

How Bangabandhu flew into London

SHAKHAWAT LITON

An unusual secrecy shrouded Bangabandhu's departure aboard a special Pakistan International Airways flight on his release from captivity in West Pakistan. He flew in from Rawalpindi to London in the early morning of January 8, 1972. But the British government was not aware beforehand of his departure for London.

The then British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, termed Bangabandhu's arrival as unexpected, according to a declassified document of the US Department of State. "We first heard of his release in a message from Islamabad which was received when the aircraft carrying him was only an hour away," Heath told the then US President, Richard Nixon, in a message on January 13.

Initially, London was not in consideration as a destination. During discussions with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Bangabandhu had suggested that he should be sent to Dhaka or handed over to the Red Cross or the United Nations. These ideas were not accepted by Bhutto and he wrote to Edward Heath referring to his discussion with Bangabandhu.

Bhutto took over power by overthrowing President Yahya Khan a few days after Pakistan army's defeat in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and announced the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the face of tremendous pressure from the world community.

Bhutto had suggested that Bangabandhu, who earlier had been convicted to death in a mock trial by a military court on charges of waging war against Pakistan, should be sent to Tehran. But Mujib refused to go to Tehran. When London was presented as an alternative, Bangabandhu accepted it.

"He [Mujib] was anxious to reach Dacca as soon as possible and we gave him an R.A.F. aircraft for the onward journey. It was his own choice that he should not transfer to an Indian aircraft in Delhi," reads the British Prime Minister's message for Nixon.

The British Royal Air Force comet jet carried Bangabandhu home via Delhi on January 10 where his people were eagerly waiting for his return.

There has always been a question in some people's minds as to why Bangabandhu flew

into London from Rawalpindi. Dr Kamal Hossain, who was kept in prison during the nine months of the Liberation War and released along with Bangabandhu and flew with him, faced a similar question from the Commonwealth Oral Histories in December 2014.

He recollected that they wanted to return to Dhaka by the shortest possible route, but because of the hostilities that had gone on until December, 1971, Indian air space was closed for Pakistani aircrafts.

"Now I had said, 'Alright, why don't we take a UN plane or a Red Cross plane?'"

"And they [Bhutto and other Pakistani officials] said, 'No, we want to take you on one of our planes - Pakistan International Airlines - and we can't fly over India, so choose some destination which would be acceptable,'" said Kamal in the interview which was posted on the official website of Commonwealth Oral Histories on July 13, 2015. "We said, 'Any neutral country will be fine.'"

The moment the possibility of London was presented, "we just seized it and said that would be best, because many people who come out of exile to participate in the diplomatic efforts in support of Bangladesh were residents there," remembered Kamal, who had held portfolios of law and foreign affairs of the Bangabandhu-led government.

West Pakistan's new President Bhutto saw Bangabandhu off at the Rawalpindi airport amid secrecy.

"The bird has flown," Bhutto told reporters later.

On Bangabandhu's arrival in Heathrow Airport, Bangabandhu was met by a senior British Foreign and Commonwealth Office official in the VIP lounge. Thus, Bangabandhu was accorded head of state protocol.

Bangabandhu held a meeting with Heath at 10 Downing Street, residence cum office of the British premier, on the night of January 8. In an hour long meeting with Heath, Bangabandhu raised the question of the British recognising Bangladesh as a sovereign country.

In his message to US President Nixon, Edward Heath said Sheikh Mujib spoke of his hope of Commonwealth membership. "I



In London the then British Prime Minister Edward Heath received Bangabandhu in 10 Downing Street when he accorded Bangabandhu the honour of a visiting head of state.

assured him of our goodwill, but at the same time explained the reasons why we could not recognise Bangladesh at once."

"The problem is one of timing. Too early recognition would antagonise West Pakistan and complicate Bhutto's task," explained Heath.

In the wake of the then ongoing Cold War between the Western and Soviet block, he however cautioned that: "On the other hand, if we delay too long, the Communist countries will get a start on us in the East, and the position of their friends there will be

strengthened."

Convinced of the discussion with Bangabandhu, the British premier felt the necessity for recognising Bangladesh as an independent nation. He also suggested that the US president, whose administration had wholeheartedly sided with Pakistan during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, should convince Bhutto to recognise Bangladesh.

"Anything which you can do to help Bhutto accept the inevitability of recognition

of Bangladesh would be most helpful. I am myself in touch with him and have told him that Mujib, in his talk with me, ruled out any formal link between East and West. But your views will I know weigh heavily with Bhutto and his government," Heath wrote.

