

Historic March

March 16, 1971



Bangabandhu-Yahya Talks Get Underway, People Intensify Movement in the Street

Media Flashback
Compiled by Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Ekram Kabir and Dipak Kumar Karmakar.

PRESIDENT Yahya Khan and the Awami League Chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman held talks for two and a half hours in Dacca on Tuesday on the present political situation of the country.

The talks which were held at the President Bhaban started at 11am and continued till 1:30pm. No side was at the talks. They will meet again at 10 am today (Wednesday).

After coming out of the talks, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman told the waiting newsmen at the gate of the President Bhaban that he had discussed with the President "political situation and other matters".

Sheikh Mujib, however, declined to comment whether the talks were held in a friendly atmosphere. He said "do not ask me any more questions. I am going to meet the President again tomorrow."

He said that it was not a matter of one or two minutes, it would require sufficient time, and the talks would continue.

Sheikh Mujib conferred with the AL High Command at his residence for about two hours prior to his departure for talks with President Yahya Khan. After his return from the President Bhaban, he again met the High Command and discussed relevant issues. The High Command also met in the evening.

Economic situation of the country is learnt to have featured prominently in the discussion between the President and Sheikh Mujib.

Before boarding his car on way to President Bhaban, Mujib was surrounded by a host of newsmen at the portico of his residence. He greeted them with 'Joy Bangla' slogan. He was looking jubilant.

His white Toyota car hoisting a black flag entered President Bhaban minutes before 11am. The students' flag for Bangladesh was pasted on the windscreen of Sheikh's car.

— The Pakistan Observer March 17, 1971.

Freedom of Moni Singh

East Pakistan students union's (EPSU) Central Committee in a joint statement, urged Awami League Chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to demand the freedom of comrade Moni Singh and other political activists who were convicted by the martial law tribunal and taken into captivity. They also demanded withdrawal of cases against the political prisoners and their unconditional freedom.

"Following the example of oppressory rule of Ayub Khan, the government of Yahya Khan too for a long time have abused power and have unlawfully taken political and patriotic personalities of Bengal into captivity. Many of these leaders have been taken into custody without a fair trial. Today in the burning hour of our liberation movement we want our popular leaders to fight side by side with us. So we urge the great leader of our independence Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to demand the unconditional freedom of comrade Moni Singh, NAP leader Ajay Roy, Tejen Nag, Mirza Abdul Haq, Mahbubullah and all other political prisoners who were taken into captivity and demand the lifting of cases against them. — added the statement. — Sangbad March 17, 1971.

Now Is the Time

A session of patriotic poems, songs and dramas was held at the Central Shaheed Minar by the Vikkhubda Shilpee Samaj last Tuesday at 4 pm.

The function began with poetry recitals. Khan Ataur

Rahman, Golam Mostafa, Hasan Imam, Ali Mansur, Ansar Abdul Hamid and Haqim Bhai recited poetry of Rabindranath, Nazrul, Sukanta and Sikander Abu Zafar.

After the recitals, patriotic songs were rendered by Altaf Mahmud, Mostofa Jaman Abbasi, Jehedur Rahim and Ajit Roy.

The principal attraction of yesterday's programme was the staging of a drama based on the mass movement. The theme of the drama was the unity of the people of all classes for the mass movement.

The powerful dialogue and acting stirred the audience's minds deeply. At one point, the audience became enraged at an artist who was playing an anti-movement character.

In one scene of the play, a demonstration of slogan-chanting people was shown coming forward. Then the police were ordered to open fire, but the policemen refused. Instead, they gave support to the people's movement.

Later Khan Ataur Rahman said in a speech that patriotic songs and dramas and poetry were touching the hearts of the people. Now is the time to spread patriotic culture among the people, he said.

— Dainik Purbodesh March 17, 1971.

India Bans Overflight

NEW DELHI, March 16: According to a source, the Indian government has put restrictions on the overflight of its territory by foreign planes flying to East Pakistan.

