

March 1971

(Continued from previous page)

Regiment and the Ansars to stand by you and to fight. No compromise. Victory is ours. Drive out the last enemy from the holy soil of our motherland. Convey this message to all Awami League leaders, workers and other patriots and lovers of freedom.

May Allah bless you.

Joy Bangla.

So far I can remember, the message which I received on 26 March 1971 at around 3 p.m. at Chittagong University from Revolutionary Council Headquarters (*Sangram Parisad headquarters*) at Chittagong with a request to send it to everyone was this second version. First version was frequently announced from Shadhin Bangla Betar, which we came to know later on.

Later it was stated in the book *'Bangalir Jatiyatabadi Sangram Muktijuddhe Chattagram'* (Chittagong 1993) by Jatiya Samajtantric Dal leader Dr. Mahfuzur Rahman: This message was heard in the wireless of a ship anchored at the Chittagong port, and it was written down and spread over Chittagong in published leaflet. A detailed description of how and which version of Bangabandhu's declaration of independence people heard and how it was broadcast has been compiled in the book *'Bangladesher Shadhinata Ghoshona/ Facts and Witness'* (Second Edition: Dhaka, 2013) by A F M Sayeed. Some significant facts stated in this book are as follow:

1. According to the statement of wife of Subedar-Major Shawkat Ali of EPR signal corp retired Professor of the department of Bangla at Rajshahi Mohila College, Feroza Begum and her daughter Professor Dr. Selina Parvin of the department of Zoology at Rajshahi University, on 25 March at evening Colonel Awan took the keys of the Signal Center to himself. Subedar-Major Shawkat Ali with his self-made portable transmitter announced Bangabandhu's declaration of independence at mid-night from his residence at Peelkhana. The announced declaration was the first version as we quoted above. During the announcement of the declaration with the transmitter, Shawkat Ali and his companion EPR soldiers including Subedar Molla, Subedar Zohur Munshi, Subedar Abdul Hai and Subedar Ayub were caught by the Pakistani army. After suffering long days of oppression all of them were martyred except Subedar Ayub.

2. Another EPR soldier broadcast Bangabandhu's taped declaration from Baldha Garden and then sought next directives making a phone call to the residence of Bangabandhu. As per the suggestion of Bangabandhu's near one Golam Morshed, he left that place throwing the broadcast machine into a pond.

3. Mejbahuddin Ahmad, shift-in-charge of Moghbazar Wireless Station, broadcast Bangabandhu's declaration of independence from there and it was received at Chittagong by engineer Abdul Kader, assistant engineer Golam Rabbani Dakua, wireless worker Mahfuz Ali and wireless operator Mahtabuddin of Silimpur Wireless Station.

Another question has to be raised here. Why the leader of the land stayed waiting for being arrested after the declaration of independence? Some people said, he had a fear that if the Pakistani army couldn't arrest him they would show huge atrocities in Dhaka city – neither Bangabandhu nor any of us had any idea about how much atrocious they could be! Another answer to this question is such that doing politics in concealment was not as per his habit.



I will mention here two events about this habit from his *'The Unfinished Memoirs'* (Dhaka, 2012). The first one was an event of his 17 or 18 years of age. As a result of 'slight ill-feeling' between Hindus and Muslims, one of his classmates namely Abdul Malek was taken held by Hindu community to the house of the local Hindu Mahashava president Suren Banarji and was beaten up there. On hearing this, Sheikh Mujib went to that house and requested them to set him (Malek) free. Getting no positive response to this request, fighting started between the two groups and Mujib and his companions brought Malek out breaking the door and took him with them. A case was filed on this ground and it was clear that step was being taken for arresting Mujib as one of the defendants. One of his well-wishers told him, *'Miabhai, go and stay in a neighbouring house, please.'* Mujib replied, 'I will not go, I will not flee. People will say, I have been afraid.' Mujib was arrested and produced to the court, and as bail was not granted, he had to live in jail-custody for seven days.

