

Maulana Bhasani -- the builder of opposition politics

M. WAHEEDUZAMAN MANIK

THROUGHOUT almost six decades of his struggling political life, 'Majloom Janoneta' Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was both a demanding spirit and a dauntless voice for freedom and emancipation of the humbled and the disinherited citizens against the overwhelming powers of the governmental machinery and the overweening grip of the ruling elite of the society. Doubtless, his unblemished long political career was characterized by a selfless dedication for championing the causes of the most underprivileged segments of our society. Indeed, he had an impeccable record of a life-long relentless struggle for the downtrodden and the disinherited. However, Maulana Bhasani was more than a spokesman of the peasantry and working class. His legendary name is also integral part and parcel of Bangladesh's struggle for freedom and independence. He was both the maker and shaker of political events in the then East Pakistan during the most turbulent years of Bengla speaking people's association with Pakistan. The seed of opposition politics and agitation was carefully planted by him in the then East Bengal in the formative years of Pakistan. He was also responsible for founding the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML), the first viable opposition party in Pakistan. The main purpose of this commentary is to appraise the sanguine role of Maulana Bhasani as the builder of the politics of opposition and agitation in East Bengal in the formative years of Pakistan. Given the fact that he was intimately associated with all of the progressive movements during the Pakistan era, no attempt has been made to provide any chronological details of any of those movements within the limited scope and size of this paper. Rather, the intent here is to underscore Maulana Bhasani's central role as the fearless organizer of a viable opposition in the then East Pakistan with specific reference to his pivotal role in the formation of the EPAML and some of his accomplishments as the fearless dissenting voice in the early years of Pakistan.

The genesis of the disintegration of Pakistan was conditioned, to a great extent, by Mohammad Ali Jinnah's quest for installing the anti-Bengali collaborators and rightist Muslim Leaguers in both the party apparatus and the governmental structure of East Bengal. Indeed, the seed of colonial mode of governance in East Bengal was also planted by the Founding Father of Pakistan. A deliberate policy was quickly initiated for packing the East Bengal (East Pakistan) branch of Muslim League with their loyalists. Most of the celebrated Bengali Muslim League leaders were kept out of the newly revamped provincial branch of the Muslim League. Thus the chief intent of the Punjabi-Mohajir dominated Pakistani rulers was to perpetuate their colonial policy in the then eastern province of Pakistan through the use of the loyalist Muslim League government. Both Khwaja Nazimuddin and Nurul Amin regimes had willingly initiated and enthusiastically

implemented various repressive and discriminatory measures in East Bengal for furthering and sustaining the colonial interests of the Karachi-anchored non-Bengali central government of Pakistan.

For instance, H.S. Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim, widely recognized as the stalwarts of Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML), were in the vanguard of Pakistan movement. Maulana Bhasani was the legendary figure in Assam politics, and as the President of Assam Provincial Muslim League, he had spearheaded the Pakistan movement in Assam. Yet, after independence, there was hardly any leadership roles for these dedicated and charismatic leaders in the newly installed government or in the provincial Muslim League. The followers of both H.S. Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim were specifically excluded even from the primary membership of the ruling party. Maulana Bhasani was also deliberately discredited and maligned by the ruling coterie immediately after his return to East Bengal from Assam. On his return to the then East Bengal in later part of 1947, he had won an assembly seat (through an uncontested bye-election) in East Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly (EBLA) from South Tangail constituency. However, the provincial ruling coterie had hatched a conspiracy out to dislodge him from the Provincial Assembly. His election to the Assembly was declared null and void on flimsy grounds. Above all, Maulana Bhasani was declared disqualified by the provincial governor to run for re-election or for holding any public office!

