

The Proclamation of Independence

(17 April 1971)

WHEREAS free elections were held in Bangladesh on 7th December 1970 to 17th January, 1971, to elect representative for the purpose of framing a Constitution,

AND

WHEREAS at these elections the people of Bangladesh elected 167 out of 169 representatives belonging to the Awami League,

AND

WHEREAS General Yahya Khan summoned the elected representatives of the people to meet on the 3rd March 1971, for the purpose of framing a constitution,

AND

WHEREAS the Assembly so summoned was arbitrarily and illegally postponed for indefinite period,

AND

WHEREAS instead of fulfilling their promise and while still conferring with the representatives of the people of Bangladesh, Pakistan authorities declared an unjust and treacherous war,

AND

WHEREAS in the facts and circumstances of such treacherous conduct Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of 75 million people of Bangladesh, in due fulfillment of the legitimate right of self-determination of the people of Bangladesh, duly made a declaration of Independence at Dacca on March 26, 1971, and urged the people of Bangladesh to defend the honour and integrity of Bangladesh,

AND

WHEREAS in the conduct of a ruthless and savage war the Pakistani authorities committed and are still continuously committing numerous acts of genocide and unprecedented tortures amongst others on the civilian and unarmed people of Bangladesh,

AND

WHEREAS the Pakistan

Government by levying an unjust war and committing genocide and by other repressive measures made it impossible for the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh to meet and frame a Constitution, and give to themselves a Government.

AND

WHEREAS the people of Bangladesh by their heroism, bravery and revolutionary fervour have established effective control over the territories of Bangladesh,

We, the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh, as honour bound by the mandate given to us by the people of Bangladesh whose will is supreme, duly constituted ourselves into a Constituent Assembly, and

having held mutual consultations, and in order to ensure for the people of Bangladesh equality, human dignity and social justice,

declare and constitute Bangladesh to be a sovereign People's Republic and thereby confirm the declaration of Independence already made by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and

do hereby affirm and resolve that till such time as a Constitution is framed, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman shall be the President of the Republic and that Syed Nazrul Islam shall be the Vice-President of the Republic,

that the President shall be the Supreme Commander of all the Armed Forces of the Republic,

shall exercise all the Executive and Legislative powers of the Republic including the power to grant pardon,

shall have the power to appoint a Prime Minister and such other Ministers as he considers necessary,

shall have the power to levy taxes and expend moneys, shall have the power to summon and adjourn the Constituent Assembly, and

do all other things that may be necessary to give to the people of Bangladesh an orderly and just Government.

We the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh do further resolve that in the event of there being no President or the President being unable to enter upon his office or being unable to exercise his powers due to any reason whatsoever, the Vice-President shall have and exercise all the powers, duties and responsibilities herein conferred on the President.

We further resolve that we undertake to observe and give effect to all duties and obligations that devolve upon us as a member of the family of nations and to abide by the Charter of the United Nations.

We further resolve that this Proclamation of Independence shall be deemed to have come into effect from 26th day of March, 1971.

We further resolve that in order to give effect to this instrument we appoint Prof. Yusuf Ali our duly constituted Potentiary and to give to the President and the Vice-President oaths of office.

Prof. Yusuf Ali
Duly Constituted Potentiary

By and under the authority of the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh.

(The final decision for the formation of the provisional Government of Bangladesh was taken on April 10, 1971 and the formal declaration was made in a public ceremony on April 17, 1971)



Mujibnagar Shaped Rainbow Dreams

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tics where poetry needed to arm itself with the spirit of militancy. The militancy is what Mujibnagar is all about today.

In the annals of history, the story of Bangladesh will forever be one of glory brought to its people by the men who achieved the impossible through the war they waged once 17 April came to pass. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation committed to politics of the constitutional order, found himself once more in the captivity of men who had never felt comfortable or easy in his presence. His task was to inform the rest of the world that his people were free. He made that message percolate down to all Bengali hamlets and towns even as the soldiers came looking for him. His call for freedom, in the deep hour that brought 26 March into the consciousness, was heard --- and passed on. In April, it was that call which reinforced the flagging spirits of a people surviving through the terror unleashed by strange men defined by stranger attitude. For Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansoor Ali and A.H.M. Kamruzzaman, there were too many forks in the road. They simply took the one that was without ambiguity. They opted for a war of liberation.

