

Mujibnagar Day: A milestone in our liberation war

ZAHID HOSSAIN

TODAY is April 17 -- Mujibnagar Day. On this day in 1971, the Mujibnagar government was formed by the elected leaders of Bangladesh as the rightful constitutional, logical, and realistic step forward towards the full realization of our dream of an independent country of our own.

The observance of Mujibnagar Day in a befitting manner now warrants a special significance, specially in the backdrop of a sinister and ominous move by a certain quarter to distort our history of the war of independence. On this day the country and the people of Bangladesh should always gratefully cherish the memories of the freedom fighters and those political leaders who led them with deep affection and profound regard as well as with their firm determination and conviction.

The formation of the Mujibnagar government and its pronouncement to the world at large on April 17, 1971 is really a red-letter event in our national history, specially after the thumping victory of the Awami League in the elections of 1970 under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The 167 MNAs and 293 MPs who composed the Constituent Assembly fulfilling their constitutional obligation to the electors, gave a true shape and constitutional perspective on this day, making the dream of an independent Bangladesh a reality. From this point of view, Mujibnagar day (April 17) is a landmark in our struggle for independence as well as in our national history.

The Mujibnagar government was formed at the Baidyanathtala mango grove of Meherpur, a former Subdivision of Kustia district following the April 10 proclamation of independence order of Bangladesh. The oath taking was witnessed by hundreds of foreign journalists who had assembled there to hail the birth of a new nation.

The president of the new nation was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; Syed Nazrul Islam became the acting president in the absence of Bangabandhu; Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister; M. Mansur Ali, the Finance Minister; M. Quamruz Zaman, the Home, Relief and Rehabilitation Minister; and Khandakar Mustaque Ahmed, Foreign Affairs and Law Minister. General M. A. G. Osmani who was then a retired colonel and MNA elected from Awami League was made the C-in-C of the Bangladesh armed forces.

Herculean task

It was a Herculean task. Organizing civil administration and the freedom fighters, securing arms for the latter and training them, mobilizing international support for the liberation war through intense diplomatic action, ensuring speedy communication and effective coordination of various activities at hundred different levels, above all, keeping the morale of the freedom fighters high throughout the dark, difficult, and strenuous days of the war, called for extraordinary wisdom, dedication, patience, foresight, courage, and tenacity on the part of the Mujibnagar government and all those connected with it.

The formation of the Mujibnagar government had great significance

for the fact that the great men who gave leadership to this great event in the absence of our supreme leader and continued the armed struggle for the following eight months, having allowed no breach in the unity of their people, which was one of the cornerstones of our total liberation war, fought valiantly involving everyone, and above all kept our leader alive in the minds of every freedom fighters as if he was fighting side by side with them.

The creation of April 17 in fact, gave the total war effort a fuller meaning. It cemented the unity of the people, brought the world closer to the existence of freedom fighters, made the war efforts bloom in its full focus, and realized the presence of Bangladesh in the comity of nations. It was in effect a

of the Pakistani military machine came, it remained for him to inform his associates that a long and hard struggle on the battlefield had become necessary. The declaration of independence he made moments before his arrest by the Pakistani military forces forced upon his associates the need for armed struggle. And that was proof that while he awaited uncertain

politics lies in an absence of legitimacy. And in Bangladesh's politics at that point in time, the absence of the Mujibnagar government would only have given the freedom struggle a clearly secessionist hue, to the immense delight of the Pakistanis and to the consternation of a Bengali population directly in the military's line of fire. Seen in such light, the

through an exercise of brazenness) assisted the cause not a little.

Flight to India

The killing of unarmed civilians, the razing of villages and townships, and the atrocities against women only strengthened the cause of the provisional government. In the months between March and December 1971, the flight of ten million to India convinced the global community of the necessity and the righteousness of the Bengali cause, and helped the Mujibnagar government to inform the world that there was no alternative to an independent Bangladesh.

The provisional government undertook the onerous responsibility of moulding international opinion in Bangladesh's favour: the effort was assisted a great deal by the momentum of declaration of allegiance to the national struggle by Bengali diplomats stationed in Pakistani missions abroad. Placing the entire diplomatic efforts in the hands of a well-respected personality like Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury was yet another factor for the success of the efforts of Mujibnagar government in mobilizing world opinion in our favour.