Maulana Bhasani had courageously confronted and challenged the Muslim League leadership in the then East Bengal through the formation of a viable political organization. Being essentially goaded and aided by the more liberal factions of the ruling Muslim League, various groups of dissidents, and other progressive forces of the province, he had formed the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML) on June 23, 1949 (the word "Muslim" was formally rescinded from the nomenclature of the party in 1955). There is no doubt that the establishment of this opposition party was a milestone at a critical juncture of the new nation of Pakistan. The EPAML, under the charismatic leadership of Maulana Bhasani emerged as the most effective opposition party in the early years of Pakistan. Maulana Bhasani was the President of the Awami League for eight long years (1949 through 1957), and during those turbulent years he sincerely tried to build-up this party as the most effective political instrument for ventilating and articulating the genuine grievances and demands of the people of the eastern province of Pakistan. Both Maulana Bhasani and the EPAML had played pivotal roles in articulating Pakistan's Bengla speaking people's cherished desire and quest for autonomy and self-determination. Maulana Bhasani and his party had undeniably played the most defining role in all of the progressive movements in the then East Bengal during the early years of Pakistan.

Notwithstanding the deliberate

distortions of Bangladesh's political history, it is a matter of fact that Maulana Bhasani was the most authentic founder of the Awami League. Many credible writers attest to the fact that he was the driving force behind the establishment of the EPAML in an era which was invariably dominated by the Muslim Leaguers. For instance, in his seminal assessment of the role of the Awami League in the political development of the then Pakistan, Dr. M. Rashiduzzaman underscored the central role of Maulana Bhasani in building-up a sustainable opposition in the then East Bengal during the early years of Pakistan: "If any one man should be given credit for the rise of an opposition in East Pakistan, it is Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. Maulana Bhasani became a popular figure in the

partition campaign promises into realistic and pragmatic public policies and programmes. He also stressed that the ruling party has miserably failed to fulfill the minimum demands of the people. In another public meeting, organized by the East Pakistan Muslim Student League (EPMSL) on September 11, 1949, he had earnestly appealed to the people to dislodge the repressive provincial government and the anti-Bengali central government of Pakistan. He urged the people to build-up resistance movement against the ruling coterie of Pakistan. In a mammoth public meeting on October 11, 1949 at Armanitola Maidan, Maulana Bhasani had forcefully demanded the immediate resignation of the then provincial government for exhibiting its ineptness in dealing with the food crisis. In defiance of the Section 144, Maulana

was founded by the dissident Muslim Leaguers. Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was rightfully considered as the founder and guiding genius behind the organized opposition to the Muslim League government in East Pakistan" (M.B. Nair, *Politics in Bangladesh: A Study of Awami League, 1949-58*, New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1990, p. 61 and pp. 248-249).

There were many instances where the Awami League-sponsored public meetings and processions were disturbed or dispersed by the "hired goondas" of the ruling Muslim League. As the principal founder as well as the first President of the EPAM, Maulana Bhasani and scores of his party loyalists and progressive forces had to face stiff resistance from the Muslim Leaguers, and they were also the victims of repressive measurers of both the

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1930's when he organized the peasant movement in East Bengal and Assam. Later, in the 1940s he gave his support to the Pakistan movement led by the Muslim League. Maulana Bhasani was frustrated by the closed-door policy of the Muslim League in Pakistan, however, and eventually, it was under his leadership that the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML) was born at Dacca, on June 23, 1949" (M. Rashiduzzaman, "The Role of Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan," *Asian Survey*, July, 1970).

Dr. Talukder Maniruzzaman has succinctly observed that the 1948-phase of the Bengali language movement had "spearheaded the formation of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML), representing both genuine social protest and the political ambitions of the frustrated Muslim Leaguers. Maulana Bhasani was elected President of the party and (H.S.) Suhrawardy soon after became convener of the All-Pakistan Committee of the new party" (Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Bangladesh Revolution and its Aftermath*, UPL, 1988, pp. 20-21).

