

Mujibnagar Day, a milestone in our liberation war

Since the present caretaker government is fully backed and guided by the army, the recent assertion by the chief of army staff that due respect should be given to all our leaders has opened the door for the government to bring back the full glory of our independence war and, thereby, appropriately describe the heroic role played by the Mujibnagar government to the younger generation through holding seminars, discussion meetings, rallies and other such programs at national level.

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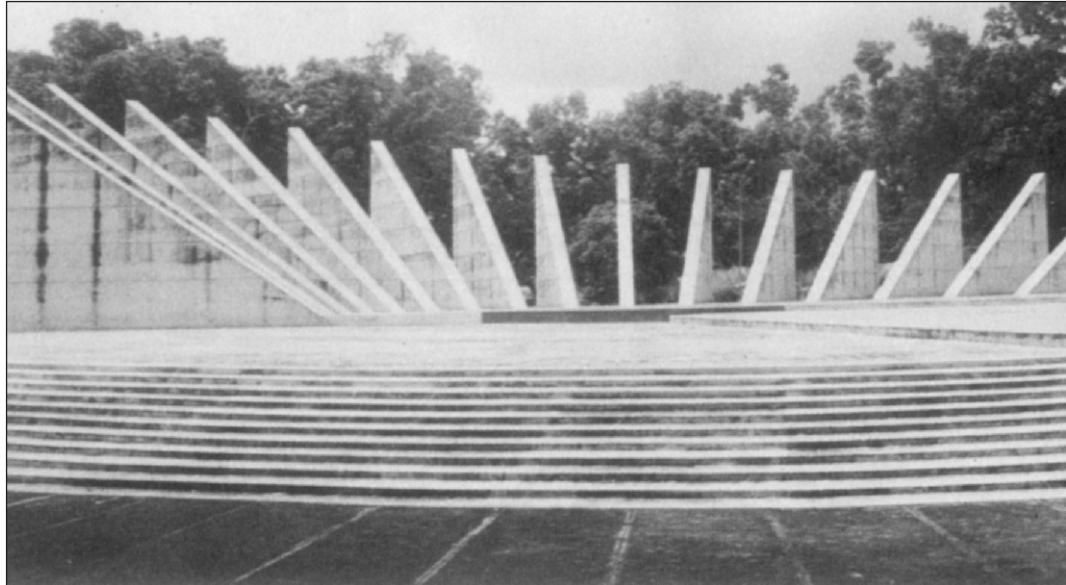
TODAY is April 17 -- Mujibnagar Day. On this day in 1971 the Mujibnagar government was formed by the elected leaders of Bangladesh under the Presidentship of Bangabandhu SK Mujibur Rahman. This was a constitutional, logical and realistic step forward towards the full realization of our dream for an independent country of our own. The observance of Mujibnagar Day in a befitting manner has special significance now, against the backdrop of a sinister and ominous move by a certain quarter to distort the history of our 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, especially considering the thumping victory of the Awami League in the elections of 1970 under the leadership of Bangabandhu. The 167 MNAs and 293 MPs who composed the Constituent Assembly gave a true shape and

constitutional perspective to this day, making the dream of an independent Bangladesh a reality. From this point of view, Mujibnagar Day (17th April) is a milestone in our struggle for independence, as well as in our national history. The Mujibnagar government was formed at the Baidyanathatala Mango grove of Meherpur, a former Subdivision of Kustia district, following the April 10th 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. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was made the president; 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 ret'd. 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 the 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 and, above all, keeping the morale of the freedom fighters high throughout the dark, difficult and strenuous days of the war. This 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 not allowing any breach in the unity of their people, fought valiantly and, above all, kept our leader alive in the minds of every freedom fighter, as if he was fighting side by side with them. The creation of the government, 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 the freedom fighters, and made the war efforts bloom in full focus, and announced the presence of Bangladesh in the comity of nations. It was, in effect, a formal introduction to the rest of the world of the nature of the political leadership that was set to guide the nation in a concerted and organized war of

national independence. That Bangabandhu 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 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 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 the 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 politics lies in the 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 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 state 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 with 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 through an exercise of brazenness) assisted the cause not a little. Flight to India The killing of unarmed civilians, the razing of villages and township, 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 people to India convinced the global community of the necessity and the righteousness of the Bengali cause, and helped the Mujibnagar government to inform