The story of the weeks and months after 17 April and till 16 December remain verily and enumeration of deeds of heroic proportions. Here was a free Bengali government for the first time in history (the Sirajuddaulah experiment was quite a different proposition in a different context in time), about to be conducted by politicians most of whom had never before been privy to the art of governance. These were men who had dreamed in grand manner. Back in 1965, in the moonlit isolation of the river Buriganga, Mujib and Tajuddin and Syed Nazrul Islam and all

the other good men deliberated on the modalities that would free Bengalis of subjugation. Their plan was solidly defined, aptly formulated. They had won elections on the strength of that plan, had attempted negotiating with their adversaries on that basis, and were now engaged, suddenly as it were, into abandoning it for what in good time should have been the ultimate aim, freedom. Tajuddin Ahmed, certainly one of the brilliant men to give character to the Awami League even as Bangabandhu gave outline and voice to the spirit of Bengali nationalism was under no illusions. A government was called for. His enthusiasm was shared in equal measure by his colleagues. Nazrul Islam, the decent, soft-spoken man steeled in the art of politics, substituted for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his capacity as Acting President of the republic. With Tajuddin Ahmed as Prime Minister, with Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman as important linchpins in the Bengali administration, it was obvious that the Bengali nation was serious about itself and about its aspirations.

Observe the triumphs and the ordeals of the Mujibnagar government. It was a body of constitutionally-oriented politicians suddenly thrust into the job of waging war against a powerful, armed-to-the-teeth military. That was the ordeal. But if it was that, there was also the sheer magic that came of organising the freedom fighters throughout the avuncular presence of Ataul Gani Osman. There were the military zones, or sectors, to be delineated. And it was done, through amazing bravado which quickly gave way to sound strategy. In the nine months of the war, the Mujibnagar government galvanised the young and old and almost everybody it could come by into beeping up the Mukti Bahini. Villages soon emptied of the

young. Everyone, including the Pakistanis, knew where the flute-playing, poetry-spewing children had gone. In the villages were the parents and the children too young to walk away to war. The occupiers, true to historical tradition, vented their indignation through torching the villages. Or making holes in Bengali hearts per courtesy of the bullet. The numbers in the Mukti Bahini kept going up.

The Mujibnagar administration put the necessary elements of a functional government in order by utilising the services of the civilian officers who regularly found their way to the offices where Tajuddin and Nazrul and their colleagues worked. It was this civilian structure that produced the rudiments of a civil service and produced the tentative foundations of a workable system. In time, the administration was to branch out into wider areas. Bengali diplomats, most in their youth, walked away from their Pakistani superiors and simply told the world that they were battling Pakistan in the interest of Bangladesh. All of them came to Mujibnagar, or embraced its principle... that happiness for a Bengali lay in the formation of a state, de facto as well as de jure. It was a principle given new spark by the moral force exemplified by Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. As the leading lights of Bengali society fanned out, to disseminate the message that freedom was of the essence in occupied Bangladesh, the propaganda machine worked the livelong day to tell a trapped nation, within the parameters of a suffering country as well as beyond them, that liberty was on its way. That was the energy working away among the artists and the government officials and all the humble people who together came to personify the Swadhin Bangla Better (Free Bengal Radio). In the gloom of the villages, spirits soared as the songs floated all the way from

Mujibnagar. Men and women traced their destiny in the silent light of the stars.

In the rain-soaked, sorrow-dripping camps teeming with the millions of refugees fleeing from the terror of the occupation army in Bangladesh, the men who spoke for the Mujibnagar government went about spreading hope, sharing courage and building dreams of the rainbow in a land of liberty and poetry. The dream endures. It crosses the barriers of class, leaps across the fences of partisan politics. It is a dream that speaks of the inclusivity of all citizens of Bangladesh in the great enterprise of modern statehood. It speaks of opportunities for all. This dream was, and is, about the majesty of the people, and of their ambitions for themselves and their country.

Mujibnagar Day : Historic Foreground

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during the War of Liberation to facilitate the leaders and the commanders of the War of Liberation dispense their duty in safety in the face of attack of the occupation army in March.