According to Dr. M.B. Nair, "Maulana Bhasani was primarily responsible for the growth of the Party (EPAML). He united the various opposition groups and pitted them against the ruling Muslim League. Though Suhrawardy's contribution to the formation of the (East Pakistan) Awami Muslim League was much less than that of Bhasani, his followers who were the best party workers of the undivided Bengal (Provincial) Muslim League (BPML), constituted the core of the party." M.B. Nair also attests further about Maulana Bhasani's dominant role in the formation of the Awami League: "The Awami League, the first Muslim opposition party in Pakistan,

central government of Pakistan and the reactionary provincial government of East Bengal. The hostile political environment of the then East Bengal is well reflected in the words of Dr. M. Rashiduzzaman: "The political climate for an opposition party was not favorable in Pakistan at that time. Only a few months after it [EPAML] came into being, an Awami League procession and meeting was lathi (baton) charged and teargassed by the police. After this incident, nineteen Awami League leaders, including Maulana Bhasani, were arrested. In 1951, the Awami League public meeting scheduled to be addressed by Suhrawardy could not be held as the government imposed Section 144... in certain parts of the city. This repressive policy towards the opposition was the natural consequence of an attitude typified by a statement of Liaquat Ali Khan, the prime minister of Pakistan, at Mymensingh, East Pakistan, in December 1950: 'Pakistan has been achieved by the Muslim league. As long as I am alive no other political party will be allowed to work here.'" (M. Rashiduzzaman, "The Role of Awami League in the Political Development of Pakistan," *Asian Survey*, July, 1970).

Immediately after the formation of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, Maulana Bhasani started organizing and addressing hundreds of mass meetings throughout the province in order to arouse an awareness among the public about the ineptness of the repressive Muslim League government. He had also addressed many meetings in the city of Dhaka. For example, on June 24, 1949, in the first public meeting of the EPAML, held at Dhaka's Armanitola Maidan, Maulana Bhasani vehemently criticized the provincial government for its blatant failures in translating the pre-

partition campaign promises into realistic and pragmatic public policies and programmes. He also stressed that the ruling party has miserably failed to fulfill the minimum demands of the people. In another public meeting, organized by the East Pakistan Muslim Student League (EPMSL) on September 11, 1949, he had earnestly appealed to the people to dislodge the repressive provincial government and the anti-Bengali central government of Pakistan. He urged the people to build-up resistance movement against the ruling coterie of Pakistan. In a mammoth public meeting on October 11, 1949 at Armanitola Maidan, Maulana Bhasani had forcefully demanded the immediate resignation of the then provincial government for exhibiting its ineptness in dealing with the food crisis. In defiance of the Section 144, Maulana

League to arouse an awareness among the masses throughout the province about the anti-Bengali constitutional design of the non-Bengali-Mohajir dominated central government of Pakistan. The anti-BPC movement took place in two phases, first one started immediately after the Report of the BPC of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (CAP) with regard to the future Constitution of Pakistan" was published in the national dailies on September 29, 1950. There was a chorus of condemnation of the BPC report throughout East Bengal, and Awami League leaders spearheaded this movement. Awami League leaders and other opponents of this Report had clearly demanded that any future Constitution of Pakistan must ensure "full regional autonomy for East Bengal" and "recognition of Bengali as

founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah! Characterizing the BPC Report as both "un-Islamic" and "un-democratic," Maulana Bhasani, in a pamphlet on January 1, 1951, directed his party workers to mobilize public opinion against the evil design of the ruling coterie of Pakistan. The stiff resistance from all quarters of people of the province had compelled Liaquat Ali Khan to announce "the postponement of any discussion" on the BPC Report.

The second phase of the anti-BPC movement started soon after the Second draft of the BPC report was tabled in the central legislature on December 22, 1952 by Khwaja Nazimuddin, the then prime minister of Pakistan. There was hardly any substantive modification of the BPC report excepting Nazimuddin's new ploy of introducing the so-called party-principle between the two wings of Pakistan. Maulana Bhasani and other leaders of his party were also in the vanguard of this phase of the anti-BPC movement. The patriotic people of the then East Bengal quickly rejected Khwaja Nazimuddin's perverted version of the BPC Report. In observance of the Anti-BPC Protest Day, the All-party anti-BPC movement organized a large public meeting at Paltan Maidan on December 11, 1953. Maulana Bhasani had the honor of presiding over that historic meeting.