However, around three weeks before Heath's message to Nixon, Bhutto had sent a message to the US administration not to act in haste in recognising the "so-called Bangla Desh". Bhutto made the request at a meeting with the US ambassador in Pakistan on December 20, only four days after the Pakistan army's surrender in Dhaka, giving birth to an independent Bangladesh, according to a declassified telegram from Embassy in Pakistan to the Department of State.

Bhutto told the US ambassador that he was convinced that sentiment in both wings--East and West Pakistan--was still overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining the union.

Bhutto also made desperate efforts to prevent the UK government from recognising Bangladesh as an independent country. On January 3, at a meeting with the US ambassador, Pakistan's foreign secretary Sultan Khan informed him that Bhutto had told some ambassadors that Pakistan would leave the Commonwealth if the UK government recognised Bangladesh. This view, the foreign secretary said, had been officially communicated to the British government, according to another declassified US embassy document sent to the Department of State on January 3.

The goodwill of the British government as demonstrated during Mujib's stopover in London on his way home from captivity in Pakistan, was, however, maintained as the UK recognised Bangladesh as an independent nation on February 1972. This recognition eventually led to recognition from other European and Commonwealth nations and Bangladesh's induction into the Commonwealth on April 18, 1972.

Thus, after being freed from captivity, Bangabandhu's first meeting with a head of the government, Edward Heath, yielded fruitful results. This shows that apart from being a charismatic leader, he was a great diplomat too.

The writer is senior reporter, The Daily Star.

BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF JUSTICE MAHBUB MURSHED A champion of social justice

KAZI SALLAHUDDIN

THE time dial of rotating years has once again brought us to the birth anniversary of perhaps one of the most distinguished sons of the country, Syed Mahbub Murshed, popularly known as Justice Murshed. Born a little after the first decade of the last century, Murshed remains a prominent figure in the country. Although he came from a privileged background, he was an articulate spokesman for the repressed and subjugated people. He had brilliant academic results both at home and abroad, which led to him becoming a barrister in England at the honourable Lincoln Inn society in 1938.

Justice Murshed rose to eminence of the highest order as a jurist with an imbued sense of social justice. His contribution to the field of literature and belles-lettres was no less outstanding. Murshed bestowed upon us wisdom on various issues, ranging from constitutional law, jurisprudence, literature, politics, and not to forget innumerable social causes. As a judge, and later as Chief Justice, he was a fearless exponent of the rule of law. Justice Murshed chose never to yield even to the highest provocation. The greatness of his legal mind was that he drew inspiration from a variety of historical, philosophical and theological sources. Yet, he was able to interpret these themes in his own inimitable fashion. Justice Murshed's genius lay in the ability to fathom



Justice Mahbub Murshed

these diverse intellectual influences in his own individualistic way. He was acutely aware of the fact that excessive insistence on the letter of the law could violate the spirit, as he stated, "It is not the use but the abuse of power that the Courts should seek to redress." Murshed's judicial pronouncements, while sitting at the bench of High Court and Supreme Court of Pakistan, where he served as

an ad-hoc judge, then as Chief Justice, reflected the ideals of liberty and justice. Some of his judgements created constitutional history, and became landmark judgments, winning him international acclaim. His verdicts also often went against the Ayub-Monem dictatorship.

Around five decades ago, when our country was under the rule of occupying forces, when those who

governed our land from more than 1000 miles away were determined to impose their culture upon us, and erase our cultural heritage, it was Murshed who fought for the age-old traditions and cultural identity of Bangladesh. He organised the centennial celebration of Tagore in 1961 in Dhaka and other parts of the country, in defiance of the Pakistani regime. When the great tide of nationalism swept the country in the 1970s, the person to figure most prominently in the process to liberation which began from the 50s was Syed Mahbub Murshed. The fight for a separate identity thus became through a process of metamorphosis a battle for nationalism. The passion of a nation's struggle for independence found eloquent expression in the manifold speeches, judgements and writings of Justice Murshed. He thus became one of the most articulate spokesmen of Bangali nationalism.