Following the hijacking and destruction of an Indian Airways Corporation plane at Lahore, restrictions were put on all Pakistani airplanes flying from the West to the East wing.

The ban of overflights by all foreign planes was imposed as an extension of that policy and also in view of the flow of Pakistani troops into East Pakistan.

Jamalpur Marches

JAMALPUR, March 16 (APP): Thousands of agitated armed men from Sherpur crossing the 'ferryghat' united in a mammoth procession here in Jamalpur. The processionists routed the main streets of the town chanting slogans in favour of the people's movement. Later they gathered in the court maidan for a public meeting where they declared their all out support and solidarity with the non-cooperation movement.

— The Ittefaq March 17, 1971.

Torture in Rajshahi

RAJSHAHI, March 16: Four Awami League leaders have condemned the killings of unarmed civilians, trespass into the university, medical college hostels and private houses, molestation of nurses and lady students, abduction of women and sacrilege of mosques by the members of law enforcing agency during curfew hours in Rajshahi, reports PPI.

Giving a vivid picture of what had been done in Rajshahi during the first week of this month under the shield of the so-called lawlessness, the signatories to the statement said that the law enforcing forces opened fire on the peaceful procession at the Telephone Exchange corner on March 3 when they were parading the streets to register their protest against the abrupt and dubious postponement of the National Assembly session only one day ahead of scheduled date. The forces opened fire again in the afternoon before the curfew was imposed, they said and added that in all these firings an unknown number of people were killed and injured.

They said that after the curfew was imposed at 9pm they had entered into the shop and private houses. They abducted the women-inmates of the

houses to the satellite town and outraged their modesty there. They also raided the hostels of Rajshahi University and Rajshahi Medical College and harassed and molested the lady students and nurses. Besides torturing the male students, the students were forced to vacate their rooms.

The Imam of the Satellite Town Mosque was mercilessly beaten in the mosque, they said. The signatories are Nazrul Haque Sarker, Mohsin Ali, Abdul Hakim and Abdul Hadi, President of the District, City and Paba Thana AL and General Secretary of the Sadar Sub-divisional AL respectively.

— Pakistan Observer, March 17, 1971.

The signatories said, they not only arrested innocent people and raided houses but they had also burnt the two symbolical boats and AL flags on the roof of the Paba Thana AL office which was burnt later on.

Ataur Rahman Urges

KHULNA, March 16: Ataur Rahman Khan, chief of the Bangladesh National League today reiterated his stand for a sovereign Bengal and urged the leader of the majority party, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to form a National Government for Bangladesh, reports APP.

Khan addressing a huge public meeting today at local Shaheed Hadis Park further said that 75 million people of Bengal wanted sovereign Bengal and there was no point of any compromise at this stage with the leaders of West Pakistan to work out viable

constitutional and political situation.

He also urged the President of Pakistan and the leaders of West Pakistan to realise the bare truth that no one in Bengal would rest unless their demand for a sovereign Bengal was achieved.

— The Pakistan Observer, March 17, 1971

'We Resisted the Pakistanis As One Nation'

Recollecting the days of movement leading to the struggle for independence the Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Shaikh Razzaque Ali said Maulana Bhasani was a great leader with foresight. When his followers and other political leaders had doubts about the question of independence, he had no doubt. "A political career spread over decades gave the Maulana a unique acumen", added the Speaker.

"Maulana Bhasani suffered from many contradictions politically. But on the question of independence of Bangladesh he had no illusions. Back in 1909 he realized that it was no more possible to remain a part of Pakistan and we should have our own political identity as an independent state", the Speaker told the Daily Star.



Shaikh Razzaque Ali

By Mahfuz Ullah

Shaikh Razzaque Ali, a close associate of Maulana Bhasani and a host to many underground left leaders during Pakistan days, was member of the executive committee of the National Awami Party when the war of independence started.

