaka and the replacement of Yahya Khan by Bhutto. These experiences left his physical courage undiminished, as is evidenced by an incident which took place shortly after his triumphal return to Dhaka. At that time both Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and freedom fighters were sharing BDR barracks at Peelkhana. Unhappy with their uncertain future in an independent Bangladesh, freedom fighters clashed with the border guards who regarded BDR to be undeserving of their job security, since not all of them had fought in the liberation war. Mujib wanted to go to the Peelkhana barracks himself in an effort to defuse the situation. Tofael Ahmed, Mujib's Political Secretary, who had been involved in the recruitment of these freedom fighters strongly opposed the idea of Mujib himself going to the scene. He pointed out that they were in an ugly mood and Mujib might be insulted by them or even come to bodily harm from some radical elements who felt that political leaders had not taken part in the actual fighting and were enjoying the fruits of

independence while no one was bothering about their future. Other Awami Leaguers concurred with Tofael Ahmed. Mujib disregarded their counsel and faced the freedom fighters directly without any bodyguards and calmed them down by assuring them that they would be absorbed in a new organisation, the Rakkhi Bahini.[1]

What were the sources of his extraordinary physical courage? One was that of all the political leaders he was most organically connected with the people. He had a conviction that he had a mission to fulfil. The conviction grew stronger as he saw that the other politicians did not have the inner strength to confront the power structure in West Pakistan when the going got rough, especially after the advent of the military rule in 1958. The other source of his courage was spiritual. Mujib was a man of faith, although he did not parade his religiousness. He did not practice strictly all the rituals of Islam, such as praying five times a day, but his piety was of a more profound nature. He summed up his personal philosophy to a visitor in February 1972 as follows: "A man can suffer for his cause. I suffered for my people, my Bangladesh. My people love me and I know it.... This gave me the strength to suffer. If a man is ready to die, how can you kill him? ... I believe in God. We call him Allah. He helped me to endure my suffering. Allah is great."[2]

Second, his human qualities. Mujib was an extremely generous and caring person. Those who came into personal contact with him were charmed by his civility and attentiveness. He had an amazing memory for faces and names. Mujib was loyal to his friends and party workers. In fact, he was loyal to a fault and some of them took advantage of Mujib's weakness. Stories of their indiscretions and misdeeds reached his ears but he did not have the heart to punish them. The only exception, as we have observed, was the case of Abdul Mannan, the Awami League labour leader who had the temerity to send his private army to arrest and detain Fazlur Rahman. Only because Fazlur Rahman happened to be an old friend and associate of Mujib—both of them were put on trial in the infamous Agartala Conspiracy Trial—that Mujib, somewhat belatedly, brought charges against Abdul Mannan for corruption, but they were not followed through.

He never forgot those who were kind or helpful towards him in his days of struggle and adversity. It will suffice to mention one such case. Shah Azizur Rahman had been his nemesis when both of them were student leaders. But when Mujib revived the Awami League after the

death of Suhrawardy, Azizur Rahman joined the party at a time when even some of the old timers deserted Mujib. Later, of course, Azizur Rahman not only parted company with Mujib but supported Yahya Khan during the liberation struggle. After the emergence of Bangladesh Azizur Rahman's family was in great distress. His wife appealed to Mujib for financial assistance. Mujib granted a monthly allowance to the family to tide over their financial difficulty.

Let us look at the trajectory of the heroic leadership of Mujib. Heroic leaders come to the fore usually during periods of crisis. As the prospect for the restoration of genuine democracy looked gloomy in the aftermath of Ayub Khan's military coup in 1958, Bengali masses began to feel instinctively that only a courageous man willing to stake his life for his mission could lead a movement to overthrow the military rule. The popular yearning for a heroic leader could not be satisfied by faint-hearted traditional leaders. As Ayub Khan gradually consolidated his position, almost all of them more or less compromised with the Ayub regime. While Bhashani actually collaborated with the Ayub regime, others were content to keep a low profile. But Mujib, even at the risk of alienating Awami Leaguers in the western wing and causing unhappiness among more cautious members of the party in East Bengal, almost single-handedly dared to put forward his programme of Six Points in the mid-1960s. It was a call for a radical change in the structure of power relations between the two wings of Pakistan through a loose federal form of government. Naturally it was regarded as a challenge by the Ayub regime based on a centralised unitary system. It responded to Mujib's "insolent" proposals with the "language of weapons." Trumped-up charges of treason were brought against him. In Dhaka demonstrations became so violent that Ayub Khan thought it prudent to drop the case against Mujib. With Mujib's release the longing of the masses to identify with a heroic leader was consummated at a mammoth public meeting where he was accorded the title of Bangabandhu by acclamation. They legitimised his charismatic leadership by giving Awami League a landslide victory in the only general election held in Pakistan.

