

Two Most Important Pe

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman



We salute Bangabandhu for leading us to freedom and spearheading the movement that brought us independence and the sovereign state of Bangladesh. Looking at the past we judge Bangabandhu's contribution to be the most significant in terms of giving us the greatest source of pride and self-confidence that comes to a nation when it earns its freedom through an armed struggle. It is our judgement that without his leadership role both our freedom and independence would not have come at the time that they did. We judge him to have had the greatest impact in shaping our immediate past. If freedom gives a nation the best chance to nurture and develop its creativity, and if an independent state is the best guarantor of that freedom, then Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's contribution is by far the greatest in giving us a chance to live and grow in creativity and dignity.

—Editor

SHEIKH Mujib was two months short of his 51st birthday when a delirious nation welcomed him on the 10th January of 1971 on the independent soil of Bangladesh. How could one so young have earned so much trust, respect and, most importantly, love from such a large number of ordinary people? Well, it was a tribute that Bangabandhu was receiving for a lifetime of service to his people.

If one looks at Mujib's life it becomes very clear that there was no thought in his mind, no dream in him except to struggle for the rights of the people of what later became Bangladesh. Starting from the early days of our Language Movement in 1948 up to our Liberation War, there is not a single instance of mass movement or democratic

struggle of our people in which Bangabandhu was not present either as an active organiser or as its leader.

What marked his emergence in our politics was his bold articulation of the political and economic demands of our people against the designs of our Pakistani rulers. From the very early days Bangabandhu distinguished himself for his courage. He would say things, do things and lead the people into situations where others would dare not enter.

Bangabandhu helped us overcome our sense of helplessness and gave us that critical strength to stand up against the Pakistani oppressors, especially its formidable army. There was an electrifying presence about his personality that had the capacity to infect ev-

eryone and enthuse the masses to follow him. What made the people trust him so much was the singularity of his vision and the sincerity of his purpose. He had an unmatched ability to sense what the people wanted and amazing capacity to articulate those in a manner that would have the greatest mass appeal. His most famous six-point programme was as simple as it was powerful, once uniting the people behind a vision that was to lead us to the independence struggle.

Proclamation of his six-point programme and the mass movement that followed, becoming falsely accused in the Agartala Conspiracy case, and the 11-point movement of the students and workers made Sheikh Mujib the unquestioned leader of our masses and helped to unite the people behind a

single leadership. The 1970 elections, in which he got more than 95 per cent votes from the eastern wing of Pakistan, gave the final seal to Mujib becoming the sole representative of our people, and its most authentic voice.

In our view Bangabandhu's speech on the 7th of March 1971 can be rated among the greatest in terms of political oratory. It contained a clear articulation of the aspirations of our people, a direction of steps needed to be taken in the immediate and remote future and had a magically enthralling effect on the people in general. From that day onwards, Pakistan lay virtually dead. It was only a matter of time for us to physically assert our independence. Morally and psychologically our battle

was won.

Bangabandhu's greatest strength in time became his greatest weakness - his tremendous mass popularity. What was an asset as a leader of the masses was not necessarily so as an administrator. And he took too long to understand it. Here lay his fatal flaw. He did not fully understand that the magic he showed and had got used to throughout his extremely successful political life was not to produce the same results in running the country.

However we salute him not for how he ran the country but that he led us in getting one. Bangabandhu's contribution had the greatest impact on our lives in terms of getting us where we are today - proud citizens of a free and independent country.

Highlights of an eventful life

Born on March 17, 1920 in a respectable Muslim family of Tungipara, a village in the then Gopalganj sub-division of Faridpur. His parents - Sheikh Lutfar Rahman and Saira Begum - fondly called their third child among four daughters and two sons Khoka.

1927 Starts schooling at Gmadanga Primary School, moves on to Gopalganj Public School two years later before being transferred to a local missionary school.

1934 Serious eye ailment forces a break of study. For treatment of goes to Calcutta with his father and has one of his eyes successfully operated upon.

1937 Returns to school after a four-year break.

1938 Marries Begum Fazilatunnesa; blessed with three sons - Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel - and two daughters - Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana.

1939 Leads a group of students at the Gopalganj missionary school, demanding that the cracked roof of the school be repaired during Chief Minister of undivided Bengal Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq's visit to the school along with Hussein Shahid Suhrawardy, who later becomes the chief minister of Bengal and eventually the prime minister of Pakistan.

