

FOCUS

Tajuddin Addresses the People of the World

BANGLADESH is at war. It has been given no choice but to secure the right of self-determination through a national liberation struggle against the colonial oppression of West Pakistan.

In the face of positive attempts by the government of Pakistan to distort the facts in a desperate attempt to cover up their war of genocide in Bangladesh, the world must be told the circumstances under which the peace-loving people of Bangladesh were driven to substitute armed struggle for parliamentary politics to realize the just aspirations of the people of Bangladesh.

The Six-Point programme for autonomy for Bangladesh within Pakistan had been put forward in all sincerity by the Awami League as the last possible solution to preserve the integrity of Pakistan. Fighting the elections to the National Assembly on the issue of Six-Point, the Awami League won 167 out of 169 seats from Bangladesh in a House of 313. Its electoral victory was so decisive that it won 80 per cent of the popular votes cast. The decisive nature of its victory placed it in a clear majority within the National Assembly.

The post-election period was a time of hope, for never had a people spoken so decisively in the history of parliamentary democracy. It was widely believed in both wings that a viable constitution based on Six-Point could be worked out. The Pakistan People's Party which emerged as the leading party in Sindh and Punjab had avoided raising the issue of Six-Point in their election campaign and had no obligation whatsoever to its electorate to resist it. In Baluchistan, the dominant party, National Awami party, was fully committed to Six-Point. In NWFP, the NAP, dominant in the Provincial Assembly, was also a believer in maximum autonomy. The course of the elections, which marked the defeat of the reactionary parties therefore, gave every reason to be optimistic about the future of democracy in Pakistan.

Preparatory to the convening of the National Assembly talks were expected between the main parties in the political arena. However, whilst the Awami League was always willing, preparatory to going to the Assembly, to explain its constitutional position and to discuss alternative proposals from the other parties, it believed that the spirit of a true democracy demanded that the constitution be debated and finalised in the National Assembly rather than in secret sessions. To this end, it insisted on an 'early summoning' of the National Assembly. In anticipation of this session, the Awami League worked day and night to prepare a draft constitution based on Six-Point and fully examined all the implications of formulating and implementing such a constitution.

The first major talks over Pakistan's political future took place between General Yahya and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in mid-July. In this session General Yahya probed the extent of the Awami League's commitment to its programme and was assured that they were fully aware of its implications. But contrary to expectation Yahya did not spell out his own ideas about the constitution. General Yahya gave the impression of not finding anything seriously objectionable in the Six-Point but emphasised the need for coming to an understanding with the PPP in West Pakistan.

The next round of talks took place between the PPP and the Awami League from 27th January, 1971 in Dacca where Bhutto and his team held a number of sessions with the Awami League to discuss the constitution.

In the case with Yahya, Bhutto did not bring any concrete proposals of his own about the nature of the constitution. He and his advisers were mainly interested in discussing the implications of Six-Point. Since their responses were essentially negative and they had no prepared brief of their own it was not possible for the talks to develop into serious negotiations where attempts could be made to bridge the gap between the two parties. It was evident that as yet Bhutto had no formal position of his own from which to negotiate.