When Yahya Khan provoked a constitutional crisis by his unwillingness to respect the results of the general election, Mujib was compelled to show his hold over his people. He did so by launching a non-co-operation movement and appealing to his followers to set up what amounted to a parallel government in East Bengal. Mujib did not have the formal

authority to enforce obedience but such was his charisma by then that his appeal was heeded by civil servants, magistrates and the police who control the mechanisms by which a country is governed. The writ of the Yahya regime ceased to extend beyond the military cantonments. Yahya Khan was left with no option but to beg Mujib to resume negotiations for a peaceful transition to a civilian rule. No one could be certain about the intentions of Yahya Khan in the early stage. While negotiations were going on in Dhaka there were disturbing signs that the Pakistan Army in East Bengal was being reinforced with men and materiel from West Pakistan. But it was only in the evening of 25 March 1971 that Mujib finally realised the futility of negotiations after receiving a flood of information about frenzied preparations for a military strike. Mujib had no illusions about the military and he feared that they would not hesitate to turn Dhaka into a slaughterhouse to find him. It was mainly to spare the innocent citizenry from this ordeal that he chose to court arrest, ignoring the entreaties of some of his entourage to go into hiding and lead from the underground an armed self-defence against the military occupation.

All men make mistakes. Some are small and inconsequential and some are big and have grave consequences. Mujib's last-minute decision to allow himself to be captured proved to be a colossal blunder.

No foreigner was a more ardent supporter of the Bangladesh during the liberation war than André Malraux, the French Minister of Culture. Malraux was both a man of letters and a man of action. He had fought gallantly in the Spanish Civil War and in the French Resistance during the Second World War. In 1971 he "adopted" Bangladesh because its cause was so just. In spite of his advanced age—he was over 70 at that time—he was toying with the idea of training cadres to fight for their national liberation. Talking to C.S. Sulzberger of *The New York Times* on 1 November 1971, he said: "Their cause is desperate. No one can survive without a leader with a name. They need a de Gaulle. *Il leur faut un de Gaulle*."[3]

De Gaulle was a relatively junior general when France suffered a shattering defeat in June 1940. It was at this time that Marshall Petain, a patriot with an impeccable military record, formed the new French government with the primary aim to sign an armistice with Germany to prevent further bloodshed and suffering. De Gaulle's name was virtually unknown outside the French military circles. But he made a name for himself by flying to Great Britain to fight the German occupation of his

homeland from abroad rather than serve under the collaborationist Vichy regime. With a handful of followers he laid the groundwork for the Free French movement and saved the honour of France. Aloof and imperious, he became "destiny's instrument" by acting on his personal conviction that dignity and greatness of France were worthier goals than mere material happiness of Frenchmen.

Mujib was no de Gaulle. Personable and gregarious, he cared for ordinary people. Publicly, he had exhorted Bengalis to shed blood for the liberation of their homeland in the days before the military crackdown. But at the crucial moment he allowed himself to be swayed by humanitarian considerations. He preferred Pakistani captivity rather than lead the impending liberation struggle in person. He did not apparently think through the consequences of his action.

In the first place, this deprived his followers of his leadership when it was most needed. The disgraceful infighting between the immature student leaders and the political wing of the party, represented by Tajuddin, weakened the authority of the provisional government. Sheikh Moni, as we have seen, went to the RAW, the intelligence service of India, the host country, and persuaded them to set up an independent force, the Mujib Bahini, which was to function outside the control of the provisional government. Worse still, in the midst of the liberation war, Mushtaque attempted to sabotage the objectives of the provisional government by establishing relations with the American Consulate in Calcutta with a view to coming to terms with Pakistan and settling for less than total victory.