1940 Joins the Nikhil Bharat Muslim Chhatra Federation (All-India Muslim Students Front); elected to a one-year term.

1942 Passes the Entrance (currently Secondary School Certificate) Examinations; admits admission as an intermediate student in the humanities group of Calcutta Islamia College; gets actively involved in the movement for creation of Pakistan.

1943 Gets elected as a councillor of the Muslim League.

1944 Takes part in the conference of the All-Bengal Muslim Students League held in Kushtia and plays a key role; elected as secretary of the Faridpur District Association, a Calcutta-based organisation of the residents of Faridpur.

1946 Elected general secretary of Islamia College Students Union.

1947 Obtains Bachelor of Arts degree from Islamia College under Calcutta University; plays a pioneering role in protecting Muslims and trying to quell the violence during the communal riots in the wake of the partition of India and the birth of Pakistan.

1948 Takes admission in the Law Department of Dhaka University; joins the Muslim Students League on January 4; plunges into hectic activities to build a strong movement against the heinous design to make Urdu the only state language of Pakistan; establishes contacts with students and political leaders; his resolution for an All-Party State Language Action wins approval at a meeting of the workers different political parties at Fazlul Huq Hall on March 2; arrested on March 11 along with some co-workers while demonstrating in front of the Secretariat against the conspiracy of the Muslim League government and later released on March 15; calls for a countrywide student strike on March 17 after the po-

lice swoop on an All-Party State Language Action Council rally at Dhaka University Bat-Taly on March 16; leads a movement in support of the Dhaka University Class Four employees struggling for redressal to the injustice done to them by their employers May 19; arrested once again on September 11.

1949 Released from jail on 21 January; extends his support to a strike called by the Class Four employees of Dhaka University to press home their demands and fined by the university authorities; arrested again for staging a sit-in strike in front of the vice-chancellor's residence; elected joint secretary of Awami Muslim League, formed on June 23, despite his incarceration; released at the end of the month; begins organising agitation programme against prevailing food crisis; detained for violating Section 144 and later freed; raises demand for Chief Minister Nurul Amin's resignation in October and once again arrested along with Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani.

1950 Arrested on January 1 while leading an anti-famine procession in Dhaka on the occasion of Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan's visit to the province and jailed for two years.

1952 Goes on hunger strike for 17 consecutive days in protest of firing on and killing of students on February 21; moved to Faridpur jail from Dhaka jail; released on February 26.

1953 Elected general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami League at its council session.

1954 Sweeps the Gopalganj constituency in the general elections, beating Muslim League candidate Wahiduzzaman by a margin of 13,000 votes; made minister of forest and agriculture of new provincial government; arrested again after the central government arbitrarily suspends the United Front Cabinet.

1955 Elected a member of the legislative assembly. The Awami League puts forth a 21-point programme demanding autonomy for East Pakistan; on June 23 the Working Council of the Awami League decides that its members would resign from the legislative assembly if autonomy was not granted to East Pakistan; on October 21 the party dropped the word Muslim from its name at a special council of the Bangladesh Awami Muslim League, making the party a truly modern and secular one; Bangabandhu was re-elected general secretary of the party.

1956 Moves a resolution opposing representation of army in the administration; joins the coalition government, assuming the charge of Industries, Commerce, Labour, Anti-Corruption and Village Aid Ministry.

1957 Resigns from the cabinet in response to a resolution of the party to strengthen the organisation by working for it full-time; goes on an official tour of China and the Soviet Union.

1958 Arrested four after President Major General Iskander Mirza and the chief of Army General Ayub Khan im-

pose and bans politics; freed after 14 months in jail only to be arrested again from the gate.

1961 Released from jail after he winning a writ petition in the High Court; starts underground political activities against the martial law regime and dictator Ayub Khan; sets up an underground organisation called *Swadhin Bangla Biplabi Parishad* or Independent Bangla Revolutionary Council, comprising outstanding student leaders in order to work for the independence of Bangladesh.

1962 Arrested under the Public Security Act on February 6; freed on June 18 following the withdrawal of the four-year-long martial law on June 2; joins other national leaders to protest the measures introduced by Ayub Khan; goes to Lahore and join forces with Shaheed Suhrawardy to form the National Democratic Front, an alliance of the opposition parties.