Scores of foreign journalists, being driven out from Dhaka took shelter in Calcutta to send every day despatch on 'Muktijuddya'. They along with the local journalists of Calcutta had been advised on the night of 16th April to be at the Press Club (Calcutta) in following morning and said with utmost brevity that there could be a news of very importance and they would be taken to an important spot.

Hundreds of journalists, foreign and local, were accordingly assembled at the Calcutta Press Club in the next morning. They were taken towards Indo-Bangladesh border with giving no hint where they were heading to. Nobody knew about the destination. They, in the course of the journey along zigzag, broken and unpaved roads Indian army and Border Security Force deployed here and there and a few groups of the freedom fighters. They reached Vaidyanathala before the day reached the noon and saw a rostrum erected in

the shades of mango-orchard. Keeping that in front, freedom fighters in hundreds and freedom loving villagers in thousands were standing. With the arrival they came to know that a new nation was to be born in the World and they would be the witness of the historic event.

The first government of the 'Swadhin Bangladesh' was formed with the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the apex as the President and in his absence Syed Nazrul Islam as the Vice-President. The government took the oath and the historic paper of declaration of independence was distributed.

The day which is to be written in the satin our history with golden letters along with the 7th March—the day of the historic address of the Bangabandhu, the 26th March—the Independence Day and the 16th December—the Victory Day in the 17th April—the Mujibnagar Day.

This historic day and the Mujibnagar had been ignored for twenty years as past of the playful distortion of the history of the country. There had been an evil design to cover one of the glorious chapters of the war of liberation with a

dark curtain and put that in the oblivion. The Mujibnagar Day was ignored in the days of Zia, Ershad and Khaleda Zia after 1975. The day was given no significance during the office of their tenure by Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television. There had been a ploy to erase the milestone-day from the memory of the newer generation.

On the 17th April, 1992 when Khaleda Zia was in the office, Betar and Television gave wide coverage to the red carpet reception of the Pakistan army-chief.

The present government has taken steps to re-establish the glory of Mujibnagar. Prime Minister and the daughter of the Father of the Nation Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation of Mujibnagar Complex last year. It is now time to be omniscient, against the enemies of our independence and the Mujibnagar day is, in the fitness of things the right day to be pledge-bound to resist them. This is the call of the hour that all liberation quarters join hands and stand unitedly and take concerted steps against the anti-liberation and communal forces are busy in acts of conspiracy against the government

ected through free and fair election. We must not forget that they are out to destroy the economy of the country through creating anarchy, making the Parliament non-functioning, deteriorating law and order situation and calling frequent hartals for non reasons. They are there to grab the power with directives and assistance of their masters abroad to destroy Bengali nationalism and the spirit of the War of Liberation once for all.

We have to take lessons from the tragedy of 1975 which was a culmination of multi-pronged limitations, failure in assessing reality and lack of awareness on some counts. We have to take all out preparation to foil the designs of the enemies.

The declaration-paper of independence from Mujibnagar speaks of the commitment of the overall emancipation of the freedom loving people of the country. This commitment is to be fulfilled by the democratic government elected by the people. Resistance will there be, also be ploys and evil designs—but facing this odds and taking the realities into account we have to march forward.

[Translated by Ranjit Biswas]

Mujibnagar Day : A Landmark in War of Liberation

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of complacency had proved short lived. Inspired by Bangabandhu's last message to rise up against the invading Pakistani soldiers the freedom fighters dispersed only to rally again under the leadership of the provisional Bangladesh government, popularly known as Mujibnagar government.

This is where lies the significance of the day. Bangabandhu went to the jail in the then—West Pakistan with a conviction that his Party Awami League as well as his followers were strong enough to lead the War of Liberation. The launching of the provisional government, which later went in exile, proved Bangabandhu's trust on his party and the nation correct. The provisional government led by a war cabinet did every thing that was to be done to win the war against the Pakistani military.