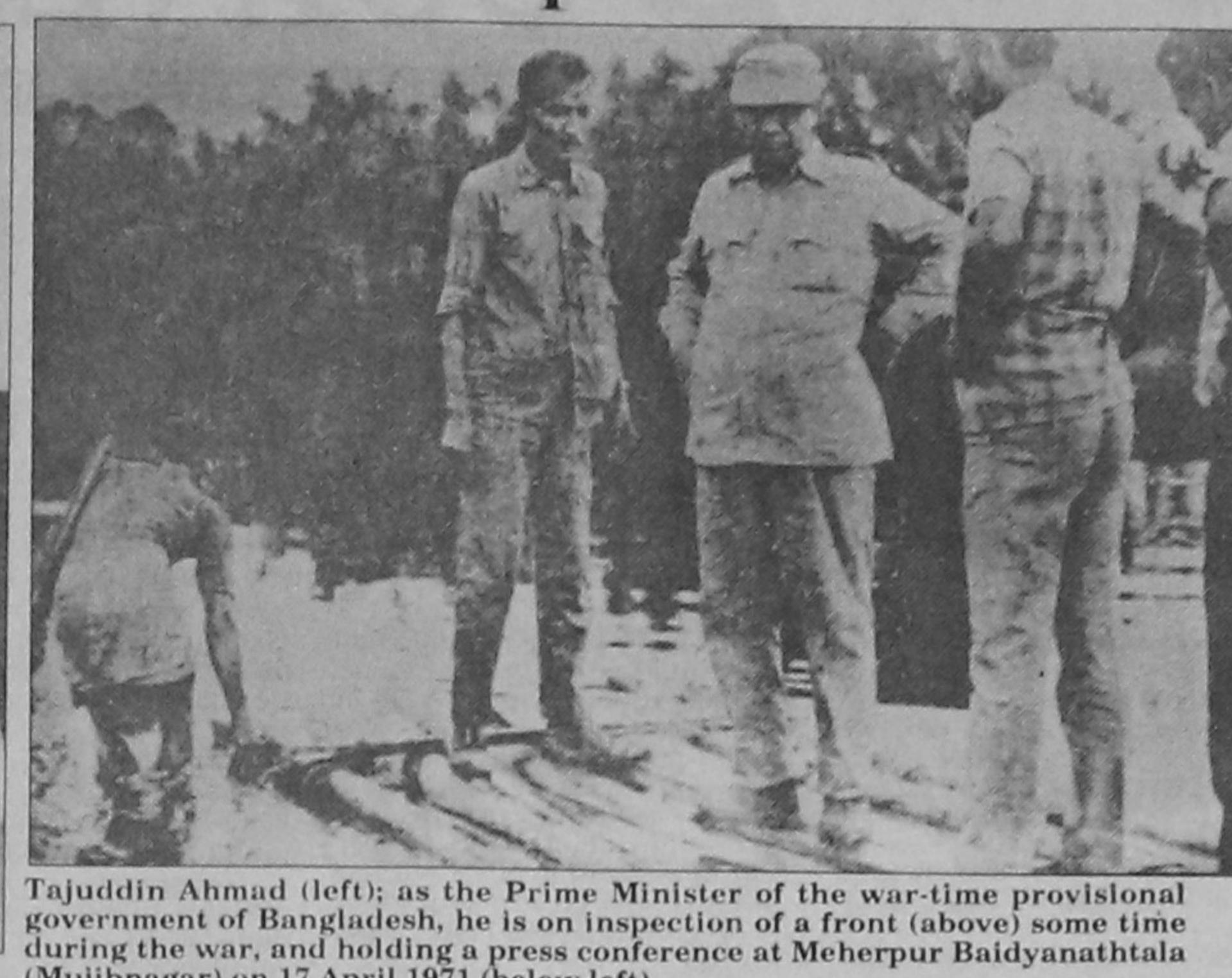
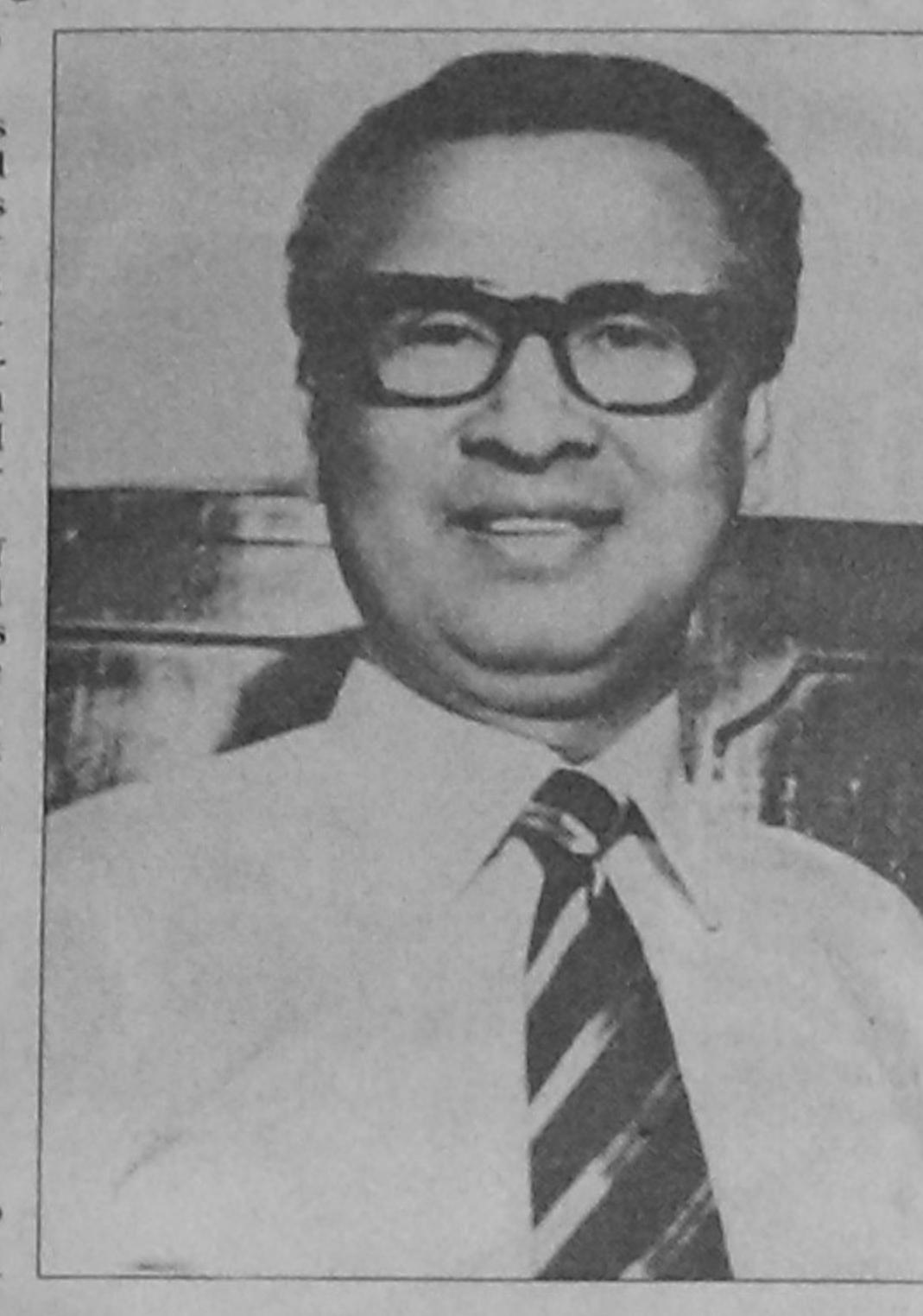
It must be made clear that when the PPP left Dacca there was no indication from their part that a deadlock had been reached with the Awami League. Rather they confirmed that all doors were open and that following a round of talks with West Pakistani leaders, the PPP would either have a second and more substantive round of talks with the Awami League or would meet in the National Assembly whose committees provided ample opportunity for detailed discussion on the constitution.