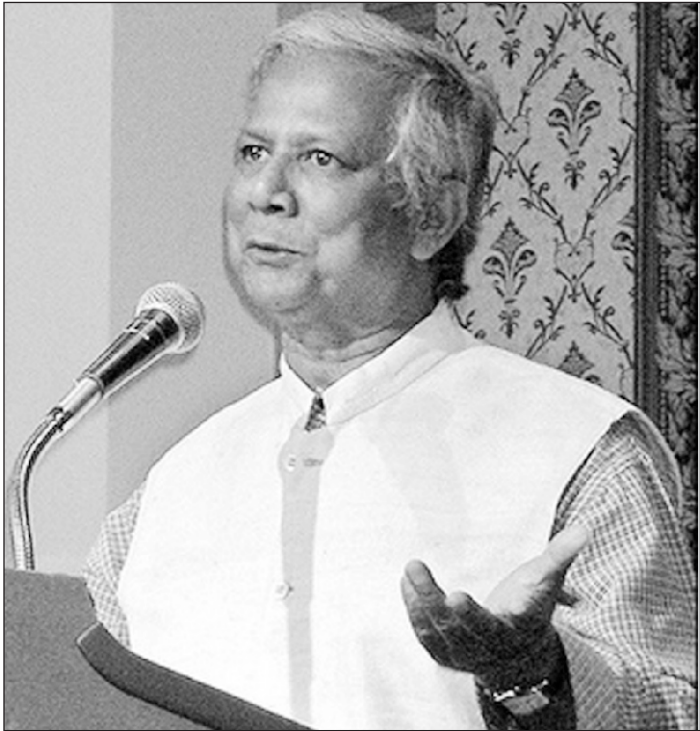


the world that there was no alternative to an independent Bangladesh. The provisional government undertook the onerous responsibility of moulding international opinion in Bangladesh's favour: the effort was assisted a great deal by the declaration of allegiance to the national struggle by Bengali diplomats stationed in Pakistani missions abroad. Placing the entire diplomatic effort 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 the really democratic and progressive principles of the new government. The guiding principles and 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 values, 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. He united the Bengali speaking people of a piece of land, and raised a nation of indomitable courage and splendour, so powerful and splendid in its commitment that it faced head-on a heavily equipped Pakistan army bare-handed. It was 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. Since the present caretaker government is fully backed and guided by the army, the recent assertion by the chief of army staff that due respect should be given to all our leaders has opened the door for the government to bring back the full glory of our independence war and, thereby, appropriately describe the heroic role played by the Mujibnagar government to the younger generation through holding seminars, discussion meetings, rallies and other such programs at national level. Zahid Hossain was associated with the Mujibnagar Government as the Chief of Psychological Warfare, Ministry of Defence.

Yunus in politics: Answers to the criticisms



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WHEN he decided to join politics, he was aware of the risk of criticism. Praise, he has enjoyed in plenty during much of his life. Very few individuals, anywhere, have had the good fortune of receiving such profuse praise. It is said that the people of the world know of Bangladesh because of Dr Yunus. For some, this is simply inconceivable and unacceptable. A small coterie of jealous intellectuals and politicians is getting some consolation through illogical and untrue criticism, which Dr Yunus usually prefers to ignore. I will try to show in this writing how hollow their criticisms are. I do not remember the names of all the critics, but I remember some. Many of the columnists made almost the same points again and again in their criticisms. I will try to answer these briefly, as an ordinary supporter of Nagorik Shakti. At the top is the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina. However she did not mention names when she said: "There is no difference between bribe-takers and interest-takers." I prefer not to say anything myself on this. I will, instead, quote the prominent economist Dr Debopriyo Bhattacharya. He commented on this remark in a TV talk show recently: "To take bribe is a legally punishable offense. To take interest is a legally valid activity. If you stop taking interest, banks and businesses will cease to exist. The economy of the country will be jeopardized. One cannot equate bribe-taking and interest-taking." The funny thing is that Sheikh Hasina made the comment with Mr. Abdul Jalil (Awami league