For his direct involvement in the 1952-phase of the Language Movement, Maulana Bhasani was arrested on April 10, 1952, and he put behind bar without trial till April 21, 1953. However, he did not deviate from his commitment toward making Bengla one of the state languages of Pakistan when the first council meeting of EPAML was held on November 14-15, 1953. The newly adopted party manifesto, adopted by the EPAML council meeting, demanded that "Bengla" should be recognized as one of the state languages of Pakistan. Nor did he compromise on the state language issue when the Jukta Front (United Front) was formed on December 4, 1953.

The United Front was formed in December 1953 as an electoral alliance of several political parties that included East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (EPAML), Krishak-Sramik Party, Nezam-e-Islam Party, Gonotontree Dal, and Khalifat-e-Rabbani Party. Maulana Bhasani, of course in collaboration with Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Haque and H.S. Suhrawardy, was instrumental in the formation of the United Front (UF). Given the fact that the EPAML was the largest political party of this historic electoral alliance, the 21-point election manifesto of the Front reflected most of the popular demands that were thus far articulated by Maulana Bhasani and other progressive forces of the then East Pakistan. A great deal of credit was also due to his charisma, his relentlessness, and his oratory and organizational skills for the landslide victory of Front in 1954 election in which the ruling Muslim League was virtually routed out from the political scene of the then East Bengal. He had also vehemently criticized the central government of Pakistan for illegally dismantling Sher-e-Bangla's United Front government in

East Bengal. He was dismayed when both Sher-e-Bangla and H.S. Suhrawardy joined the central government of Pakistan as ministers in Mohammad Ali Bogora's Cabinet without showing any regard for the pre-election pledges of the United Front.

Although the Awami League, as a political party, had vacillated or moderated its stand on the issue of "provincial autonomy" when Suhrawardy became the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Maulana Bhasani had never shelved or compromised his commitment to "full-fledged regional autonomy for East Bengal." On a matter of principle, he had sharply disagreed with Suhrawardy's version or interpretation of East Pakistan's demand for full autonomy. He also openly criticized Suhrawardy's advocacy for adopting the so-called "One Unit" plan for uniting or centralizing the western regions of Pakistan. Maulana Bhasani vehemently opposed Suhrawardy's support for "Parity Principle," an "anti-Bengalee" policy deliberately crafted into the 1956 Constitution in order to deny the numerical majority of Bengalees in the central legislature and the central services of Pakistan. Being totally disgusted with the deplorable state of political affairs in mid-1950s, it was Maulana Bhasani who had started demanding complete separation of East Pakistan from the rest of Pakistan, and his oft-quoted "Assalalamikum" to West Pakistan was early warning for subsequent separation of East Pakistan from the rest of Pakistan.

Born in 1886 in the village of Dhangora of Sirajganj subdivision of the then Pabna District, Maulana Bhasani breathed his last at Dhaka Medical College Hospital at 8:20 p.m. on November 17, 1976, and he was buried at Santosh, Tangail on November 18, 1976 with state honour. His stature as one of the greatest heroes of Bangladesh's history comes not from a single action or accomplishment but from his lifelong commitment toward establishing or accruing social justice through political activism. He espoused a genuine cause for protecting, articulating, and enhancing the interests of the people of the then eastern province of Pakistan. Underneath the flowing beard, Maulana Bhasani was a serious man with a deep sense of compassion for the disadvantaged segments of the society. It is understood from whatever limited literature is available on the early phase of his life that he had learnt to be compassionate in his youth by doing compassionate acts for the underdogs of the society, and he cared for them even more as he grew older. He had remained a dedicated fighter till he breathed his last for accruing social justice for those people who were unjustly dispossessed, disinherited, abandoned, and humiliated. Maulana Bhasani's action orientation and his lifelong commitment to social justice was the determining factor for his spectacular emergence as the most authentic planter and organizer of politics of opposition and agitation in the then East Bengal in the formative years of Pakistan.

