

Historic March

March 7, 1971



Media Flashback '71

Pakistani Leaders Support Mujib's Demands

Mian Nizamuddin Haider, MNA-elect and a leader of the Bahawalpur United Front, has expressed full support for the four demands put forth by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and urged the Government to accept them so that the present grave political crisis can be resolved.

In a statement issued last night he said that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was one of the greatest patriots and believed in one united Pakistan. He said he had a long association with Awami League Chief and knew that he (Mujib) was solidly behind the concept of solidarity and integrity of Pakistan. He said attribution of unwarranted motives to his political struggle for the rights of the people was the work of those who were jealous of his tremendous popularity with the masses and were annoyed because they found their ambitions for coming into power frustrated.

Referring to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's complaint that he had been completely neglected by the Government while taking important decisions was fully justified as he was the leader of the majority party in the country. "In the present circumstances he is the only man who can keep Pakistan together and I appeal to people to rally around Sheikh Mujibur Rahman," he said.

Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, West Wing Chief of the Pakistan Democratic Party, urged the President; Gen A M Yahya Khan, here today to go to East Pakistan to thrash out and settle national issues with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other patriotic leaders.

Seven Karachi Awami League leaders here urged the Government not to take any half-hearted measures and should allow the National Assembly to be held in a peaceful and congenial atmosphere.

The already tense atmosphere, they said in a statement issued here tonight, should not be allowed to grow worse.

The statement was signed by Sheikh Manzurul Haq, President, Mr S A H Bilgrami, Vice-President, Mr W A Choudhury, Vice-President, Mr Khalil Ahmed Tirmizi, General Secretary, Syed Ahsan Ali, Organising Secretary, PIR Mohammad Bashir Siddiqui, Hon. Treasurer and Khwaja Abdul Malik, Publicity Secretary, all of Karachi Awami League.

The statement continued: "It is an accepted convention the world over that while convening the National Assembly of a country, the majority party is consulted in this respect and all other affairs concerning the nation, but in Pakistan in spite of repeated advice of the Awami League, the National Assembly was not convened for two long months after the general elections. On the other hand, the Assembly was convened on March 3 at the advice of PPP which is a minority party having nearly 1/4 members of the total strength and was postponed when it so demanded. When the democracy-loving people of East Pakistan protested against the decision of postponement, action was taken against them.

"We wholeheartedly support the four demands put forward by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman since he should be repository of all powers in the country in view of the mandate given to him by the thumping majority of Pakistan."

'The Struggle This Time Is for Our Freedom, the Struggle This Time Is for Independence'

Full Text of Speech Given by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Ramna Race Course Ground on March 7, 1971. Duration: 18 minutes

Brothers of mine!

It is with a heavy heart that I've come in front of you today. You know and understand everything. We have tried our best but still the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rangpur and Jessore have been stained with the blood of my brothers.

The people of Bengal want freedom — they want to live. They want their rights today. You made Awami League victorious in the elections through your votes. We would write a constitution — and through this constitution, the people would gain their economic, political and cultural freedom.

But the history of the past 23 years is a history of the people of Bengal's heart-breaking cries: a history of the cries of an oppressed people!

In 1952 we shed blood. In 1954 we could not go to power despite winning the elections. In 1958 Ayub Khan imposed martial law and kept us enslaved for 10 years. In 1966 we gave the Six Point Programme, and they murdered many of my brothers because of that 'crime'.

In the face of the 1969 people's uprising Ayub Khan fell and Yahya Khan came to power.

He said he'd give power back to the people, give them a constitution, and we accepted his words.

You all know what happened next. We had discussions with Yahya Khan. We requested him to convene the National Assembly on February 15. But, he did not keep my request even though I was the leader of the majority party. Instead he listened to the leader of the minority party Mr Bhutto.

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Voice of the people: Sheikh Mujib addressing an ocean of humanity at the Race Course Ground, March 7, 1971.

I am not the leader of the majority party only in Bengal — I am the majority party leader in the whole of Pakistan.

Mr Bhutto told him (Yahya) to convene the assembly on March 3. And he (Yahya) set March 3 as the date for the inauguration of the assembly.

Even then I said we'd go to the Assembly session. I said that, even though we are the majority party, we'd still accept any reasonable suggestion from anyone, even if his party has only one seat.

Mr Bhutto came to Dhaka, we had discussions with him. He left saying the door of discussion is not closed, there'll be more talks.

Maulana Nurrani, Maulana Mufti Mahmud and other West Pakistani leaders came and we had discussions with them. The idea was we'd write a constitution through discussions.

However, I let them know that I have no right to amend the Six Points Programme — it belongs to the people.

But Mr Bhutto issued a threat. He said he didn't want to become a hostage by coming here. He said the assembly would turn into an abattoir.

He threatened other West Pakistani members of parliament, saying he would smash their heads if they joined the assembly session in Dhaka, there'd be bloodshed, they'd be killed. He said he'd start a movement from Peshawar to Karachi, he'd not allow a single shop to open.