The speeches and statements made by the Acting President, late Syed Nazrul Islam, Prime Minister late Tajuddin Ahmed and other leaders of the exiled Mujibnagar government at the formal oath taking ceremony and other subsequent occasions were widely appreciated world over as those reflected really democratic and progressive principles of the new government. The guiding principles and the state policies announced time to time by the exiled government were all fully democratic based on universal human rights principles and other widely accepted international norms and protocols.

Finally, the formation of the Mujibnagar government was the real birth of a new nation -- a nation imbued with the spirit of democratic value, nationalism, secularism, and socialism, obtained from the call of a man whose stature as a statesman had surpassed any of his time and most of his predecessors, who united the Bengali speaking people of a piece of land to one man and raised a nation of indomitable courage and splendour, so powerful and splendid in its commitment that it went head on to face a fiercely equipped army of Pakistan, bare-handed bred with the courage of conviction and valour and strength of insurmountable will of head, heart and unity to be independent and ready to shed the last drop of blood of every individual born on this soil then called East Pakistan.

Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury BB who as the Sub-Divisional officer (SDO) of the then Meherpur Sub-Division, under Kustia district played the most critical role in organizing the Mujibnagar Ceremony has termed it as a "Milestone of our national history" saying that it gave "life and legitimacy" to the national liberation movement both internally and internationally.

Talking to me recently Dr. Chowdhury expressed his extreme annoyance at the recent trend of distorting the history of the our liberation war aiming to divide and confuse the new generation: "I am sure the new generation will go back to the sources of history and find out the real history and the truth shall prevail," he expressed his firm conviction.

Almost similar sentiment has been expressed by Mr. Mahbubuddin Ahmed, BB who led the guard of honour given to the members of the Mujibnagar Cabinet on that auspicious day. Mr. Mahbub who was Sub-Division Police office of Jhenaidah (SDPO) at that time talking to me recently was very critical of the recent move by a section of our so-called intellectuals to distort the history of our liberation war.

However, the nation should gratefully remember the heroic courage, conviction, and determination of the politicians, the freedom fighters, and the people in general who sacrificed their everything for the cause of an independent country of our own. Equally firm determination, selfless sacrifice, and deep sense of patriotism are now also needed for the protection and proper implementation of the spirit of our liberation war against the designs of a section of our people who are engaged in doing everything possible to reestablish the so-called nationalism based on religion. Reaffirmation of strong conviction and united endeavour, as in 1971, are possibly the real need of the hour.

Finally, the formation of the Mujibnagar government was the real birth of a new nation -- a nation imbued with the spirit of democratic value, nationalism, secularism, and socialism, obtained from the call of a man whose stature as a statesman had surpassed any of his time and most of his predecessors, who united the Bengali speaking people of a piece of land to one man and raised a nation of indomitable courage and splendour.



Mujibnagar, April 17, 1971: C-in-C Col. Osmany, Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam, and Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed at the swearing in ceremony.

formal introduction to the rest of the world of the nature of the political leadership that was set to guide the nation into a concerted and organized war of national independence.

That Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the paramount leader of the country, both in its struggle for constitutional legitimacy and military triumph, was given political and moral sanction by everything that happened on April 17, 1971 in a spot of territory that was to be forever transformed in the annals of politics.

Bangabandhu never preached revolution

Bangabandhu had never preached revolution and political terrorism had never been part of his platform. Therefore, when the assault

and terrible incarceration, he had briefed his associates on what needed to be done. The dispersal of the leadership out of Dhaka as the army went into action was a sign that there was to be no turning back from the course Bengalis had set for themselves. And thus the formation of Mujibnagar government was undoubtedly a rightful constitutional as well as logical and realistic step by the trusted and capable associates of the great leader.

The establishment of the Mujibnagar government was an absolute necessity for another reason. Had it not been put in place, it is reasonably certain that diffuse guerilla movements would have spawned all over the country without any form of central control. The danger inherent in such

presence of Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam and Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed with their colleagues deep in Meherpur in April 1971 was a clear, unequivocal statement of intent: that the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh had taken it upon themselves to give shape and substance to an independent statehood for them.

It was thus that the global community was left with hardly a choice. The initiation of the war of national liberation, given the fact that it was being waged by a leadership privy to the electorally acknowledged support of the nation, could not be dismissed as an insurrection or a secessionist enterprise. Moreover, the military's misadventure (swooping upon Bengali political aspirations

4x3

8x3

9x2

9x3

Zahid Hossain was associated with the Mujibnagar Government as the Chief of Psychological Warfare, Ministry of Defense.