Bhutto's announcement to boycott the National Assembly therefore came as a complete surprise. The boycott decision was surprising because Bhutto had already been accommodated once by the President when he refused Sheikh Mujib's plea for an early session of the assembly on 15th February and fixed it in line with Bhutto's preference for 3rd March.

Following his decision to boycott the assembly, Bhutto launched a campaign of intimidation against all other parties in West Pakistan to prevent them from attending the session. In this task, there is evidence that Lt Gen. Umer, Chairman of the National Security Council and close asso-

ciate of Yahya, with a view to strengthening Bhutto's hand, personally pressured various West wing leaders not to attend the assembly. In spite of this display of pressure tactics by Bhutto and Lt. Gen. Umer, all members of the National Assembly from West Pakistan, except the PPP and the Qayum Muslim League had booked their seats to East Pakistan, for the session of 3rd March.

Within the QML itself, half



Tajuddin Ahmad (left); as the Prime Minister of the war-time provisional government of Bangladesh, he is on inspection of a front (above) some time during the war, and holding a press conference at Meherpur Baidyanathala (Mujibnagar) on 17 April 1971 (below left).



raise serious difficulties in the West wing. For this reason West wing MNAs must be permitted to get together to work out a new pattern of relationships in the context of a Six-Point constitution and the dissolution of one unit.

Once this agreement in principle had been reached between Sheikh Mujib and Yahya there was only the question of defining the powers of Bangladesh vis-a-vis the Centre during the interim phase. Here it was again jointly agreed that the distribution of powers should as far as possible approximate to the final constitution based on 'Six Point'.

For

working out this part of the interim settlement M Ahmed, the economic adviser to the President was specially flown in. In his talks with the Awami League advisers he made it clear that provided the political agreement had been reached, there were no insuperable problem to working out some version of Six-Point even in the interim period. The final list of the amendments to the Awami League draft which he presented as suggestions, indicated that the gap between the government and Awami League position was no longer one of principle but remained merely over the precise phrasing of the proposals. The Awami League in its sitting of 24th March accepted the amendments with certain minor changes of language and there was nothing to prevent the holding of a final drafting session between the advisers of Yahya and Mujib when the interim constitution would be finalised.

Whilst

hope for a settlement was being raised more ominous signs of the intentions of the army were provided by their sudden decision to unload the ammunition ships M V Swat berthed at Chittagong port.

Preparatory to the decision, Brigadier Mazumdar, a Bengali officer commanding the garrison in Chittagong had been suddenly removed from his command and replaced by a West Pakistani. On 24th night he was flown to Dacca under armed escort and has probably been executed. Under the new command notice was given to local authorities of the decision to unload the ship in spite of the fact that the army had abstained from doing so for the last 17 days in the face of non-cooperation from the port workers. The decision to unload was a calculated provocation which immediately brought 100,000 people on the streets of Chittagong and led to massive firing by the Army to break their way out. The issue was raised by the Awami League with General Peerzada as to why this escalation was being permitted whilst talks were still going on. He gave no answer beyond a promise to pass it on to General Yahya.

The question of legal cover for the transfer of power is merely another belated fabrication by Yahya to cover his genocide. He and his team had agreed that, in line with the precedence of the Indian Independence Act of 1947, power could be transferred by Presidential Proclamation.

(2) Transfer of power in the provinces to the majority par-

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(3) Yahya to remain as President and in control of the central government.

(4) Separate sitting of the National Assembly members from East and West Pakistan preparatory to a joint session of the House to finalise the constitution.

Contrary to the distortions

put out by both Yahya and Bhutto the proposal for separate sittings of the assembly was suggested by Yahya to accommodate Bhutto. He cited the practical advantage that whilst Six-Point provided a viable blueprint to regulate relations between Bangladesh and the Centre its application would

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