In his professional life as a lawyer, despite professional preoccupations, Murshed found the time to write, speak and also participate in various social and humanitarian activities. His article "Quo Vadis Quaid-e-Azam", where he criticised the policies of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, in defence of his uncle Fazlul Haque, which was printed at *The Statesman* in Calcutta and *The Telegraph* in London, created a stir. During the famine of 1943, and later the communal riots of 1946, Murshed worked actively with Anjuman Mofudil Islam. Murshed was a Sufi and liberal

Muslim, and spoke of tolerance which was against any form of communalism. During the communal violence that shook the subcontinent during the partition, Murshed was one of the people who were primarily responsible for setting the process, which resulted in the Liaquat-Nehru pact, in motion.

Another of his significant contributions was the final touches that he gave to the drafting of the historic six-point demand in 1966 for provincial autonomy of the then East Pakistan - a demand of the Bangali intelligentsia. In early 1954, while he was still a practicing lawyer, Murshed was one of those to draft the 21-point manifesto of the Jukta-front government. This was later summarised into the now popular six-point manifesto by him. Later in 1966, Mazharul Haq Baki, the then president of Chhatra League, recorded that no one except Chief Justice Murshed dared to accede being the chief guest in their annual conference. This is where Murshed, like Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, made the clarion call for provincial autonomy of then East Pakistan.

When the then President of Pakistan Ayub Khan celebrated his so-called "Decade of Reforms", Murshed resigned from the post of Chief Justice to join the masses in the fight for democracy. Organising the defence of the Agartala conspiracy case was among the first things he did after his resignation. Following this, Murshed entered politics, which

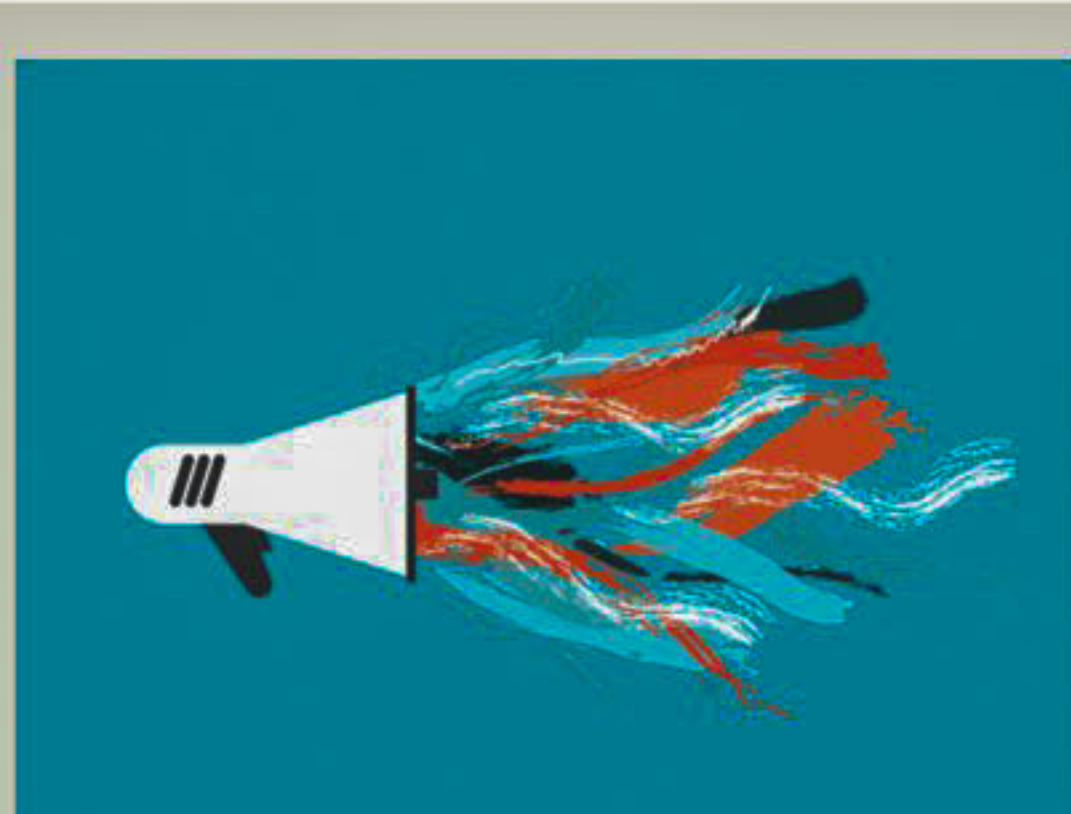
gave major momentum to the anti-Ayub movement. It was because of Murshed who was leading the charge during the mass upsurge while others were jailed that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not released on parole but rather released unconditionally. It was also on account of Murshed's constant public demands that all the co-accused of the Agartala conspiracy case were unconditionally exonerated.