It quickly raised an army, divided the country into war zones, arranged training of the freedom fighters and mobilised international support for the cause of independence. The launching of the war cabinet shortly after the March 25 crackdown demonstrated the fact that Bangabandhu was prepared for the War of Liberation even though he held negotiations with the Pakistani military rulers for a peaceful solution to the crisis until the last moment. He was prepared because he could foresee the moves that the Pakistani rulers were going to make. The great leader had his independence message ready and after his arrest his men had ensured that his call for the War of Liberation was broadcast from Chittagong Radio Station.

Successive rulers after the Aug. 15, 1975 assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, ignored the history that was written at Mujibnagar, a tiny area dotted with mango trees. Those now. Awami League governments had always feared the history of our War of Liberation that is synonymous with Bangabandhu. Their ignorance about the events at Mujibnagar on 17 April, three days after the Bengali New Year Pahela Baishak, was deliberate. To return to Mujibnagar had meant a return to the history that they had tried their best to erase from the nation's memory. It was a heinous attempt. In doing so they had tainted the history with lies and confused the post-independence generations. They had succeeded only briefly. The truth began to unfold once again after the Awami League led by Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina returned to power after 21 years, a

period distortion and deprivation that the nation was forced to endure.

The honour that was snatched away from Mujibnagar has now been returned to an area, which despite its small size, is a great landmark in the history of our Liberation War. In observing the Mujibnagar Day last year Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited the historical site to break grounds for a project that will restore its lost historical significance and guide the people to learn the real history of the nation and work for realizing Bangabandhu's dream of building Sonar Bangla, a nation of prosperity.

The work on the project that includes a monument and War of Liberation museum is under way. Thousands people from across Bangladesh pour into Mujibnagar to pay tributes to those who had led them to independence.

That 17th day of April 1971

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up against the Pakistani marauding forces has created such an instance in history that this unprecedented struggle will forever remain a source of inspiration for the freedom-loving people of the World. The history of our Liberation War has been enriched by our day to day struggle and has raised our prestige in the world community". He further said, "We have a firm belief that our war will not be a prolonged one; because our strength is increasing everyday and our struggle is being increasingly recognised by the world community." During this speech, he announced the names of the sector commanders entrusted with directing the war-efforts in different sectors. He in-

formed, "the headquarters of our Independent Bangladesh has been set up in the liberated areas of the South-West."

The 6-member council of ministers was formed on 13th April. Later, they were allocated ministries. On 14th April, it was announced that Colonel MAG Osmany had been appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the Liberation forces; the regional commanders in the armed forces were Major Khaled Mosharraf (Sylhet-Comilla), Major Ziaur Rahman (Chittagong-Noakhali), Major KM Shafiullah (Mymensingh-Tangail) and Major MA Osman Chowdhury (South-West region). Later, many changes were brought about in the hierarchy of

the armed forces.

The need for an oath-taking ceremony arose after the formation of the cabinet. Much of Meherpur under Kushtia district was then free from the clutches of the invaders at that time.