Even then, 35 West

Pakistani MNAs came. But on March 1, Yahya Khan cancelled the opening session of the assembly.

And the people of Bengal were blamed! Blame was put on me! It was said nothing could be done because of my intransigent attitude.

Then the people of Bengal were full of protest. I called a hartal to conduct the movement in a peaceful manner. The people came out on to the streets of their own free will.

But what did we get? Weapons were used against the unarmed people of Bengal.

We do not have any guns. But the weapons we bought with our money to defend the country against external enemies, those arms are being used to kill my innocent people. Firing is going on against my unfortunate people.

Whenever the majority Bengalees have tried to gain political power, there have always been conspiracies — they have leapt on us.

Yahya Khan has said that, apparently, I had wanted to join the round table conference on March 10. We talked on the telephone. I told him you are the president. Come to Dhaka, see how my poor people have been killed, how my mother's cradle has been emptied.

I've already said this before — there'll be no round table conference. What round table conference? Shall I sit at the Round table with those who have emptied my mother's my sisters cradles?!

On the third I called for non-cooperation movement at Paltan Maidan. I said, stop payment of taxes-rents, don't go to office. You accepted it.

Suddenly without any discussion with me or my party, the speech Yahya gave after talking to somebody for five hours, in that speech he has put all the blame on me and the people of Bengal.

does not arise. The people have not given me that right. The blood stains are yet to dry. I cannot step over the martyrs blood to join the assembly on March 25.

Brothers of mine! Do you have trust in me? (hundreds of thousands raise their hands and shout yes!)

I don't want the prime ministership; I want the people's

'I've already said this before—there'll be no Round Table Conference. What Round Table Conference? Shall I sit at the Round Table with those who have emptied my mother's, my sister's cradles?'

It was Bhutto who was guilty, but it was the people of Bengal who got shot.

We get shot and it is our fault; we get fired on, and it is our fault.

Yahya has convened the assembly but I have my conditions: martial law has to be withdrawn, the army has to be sent back to the barracks, killings have to be investigated, and power has to be transferred to the elected representatives of the people.

After that, I shall consider whether I will sit in the Assembly or not. Until these demands are met, the question of joining the assembly simply

rights.

They could not bribe me with promise of prime ministership. They could not take me by threatening me with hanging. You shed blood, and freed me from the conspiracy case.

On that day I said I'd repay my debt of blood with blood. Do you remember? Again today, I am ready to repay that debt of blood with blood.

I want to say this clearly: from today all offices, courts, high court, supreme court, educational institutions will remain closed for an indefinite period.

No employee shall go to

the office — this is my order. Rickshaws, trains and other transports will move, so that the poor doesn't suffer. Trains will move, but they cannot ferry army troops. If they do, then I cannot be held responsible for any accidents.

All governments, semi govts, and autonomous organisations including the government Secretariat will stay closed. Banks will stay open for two hours for transactions within East Bengal only. No money can be transferred from East Bengal to West Pakistan. Take care how you go.

Telephone and telegraph will operate within Bangladesh, but journalists can send news abroad.

People of this country are being destroyed, so take care how you go. If necessary, everything will be closed down.

You will go and collect your salaries at the proper time.

If salaries are not given, if another bullet is fired, then turn every home of Bengal into a fortress. Resist the enemy with whatever you have. All roads have to be closed down. We will starve then to death — we will finish them in the water!

Even if I am not there to give the order, if my colleagues are not there, you will continue the struggle.

(Soldiers), you are my brothers, you stay in the barracks, and nobody will say anything to you. But don't open fire — result will not be good for you. You can't keep 70 million people suppressed any

more. Now that Bengalees have learnt to die, no one will keep them suppressed anymore.

Awami League has set up a fund to help families of martyrs. We'll try to help. Give whatever you can.

Owners of factories will pay the full salaries to those workers who could not go to work because of the curfew, or who took part in the hartal.

I say this to government employees: What ever I say, you have to accept. Let no one be seen in the offices.

There'll be no payment of taxes until this country is free. You leave it all to me — I know how to conduct a movement.

But beware! Remember one thing, our enemies have infiltrated into our ranks, they want to create feuds amongst ourselves. Bengalees, non-Bengalees, Hindus, Muslims, they are all our brothers. It is our duty to protect them.

If radio and television do not broadcast news of our movement, then no Bengalee will go to radio and TV.

If this can be solved peacefully, then there is a chance we may live as brothers, otherwise there is no chance. Don't overdo it, that'll be the end of all relations.

My request to you is to build Action Committees under Awami League leadership in every village, neighbourhood, union. Be prepared with whatever you have got.

Remember — now that we have shed blood, we shall shed more blood, but we shall make the people of this country free Insha-Allah!

The struggle this is for our freedom — the struggle this time is for independence! Jot Bangla!

— Original Bengali of speech taken from "Ekti Phul ke Bachabo Bole" by Major (ret'd) Rafiqul Islam psc. Translated by Sabir Mustafa.

martyrs have shed their blood and made the supreme sacrifice of their lives. The blood of these martyrs shall not go in vain.