The second event was of 1954. The central government introduced the rule of section 92A in the province dismissing its *Juktafront* government. Extensive arrests started all around. Sheikh Mujib was out of home. He was informed that police went to his house to find him. As he stated in his *'The Unfinished Memoirs'*, 'at the time of departing from my colleagues, I told many of them, "I am headed for prison but let me stress something: you shouldn't obey this unfair decree without protesting against it. You should oppose it openly. The people of the country are ready to do so; all you have to

do is lead them. Many of us will land up in jail but it is better to protest and end up there." On returning home I took my meal, prepared my beddings and then making a phone call I told district magistrate Mr. Yahiya Khan Chowdhury, "The police has been to my house no doubt to arrest me. You will find me there; so send a vehicle for me". He (Mr. Khan) replied, "We have to obey orders. I am sending a vehicle, so get ready. They are calling me repeatedly to have you arrested." I thanked him and hung up. Renu got my things ready, crying as she did so.'

It can be understood from these events that lawful politics was a matter of his confidence and practice, he never thought of leading a political movement going in concealment. If he were not arrested in 1971, we would be more gainful in the war of liberation, conflicts

might not be seen in his party and conspiracy against this just war could not be formed. But we also cannot hope from a man for doing something against his personal belief and inclination. He went to jail and hoped that his colleagues would complete his commenced task. We are lucky, they did that task devotedly.

Bangabandhu was absent in the war of liberation, but the war was conducted in his very name. Even those who wanted to compromise with the enemy party during the war used his very name. Such was the glory of his name, greatness of his name!

Bangabandhu's trial was done in Pakistan when he was in captivity there; he was awarded a sentence of punishment too. A grave was dug for him beside his cell in the jail. Bangabandhu however was unyielding. He requested the jail authority that his deadbody should be buried in the soil of Bengal after his death.

We are fortunate that Bangabandhu could return to the land of Bengal in his life time. He took over the responsibility of ruling the country. The Pakistanis dared not to kill him, but the treacherous people of his own country killed him along with his family members brutally. Killing him was not their only motif, they wanted to destroy the feeling of the war of liberation, wanted to reshape the millions of martyr's blood-bathed Bangladesh. In the long run they failed; all attempts to protect them also became futile. Bangabandhu got his room not only in the soil of Bangladesh, but also in the hearts of millions of people.

Translation: *Munshi Jalal Uddin*

Bangabandhu – The Great Hero

(Continued from previous page)

water resource development as early as in March 1973. In his address to the nation on 26 March 1972, he informed that 61 subdivisions of the country would be upgraded into districts and elected authorities would be set up in all districts. At the root of Bangabandhu's belief glowed the conviction that people were the source of all power. Therefore, empowerment of the people was his ultimate goal. The Bangabandhu Bridge that we built in the decade of 1990s was conceptualised by Bangabandhu more than two decades earlier.

Pragmatic Foreign Policy

While returning to his native land from Pakistan via London, Bangabandhu had said that Bangladesh would be the 'Switzerland of the East'. The foreign policy of Bangladesh based on 'Friendship with all, malice towards none' was framed in that light. Bangabandhu presented an outline of the country's foreign policy in his very first press conference after returning home. He declared, 'We want good relations with all our neighbours; it is true that our link with Pakistan has been severed, but there is no scope for enmity now.' He extended his hands of commercial cooperation to countries like China and Egypt, who had not recognized Bangladesh till then. He entered into an agreement with Saudi Arabia for sending Haj pilgrims. He was able to send back the Indian army to their soil from Bangladesh within three months.

It seems amazing that Bangabandhu could think of bolstering the defence of Bangladesh's borders as early as in 1974. He took the initiative to finalise the maritime boundary with Myanmar at a time when even the United Nations was not concerned about maritime borders. He finalised the land boundary with India and signed the Indira-Mujib Agreement for exchanging enclaves. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has demonstrated her diplomatic sagacity by adhering to the main planks of her father's foreign policy.

