



BANGLADESH'S LIBERATION WAR

Documents and History

Here we publish an excerpt from Hasan Hafizur Rahman's introduction to History of Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, the largest collection of the Liberation War documents. Mr. Rahman was the project director of the History of Bangladesh War of Liberation Project. He was also a famous journalist and litterateur.

HASAN HAFIZUR RAHMAN

THE timeline for Bangladesh's Liberation War stretches from March 25, 1971, to December 16 of the same year. The responsibility of documenting the History behind Bangladesh's War for Liberation was handed down to the Muktiyuddho Itihas Likhon O Mudran Prokolpo (The Project to Document the Liberation War) based on the collection of documents and data from all the incidents around the world which were related to Bangladesh's War of Independence. The project started under the aegis of the Ministry of Information of the Government of Bangladesh in January 1978.

Even though the original responsibility was of writing the history, the project later decided to collect and publish documents and data related to the war. To document the history of any event, especially an event as important as Bangladesh's Liberation War in an unbiased and fair method is extremely difficult unless there are supporting documents and data behind each piece of information. And this was the reason we prioritised the presentation of documents and data related to the war, rather than the history of it in itself. And resulting from the data and documents will tell the story, will conserve the whole events unfolding through a chronological order, and will conserve the order of related incidents to the event during its lifetime.

The project thus decided to publish the documents and data presented within a few volumes keeping such a view in mind. Correlated to this a special judgement posed

itself in front of the project, which was: even though the gathered documents of events paralleled and were inclusive of the Liberation War, there remained a huge backdrop behind the Liberation War itself. The Liberation War cannot be studied by removing it from this background. The events behind this story – which can be christened as the Struggle for Independence – were the main causes which made the Liberation War absolutely necessary. And that is the reason why it is impossible to even discuss the Liberation War without introducing the Struggle for Independence first. The project in this situation had thus accepted the decision to dedicate its resources to gather documents and data regarding this background to be presented in two volumes along with Bangladesh's Liberation War – Documents and History. (...)

We had to change our decision of the initially agreed upon publication of 7,200 pages, since the gathered data was too great to be contained in such a limitation. According to the new decision, a budget was passed so that each volume would amount to nearly 900 pages – 15,000 pages for the whole publication – so that all the collected documents could be printed completely in the publication. We continued working based on this foundation.

We kept the process of gathering data and documents on a very transparent and free level. But on the other hand, we have been very conservative about salvaging and accepting data and documents for the background. We have decided to only include those documents for the volumes dealing with the background which are directly related with the existence of current Bangladesh



Hasan Hafizur Rahman (1932–1983)

and the sentiments of the people residing within the country. That is to say that only those documents directly related to the events unfolding during the Struggle for Independence including the protests and processions taking place in this area of the world instigated by the people residing here were included in those volumes in chronological order. And thus we did not have to go through ancient history to uphold the history from this angle. We started with the documents unearthed dating back to 1905, when Bengal was divided to give this background an apt meaning and start. We are of the opinion that this timeline marks the start of the Struggle for Independence

with precision and logic and void of superfluity.

Documents concerning the backdrop are included in two volumes. The first volume ends with the timeline of Aiyub Khan's rule in 1958. The segmentation has been put into effect keeping in mind the ease of pagination for the whole publication only – not keeping in mind any political or historic scenario as one might begin to think. (...)

Our most important aim was to publish actual accounts of events through authentic documents in the right amounts. There are no personal opinions of ours, nor did we try misleading the reader, nor any personal descriptions or reasoning provided by us. We have tried to maintain an unbiased form of the accounts from the beginning to the end. Our main aim was to collect the documents, edit them and then place them in order while keeping such a sentiment always in mind. We have kept this aim and upheld it in surgical precision so as not to break any sort of correspondence linked to the project. Each article upholds all names worthy of importance in their actual and deserved weight, according to the data. And so, the general population naturally is the protagonist in every case. The leader rises up from the general masses only when there is an unquenchable thirst for change within the masses and when they become unstoppable in pursuing their dreams. The same had happened in Bangladesh's case. And that is why even documents of events caused by parties and organisations have been included who were never directly or even remotely involved in Bangladesh's politics or governance. That is because the struggle for independence in Bangladesh predates 1971 and was always existent within the hearts and minds of its people who kept the sentiment alive through their

own revolutions. In reality, the surrounding shrubs and bushes at the edge of a forest start defining it as it gets thicker while traversing towards its heart. One has to learn of all the plants within the forest before actually knowing it. (...)

We have collected documents and data containing approximately 3.5 lakh pages. Now we are publishing only 15,000 pages of documents and data. So a major portion of the collection will remain unpublished. Besides that the continuous search for document will enrich our collection progressively... The whole effort of documenting the Liberation War will obviously widen the scope of doing more research and publishing more books on the Liberation War. To create wider scope for work on the Liberation War is extremely important for the nation. Because the more the nation will learn about the Liberation War the more it will progress. (...)

Those, during Bangladesh's War of Independence, who sacrificed themselves, were victimised, who realised their losses, who in every circumstance – no matter how dire – kept their hearts' flames alight for the love of this country, and to those who have patronised us towards our work at every turn and instance, we dedicate this anthology of the Documents and History of Bangladesh's War for Independence with deep affections, great admiration and undying gratitude and hand it over to the people of Bangladesh.

Translated by Hasan Ameen Salahuddin of The Daily Star. Source: History of Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents, Edited and Published by Ministry of Information, December 1985.

Intrepid Bangabandhu

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

historical perspective; of special significance is the ludicrous attempt by a quarter to belittle Bangabandhu by raising a motivated controversy about the proclaimer of our independence.

