



Declaration of Independence

As transmitted by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the final hours of March 25, 1971.

To the people of Bangladesh & also of the world:

Pakistan Armed Forces suddenly attacked the E.P.R. Base at Peelkhana and Police Line at Rajarbag at zero hrs. of 26.3.71, killing lots of people. Still battle is going on with the E.P.R. & Police forces in the streets of Dacca. People are fighting gallantly with the enemy forces for the cause of freedom of Bangladesh. Every sector of Bangladesh is asked to resist the enemy forces at any cost in every corners of Bangladesh.

May Allah bless you and help you in your struggle for freedom.
Joy Bangla

The declaration of March 27, 1971

As read out by Major Ziaur Rahman, of the 8th East Bengal, on Kalurghat radio.

Major Zia, Provisional Commander-in-Chief of Bangladesh Liberation Army, hereby proclaims, on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the independence of Bangladesh.

I also declare, we have already formed a sovereign legal government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which pledges to function as per law and the constitution.

The new democratic government is committed to a policy of non alignment in international relations. It will seek friendship with all nations and strive for international peace.

I appeal to all government to mobilize public opinion in their respective countries against the brutal genocide in Bangladesh.

The government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is sovereign legal government of Bangladesh and is entitled to recognition from all democratic nations of the world.

(From Rafiqul Islam's Bangladesher Swadhinata Sangram, first published March, 26, 1981. Also from Ekti Phul ke Bachabo Bole by Major (retd.) Rafiqul Islampsc, published in 1974.)

Those Terrible Days, Those Glorious Days

By K. G. Mustafa

THE 7th of March, 1971, was landmark in the history of our liberation struggle. On this day the military rulers of Pakistan sent to Dhaka an army officer to replace both Governor Ahsan and GOC, Yakub Khan. The officer, General Tikka Khan, was known as The Butcher of Baluchistan for the massacre he had committed in Quetta in 1962. General Tikka Khan's appointment was made at a time when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was running the civilian administration of the province by issuing "directives" to all government as well as non-government officers and staff. The general's arrival also coincided with the public meeting at the Race Course which was addressed by the Sheikh.

Rumours had it that the Sheikh would proclaim independence at the meeting and the armed forces, under Tikka's command would bomb the crowd in retaliation. The situation was tense, although the mood of the people was defiant.

Bangabandhu came to address the million-strong listeners about two hours late. He delivered a rather short speech, but the best of his life. He refuted President Yahya's accusations one by one, and, at the same time conveyed his message home to the vast majority of the audience. The message was loud and clear! "The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation, the struggle this time is the struggle of our independence." With this announcement the on-going non-cooperation movement got an unmistakable direction. Tikka's troops were not seen anywhere near the meeting place or above.

But, the military rulers were not sitting idly by. With a view to breaking the non-cooperation movement, the Martial Law authorities issued an order asking the civilian employees of the armed forces to resume their work with effect from March 15, 1971. The following day Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman issued 35 directives according to which the civil administration of the province would be conducted. The administration complied with the Bangabandhu's directives.

President Yahya Khan flew in to Dhaka on March 15 to hold talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The talks began on March 16, 1971. While Generals Pirzada, Omar and Mitha Khan were assisting Yahya, Sheikh Mujib was being assisted by his partymen Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and dr. Kamal Hussain, as well as by academics like Professors Abdur Razzak, Mozaffar Ahmad Chowdhury, Rahman Sobhan, Khan Sarwar Murshid and Dr. Anisur Rahman, among others. The talks took place at the President's Rest House which was renamed Ganobhavan in 1972.

I was among the press corps present in the Sheikh's residence at Road No. 32, Dhanmondi. On return from his talks Mujib met the pressmen to say only these words: "Talks are progressing. I can't say anything else at this stage."

Next day also the Sheikh repeated what he had said on return from the President's Rest House. Holiday's Enayetullah, would not allow the Sheikh to brush aside newsmen like that. He raised his voice to tell Bangabandhu: "While pretending to conduct negotiations, Yahya Khan is actually preparing for mounting a military operation against us. Why are you giving him so much time?"

Bangabandhu gave Enayetullah a patient hearing, and then, calmly said, "who told you that I also don't need time?"

The situation took a very perilous turn on March 19. As asked by Bangabandhu, I



Mujib with journalists: "Who told you I also don't need more time?"

Photo: From Dhaka 1971

went to his residence at 7 p.m. on that day. He was briefing me off the record, on the latest talks he had with President Yahya Khan.