Dr. M. Waheduzzaman Manik is a Professor and the Chairman of the Department of Public Management at Austin Peay State University, Tennessee, USA.

The epitome of an honest leader

ABID SALIMULLAH BAHAR

FOLLOWING the famous Indian political arena of South Asia many notable politicians emerged. One of them was Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, born in 1885. In his political career he was involved in anti-British movements, in 1954 helped in the win of East Bengal's United Front, in 1957 said the famous "Assalamu Alikum" (in this case meaning goodbye) to the West Pakistani military rulers. He was the man behind the 1969 mass uprising. After independence he led a long march against India's Farakka dam. After a long colorful political career Bhasani died on November 17, 1976.

Unlike most political leaders of the subcontinent, in his political career Bhasani did not seek to head the government. Nor was he interested in power as an expression of some kind of personal empire or for personal aggrandisement. He sought the kind of power a legislator would possess. He was given the title, "Janotar Chabuk" meaning Whip of the Masses. In this role, as a political leader he had two overlapping sets of followers -- those who responded to him as a *pir* and those who responded to his political positions. Unlike traditional leaders, Bhasani showed humility and felt sorry before his death that many of those leaders he had helped to be elected to bring change betrayed him and he was not able to fulfill his promises. This is different from those who claim their success in being able to leave their names in history.

Research on his leadership in Assam, Pakistan and Bangladesh periods shows that governments, populist leaders, religious and other rightist leaders detested him. In 1957, he was attacked by the followers of the rightist branch of the Awami League. In 1970, he was even physically attacked by Jamaat-e-Islami supporters in West Pakistan. However, people in general responded particularly to him. What is clear is that *rububiyah* as a universal philosophy allowed him to work with people of various orientations but in the end, only the leftist followers and his *sufi* followers were his core supporters. Despite his association with the

Communists, he consistently showed his belief in Islam.

The analysis of Bhasani's leadership shows that scholars failed to understand his vision. They used faulty analogies. Faulty analogy is often accompanied by a "poor understanding of the history" and of "the context." They essentially assume Bhasani worked with the Communists therefore he was a Communist; that he dressed like a Muslim fundamentalist so he was a "fanatically religious person"; he opposed Indian policies, and most "fundamentalists" oppose Indian policies therefore he was "a religious fundamentalist." The comparison does nothing to prove the point. The arguments sound logical and reasonable but they lack factual evidence.

Given his experience of Bengal as a society comprised of both Hindus and Muslims and his adoption of a universalistic policy, he demonstrated himself to be a progressive leader who tried to "rationalise" his version of Islam meant a society characterised by "Islamic living" with a lofty aim to establish a secular democratic society.

Bhasani was a political leader as well as a *sufi* spiritual leader. Sufis are seen as godly people and in Bengali society they are trusted as honest in disposition. As a *sufi* leader he continued to practice with his followers the devotional exercises in his Darbar Hall. He lived in rural Bengal among peasants, and honestly fought for their rights. This type of leadership led his people to trust him as one of them and people responded to his appeal. In addition, Islam served Bhasani's politics as a means of mobilisation (communicating ideas through the use of religious idiom, utilizing religious institutions, such as the *sufi* orders, as a way of supporting and spreading political activity) and as a source for personal models or techniques (e.g. using the model of the companion of the Prophet or the *pir* to learn not only about what one's goals should be, but also how to bring them about and how to exercise leadership).

As a vision mainly rooted in *sufi* tradition, Bhasani's religious and philosophical ideas ask for the self-sacrifice and the destruction of the ego.