During the roundtable conference in 1969, Justice Murshed demanded 'one man, one vote.' Prior to this new demand, there was parity of 150 seats each for East and West Pakistan in the then Pakistan National Assembly. Murshed's 'one man, one vote' proposal was accepted, and because of this, 169 seats out of 300 went to East Pakistan in the next national elections.

Murshed's resignation as chief justice in protest of the occupying Pakistani forces led the Bangali intelligentsia to consider him as the only acceptable presidential candidate against Ayub. His refusal to collaborate with the ruling military junta during the Liberation War has also been recorded in history. He thus played an important role in shaping Bangali nationalism. Justice Murshed will remain in history as someone who served his community rising above his self-interests.

The writer is the founder secretary of the Syed Mahbub Murshed Memorial Committee.

A WORD A DAY

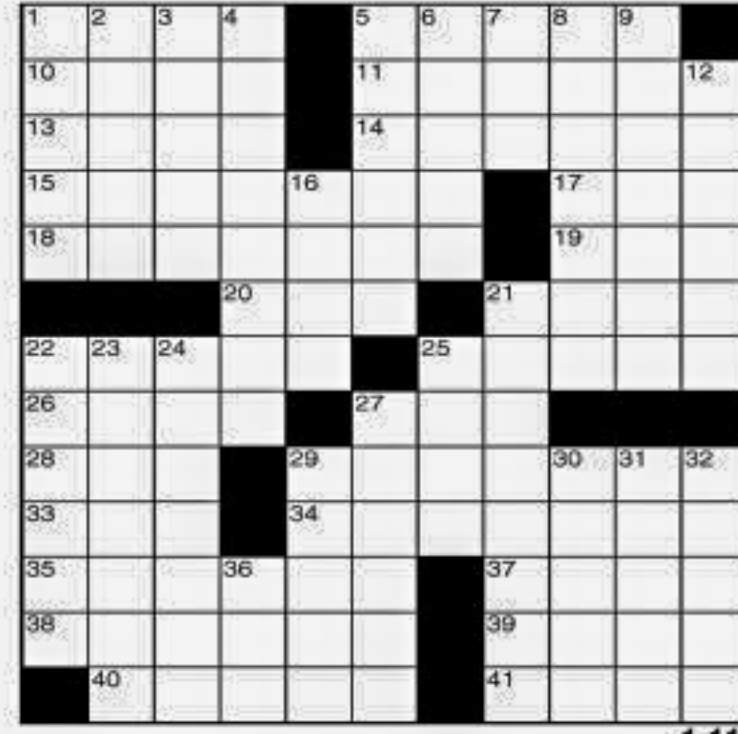


RÉCLAME
[rā-klām]

A taste or flair for publicity

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Exchange
 - 5 Camera feature
 - 10 Tardy
 - 11 Drank like a dog
 - 13 Neighbourhood
 - 14 Current unit
 - 15 Conceited
 - 17 Smoked salmon
 - 18 Kin of dashes
 - 19 Ignited
 - 20 Parrot or puppy
 - 21 Nota --
 - 22 Do a butler's job
 - 25 Pick from the menu
 - 26 Voucher
 - 27 Lamb lament
 - 28 Sedan or SUV
 - 29 Oscar-winning
 - Michael Keaton movie
 - 33 Approves
 - 34 Motivate
 - 35 Shared an old story
 - 37 "Got it"
 - 38 Search the riverbed
 - 39 Look after
- DOWN**
- 40 Derisive look
 - 41 Waiter's aid
 - 1 Web addresses separator
 - 2 Like toads
 - 3 Enjoyed avidly
 - 4 Stone from a fruit
 - 5 Hardly hide
 - 6 End table lights
 - 7 Phone download
 - 8 Competed in a bee
 - 9 Jane Eyre, for one
 - 12 Jazz legend -- Gordon
 - 16 Acute
 - 21 "Fury" star
 - 22 Harmony
 - 23 Salt sprinklers
 - 24 Dunst of TV's "Fargo"
 - 25 Rowing needs
 - 27 Loose-leaf notebook
 - 29 Hull bottom
 - 30 Stingy one
 - 31 Sports setting
 - 32 Poor
 - 36 Poem of praise



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S C O L D S M A L L
C O P O U Y E R I E
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F O R E S W A G E R
F A T S T U L A N E
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U N I T E S C A P S
G E T O N C A R E T
L A I R Y A N K I E E
R E N O S T O N E D

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