Second, the intrigues against Tajuddin were carried over to Bangladesh by Moni and Mushtaque They had one common aim: to create a rift between Mujib and Tajuddin. There had been no tension between Mujib and Tajuddin prior to the liberation struggle. In fact, they worked in complete harmony. Mujib was an inspirational leader. He had the ability to come up with bold ideas and express them to the people in clear, blunt language. Tajuddin, on the other hand, had a sharp intellect and was good at handling day-to-day problems of administration. Mujib needed someone like Tajuddin in post-independence Bangladesh. The eminently successful Chinese pattern of tandem power—Mao as the visionary leader and Chou En Lai as the pragmatic administrator—could have been replicated in Bangladesh but was not, because Tajuddin's enemies had succeeded in convincing Mujib that he was ambitious and untrustworthy.

Third and most important of all, Mujib's absence from the scene of action during the nine months of the liberation struggle deprived him of

his ability to exercise good judgement. He became vulnerable to being influenced by whatever was told or whispered to him by people around him. Before 25 March 1971 Mujib had been mainly thinking about the problems he would have to handle in the context of a united Pakistan under a loose federal system of government. His bedside reading was a book on constitution-making by Sir Ivor Jennings. He had not given much thought to the problems of governing a new, independent nation.

The art of governance of a new nation, alas, is not something that can be learned on the job. Mujib's first big mistake was to go on a spree of nationalisation in the name of socialism. True, he was badly advised by the Planning Commission, composed of well-meaning, honest academic economists. True, he was also under pressure of student and labour leaders, some of whom saw a wonderful opportunity to enrich themselves by plundering nationalised enterprises, or increase their influence by inciting the trade unions to do their bidding. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions," Dr Samuel Johnson had said. It did not take long for Bangladesh to go on a downward spiral of falling production and rising prices, corruption and smuggling. Had Mujib not been absent during the liberation struggle, it is entirely possible that he would have resisted wholesale nationalisation and would have favoured giving ample room for private enterprise. In his own mind he equated socialism with social justice rather than control of production processes by the state machinery.

Mujib had reached the pinnacle of his popularity and charisma upon his return to Bangladesh. Everybody knew about his personal suffering in Pakistan captivity. In their eyes he could do no wrong and they expected him to improve their lot, if not give them the *Sonar Bangla* promised by him, very soon. But with the economy in shambles their life did not get better and Mujib's charisma suffered.

The term "charisma" needs to be clarified, if only because it is so often abused. Derived from Greek it was originally employed in early Christian period to denote "a gift of grace" and "an extraordinary quality" possessed by a person which gives him an unique, magical power. The belief in this charisma confirms such a person as a leader with an enthusiastic following. Prophets and saints were thought to have charisma. As used by modern political scientists the term is not limited to religious figures but extended to include political leaders and even institutions. Charisma is not a property but a relationship of a leader to the masses. It is a transient attribute. The leader may lose his charisma; the people can reject him because he has failed to prove himself or because he has proved himself "false." Max

Weber, the eminent German sociologist, gives this illustration of the dynamic nature of charisma from Chinese history:

> The Chinese emperor ruled in the old genuine sense of charismatic authority. He had to prove himself as "Son of Heaven" and he was the lord approved by Heaven insofar as the people fared well under him. If he failed, he simply lacked charisma. Thus if the river broke the dikes, or if the rain did not fall despite the sacrifices made, it was evident that the emperor did not have the charismatic qualities demanded by Heaven. In such cases the emperor did public penitence for his sins .... If this was of no avail the emperor had to expect abdication; in the past, it probably meant self-sacrifice.[4]

Bengal has always been a disaster-prone region. However there is no tradition among Bengalis to fault the ruler for natural phenomena like floods and cyclones. But the ruler is blamed when there is evident callousness on the part of the government to bring relief to the people urgently. In 1974, the Mujib regime was perceived to be indifferent to the plight of the people in the countryside when there was widespread famine in the wake of floods in the northern region. In consequence Mujib's charisma fell to its lowest point ever.