Tracing the history of independence, Shaikh Razzaque Ali said whatever explanation that might be given today, but the objective situation was different. Even the Six Point Programme launched by the Awami League was in essence a programme for provincial autonomy. National Awami Party led by Maulana Bhasani, had a 14-point programme demanding autonomy.

Razzaque Ali said if we look back in retrospect we can identify some reasons for the hesitations in visualising an independent Bangladesh.

Elaborating the reasons, he said Muslim sentiment, the question of economic viability, military strength and the question of dependence on India, everything "haunted us. The reason for this

were not allowed to rule".

In 1958 when the country was preparing for election the Pakistanis imposed Martial Law and "it was an act against the interest of East Pakistan".

Though every political party practices a philosophy, the Pakistani rulers had no philosophy, added Razzaque Ali. The Two Nation Theory which gave birth to Pakistan ended in 1947 and the ruling Muslim League could not give the country a new policy. But "the emotional loyalty to the concept of 'Muslims living together' had its influence on us for quite a long time.

Discussing the role of the progressive and left elements, the Speaker said, "some of us had doubts about the outcome of the struggle. This was partly because of the influence of left politics especially the Naxal movement and the decision of the National Awami Party to boycott the general elections of 1970".

The Speaker said, if NAP had decided to contest the election in 1970, the situation would have been different. But "left leaders who were controlling the party leadership at that time had all their strength mobilised to get the party decide in favour of a boycott".

However, the Speaker added, this gave the Awami League a clean sweep in the election and during the movement in March, Maulana Bhasani extended his full support to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Recalling the days of March 1971, the Speaker said "at that time we were in Khulna. The beauty of the whole movement was that all of us joined the struggle irrespective of political opinion. Nobody bothered about individual political identity.

"To everyone, it was a question of resistance and resistance on a joint footing. We resisted the Pakistanis as one nation."

Feature

Literacy Crusade Hits the Streets

IN a sprawling lower middle-class neighbourhood in New Delhi, street theatre groups act out the literacy message in a unique campaign to teach roughly 2.4 million illiterates in the Indian capital the three Rs.

The performances in Ambedkar Nagar (population: roughly 250,000) are impromptu. The audience is unfailingly enthusiastic, even though the plays are staged late winter evenings when the neighbourhood's mainly blue-collar residents have returned home.

"All plays are scripted with the active participation of the local people who suggest the theme and even help in writing," says Rakesh Sharma of Jan Natya Manch (People's Theatre Group), one of the troupes active in the literacy crusade.

India's literacy campaign is run mainly by volunteers. In New Delhi, 6,000 volunteers —



many of them schoolchildren and housewives — have been enrolled to teach 60,000 adults to read, write and do simple arithmetic.

The Ambedkar Nagar campaign is the first planned by the Delhi Saksharta Samiti (Delhi Literacy Committee or DSS) to make the Indian capital fully literate by end-1994. Roughly 2.5 million in this megalopolis of over nine million people are illiterate.

The groundwork has been laid. Since last September, the DSS, an umbrella organisation of 10 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has organised literacy marches, meetings and show to make people aware of the importance of learning.

Classes will start from February. Ashok Kumar and Sanjeev, both 18-year-old residents of Ambedkar Nagar, are among the band of keen volunteer teachers who are presently being trained by DSS.

"We will teach them before we go to school ourselves in the afternoon," says Sanjeev. "We do not think that teaching older people will be difficult," he adds.

The DSS campaign is supervised by India's five-year-old National Literacy Mission. NGOs have launched similar crusades in 65 Indian districts.

In April 1991, Kerala in southern India became India's first fully literate state. The

Education

and Afghanistan.

The campaign in the Indian capital is still unfolding. The DSS' one-room office in Ambedkar Nagar buzzes with activity as the literacy committee and volunteers plan the day's schedule.

Before literacy classes can begin, 500 teacher trainers will teach volunteers how to handle adult learners. Three hundred teacher instructors, mostly volunteers from the neighbourhood, have already been taught by some 50 master trainers.