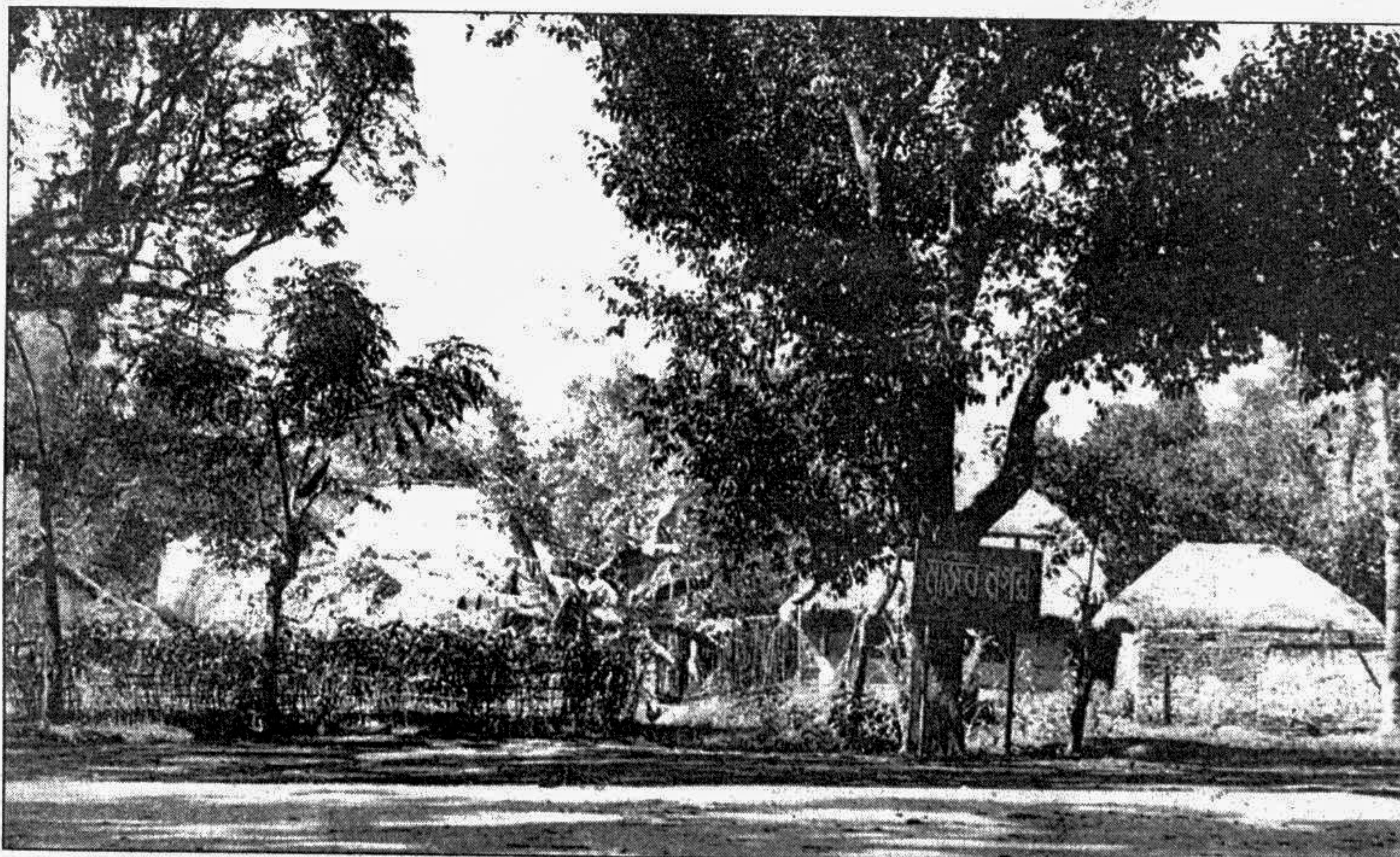
On 17th April 1971, the first cabinet of the People's Republic of Bangladesh took oath at Baidyanathala of Meherpur. Baidyanathala was renamed Mujibnagar. At the oath-taking ceremony, Professor Yusuf Ali read out the proclamation of Independence of 10th April. The Sub-divisional Police Officer Mahbubuddin (later Bir Bikram) led the guard of honour. The ceremony was held in presence of many foreign journalists and inquisitive

people. The gathering was addressed by the Acting President and the Prime Minister. In case the Pakistanis came to know about the programme there was a possibility of an air raid; the ceremony was thus brief, after which everybody returned to Calcutta. In fact, although free from enemy-occupation at that time, it was clear then, that Mujibnagar could not be kept free for long; Mujibnagar and the whole of Bangladesh had to be liberated anew through the war.

A statement was issued on behalf of Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed on 17th April aimed at the world-community. It said: 'Pakistan is now dead, buried under a mountain of corpses.' Appealing for recognising and helping Bangladesh, it said: 'No other nation has more right to get recognition; no other community had waged such painstaking struggle for their right.'

We have been observing this historic and memorable day of 17th April as the Mujibnagar Day. The oath-taking ceremony of the cabinet at Mujibnagar was brief, but its significance was far-reaching. This day reminds us that the people of Bangladesh did not breakdown in the face of a catastrophe and remained firm in their resolve to liberate the country while facing all odds. The government which was formed on the day was neither an interim government, nor a government-in-exile; although run from another country, it was the first government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. This day is reminiscent of our many sorrows and innumerable glories.

[Translated by Helal Uddin Ahmed]



Mujibnagar of 1971.