Trial of War Crimes

After assuming office for running the country for the second time in 2009 following her election victory, Sheikh Hasina's government took the initiative to hold the trial of war-crimes and crimes against humanity committed during 1971 in accordance with her election manifesto. But it was Bangabandhu who had initiated the trial of war-crimes. Not only did he throw the war-criminals and collaborators into jails, it was he who formulated the International Crimes Tribunal Act. At a huge public meeting in Tangail on 15 February 1972, Bangabandhu declared: 'The trial of war-criminals will be held on the soil of Bangladesh.' Ignoring various domestic and international pressures, the Awami League government is now carrying forward the task of trying war crimes after overcoming all challenges. The punishments of some top war criminals have now materialised.

Education and Culture

The unprecedented progress achieved in the education sector during the past few years also owes its philosophical origin to Bangabandhu. It was Bangabandhu who was the first to nationalise primary education. He knew that the structure would not be strong if the foundation was not robust. Bangabandhu nationalised primary schools immediately after independence. During the current rule of Sheikh Hasina, over 26 thousand primary schools of the country as well as the jobs of over 100 thousand teachers working there have been nationalised. New posts for around 45 thousand teachers have been created. The status of secondary school teachers have been upgraded from class three to class two. The Awami League government is now distributing around 200 million textbooks free of charge among 35 million pupils up to secondary level on the first day of the year. This program was not halted even when the horrendous acts of 'fire terrorism' were carried out. Bangabandhu established Islamic Foundation for the majority population of this country. He could establish the truth that secularism did not imply absence of religion. The attributes shown by Netaji Subhash Chandra Basu, poet Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Shere Bangla A K Fazlul Haque and Huseyn Shahid Suhrawardy- could be observed in his character.

Agriculture

We can now say with pride that we are self-sufficient in food. Our farmers have made this impossible possible. Our storages are now full with the crops produced by them. The farmers have now found a way to lead a comfortable life. The lifeblood of rural Bangla, the peasants' joy has now spread among the 'shadowed and peaceful abodes' of our small villages. The picture of the villages has undergone transformation. The farmers have been given loans of Taka 300 billion. Around 14.4 million Agricultural Input Assistance cards have been distributed among them. They are provided fertilizers at a subsidised rate. The inspirations of the farsighted statesman Bangabandhu also contributed to this green revolution. Bangabandhu played a powerful role in favour of

the farmers in the National Assembly of Pakistan during the mid-1950s. At the biennial council of the Awami League on 18 January 1974, Bangabandhu had uttered in an emotion-choked voice: 'If I cannot bring smiles to the faces of the people of Bangla, if I see that the people of Bangla are sad, and if I see that the people of Bangla do not fill their stomach with food, then I cannot die in peace, I cannot, I cannot.' Bangabandhu took steps for raising the living-standard of distressed farmers and waived their loans at the very inception of the journey of independent Bangladesh. Immediately after assuming office, he took the initiative for agricultural reforms. He waived taxes for up to 15 bigha of land, freed the farmers from 1 million certificate cases lodged against them, and also waived interests on outstanding loans.

Bangabandhu and Bangladesh

Bangabandhu and Bangladesh are synonymous, as he was linked to the people of Bangladesh through an umbilical cord. Bangabandhu was an eternal love for the soil and people of this country, which was termed as an 'extraordinary tale of love' by the famous TV personality David Frost. In his *'The Unfinished Memoirs'*, Bangabandhu had written 'I am not a communist. But I believe in socialism. I don't believe in the capitalist economy. I consider it as a tool of exploitation. As long as this economy of creating capitalists last, the exploitations of the people of this world cannot be stopped.'

The political philosophy of Bangabandhu sprang from Bangladesh, Bangali, Bangla language, and Bangali culture. Its main themes were – democracy, non-communalism, international amity, development, and the rights of the poor. At present, the non-communal and democratic spirit of Bangladesh, independent foreign policy, loyalty towards culture and roots, infrastructure development and economic growth – all are being run in the light of Bangabandhu's outlook and ideals. The torch of development, modernism, heritage, culture, freedom and prestige that Bangabandhu lit through establishing Bangladesh now lay in the hands of his daughter Sheikh Hasina.

