Lt. Com. Moazzem Hossain of the navy and several other members of the armed forces including Sgt. Zahurul Haq. Records show that there were a couple of meetings with Sheikh Mujib but his involvement wasn't there as a "conspirator."

The Pakistan authorities first charged the officers involved and then added Mujib's name as the principle accused in 1968. From a trial of a conspiracy, it became a trial of Bengali nationalism, making it part of the list of serial decisions of the Pakistan army which sharpened the movement against Pakistan in its erstwhile eastern wing. Agartala baptised Sheikh Mujib as the uncontested leader, as Moulana Bhashani joined ranks, and the newly produced graduates of the universities, a result of Gen. Ayub Khan's rural developed policy, fought Pakistan down to the floor of the streets and lanes and then kicked Ayub Khan so hard that the conspiracy case was thrown away, the court was torched, and the judges escaped by a side door in a display of public rage against Pakistan and affirmation of a new identity that had reached its full term.

It also preserved Bengalis from asking the question as to whether this trial was a sign of Mujib's loyalty to Pakistan or leadership of Bengali nationalism. Either way, the attempt to trash Mujib back-fired and he emerged from it as the supreme leader.

Sheikh Mujib had written a defense which was widely distributed and read as a defense of the people and not a person. It mirrored the feelings of the people, and so, when he won the elections in 1970 in a manner so overwhelming that it left little negotiating space to anyone, it was not only appropriate but also prophetic. He was, to use a hyperbole, the uncrowned king of East Pakistan, and maybe not really uncrowned. It was his finest hour, everyone's finest hour, and lasted all of three months until bullets cracked the March sky of 1971.

Prisoner of history?

Journalist Ataus Samad was one of the last persons to see Sheikh Mujib before he was taken in. When he went in, he saw the city already in flames. He saw a resigned but firm Sheikh Mujib who asked him to go home. And he added the words that ran roughly: "I have given you independence, now go and preserve it."

These are not the words of an undecided man. He knew directly from a loyal Bengali stallion in the Pakistani stable, Air Vice Marshall A. K. Khandaker, what the Pakistan army was planning. He also must have known that he couldn't have his way with the 6-points beyond a point and that meant stepping back, but, given the situation that was all around, given the locked in verdict of the votes, of overwhelming public pressure, the pressure from Sirajul Alam Khan's militant cadres, his freedom was limited too, and he had become part of a huge procession pushed by its own momentum. Was he a prisoner of his own history that he had helped to create?

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I have asked leaders of the party on these matters and never got any proper answer. Most of them said that they had never expected a confrontation of the scale of 1971. Even the Pakistan army didn't, and had hoped to end the matter in a few days, and sit down to a civilised dinner. Or did Mujib know that a bloodbath was inevitable and taken the chance and made the choice?. People would have given all for him, he knew, and maybe he did take a chance.

An enduring myth about Sheikh Mujib was that he was not very smart -- the stubborn, large-hearted fool as Moazzem Chowdhury and many others thought. Yet I find that Mujib may have been one of the most secretive politicians we have ever come across and probably let people think what they wanted about him because it suited him.

Another myth is that he was Suhrawardy's man, and, in fact, much of his political reputation is built on that. However, I shall cite a few examples to contest these two myths, as I myself stumbled upon them and had to reassess the man.

Almost no independence movement was planned without Mujib in the middle, but except for the ill-fated trip to India, he was never an activist in any one of them. This is remarkable considering that he was the natural leader of them all. More interestingly, he never refused to listen to any of the plans, and, one supposes, offered encouragement. It was as if Mujib was part of all of them, but again not involved in any of them.

Both Ahmed Fazlur Rahman and Moazzem Chowdhury told me that they had contacted Indian intelligence -- several London-based ex-pat Bangladeshi politicians have said so too -- from his it part of the list of serial decisions of the Pakistan army which sharpened London hotel, but even in the same hotel, when both were present, neither knew that Mujib was talking. It seems to me that this sort of thing helped Mujib to give the impression of being manipulated and yet in the end be his own man. There was never an instance when Mujib was forced to go along.