place which is reserved for supreme leaders. This applies not just to the management of the state in the post-1971 era, but even as the trigger-man of the independence war.

So high is the contest, and so defensive the state of the supporters of Sheikh Mujib, that much time is spent on the most useless debate of them all: who was the declarer of independence, whatever that may mean. It has assumed as great a significance as the identity of the person who led the independence movement to its end goal. It is not a debate at all, but an indication that no one, including Sheikh Mujib, is free from the accusing fingers of history for having failed to live up to the image that history had created for him.

When Sheikh Mujib refused to hide or lead the war from elsewhere, he probably knew what he was doing. His arrest and subsequent trial as it progressed became the rallying call for activists all over the world. The US State Department archives mention the efforts of the US officials and diplomats to convince Yahya Khan not to take any drastic step such as execution.

It does seem that Yahya was giving that assurance, but he was hardly his own man. Throughout that period there was not a moment that didn't belong to Mujib, and Mujib in Lyallpur jail, waiting to be hanged, as he thought, and his conduct during the trial, and everything else, made him the symbol of Bangladesh in defiant chains. It was when he wasn't there that he was the ultimate supreme leader.

Sheikh Mujib's Mujibnagar problem?

Yet only a few months down the road after December 1971, he was already in conflict with his own party and some major individuals. The war was run by Tajuddin Ahmed, a sort of a bureaucratic genius, who did not have the charisma of Mujib, but was very competent. He didn't even enjoy the loyalty of many of his party leaders and a few, including the Mujibnagar foreign minister, Khandaker Mushtaq, led a series of activities that undermined the prime minister in exile.

Tajuddin also had to contend with the Indian plans that raised the Mujib Bahini led by Sheikh Moni and Sirajul Alam Khan jointly as a counter-force of sorts to the Mujibnagar forces (or a fighting force that would be run by India). It was under Indian command, rule, and wish, and a less calm man than Tajuddin would have erupted in anger, and indiscretion may have followed, but he was a model of extreme grace under pressure.

It was this kind of maturity that gained the respect of the Indian war machine, especially its civilian members, who saw him as essential to the task of making Bangladesh independent (or to their objective, which was to split Pakistan).

Tajuddin's one loyal group were many of the bureaucrats of the Mujibnagar government, some of them ex-leftists, who saw him as a bearer of the red flag of bureaucratised socialism made popular by Russia and China. This was also echoed in the Indian bureaucracy, full of old Oxbridge Marxists like P.N. Haksar and D. Dhar, Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi's two top deputies.

The following statement may be contested but many Mujibnagar insiders have told me that Sheikh Mujib didn't enjoy the sudden rise of Tajuddin. "He in fact didn't like to hear much about what happened in Mujibnagar, and that was an episode he didn't want to know too much. Once at a party meeting, when Tajuddin insisted that Bangabandhu hear about what went on in 1971, he listened for a while and then started to pretend he had fallen asleep," one of those present once told me.

By March 1972, came the announcement that Sheikh Mujib had sent the declaration of independence to many places before arrest and Zahur Hossain Chowdhury, AL supremo of Chittagong, had read it out to all. This was rather unexpected because nobody really cared if there was such a declaration or not. Mujib was insisting when no one was asking.

The departure of Tajuddin from the cabinet and the downsizing of many of his followers coincided with the star of Sheikh Moni (who had tried to have the broadcast of Tajuddin Ahmed's first speech after the formation of the Mujibnagar government on April 17, 1971 blocked, but failed) rising dramatically. Over time he was effectively becoming the deputy of Sheikh Mujib, and, with Sirajul Alam Khan out of Awami League with his own party, there was nothing to stop Bangladesh turning into Mujib's somewhat private concern.

Mujib's Bangladesh history is not remembered with joy, though certainly laden with arguments. He ran an administration that was unable to cope with post-war rehabilitation and yet all the trappings of post-war criminality like hoarding, black marketing, permit selling, etc was on. Prices went out of control and the 1973 elections were so heavily rigged that they gave Mujib, the symbolic democrat, a sad name.

When Sheikh Mujib refused to hide or lead the war from elsewhere, he probably knew what he was doing. His arrest and subsequent trial as it progressed became the rallying call for activists all over the world.