Nothing is more difficult than to restore charismatic authority after it has dwindled almost to a vanishing point. Hitherto, Mujib had a highly personalised style of leadership. He used charm, cajolery and persuasion rather than coercion to achieve his goals. They had not worked after independence. There was hunger among the people for a strong hand at the helm to root out corruption and to improve their lives. It was only after the 1974 famine that Mujib decided to change his course: "I believe in extreme measures. Either I shall survive politically if I succeed in improving the economic situation or I shall go down if I fail."[5]

The point of coming to power is to do things one believes in. Most politicians believe in nothing except in power for power's sake. Mujib was not an ordinary politician; he was a national hero. He had such an enormous prestige when he took over the helm of affairs that he could have set whatever course he thought necessary for the welfare for his countrymen. He had no clear notion of what to do, he followed almost mechanically the electoral platform of the 1970 general election although it had little relevance to the requirements of post-independence Bangladesh. It had taken Mujib almost three years to realise that he had to do something drastic to reverse the decline of Bangladesh. In December 1974, a state of emergency was proclaimed. Mujib used the emergency as a "breathing space" to mobilise the Awami League parliamentarians to push through, a

month later, an amendment in the Constitution changing the parliamentary form of democracy to a presidential one and transforming a multi-party democracy to a single-party state. The President became all-powerful and invulnerable to judiciary. In the process all the fundamentals of democracy—accountability, transparency, separation of powers, independence of judiciary, freedom of the press—were sacrificed. Mujib was no doubt sincere when he said that he would restore democracy after straightening things out.

Mujib's shift towards authoritarianism caused unease among the intelligentsia. Political parties, facing extinction, were opposed to Mujib's naked personal rule. But they were unable to muster enough support to launch a popular movement against it. Apparently Mujib still had some residual charisma and most people were willing to give Mujib's "second revolution" a chance to succeed.

Which is why a number of middle class people affected by the "second revolution" were inclined to heed the popular maxim: "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." Journalists as a group were among the most hard hit by the decision to close down all newspapers, except four placed under government control. Yet, there followed a spate of applications from journalists wishing to join the BAKSAL, the governing party, in the hope of landing jobs, even if they had nothing to do with their profession. The most glaring example of opportunistic behaviour was provided by Enayetullah Khan, the owner editor of a widely-read weekly, *Holiday*. He had opposed the Mujib regime from the start and had been jailed for three weeks in June-July 1975. Within days of his release Sheikh Moni offered him the job of editor of *The Bangladesh Times* and he accepted it with great alacrity. The coup took place a week later and he quickly realised his "mistakes"[6]

Against all odds, Lenin had successfully carried out the biggest revolution in human history with a small band of dedicated Bolsheviks. He was successful because he understood that without a cadre-based organisation it was neither possible to overthrow a firmly entrenched autocracy nor to lay the foundations of a new social order. Mujib, aiming at a modest social transformation of his country, had at his disposal an imperfect instrument, BAKSAL, to implement his plan. Members of his extended family had been placed in key positions in the ruling party and most of them were corrupt and power-hungry. Many second-echelon positions had been entrusted to careerists who had no commitment to Mujib's vision of a more egalitarian society. With such people in charge of important positions in the BAKSAL, Mujib's experiment was foredoomed to failure even if he had survived the coup attempt.

By every standard he was an extraordinary man with much more good in him than bad. Some of his defects were in fact the obverse of his virtues. It must not be forgotten that it was his loyalty to friends, old associates, and his family members, that made him turn a blind eye to their misdeeds. What could have been considered a merit in his private life became a demerit in a national leader.

Mujib's tragedy lay in his character. Every ruler has to govern by a mixture of persuasion and coercion. In his carrot-and-stick manipulation he relied almost exclusively on carrot and very little on stick. The lack of a ruthless streak in his character proved to be a fatal flaw. Laws had been passed providing for capital punishment for serious economic crimes but no one was ever put before a firing squad. Wrong-doers knew that Mujib's threats were empty words.

The tragic hero, Aristotle wrote, suffers a change in fortune because of a mistaken act to which he is led by his "error of judgement" or his "tragic flaw." Such a man moves us to pity because his misfortune is greater than he deserves. Mujib was indeed a tragic hero.

What will be Mujib's legacy? Mao once said that a man's work may be judged satisfactory if it is 70 per cent correct and 30 per cent in error.[7] In his own case Mao's successors came to the judgement that his positive achievements like the unification of China far outweighed errors made by him such as the policies of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which caused the death of millions of people. Applying the 70-30 standard to Mujib one must conclude that Mujib's role in bringing about the independence of Bangladesh was a great accomplishment. This alone guarantees him a place in history.

Mujib sought to put the interests of his countrymen before his own: If he failed, it was mainly because he lacked ruthlessness without which a state cannot be governed in difficult times. But his failure as a ruler does not diminish his grandeur as a human being. He will live in the hearts of his countrymen.