1963 Goes to London for consultations with Suhrawardy, who was there for medical treatment.

1964 Leads a committee to resist communal riots; takes initiative to start a vigorous anti-Ayub movement after the arrest; arrested 14 days before the presidential election.

1965 Charged with sedition and making objectionable statements; sentenced to one-year jail term to be later released on an order of the High Court.

1966 Places his historic six-point demand at the national conference of the opposition parties in Lahore; elected president of the Awami League; tours the entire country to gather support for the six-point demand; arrested eight times in the first three months of the year; on May 8, arrested again during his speech at a rally of jute mill workers in Narayanganj.

1968 Charged in the infamous Agartala conspiracy case along with 34 Bengalee military and CSP officers; named accused number one in the case that charged the arrested persons with conspiring to bring about the secession of East Pakistan from the rest of Pakistan; trial begins on June 19 inside Dhaka Cantonment amidst tight security.

1969 The Central Students Action Council formed on January 5 to press for the acceptance of the 11-point demand that included the six-point demand of Bangabandhu. The council initiates a countrywide student agitation to force the government to withdraw the Agartala conspiracy case and release Bangabandhu. The agitation gradually developed into a mass movement. After months of protests, violations of Section 144 and curfews, firing by the police and the EPR and a number of casualties, the movement peaks into an unprecedented mass upsurge that forces Ayub Khan to convene a round-table conference of political leaders and announce Bangabandhu's release on parole. Bangabandhu turns down the offer of release on parole. On 22 February, the central government bowed to the continued mass protests and freed Bangabandhu and the other co-accused. The conspiracy case was withdrawn. The Central Student Action Council arranged a reception in honour of

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 23 February at the Race Course (Suhrawardy Uddyan). At this meeting of one million people, Mujib was publicly acclaimed as Bangabandhu (Friend of Bengal). In his speech on the occasion, Bangabandhu pledged his total support to the 11-point demand of the student.

On 26 February, Bangabandhu joined the round-table conference called by Ayub Khan in Rawalpindi. At the conference Bangabandhu placed the 6-point demand of his party and the 11-point demand of the students and said: "To end the people's anger there is no alternative to the acceptance of the 6-point and 11-point demand and the granting of regional autonomy."

When the Pakistani politicians and rulers rejected his demand he left the conference on 13 March. The next day he returned to Dhaka. On 25 March, Gen. Yahya Khan seized power and imposed martial law. On 25 October, Bangabandhu went to London on a three-week organisational tour.

On 5 December, Bangabandhu declared at a discussion meeting held to observe the death anniversary of Shaheed Suhrawardy that henceforth East Pakistan would be called Bangladesh. He added: "There was a time when all efforts were made to erase the word 'Bangla' from this land and its map. The existence of the word 'Bangla' was found nowhere except in the term Bay of Bengal. In the name of Pakistan announce today that this land will be called 'Bangladesh' instead of 'East Pakistan'."

1970 Bangabandhu was re-elected president of the Awami League on 6 January. The Awami League at a meeting of the working committee on 1 April decided to take part in the general elections scheduled for later that year. On 7 June, Bangabandhu addressed a public meeting at the Race Course ground and urged the people to elect his party on the issue of the 6-point demand. On 17 October, Bangabandhu selected the boat as his party's election symbol and launched his campaign in the form of a boat rally at Dhaka's Dholai Khal. On 28 October, he addressed the nation over radio and television and called upon the people to elect his party's candidates to implement the 6-point demand. When a mighty cyclonic storm hit the coastal belt of Bangladesh, killing at least one million people, Bangabandhu suspended his election campaign and rushed to the aid of the helpless people in the affected areas. He strongly condemned the Pakistani rulers' indifference to the cyclone victims and protested against it.

He called on the international community to help the people affected by the cyclone. In the general elections held on 7 December, the Awami League gained an absolute majority. The Awami League secured 167 out of 169 National Assembly seats in then East Pakistan and gained 305 out of 310 seats in the Provincial Assembly.