Nineteen-year-old Rekha who did not go to university after high school, was trained for six days to become a teacher trainer. The prospect of teaching is exciting for the young girl.

According to those involved in the literacy campaign, there is a lot of interest in the campaign in Ambedkar Nagar. "When we were contacting volunteers many illiterates came to us wanting to be taught," says Harish Kumar, a master trainer.

But the urge to learn is new. DSS volunteers say sceptical residents had initially slammed doors in their faces when the campaign was first broadcast.

"We spent several days roaming the streets and lanes and holding public meetings before people agreed to support us," says Vijaya Bharatiya of the Ambedkar Nagar literacy committee.

In the beginning, many parents were also opposed to their school-age children acting in street plays and volunteers had to visit homes to convince them, the organisers say.

According to DSS, the campaign will be launched in two phases. It said 30,000 illiterates will be targeted at one time. Each person will be exposed to a minimum of 180 hours of instruction over a six to eight-month period. A second round of marches, rallies and plays will be held in April.

A post-literacy campaign next year will help to prevent the neo-literates lapsing back to illiteracy. The master trainers, 25 of whom are residents of Ambedkar Nagar, are also responsible for the follow-up programme.

The campaign has already had some positive spin-offs. Many young addicts have been able to give up drugs and get involved in the literacy mission in Ambedkar Nagar, volunteers say.

— IPS

Should We Have Sex Education?

When your son or nephew or teen-aged student asks you the difference between transvestite, transsexual and a drag queen, or queries about how is one to differentiate between a gay, lesbian or bisexual, ought one to keep mum? They will continue to pester you about details of exhibitionism, AIDS, sadomasochism, masturbation, pornography and voyeurism. Adolescent boys and girls get to know about sex in one form or the other. This is often in a twisted and perverted form through distorted information given to them by their older cousins, servants, smuggled pornographic books, and whispered secrets behind the desks in the class-rooms.

Since the teenagers will one day learn about the fundamentals of what is sex, its use and misuse, one wonders if it is not wise to advise parents and teachers to guide the young men and women in the right direction instead of making it a taboo. The question then arises as to how and when the explanations and discussions of sex education must take place. Is it necessary at the moment or is society not prepared for it? Do we need this revolutionary change in our education system?

"There are many cases when the young wives panic when the husbands come near them. The young, inexperienced women are naive while the men are crude and bumbling in their approach." Many such cases occur but people do not wish to report it," says Dr A K M Qamruzzaman of the Dhaka Medical College. All this is due to lack of sex education, the doctor explained. There are situations, he added, where the new bride is beaten up by her parents because she fails to compromise with her newly acquired husband. While the young woman is frightened, the young man may be rough merely because of their ignorance, the psychiatrist stressed.

Dr. Qamruzzaman also cites examples of pre-marital relationship, which are on the increase, he informs, in our urban set-ups. He said, "a good majority of my patients have had such sexual relations and often the young woman is an ignorant participant." The young woman, he believed, should know about the danger involved in sex, particularly in

our society, where an illegitimate child is an outcast. There are unwanted pregnancies and the young women would only be helped if they had proper sex education, Dr. Qamruzzaman elaborated.

He suggested that a senior teacher who has a background of Biology should deal with this and there should be a female counterpart to help girls in high schools, colleges and universities to overcome their curiosity and interest in sexual matters. Teenagers normally do discuss sex among themselves and if a proper guidance is given to them they will be helped rather than hindered. "Normally, he continued, "it is the duty of the parents to explain it to the sons and daughters but they put it off. They do not mean to shrug it off but they are shy and find it difficult to communicate." Similarly, he added parents find it difficult to decide exactly what to say and postpone performing their responsibilities. They keep hoping that they will learn from other young ones. "It is preferable that the parents should instruct themselves or the information can be distorted," Dr. Qamruzzaman added.