It was agreed, inter alias that the Constituent Assembly would sit in two committees — East Pakistan Committee and West Pakistan Committee — to draft the basic laws for the respective wings. But the leaders of smaller West Pakistani Parties, like Mian Mumtaz Daulatana, — Wali Khan, were not satisfied with the tentative formula, but, Yahya Khan would agree. He was due to arrive in Dhaka on March 21, 1971. However, the Sheikh warned me not to be optimistic about it, because, "I don't know what the hawks in the army are doing. They are deadly against transferring power."

At this stage Abdus Samad Azad, followed by Tofael Ahmed, entered the room and we heard angry slogans outside. Bangabandhu rushed out saying, "Look here, the hawks are in action." A huge procession converged at the gate. They said an army patrol killed two persons at Joydavpur. In violation of a clearcut assurance given by Yahya Khan that the army personnel would be confined to barracks during the talks.

As Bangabandhu addressed the crowd, I left for the Observer House.

On the morning of March 23, 1971, Mumtaz Daulatana of the Council Muslim League, Abdul Wali Khan of the National Awami Party called on Sheikh Mujib to tell him that they would not accept a formula that would make Bhutto the sole arbiter of West Pakistan. Mujib, in reply, said "Let West Pakistan leaders set their house in order; I assure you I will not interfere." The same afternoon those leaders were on board a PIA plane bound for Karachi. Bhutto stayed behind. I did not visit Road No. 32, Dhanmondi after my last meeting with the Sheikh on the 19th of March, 1971. But, Bangabandhu's press secretary, Aminul Huq Badsha, used to see me every night.

On March 23, a number of incidents took place in the city. In some places Pakistani flags were lowered by angry youths. To them Pakistan Day meant nothing. They had already hoisted Bangladesh flag on March 2, 1971, and therefore, the Pakistan flag was no longer their national flag.

Aminul Huq Badsha came to visit me in the small hours of March 24 at the Observer House. He said to me, "Leader (meaning Mujib) wants you to brief foreign newsmen, without quoting him, that "the proclamation of independence of Bangladesh has been decided upon by Bangladesh leaders since talks with West Pakistani leaders have bogged down." Badsha did not fail to warn me that this briefing was meant for foreign press only, and not for local press.

However, a meeting of experts was due to take place at the President's Rest House in the afternoon of March 24, 1971. I was in the Dhaka Press Club at around 4-30 p.m. Tajuddin Ahmed dropped in with typed document in his hand. He wanted to know if I could help him in reaching Dr.

Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury. I could not help him as I had no contact with our "Mac sir".

Half an hour later Rahman Sobhan passed by. I enquired what was going to happen. With his posture of confidence, he replied, "something will happen, this way or that way."

The expert level meeting was shifted to 5 p.m. the following day, that is, on March 25. It was day of rumours. The Press Club being a listening post, people of various hue visited it throughout the day.

In the afternoon a journalist working for a Urdu newspaper said to me that Bhutto talked to pressmen at Intercon at 3 p.m. He said, he had an appointment with Yahya, but "the President was not there at the Rest House. Perhaps he has gone to the cantonment to inspect troops."

I returned home (at our Azampur Estate flat) after 5 p.m. At around 6-30 p.m. a relative of ours, Mansur, telephoned me from Kalyanpur to say that Yahya had left for Karachi at 6

p.m. and he did not feel safe in that area as tension was mounting both in Mirpur and Mohammadpur. I promised to check up and advise him, but I failed to contact anyone.

At around 9 p.m. my elder brother, Khondker Mohammad Elias came to my place. His son Sun-Yat was already with us since evening. Elias and his son left for their home in North Shahjahanpur after some discussions with me. I decided to go to Observer thinking that a newspaper office was a better place to know what was happening all around.