Coming to facts, it is the myopic elements that would focus their attention on the charged protests of March 1971 in Chittagong and credit a military commander with the declaration of independence although the same figure made a proclamation in the

AS the nation celebrates the forty-fourth Independence

Day grateful Bangladeshis need to remember Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the intrepid architect of our freedom struggle. In particular, the post-liberation generations must be enabled to understand and appreciate facts in its proper

name of Bangabandhu. Such deliberate distortion ignores the broader canvas of our independence movement traversing four decades.

If one has a caring mind to know the supreme leader and also the proclaimer of our independence, one needs to hear Bangabandhu's historic speech of 7th March 1971 wherein he explicitly said: "The struggle this time is for our emancipation. The struggle this time is for independence." What greater clarity could one seek in locating the proclaimer of our independence movement?

The intrepidity of Bangabandhu can be gauged by understanding the socio-economic realities of post-partition East Pakistan. At a time when there was real dearth of educated and conscious Bengali activists, Bangabandhu was Bengal's fearless spokesperson continuously defying the establishment. Here was a leader who spent two-third of his youth in jail for advocating Bengal's causes. History testifies that he never compromised with his political commitment and the decade of 1960s witnessed proud and forthright Bengalis protesting and dominating Pakistan's political landscape. Bangabandhu's deft political stewardship galvanised the

entire Bengali population and the rest is history.

One needs to imagine the initial years of the decade starting 1960, when the jackboots of the military junta took upon itself the task of teaching the nation about the basics of democracy and found spineless collaborators from this part of the world; think of that time when East Bengal's political world was pathetically lackadaisical and courage was in short supply. It was in such circumstances that the Bengalis had to be awakened from their somnolence, if not deep slumber.

The sensitive and sentimental Bengalis awoke, but only after the poet of politics took charge of a fledgling party and declared the historic Six Points that, by all estimation, were a prelude to our total economic and political self-rule. Let any discerning mind take a look at the Six Points and try to understand why Bangabandhu was repeatedly incarcerated. The architect of our freedom could look beyond his times. Was there anybody in the political landscape at the relevant time that had the gift of such courage and farsightedness?

Bangladeshis, particularly those born after 1970, must know that Bangabandhu was not

one of those "boneless wonders" for whom expediency was all. He had the courage to never submit or yield and was a solid rock in the wilderness of shifting sands. He spoke loud and clear for his convictions and had the resolute courage to stand up in support of his views. His inner strength enabled him to be dignified and hold his head high despite the adversity. He faced repeated imprisonment with ease while others did not venture to wander beyond the safe provision of personal gratification.

The 1960s were a time when we were helpless and in the grip of some all-powerful autocrat; our limbs were paralysed and our minds deadened. At that time the dominant impulse in the then East Pakistan was that of pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police, the secret service, fear of the official class; fear of laws that suppress and of prison. Deliverance from such fear was possible because of the manifestly energising fire that Bangabandhu lit each time he spoke.

All citizens, particularly students of history, may recollect the brave stance that Bangabandhu took to ensure the exit of the last Indian soldier from Bangladeshi soil by March 1972. It is rightly doubted whether

any other leader would have succeeded in accomplishing such an onerous task. If not for anything else, at least for this supreme act of courage and statesmanship Bangabandhu's memory will remain ever enshrined in the hearts of grateful Bangladeshis. The sector commanders of our Liberation War know that better than anyone else.

The way Bangabandhu conducted himself while confronting the overbearing and scheming top Pakistani military brass in Dhaka in March 1971 spoke volumes of his courage and sense of honor. Persons who have seen the transcriptions of those historic meetings bear testimony to Bangabandhu's bravery and candidness. Both in incarceration and in facing the assassin's bullet Bangabandhu did not wilt or cower.

"Undismayed by disaster or the trumpet sounds of a doom" Bangabandhu confronted life with a tight-lipped courage. His unquenchable spirit was to set sail beyond the sunset. The walls were crumbling and the fabric of a mighty state was collapsing but at the gates of dawn he stood like a heroic figure challenging the new day.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

- ACROSS
- 1 Snowboarding spot
 - 6 Like the desert
 - 10 Watergate evidence
 - 11 Column type
 - 13 Happening
 - 14 African scavenger
 - 15 Ventilator
 - 16 Fuss
 - 18 Apiece
 - 19 Sources of income
 - 22 Mouse-spotting cry
 - 23 Brussels-based org
 - 24 Fizzy drinks
 - 27 Grow toward night
 - 28 God of war
 - 29 Buddy
 - 30 Skiers' purchases
 - 35 Grow older
 - 36 Chopping tool
 - 37 Cry of insight
 - 38 Breath fresheners
 - 40 Glossy fabric
 - 42 Detail map
 - 43 Tip over
 - 44 Hot, in a way
 - 45 Cheerful
- DOWN
- 1 Iron output
 - 2 "C'est --!"
 - 3 Sung drama
 - 4 Farm enclosure
 - 5 Fancy homes
 - 6 Kind of committee
 - 7 Singer Orbison
 - 8 Words of emphasis
 - 9 Set of chairs and a table
 - 12 "Downton Abbey" butler
 - 17 Cartoonist
 - 20 Minimal amount
 - 21 Aptitude
 - 24 Deli meat
 - 25 Starts
 - 26 Cabinet department
 - 27 Ties, as skates
 - 29 Blend
 - 31 Delicious
 - 32 Glutton
 - 33 Use your brain
 - 34 Annie's dog
 - 39 Singer Ritter
 - 41 Gorilla or gibbon

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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