Modern and Digital Bangladesh

Bangabandhu is the inspiration for the massive programs initiated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for erecting the base of a modern Bangladesh. Not only the present, we should also cast our eyes to the future – this farsightedness of Bangabandhu inspired Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to adopt 'Vision-2021'. She painted the 'water-colour' painting of Bangladesh while standing on the pedestal of 2009. This 'Vision' looks at Bangladesh as bereft of hunger, poverty, corruption, illiteracy and backwardness; it aspires for a developed, prosperous, knowledge-based modern- in one word, a Bangladesh where everybody has work, income, earnings, shelter, education and healthcare.

The Prime Minister has taken advantage of the opportunity for flourishing information technology in a big way. She regularly converses with and provides directions to different levels of officials in administration through video conferencing. Even ordinary people from far-flung areas can let the prime minister know about their wants and difficulties. Distant places have now come closer due to the successful application of information technology. We have noticed that information and service centres have been established in each union of the country. The rural people are receiving 220 services from these centres including government forms, notices, information about passports and visas, information about agriculture, education and different services, job-related news, citizenship certificates, results of public examinations and registration for traveling abroad. Notable successes in this sector during the first five years of the current Sheikh Hasina government include- mobile banking, life insurance, soil testing and prescribing fertilizer, payment of electricity bill and scope for obtaining land-related services. In addition, computer laboratories have been set up in around 4 thousand educational institutions; mobile healthcare and telemedicine system have been installed in upazila and district level hospitals.

Let me return to the theme of Bangabandhu again. Rabindranath occupies all our spirit and awareness. He is always present in our mental world. And Bangabandhu reigns in all our realities, as a constant companion of the soil and its people. It is possible to properly outline the deeds of the Father of the Nation within a limited space like this. In pages after pages of his *'The Unfinished Memoir'*, we discover a great hero whose lifelong dream was centred on his dearest countrymen.

'This country is my pride

This soil is to me like gold

For freedom blooms here

My thousand aspirations

Thousand cravings.'

These cravings were not that of the poet Subhash Mukhopadhyay alone; these were Bangabandhu's as well.

Translation: *Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed*

Even Death Couldn't Touch
Asad Chowdhury

The path began here,

Alas, it was lost and that too here!

The tree of tremor rests here

With the seed of volcano sown here.

-Tungipara, Nawshad Nuree

Suddenly lights went off

The path to freedom was lost in its
own secured abode–

For thousands of years

The wealth protected with an untidy veil,

Comparable to the dancing light,

Grew into the queen of the world

In every fold of dreamy memories

Was blown out thus...

Five offspring

Who could never touch the corpse

Believe me, even death could never touch

The greatest Bangali time has ever seen.

Earthquakes, tidal waves,

Bores like Gorky, floods, epidemics–

By overcoming all these calamities

Bangalis came to the forefront of the globe

Following your footprints

They fought with indomitable courage with you in their heart.

By winning victory when they were ready

To drink freedom to the lees

They lost the path to freedom.

Now your memories inspire us to dream

An unhindered dream of freedom–

In distressing wonder I feel

You are with us

And will remain forever.

Translation: *Saera Habib*

To the Father of the Nation
Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam

They found no way but to kill you

'That had been the only way to ruin Bangladesh!'

The defeated and wounded serpents, all villains, thought

Freedom will meet an end with your death.

If you depart, they can swindle in the name of religion

And with political and business gains, fulfill their lust for women

As they did in the terrible year of nineteen seventy one

When they enjoyed wealth and women in the name of religion.

Your thought, human wealth, your life blood

Would be the eternal guards of a secular homeland

So they did slay all your relatives at the same event of killing you

Where child Russell's death surmounted the avenge-peak.

Killers haven't been successful

Your competent daughter has unified the country in a string.

O father! Do bless us from the heaven

So that we can prevent hyenas from blood sucking.

Translation: *The poet himself*