1971 On 3 January, Bangabandhu conducted the oath of the people's elected representatives at a meeting at the Race Course ground. The Awami League members took the oath to frame a constitution on the

basis of the 6-point demand and pledged to remain loyal to the people who had elected them. On 5 January, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the leader of the majority party, the People's Party, in the then West Pakistan, announced his readiness to form a coalition government at the centre with the Awami League. Bangabandhu was chosen as the leader of his party's parliamentary party at a meeting of the National Assembly members elected from his party. On 27 January, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto arrived in Dhaka for talks with Bangabandhu. The talks collapsed after three days of deliberations. In an announcement

on 13 February, president Yahya Khan summoned the National Assembly to convene in Dhaka on 3 March. On 15 February, Bhutto announced that he would boycott the session and demanded that power be handed over to the majority parties in East Pakistan and West Pakistan. In a statement on 16 February, Bangabandhu bitterly criticised the demand of Bhutto and said: "The demand of Bhutto Sahib is totally illogical. Power has to be handed over to the only majority party, the Awami League. The people of East Bengal are now the masters of power."

On 1 March, Yahya Khan abruptly postponed the National Assembly session, prompting a storm of protest and throughout Bangladesh, Bangabandhu called an emergency meeting of the working committee of the Awami League, which called a countrywide hartal for 2 March. After the hartal was successfully observed, Bangabandhu on 3 March called on the President to immediately transfer power to his party.

On 7 March, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addressed a mammoth public rally at the Race Course ground, where he declared: "THE STRUGGLE NOW IS THE STRUGGLE FOR OUR INDEPENDENCE. JOI BANGLA." In this historic speech, Bangabandhu urged the nation to break the shackles of subjugation, and declared: "SINCE WE HAVE GIVEN BLOOD, WE WILL GIVE MORE BLOOD. GOD WILLING, THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY WILL BE LIBERATED ... TURN EVERY HOUSE INTO A FORT. FACE (THE ENEMY) WITH WHATEVER YOU HAVE."

He advised the people to prepare themselves for a guerrilla war against the enemy. He asked the people to start a total non-co-operation movement against the government of Yahya Khan. There were ineffectual orders from Yahya Khan on the one hand, while the nation, on the other hand received directives from Bangabandhu's Road 32-residence. The entire nation carried out Bangabandhu's instructions. Every organisation, including government offices, banks, insurance companies, schools, colleges, mills and factories obeyed Bangabandhu's directives. The response of the people of Bangladesh to Bangabandhu's call was unparalleled in history. It was Bangabandhu

who conducted the administration of an independent Bangladesh from March 7 to March 25.

On 16 March, Yahya Khan came to Dhaka for talks with Bangabandhu on the transfer of power. Bhutto also came a few days later to Dhaka for talks. The Mujib-Yahya-Bhutto talks continued until 24 March. Yahya Khan left Dhaka in the evening of 25 March in secrecy. On the night of 25 March, the Pakistan army cracked down on the innocent unarmed Bangladeshis. They attacked Dhaka University, the Peelkhana Headquarters of the then East Pakistan Rifles and the Rajbarah-Police Headquarters.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman read out a wireless message, moments after the crackdown began, declaring the independence of Bangladesh as 25 March gave way to 26 March. His declaration was transmitted over wireless to the country.

"THIS MAY BE MY LAST MESSAGE FROM TODAY BANGLADESH IS INDEPENDENT. I CALL UPON THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH WHEREVER YOU MIGHT BE AND WITH WHATEVER YOU HAVE, TO RESIST THE ARMY OF OCCUPATION TO THE LAST. YOUR FIGHT MUST GO ON UNTIL THE LAST SOLDIER OF THE PAKISTAN OCCUPATION ARMY IS EXPELLED FROM THE SOIL OF BANGLADESH. FINAL VICTORY IS OURS."

He called upon all sections of people, including Bengalee military and civilian personnel, students, workers and peasants, to join the resistance against the occupation Pakistan army. This message of Bangabandhu was immediately disseminated throughout the country through radio equipment under special arrangements. The same night jawans and officers in Chittagong, Comilla and Jessore cantonments put up resistance to the Pakistan army after receiving this message. Bangabandhu's declaration was broadcast by Chittagong radio station. The Pakistan army arrested Bangabandhu from his Dhamondi residence at 1:10 am and whisked him away to Dhaka Cantonment. On 26 March he was flown to Pakistan as a prisoner. The same day, General Yahya Khan, in a broadcast banned the Awami League and called Bangabandhu a traitor.

On 26 March M A Hannan, an Awami League leader in Chittagong, read out Bangabandhu's declaration of independence over Chittagong radio. On 10 April, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Bangladesh was formed with Bangabandhu as President.