G.S.), the Chairman of Mercantile Bank, at her side. Mr. Jalil should teach her about the banking business. At the same time, it is clear that Sheikh Hasina's knowledge about Grameen Bank is also very limited. Even if we assume, for argument's sake, that Grameen Bank's interest rate is high, that interest is going to the owners of the bank -- its poor women loanees. Neither Prof. Yunus, nor any other individual is the owner of Grameen Bank. Prof. Yunus is only a salaried managing director of the bank. If Sheikh Hasina insists on describing somebody as an interest-taker, in this case her words will apply to the poor women loanees of Grameen Bank who are the owners and recipients of that interest. Sheikh Hasina added in the same speech: "If the politicians are that bad, then why do you have such a desire to be in politics?" She is quite right. This is precisely the reason why Dr Yunus wants to come to politics. If the politicians were honest, then the country would not have been in such a situation. Does Sheikh Hasina have no knowledge about the corruptions of the politicians? Is she not reading about it every day in the newspapers? Dr Yunus gave the call for honest and able candidates because of this state of politics. Had the politicians been good, Dr Yunus would not be required in the political field at all. Many columnists, including Mr. Badruddin Omar, have written that Dr Yunus is the only one active in politics, taking advantage of the emergency; the caretaker government has facilitated this for him; etc. The

complaint is not correct. Firstly, at that time the emergency had not banned political discussions and writings. Only processions, horthals, aborodhs, public meetings and destructive programs were banned. All the parties -- Awami League, BNP, LDP, CPB, Workers' Party -- were conducting meetings within four walls. These were duly reported in the newspapers and TV. The columnists preferred not to notice these. Secondly, Dr Yunus published two open letters -- that has been the extent of his political activity. The rest did not come from him. These, rather, came from the newspapers and the TV channels. Nevertheless, the columnists kept saying that Dr Yunus was monopolizing all political activities. Would the columnists please say, which activities? Yes, he called for formation of supporters' groups -- but these were to be formed within the four walls. Such Ghoroa Rajniti had not yet been banned. Then why the complaints? Some blue-panel teachers opposed the participation of Dr Yunus in the Dhaka University convocation, and his being the convocation speaker. They argued that Dr Yunus had become a controversial person by entering politics. So, the University could no longer honour him with an honorary degree, or invite him to be the convocation speaker. One does not become controversial by joining politics. Dr Yunus has only named his party, and has hardly done anything else in politics. He has not joined any government, and has not had any opportunity to become controversial. Then why this opposition in anticipation? Is this not carrying narrow-mindedness too far? He was honored as a Nobel Laureate. Has anything happened to that status? Was it not still shining, unblemished as ever? This incident will be long remembered as an example of how narrow-minded even university teachers can become if they happen to be Awami-adjuncts. They did not mind being diminished in the eyes of their own students. Their opposition did not cost Dr Yunus anything. He was duly honored with the degree, and he duly delivered his long written speech. May I say here, for the benefit of those blue-group teachers, that Dr Yunus had received 27 honorary doctorates from various universities of the world prior to the one from Dhaka University -- and none of those had waited for a Nobel prize. Dr Yunus, while visiting Abu Dhabi, requested Mr. Al-

Nahiyani, the minister for higher education and technology, to consider establishing a world-class medical college and hospital in Bangladesh. The minister agreed in principle, and promised that he would give a formal declaration when visiting Dhaka in April. He even proposed that the college be jointly named after him and Yunus. The fact that Mr. Al-Nahiyani also happens to be the chairman of Dhabi Group does not affect the proposal in any way. But some columnists tried to muddy the water even with this news. I am afraid, lest their opposition for opposition's sake deprives Bangladesh of a world-class medical college and hospital. Dr Yunus has suggested that the establishment of a mega-port (a deep-sea one) and a mega-airport will be an important corner-stone for the country's economy. He indicated that Moheshkali, or nearby areas, could be a good place for that. He also suggested that this could take place on the basis of a social business enterprise (no loss and no dividend). The super-port and the super-airport are bound to become the subject of wide discussions by all concerned. But even before discussions have started, the critics are taking this as an opportunity to attack Dr Yunus. Dr Yunus never made any comment on the existing port in Chittagong. But that has not prevented the columnists from distorting his comments. Dr Yunus is in favour of giving India transit facilities. This is his opinion. He has not got an opportunity yet to elaborate his arguments for this, and the conditions under which he thinks that transit can be permitted. But the columnists got busy with severe criticism all the same. Some political parties are also in favour of permitting the transit. This needs active and considered discussions. This is not something which can be done by writing columns attacking Dr Yunus. Many have written that Dr Yunus should not have come to politics. He is a crown on our head, and should remain on the head. Politics is a dirty thing. He will become controversial if he comes in politics. He should act as a guardian to the nation, etc. It seems that those who are taking this line are his well-wishers. But the criticism is not proper. Under the prevailing political culture of our country nobody expects that political leaders are waiting for advice from Dr Yunus. In particular, the two all-powerful leaders would hardly care for that. Therefore, he will be crying in the wilderness in his role as guardian. He