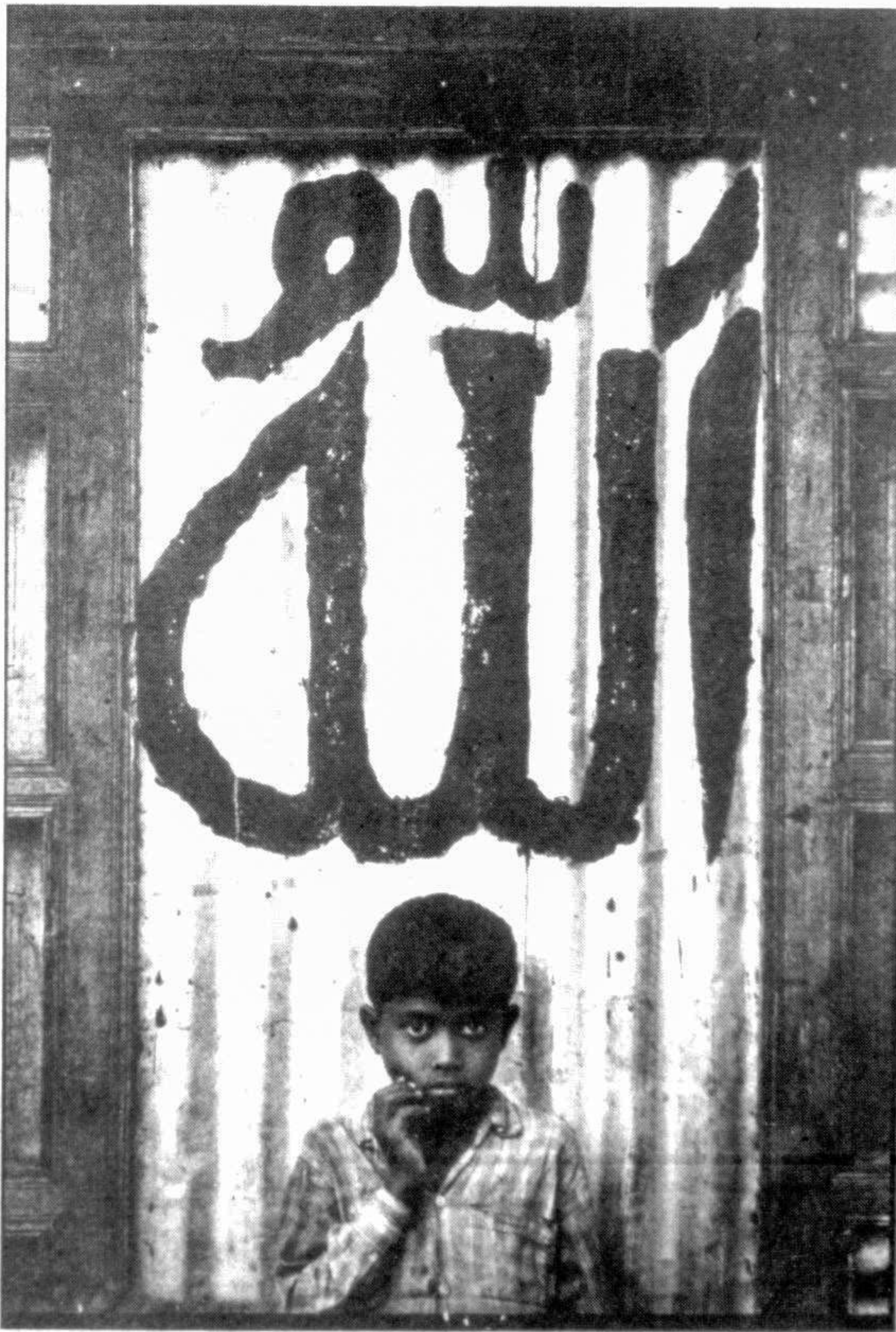
I walked down to Motijheel. News editor ABM Musa turned up after shifting his family to Dhanmondi from Mohammadpur. Troops were out on the streets by 10 p.m. At around 11-30 p.m. we saw tracer bombs fired towards Rajarbagh Police lines. Thunderous sounds of all kinds of arms were heard from all around. It was a nightmare. Arson and killing went on in Motijheel area as well. We saw through

windows the whole of Patuatuli in the old city was set ablaze. A 72-hour curfew was clamped. Blackout was ordered. The monotony of curfew and blackout was broken by tracer bombs, artillery fire and tank bombardments.

At day break on March 26, Manu Munshi, a staff photographer of the Purbodesh, called everybody to a window to see something. It was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto riding an open jeep with General Tikka Khan and moving towards the Government House!

Two hours later Musa sprang another surprise. His transistor was broadcasting Yahya's address to the nation. In the lowest possible volume, we heard Yahya's justification for waging war on Bangladesh, banning Awami League and teaching the Bengalis a lesson! We were holed up in the Observer House until 8 a.m. on March 27.

The author is the Acting Editor of the daily Sangbad.



Bangladesh, 1971: When people had to declare their religion in order to have a chance of survival. Photo: Anwar Hossain.

বিশুদ্ধতার প্রতীক
ইস্পাহানি মসলা

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মসলা
বিশুদ্ধ পানিতে ধুয়ে
সর্বাধুনিক মেশিনে
পেষাই ও প্যাকেট
করা হয়।



এম এম ইস্পাহানি লিঃ এর একটি সামগ্রী