The first phase of our struggle has been launched. Our heroic masses have displayed indomitable courage and determination. They have braved bullets and violated curfews in a planned manner. I also congratulate our people, and our Awami League volunteers, who have frustrated the designs of agent provocateurs and anti-social elements to create communal tension between different religious groups and between Bengalis and so-called 'non-Bengalis'.

"I once again reaffirm that every person living in Bangladesh is a Bengali and that his person, property and honour are our sacred trust and must at any cost be protected. We are proud to note that since our volunteers have undertaken the task of vigilance and patrol, there have been no untoward incidents.

"Our struggle must continue. The objective of the present phase of the struggle is the immediate termination of Martial Law and the transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people. Till this objective is attained, our non-violent, non-co-operation movement must continue."

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Statement to the Press

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, President of Awami League, said here today that he had never conveyed any impression that an RTC-type of conference should be held.

In a statement issued here today after a two-day closed-door meeting of the Working Committee of the party, the Sheikh also 'repudiated' that the Awami League in any way obstructed the transfer of power and added that the majority party certainly would not gain by obstruction.

Recounting the measures taken during the last few days, Sheikh Mujib said that it now appeared that the "political confrontation" was soon to be followed by "military confrontation" if the majority did not submit to the dictation of the minority group.

He warned that if democracy was the ultimate casualty or the proposed transfer of power aborted, the responsibility would lie with the minority group and those who colluded with it.

He, therefore, suggested a seven-point formula for immediate adoption if the President sincerely desired that the National Assembly, as the sovereign body of the elected representatives of the people, should function.

The points are: (a) Immediate withdrawal of Martial Law. (b) Transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people. (c) Immediate withdrawal of all military personnel to the barracks. (d) Immediate cessation of

the military build-up and the heavy inflow of military personnel from the Western Wing.

(e) Immediate cessation of firing upon civilians so that not a single bullet is fired with immediate effect.

(f) Non-interference by the military authorities in the different branches of the Government functioning in Bangladesh and direction to desist from victimisation of Government officers and employees.

(g) Maintenance of law and order to be left exclusively to the police and Bengali EPR, assisted, wherever necessary, by Awami League volunteers.

Background

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said, "between the first of March when there was a sudden announcement of the postponement sine die of the sitting of the National Assembly and the sixth of March, the people of Bangladesh have been subjected to a military confrontation. There has been widespread firing upon unarmed civilians (workers, peasants and students) who had stood up to protest against postponement of the National Assembly. Those who have lost their lives during the first week are martyrs who died protecting the democratic rights of the people against arbitrary and unwarranted action of postponement sine die of the National Assembly."

He said: "It is said that the postponement of the National Assembly has been 'misunderstood'. I would like

to ask the President whether or not this postponement was effected solely in response to the machinations of a single party — constituting a minority of the total members — against the declared wishes of the majority party and also those of numerous members from the Western Wing?

"Our own position on constitution-making had been clearly stated in our Press statement of the 24th February when we reiterated our invitation to each and every Member of the National Assembly from all parts of Pakistan to co-operate with us in this historic task. On the 27th February, he went to the extent of affirming that if any Member presents before the Assembly anything just and reasonable we would accept it. But even this was ignored, it would appear deliberately and with motive."

"On the 1st March, by a Radio statement there was sudden and unwarranted postponement of the National Assembly sitting sine die. The reason given was that there should be more time for 'understanding' and it was said that there was political confrontation between the leaders of East Pakistan and those of the West. Did the people of Bangladesh not have sufficient reason to feel that their democratic rights had been grossly interfered with at the behest of an undemocratic minority? Were there not enough grounds for them to feel that a minority group had aligned itself with certain forces to obstruct the constitutional process and to deprive the majority of the people of

their rights? Indeed, these apprehensions were further fortified by the steady military build-up which became evident. This showed that political confrontation was soon to be followed by 'military confrontation', if the majority did not submit to the dictation of the minority."

"Indeed, we had warned in our statement of the 24th February that dark conspiratorial forces had always intervened in our country whenever the people were to take over power through the democratic process. The microscopic minority which represented the vested interests of the Western Wing, had by sabotaging the democracy deprived the 75 million people of Bangladesh, as they did the oppressed masses of the Western Wing of their basic rights. In 1953 the Bengali Prime Minister was dismissed by a conspiracy of the Punjabi ruling clique. In 1954, the elected Government in East Bengal was dismissed and the Constituent Assembly 'itself' was dismissed by the same clique. When general elections were to be held in early 1959, the vested interests of the Punjabi once again struck and usurped power. Today the Punjabi ruling clique is attempting to repeat this disgraceful history. But they should know that the awakened masses of Bangladesh as also the oppressed masses of the Western Wing shall resist their foul conspiracies by every means possible.

He said the democratic way of life could not be established nor could power be trans-