Notes

1. Interview with E.A. Choudhury.
2. C.L. Sulzberger, *An Age of Mediocrity*, Macmillan, New York, 1973, p.25.
3. Ibid, p.782.

4. Quoted in Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*, Doubleday, New York, 1960, p.105.
5. Zillur R. Khan, *The Third World Charismat: Sheikh Mujib and the Struggle for Freedom*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, p.225.
6. Mahfuzullah, *Press under Mujib Regime*, Kakoli Prokashani, Dhaka, 2002, pp.132-133.
7. Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution*, Random House, New York, 1971, p.205.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

The Lahore Resolution – 1940

1) While approving and endorsing the action taken by the Council and the Working Committee of All-India Muslim League, as indicated in their resolutions dated 27th of August, 17th and 18th of September, and 22nd of October, 1939, and 3rd of February 1940, on the constitutional issue, this session of the All-India Muslim League emphatically reiterates that the scheme of Federation embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935, is totally unsuited to, and unworkable in, the peculiar conditions of this country and is altogether unacceptable to Muslim India.

2) It further records its emphatic view that while the declaration dated the 18th of October, 1939, made by the Viceroy on behalf of His Majesty's Government is reassuring in so far as it declares that the policy and plan on which the Government of India Act, 1935, is based will be reconsidered in consultation with the various parties, interests and communities in India, Muslim India will not be satisfied unless the whole constitutional plan is reconsidered de novo and that no revised plan would be acceptable to the Muslims unless it is framed with their approval and consent.

3) Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, namely, that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India, should be grouped to constitute 'Independent States' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign. That adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in these units and in these regions for the protection of their religious, cultural economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them; and in other parts of India where the Mussalmans are in a minority,

adequate, effective, and mandatory safeguards shall be specially provided in the constitution for them and other minorities for the protection of their religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them.

This session further authorises the Working Committee to frame a scheme of constitution in accordance with these basic principles, providing for the assumption finally by the respective regions of all powers such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs and such other matters as may be necessary.

APPENDIX 2

The Resolution Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Prime Minister of Bengal, moved at the Delhi Convention of Legislators – 1946

Whereas in this vast subcontinent of India a hundred million Muslims are adherents of a faith which regulates every department of their life—educational, social, economic and political—whose codes is not confined merely to spiritual doctrines and tenets, or rituals and ceremonies, and which stands in sharp contrast to the exclusive nature of the Hindu dharma and philosophy which has fostered and maintained a rigid caste system for thousands of years, resulting in the degradation sixty million human beings to the position of untouchables, creation of unnatural barriers between man and man and superimposition of social and economic inequalities on a large body of the people of the country, and which threatens to reduce Muslims, Christians and other minorities to the status of irredeemable helots, socially and economically;

Whereas the Hindu caste system is a direct negation of nationalism, equality, democracy and all the noble ideals that Islam stands for;

Whereas different historical backgrounds, traditions, cultures, social and economic orders of the Hindus and the Muslims made impossible the evolution of a single Indian nation inspired by common aspirations and ideals and whereas after centuries they still remain two distinct major nations;

Whereas, soon after the introduction by the British of the policy of setting up political institutions in India on lines of Western democracies based on majority rule which means that the majority of the nation or society could impose its will on the minority of the other nation or society in spite of their opposition as amply demonstrated during the two and half years regime of Congress government in Hindu majority provinces under the Government of India Act, 1935, when the Muslims were subjected to untold harassments and oppressions as a result of which they were convinced of the futility and ineffectiveness of the so-called safeguards provided in the constitution and in the Instruments of Instructions to the governors and were driven to the irresistible conclusion that in a United India Federation, if established, the Muslims, even in Muslim majority provinces, could meet with no better fate and their rights and interests could never be adequately protected against the perpetual Hindu majority at the center;

Whereas the Muslims are convinced that with a view to saving Muslim India from the domination of the Hindus and in order to afford them full scope to develop themselves according to their genius, it is necessary to constitute a sovereign, independent state comprising Bengal and Assam in the North-East zone and in Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West zone;

This convention of the Muslim League legislators of India, central and provincial, after careful consideration, hereby declares that the Muslim nation will never submit to any constitution for a United India and will never participate in any single constitution-making machinery set up for the purpose, and any formula devised by the British government for transferring power from the British to the peoples of India, which does not conform to the following just and equitable principles calculated to maintain internal peace and tranquility in the country, will not contribute to the solution of the Indian problem:

- That the zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North-East and the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West of India, namely the Pakistan zones, where the Muslims are a dominant majority, be constituted into one sovereign independent state and that an unequivocal undertaking be given to implement the establishment of Pakistan without delay.
- That two separate constitution-making bodies be set up by the peoples of Pakistan and Hindustan for the purpose of framing their respective constitutions.
- That the minorities in Pakistan and Hindustan be provided with safeguards on the lines of the All-India Muslim League Resolution passed on 23 March 1940 at Lahore.
- That the acceptance of the Muslim League demand for Pakistan and its implementation without delay are the sine qua non for the Muslim League cooperation and participation in the formation of an Interim Government at the center.
- This convention further emphatically declares that any attempt to impose a constitution on a United India basis or to force any interim arrangement at the center, contrary to the Muslim demand, will leave the Muslims no alternative but to resist such imposition by all possible means for their survival and national existence.

APPENDIX 3

The Six Points of the Awami League – 1966

Point No. 1

The character of the government shall be federal and parliamentary, in which the election to the federal legislature and to the legislature of the federating units shall be direct and on the basis of universal adult franchise. The representation in the federal legislature shall be on the basis of population.

Point No. 2

The federal government shall be responsible only for defence and foreign affairs and subject to the conditions provided in (3) below, currency.

Point No. 3

There shall be two separate, free convertible currencies for the two wings of the country or in the alternative a single currency, subject to the establishment of a federal reserve system in which there will be regional federal reserve banks which shall devise measures to prevent the transfer of resources and flight of capital from one region to another.

Point No. 4

Fiscal policy shall be the responsibility of, and the power of taxation shall vest in, the federating units. The federal government shall be provided with requisite revenue resources for meeting the requirements of defence and foreign affairs, which revenue resources would be automatically appropriable by the federal government in the manner provided and on the basis of the ratio to be determined by the procedure laid down in the Constitution. Such constitutional provisions would ensure that the federal government's revenue requirements are met consistently with the objective of ensuring control over fiscal policy by the governments of the federating units.

Point No. 5

Constitutional provisions shall be made to enable separate accounts to be maintained of the foreign exchange earnings of each of the federating units,

under the control of the respective governments of the federating units. The foreign exchange requirements of the federal government shall be met by the governments of the federating units on the basis of a ratio to be determined in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Constitution. The regional governments shall have power under the Constitution to negotiate foreign trade and aid within the framework of the foreign policy of the country, which shall be the responsibility of the federal government.

Point No. 6

The government of the federating units shall be empowered to maintain a militia or para-military force in order to contribute effectively towards national security.

APPENDIX 4

The Eleven Points of the East Pakistan Students' All-Party Committee of Action – 1969

1. (a) Restoration of provincialised colleges to their original status.
   (b) Extension in number of schools and colleges.
   (c) Night shift arrangements in provincial colleges.
   (d) 50 per cent reduction in tuition fees.
   (e) Bengali as medium of instruction as well as work in all offices.
   (f) Hostel charges to be subsidised by 50 per cent.
   (g) Increase in salaries of teachers.
   (h) Free and compulsory education up to Class VIII.
   (i) Medical University to be set up and Medical Council Ordinance to be withdrawn.
   (j) Facilities for condensed course for polytechnic students.
   (k) Train and bus concessions.
   (l) Job opportunity guarantee.
   (m) Repeal of University Ordinance and full autonomy for universities.
   (n) Repeal of National Education Commission and Hamoodur Rahman Reports.
2. Parliamentary democracy on basis of universal franchise.
3. (a) Federal form of government and sovereign legislature.
   (b) Federal government's powers to be confined to defence, foreign policy, and currency.
4. Sub-federation of Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province and Sind with regional autonomy for each unit.
5. Nationalisation of banks, insurance companies and all big industries.
6. Reduction in rates of taxes and revenue on peasants.
7. Fair wages and bonus for workers.
8. Flood control measures for East Pakistan.

9. Withdrawal of all emergency laws, security acts and other prohibitive orders.
10. Quit SEATO, CENTO and Pakistan-US military pacts.
11. Release all detainees and political prisoners including those of Agartala Conspiracy case.

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