Moulana Bhasani addressing public meeting at Paltan, 1969

He offered help whether or not the person in need desired it. He saw providing help to others as a way of helping himself to achieve grace or a place in heaven. For this he sacrificed comfort for himself and his family. He considered it as his "religious duty" his performing of *hukku Allah* and *hukku lbad*, meaning a lofty question about the indeed of existence. He found "the mind of God" in his *rububiyah* philosophy, seeing in "the order and consistency of the world of nature the result of active mind."

Bhasani's long life and service to his people stands as a testimony to the human willingness to sacrifice comfort, security and power in order to help less fortunate people. This is the religious character of Bhasani's political leadership. This is his originality.

In response to South Asian Islam's internal decay and external domination Bhasani used Islamic symbols politically, as many others have done and are doing in modern times. But his religious-political vision was markedly different from both -- emphasizing pluralism, democracy and tolerance. The one thing he might have had in common with the Muslim religious leaders of today is his "anti-imperialist" tone. Bhasani's kind of political Islam, it seems, is hardly to be found today. Its

possibilities have been submerged -- perhaps under influence of the perceived or actual threat of the West. By a narrower vision that emphasises the reconstruction of conservative social values as a bulwark against outsiders, rather than local reform and liberation.

In pursuance of this picture, every indication shows that not enough attention has been devoted nationally in Bangladesh, regionally in South Asia or internationally, to the understanding of the real Bhasani. In the absence of an accurate account of his life, much ingenuity had been deciphered by clever politicians or less-serious scholars towards discrediting the contribution of Bhasani. Previous works have been either apologetic or superficial and do not go into depth of the matter.

Bhasani, after his death is regarded as a politician and a Muslim saint. But most of all what he represents is an epitome of an honest leader, existing among dishonest partisan leaders. He indeed remains powerful, even after his death and this compelling reasons require that he be understood.

Dr Abid Salimullah Bahar used to teach Sociology at the University of Chitlango, and now teaches at Dawson College in Montreal, Canada. He did his PhD research on Maulana Bhasani from Canada.

The dreamer of independence

ENGR M INAMUL HAQUE

MOULANA Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani is the great leader who first expressed his dream of an independent East Pakistan at the Kagmari Conference in 1957. On November 25, 1970, he was the first to declare our country as independent East Pakistan. In 1971, he was the Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Mujibnagar Government. Maulana Bhasani is a legendary political figure of the subcontinent.

He will live in the hearts of the common people for whose rights he fought during his entire life. The personalities like Mahatma Gandhi and Ho Chi Minh can be compared with Maulana Bhasani. But, as at the dawn of independence of India in 1947 a sick Mahatma Gandhi was lying unattended in Kolkata, at the dawn of independence of Bangladesh in 1971 there was nobody to attend Maulana Bhasani at Santosh.

Moulana Bhasani was born at Dhangara village near Sirajganj town 1886. In 1917, when Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das arrived at Mymensingh, Bhasani was highly impressed by his speech. In 1919, Bhasani joined the Indian National Congress. In 1923, when Deshbandhu formed the Swaraj Dal, Bhasani worked for organizing this party. He went to Assam and organized a big congregation of peasants at Bhasan Char. After this congregation he was named as 'Bhasani Moulana'. In 1932, when he organized another big congregation of peasants at Sirajganj, he became famous all over the country. In 1937, the Assam government introduced a repressive 'Line Law' against the migrating Muslim peasants. Maulana Bhasani formed 'Assam Chashi Mojur Samiti' and organized agitations against this law in Dhubri, Gotalpara and other places.

In 1945-46, there was a drive to evict Bengalees from Assam in the name of 'Bangal Kheda', which erupted in riots. Maulana Bhasani toured Mangaldoi, Barpeta and Guahati areas in Assam to save the Bengalees. He proposed Assam to become a part of Pakistan. After the creation of Pakistan, he returned home and settled at Santosh, Tangail. He was

elected to the State Assembly of East Bengal as a member of the Muslim League. He was the first leader to demand the right to speak in Bangla and spoke in his own language in the Assembly. On the 23rd June of 1949, the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was formed under his leadership. In 1950, he was arrested and sent to jail under the Public Safety Act. Here he came across the communists. In Rajshahi Jail, a large number of communist inmates were killed in police firing in the Khapra ward. Maulana Bhasani went on hunger strike in jail protesting those killings. He was released when his health deteriorated.