could only continue to say good things as he was doing, without any real effect. The fact is, unless Dr Yunus and other competent and honest persons like him come forward to join politics, the quality of our politics and governance can not rise from its present low, the one which we have been experiencing for the last 15 years in spite of having democratically elected governments. We are fed up with the situation. Previously, people would say: "There is no alternative to Hasina and Khaleda, so we are compelled to vote either for one or the other." But now that there is a viable alternative in the field, but some of those people seem to say: "Oh no, not him, why should he come into politics?" If this is not self-contradiction what is it? The politics in our country has degenerated because of the two major parties and their two leaders. The country needs a personality like Dr Yunus to bring truly democratic politics. I do not claim that he can change politics, or the situation, dramatically. But he can try. If he had not come to politics, even that chance would not have been there. The only option would be to go back to the looters. Now at least there is a chance. Perhaps Dr Yunus could not avoid criticism even if he had failed to respond to the people's wishes, and refused to join politics. Then many would have said: "He is a self-centered man, busy enjoying his Noble Prize fame as the father of microcredit and an international celebrity, basking in glory. He is not interested in saving his country, and does not care for the fact that the country is going to hell." So the criticisms would be made, either way. One of the critics has written: "How can Dr Yunus float a party while he is still in the service of Grameen Bank?" The answer is -- firstly, Grameen Bank is not a government organization; secondly, he has only declared the party, and has not officially started it. There are many remarks about the issues of Grameen Phone and Telenor. The fact is, Grameen Bank is not a shareholder of Grameen Phone, Grameen Telecom is. The problem created between Telenor and Grameen Telecom will be answered by Grameen Telecom, not by Dr Yunus. One has even objected to the name, Nagorik Shakti -- saying that rural people are not Nagorik. This interpretation is not right. Nagorik means citizen, and all people of Bangladesh -- rural and urban -- are its nagoriks. Dr Yunus' method of reaching the

people with open letters has also come under criticism. This has been a simple way of communicating within emergency limitations. And what is wrong with letters and phones anyway? Some complained that Nagorik Shakti has not elaborated its programs. We should not forget that the party has hardly yet started. The policy makers are working on its detailed objectives, and these will be published in due time. The basic ideals have been given through the open letters. Those who wish to join on the basis of these have been invited to do so by forming groups. Those who want to wait for more details can wait. Nobody is being forced. Many have complained that Dr Yunus was never in politics, he did not take part in the political movements, did not give opinions and statements on various political issues; how can he suddenly come into politics? Yes, this is a very pertinent question. But everybody has to start from somewhere. Let this be his start. This is, by no means, a violation of the law, or democracy, or the constitution. We can grant him at least an apprenticeship in politics. I want to ask a question. Did the columnists raise the same question when Dr Badruddoza, Colonel Oli, Dr Mosharraf, Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Dr Mohiuddin Alamgir left their respective professions to suddenly join politics? When Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina were made the chiefs of their parties, what was the extent of their political experience? Does Dr Yunus have less experience or understanding of the country, society, economics and politics than a housewife? One critic has written: "Dr Yunus wants to get a walk-over in the empty field of politics." But where is the empty field? The fact that the players are waiting within their houses for the moment does not mean that the game will be a walk-over. When open political activities begin again, all of them will be playing in the field. Several participants in a talk show said: "Dr Yunus is doing everything on his own. He is deciding everything for the party without consulting others. He is behaving like a dictator similar to Khaleda and Hasina," etc. Well, these days politics has been confined within four walls. There was no way of organizing open meetings. Why did the critics in this talk show assume that Dr Yunus did not consult anyone? Perhaps what they meant was that he did not consult them. Everybody knows that Nagorik Shakti has hardly been formed yet. It is not a dissident