Mrs Nafis Ahmed, a headmistress for 25 years, believed that sex education must necessarily be there, and that it should come early because in the warm tropical countries, children reach puberty early. Mrs. Ahmed insisted that it must not be a taboo, and the girls must be made to feel that it is a natural phenomenon and that it is nothing to be ashamed of. "They should be given examples from Nature," she added. "It is the duty of the parents to explain all this at home or at school and I remain confused," Mrs. Ahmed explained.

"In Bangladesh," she continued, "young women pick up information from here and there but the young men often remain partially ignorant. The father refuses to talk to the sons about reproduction. The approach has to be well thought out so that there is no aversion or over-excitement or even undue tension. Sex education is necessary at the villages too and specially in adult education classes," she added. "If people cannot read, they

should be given oral instructions," she pointed out. "There should be male teachers for boys and a lady for the girls otherwise there would be too much of shyness and embarrassment and no proper feed back," she commented.

Jahanara Imam, a writer with 20 years of experience said, "There must be some sex education or the students will learn surreptitiously from older cousin, servants and friends, in which case, the information is often confused and which leads to complication in adult life. How to teach this sensitive topic is difficult," she commented. She gave her

own experience with her two sons. When they were around 13, she and her husband picked up some books on sex education from the libraries and book shops. The children were told that if they had any questions they could ask them freely. She believed that the answers to the questions on sex education should be in books in the school libraries. "I know teachers will be embarrassed at first but educationists should agree to teach it at the school level. The instructions should necessarily gradually be in the curriculum, as it is in the west," she believed.

Sikandar Hayat, a sports coach, suggested that we should make films on sex education to suit our society which will be more conservative than the Western stereotyped productions. He said, "I never got any guidance myself at home or at school and I think proper instructions are necessary for adolescents. The main problem is that we are unsure and shy about such matters in our society."

It is not everyone, however, who advocates sex education at an early level. While they affirm the fact that parents are responsible for the guidance in this direction at home, they fear the reactions of our conservative society to this new step in education.

Professor Rafiqul Islam of

the Department of Bangla, Dhaka University believed, "Our society is a puritanic Wahabi Muslim one. Among the middle class sex is a taboo. It is there in some of the books of religious instructions but it exists in a crude form. The government move to family planning brings in sex education in a very indirect form when young people are told that large families are undesirable. Thus we have the oblique sex reference. Ours is a feudal society in which sex is an obsession but outwardly we hide it." He believed that even if one took up the matter of sex education, one could not make a society as yet is not prepared for formal sex education. "We are like an ostrich in a storm," he commented. If taught in the village, he said the society might react violently and this might prevent the students from coming to study altogether. "When, where and why to introduce this particular education should be carefully thought out. Sex is a touchy area," he explained. "Nobody wants to talk about it. There is more to sex than the biological part. The psychological and emotional part should also be explained. He felt that if the parents were liberal minded, many of the problems would be removed.

Yasmine Morshed, Headmistress of a tutorial warned, "The subject of sex is going to degenerate from something serious to something to giggle about. I would be thoroughly embarrassed if I had to discuss it in class. I don't think that the traumas arising from the first realisation of sex will disappear at the giving of formal lectures."

She said that ours was not a permissive society where the fear of having illegitimate children is frequent". She added, however, that when her own children at home asked questions on sex, she answered them frankly and freely.

Sex-education should come first at home and then in schools, was her belief. She confessed that she had never discussed it with her mother as a teenager, but learnt it from friends her own age.

The conclusion that is apparent from the interviews with educationists and psychiatrists, who have years of experience in dealing with growing teenagers is that there is a need for sex-education — even if this is limited to the parents. The parents should necessarily be friends and guides in such matters or the adolescents can end up with traumatic experiences. It is incorrect for parents to hope that somehow the child will learn from somewhere else, as the information may be lopsided and imbalanced. Sex education should be there simply to answer questions, but not to develop an unhealthy obsession.

Dr. Nazimuddin Chowdhury of the IPOMC said