Khawaja Nazimuddin, soon after becoming prime minister of Pakistan on 16 February, 1951, termed Maulana Bhasani and H.S. Suhrawardy as agents of India. At the start of the historic Lan-

embargo, Maulana Bhasani returned home from Kolkata on April 25, 1955. At that time, East Bengal was being increasingly deprived of its due share in economy, and its people, were being increasingly suppressed by the government of Pakistan. Arriving back home, Maulana Bhasani opposed the Pakistan government's policy of supporting the Anglo-American global supremacy. In this context, he mentioned twice, on 17 June, 1955 and 15 January, 1956, the possibility of creating Independent East Pakistan.

Moulana Bhasani called for a council session of the Awami Muslim League on February 7 and 8, 1957 at Kagmari. It was a large congregation of intellectuals and political leaders from all over the subcontinent. At this congregation, he told the audience in his speech that, if West Pakistan does not halt its repres-

The original dreamer of an independent Bangladesh, the lifetime crusader against oppression on the masses, great leader of the common people, Moulana Bhasani has been hardly recognised or revered properly by any government till now.

guage Movement, Maulana Bhasani became a central leader of its Sardodialya Rastrabhasa Sangram Parishad. Maulana Bhasani was a key figure of the Jukto Front of East Bengal formed in 1954. At that time A.K.M. Fazlul Haq, Maulana Bhasani and H.S. Suhrawardy of the Front were very popular leaders in East Bengal. The Jukto Front led by this trio captured 228 out of 237 seats in the election and got absolute majority in the Assembly. But differences emerged between Maulana Bhasani and his partners on the formation and running of the government. But on May 30, 1954 the central government dissolved the Jukto Front government of East Bengal on charges of failure to check the communist disturbances.

Moulana Bhasani left for London on May 25, 1954 to attend the International Peace Conference in Germany. The Pakistan government tried to obstruct to his visit terming him as a communist and put an embargo on his return to his homeland. After the removal of this

sion on East Pakistan, East Pakistan would soon say 'Assalamu Alikum' to West Pakistan.

Moulana Bhasani left the Awami Muslim League and formed the National Awami Party. He led the historic 1969 mass movement, which forced President Ayub Khan's military government to step down. On 12 November 1970, a severe cyclone hit the southern coastal areas of Pirojpur, Barguna, Patuakhali, Bhola, Lakshimpur and Noakhali districts. Several lakhs of people died and more people were affected badly by this cyclone. Maulana Bhasani visited the areas but found total indifference in the attitude of the government towards the victims. Returning to Dhaka, he once again said 'Assalamu Alikum' to West Pakistan in a public meeting and declared an 'Independent East Pakistan' on November 23, 1970.

Moulana Bhasani fought uncompromisingly for the oppressed people during his whole life. On March 7, 1971,

the lifetime dreamer of an independent Bangladesh, the lifetime crusader against oppression on the masses, great leader of the common people, Moulana Bhasani has been hardly recognised or revered properly by any government till now. But he was the only leader whose name is uttered with equal respect by the leaders of both the Awami League and the BNP. I put forward the following proposals to the government to pay due homage to the great leader.

1. The Open University of Bangladesh be renamed as Moulana Bhasani Open University.
2. The Ramna Garden of Dhaka be renamed as Moulana Bhasani Uddyan.
3. The Moulana Bhasani Road from Shahhab be extended down to Hatkhola Road via Shapla Chattar of Motijheel Commercial Area.

Engr M Inamul Haque is central executive member, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani Parishad.