group coming out of a big party; it is a completely new party in every sense. No wonder discussions and consultations have to take place with caution. Professor Yunus has criticized our politicians, saying that politics in recent times has been for money rather than for ideals. This remark has generated a lot of criticism. I do not think Dr Yunus intended to accuse all politicians of money-making -- what he meant was the unmistakable central character of our politics. The foreign journalist (AFP) involved may not have grasped exactly what Dr Yunus meant. Our own journalists also make such mistakes, willingly or unwillingly, all too often. But the fact remains that our politicians in general cannot escape the accusation of corruption, even though not everyone is corrupt. Honest politicians are few in number and, in the recent past, they had negligible influence on mainstream politics. Dr Yunus's remark has also received a lot of acclamation from general people, as it has received a lot of criticisms from the politicians and the columnists. This shows that the public perception is not far from what Dr Yunus said. Some critics have said that Nobel Laureates usually do not come to politics after getting the prize. Dr Yunus is so hungry for power that he entered politics even after being awarded with such an honour. They are right; few Nobel Prize winners think about joining politics. But then which other country that has Nobel Laureates has leaders like Hasina and Khaleda? How many have parties like BNP and Awami League? Do those countries obtain first place in corruption for years in a row? No, Nobel Laureates there do not need to come to politics. Some said that Dr Yunus has said different things on politics and election at different times during the last few months, and he has not been consistent. Maybe so; but has not the political scenario of Bangladesh changed dramatically at various moments during the last four months? How could Dr Yunus say the same thing in the context of totally changed circumstances. His critics conveniently forgot to mention that he was insisting on following the constitution when it was still possible within a consensus. At one stage he proposed a peace treaty which would allow a coalition government of the two contending parties to iron out all the fundamental issues of election rules before going into an early flawless re-election.

Unfortunately, none of the parties paid any attention to him. Some said that Dr Yunus never talked about the people's problems. How can he be in politics? This is not true. Though Dr Yunus was not a man of politics, he was always concerned with the problems of the country. He put forward his recommendations in his own way, which have been widely published and have been included in several books by him. He even had a clear lay-out about the desired political process for the country. In 1983 he presented his ideas of a political party (Amar Dol) in detail while speaking as the chief guest at the launching ceremony of Gono Forum. Remember, this was long back in 1983! Some have criticized the way Dr Yunus invited letters, faxes, SMS and phones from the general people. They said that this was not the way to form a political party. But there is no written grammar to follow on how to form a political party. Why do they think that every party has to be formed in the same way? Dr Yunus is a creative person. He has his unique touch in everything he does. It is not surprising that he has this touch even in the task of forming a party. Also, what is wrong with getting the people's opinion directly from them through letters, or SMS or emails? If Dr Yunus communicates with the general people for the creation of his party, how does he offend the critics by doing so? Sometimes questions and criticisms come out of the blue. For example, a journalist asked him suddenly, without any context "Are you ready to give the accounts of your properties?" Dr Yunus's answer was: "I will give it when the government wants it." Why does Dr Yunus suddenly need to give the account of his properties? For what reason? Is he filing a nomination paper in an election? Has he been appointed in a government position? Then why did the journalist ask him that question? What agenda did this journalist have in mind? Did he ever ask this question to Khaleda Zia or Mosaddek Ali Falu (an MP)? This is how Dr Yunus is being attacked with meaningless criticism every day. Most of those who are engaging in this are well-educated people. But still they do not care for the logic or the factual correctness of the things they are saying. I have tried here to answer a few of these in my own way. Some of the other criticisms are too bizarre to merit an answer. I do not think critics will stop because of my answers. I just wanted to show how badly these criticisms lack logic, meaning, or substance. Ashikur Rahman is a student of Dhaka University.