The revolutionary government took the oath of office on 17 April at the Amrakann of Baidyanathalla in Meherpur, which is now known as Mujibnagar. Bangabandhu was elected President, Syed Nazrul Islam acting Prime Minister and Tajuddin Ahmed Prime Minister. The Liberation War ended on 16 December when the Pakistani occupation forces surrendered at the historic Race Course ground accepting defeat in the glorious war led by the revolutionary government in exile. Bangladesh was finally free.

Epitome of independence

Bangabandhu discovered the nation. He built upon the foundations of his elders but the thrust, the originality of his own leadership is beyond dispute, writes

Prof. Zillur Rahman Siddique

My heart is filled with pride when I think of the heroes this much-maligned people of ours have produced during the last two hundred years. I use the word 'hero' in the broadest possible sense. Most of our heroes left their mark in fields other than politics. In the roll call of honour, the political heroes, I fear, will be easily outnumbered by such giants as Raja Ramohan Ray, Vidyasagar and Rabindranath. We need a Carlyle of our own to speak about heroes who lived amongst us.

Carlyle obviously thought that only heroes mattered, a most challenging thought. There are many views of history, and his view is not one of the most acceptable at the moment. It may well appear that as societies get more settled, there is less occasion for a hero to play his role. If we looked at the political sense of the more stable Western nations, we would realise the truth of this. Democracy, like death, is a great leveller. No democratic society would support for long persons as colourful as a Churchill or a Fazlul Huq. Churchill the hero is the product of war. He, with all his heroism, is simply inconceivable either before the war or after. Fazlul Huq's heroism did not wait for a national crisis to assert itself. Destined to lead a people out of hopelessness - the sum total of poverty, ignorance, and a general denial of rights - he assumed the leadership of his people early in his career, and carried the responsibility till the end of his days, which means a span of fifty years or more. Despite everything that might be said against him - his lack of consistency, of philosophy, of organisational skill, his personal weaknesses - there is a greatness of spirit about him and who can deny this? He did not found a party as Suhrawardy did but he founded a people that later became a nation. Parties disintegrate but nations survive.

The last of our heroes, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is closer to Fazlul Huq than to Churchill, though his career offers some resemblance to both. Like Fazlul Huq, he was a sustained leadership and not the gift of a crisis. Like Churchill, he rode the tides of history, and even after conceding the greater merit to events, the man was a match for the events. And this remained true till the moment of liberation.

Sheikh Mujib combined in himself the charisma of Fazlul Huq and the patient political skill of Suhrawardy. He consol-

idated the party and discovered the nation. He built upon the foundations of his elders but the thrust, the originality of his own leadership is beyond dispute. Some of the qualities and advantages his peers possessed he certainly lacked - family, intellectual attainment, for example. He made up these deficiencies by his mettle, the quality supremely needed in the turbulent 'sixties. He gathered around him a band of devotees, willing to lay down their lives for the cause and many did. He was a man of the people, as Bhasani was, and a leader of youth where he resembled Suhrawardy. Unlike political philosophers, Abul Hasnat for example, he lacked in creed but his vision was whole.

Heroes and tragedies go together. Tragedy was perhaps inevitable in this case too, but the form it took will remain an eternal shame to the people. Students of Shakespeare will look for the tragic flaw in Mujib's character. Was he a Timon, a Coriolanus or an Othello? Was he as unsuspecting, as gullible as the great-hearted Moor? I doubt. I cancel out Coriolanus. I cannot call Sheikh Mujib an egotist. That he had a personal flavour remains one of his many endearing points. One has to look for reasons of his steep descent - political descent I mean - one he rose to the pinnacle of power.

What failed him, or who failed him? In Shakespeare's heroes, it is not always the fatal flaw which is within the hero, but also the external forces which work on these flaws. In the case of Sheikh Mujib, the last, perhaps the greatest and certainly the most tragic of our heroes, the tragedy stemmed, perhaps equally from both within and without. The greatness of a tragic hero is hardly diminished on account of the flaws. The flaws explain, however weakly that may be but never justifying, the huge waste, the tragedy of the fall.

There is a time for mourning and a time for exegesis. Apparently, we have already passed from the one to the other. At a further remove from both, there is a time for the poet, for the raw life to be transformed into art, for lived experience to be rounded off into a poetic vision. When the time comes, a great tragic poet may find his hero in Sheikh Mujib. He will have enough material for his work. What I wonder about, is how will he provide the catharsis - "Calm of mind all passion spent?" This will be his supreme challenge.

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