

# NATIONAL MOURNING DAY

## The Towering Courage of Bangabandhu

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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### Tribute to Bangabandhu

*Fulfill his ideals to repay our debt to him*

WE mourn this day as we have done since that dark night of 15th August forty one years ago, when Bangabandhu along with all but two of his family members were brutally killed. It was a day when the spirit of the nation was snatched from its body.

The derailment caused by the painful development of 15th August 1975 had had the most harmful consequence on the political culture of the country. The period that followed had put this country back several decades in its march towards democracy and development caused by autocratic and pseudo democratic dispensation which engendered continuous flux in the society. And the worst of everything that we witnessed during this time was the most despicable indemnity ordinance promulgated to shield the killers of Bangabandhu and his family. That aberration has been righted by the government of Sheikh Hasina and most of the killers have been bought to justice through a long drawn but established legal process. The rest of the killers must face the law too.

Bangabandhu belongs as much to the people of Bangladesh, cutting across party lines, as to history, and while we mourn his death, we must not forget the cause for which he sacrificed his life. His memory must inspire us to do more and achieve more. And the only way we can repay our debt to him is to work towards fulfilling the aspirations of the people based on the noble principles of the War of Liberation, a goal Bangabandhu had devoted his life for. That is the pledge we must make today.

### Payra seaport

*A boost to economy*

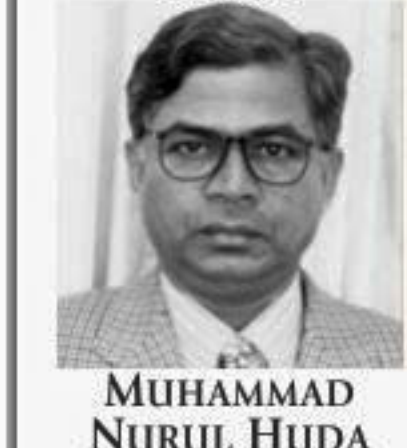
THE inauguration of Payra seaport by the prime minister signals a stepped-up effort by the government to provide the country with much needed infrastructure. The third commercial seaport of the country, it is one of the ten mega projects fact-tracked and prioritised by the government to meet the country's development challenges.

Situated in Pautakhlai, 319 kilometres south of Dhaka, the seaport will be made fully operational by 2023 and will be able to handle large vessels that neither Chittagong nor Mongla seaports can as of now. It will boost the country's exports and imports by connecting it to the hinterland through river routes, create thousands of jobs, and turbocharge the economy of the southern districts. The government plans to establish economic zones, power plants, ecotourism spots and an airport around the port. It will meet the increased demand of container handling that is likely to be tripled by 2030.

The construction of Payra seaport is a timely and significant move forward because in terms of load carried, seaway transportation is the cheapest and most effective transportation system compared to other means. The project seems to be well-planned as the site does not submerge during the monsoon.

However, to reap its full benefit, the government will have to link the seaport to the capital by well-built roads, waterways and railway.

STRAIGHT  
LINE



MUHAMMAD  
NURUL HUDA

FOR the uninformed multitudes, remembering Bangabandhu on August 15 is perhaps a ritualistic observance when the mind does not delve deep to grasp the historical significance of the tragedy. The ignorant and the deviants in our midst cannot be blamed for their short-sightedness because the distortions of our political history were done at the behest of pitiable villains occupying the pulpit of power. The crude efforts to denigrate and sideline Bangabandhu, the architect of our freedom and catapulting the minor players onto the centre stage would remain a shameful part of our existence.

The assassins of 1975 were able to physically do away with Bangabandhu but did not realise that erasing him from the hearts and minds of Bengalis was practically impossible and morally indefensible. The immutable fact of history all Bangladeshis and the rest of the world ought to know is that the towering courage of this Bengali was instrumental in the creation of a sovereign nation. So fearless and altruistic was this man that he spent

nearly two-thirds of his youth in prison for the emancipation of his people.

Imagine the 1960s when Bengalis of erstwhile East Pakistan were subjected to the most humiliating treatment. It would be no exaggeration to state that they were experiencing the tribulations of a colonised people. In an atmosphere of all-pervasive fear and subjugation, it was Bangabandhu who confronted the mighty Field Marshal Ayub Khan and showed the guts to forcefully advocate the rights of fellow Bengalis. During the trial of the so-called Agartala Conspiracy Case in Dhaka Cantonment, Bangabandhu took to task the rogue Pakistani army personnel and cautioned them to behave. He did not agree to participate in the Round Table Conference as a prisoner. The 1960s were, in fact, a time when all Bengalis could justifiably take pride in their courageous manner that drew sustenance from Bangabandhu's defiant disposition.

Bangabandhu was a real epitome of courage, both in the physical and moral sense. The historic Six Point Programme, an explicit embodiment of Bengali nationalism was unfurled at Lahore, the heart of Punjab by Bangabandhu. In Lahore, the bastion of arrogant Punjabi power, Bangabandhu displayed admirable physical and moral courage during the course of a public meeting in 1970 that he was addressing.

It so happened that his speech was

being purposely interrupted by some Muslim League-Jamaat hirelings. When these elements did not stop even after being cautioned, Bangabandhu shouted at them, asserting that he had not come to Lahore to seek votes as he had plenty of them in his place, and that they either listen to him or disappear from the meeting area. No Bengali had ever publicly ventured to rebuke the power-obsessed high nosed Punjabis in such a raw manner.

When Bangabandhu, the poet of politics spoke, it had an electrifying effect on the Bengalis whose spirit soared immeasurably in heightened expectations. Their support for their leader was total as evidenced in the historic landslide electoral victory of the nationalist causes in 1970. When the time came for tough talks across the table, Bangabandhu did not wilt. In fact, the cabal of Pakistani army generals that accompanied General Yahya Khan for the meeting in March 1971 were awed and surprised by the gutsy presentation and forceful manner of Bangabandhu.

It is an irony of the sub-continental political progression that while the prescribed text books of social science and literature were supposed to turn Indian gentlemen taking to western education into rebels, in reality, scores of them joined the imperial service to obediently serve their colonial masters. Similarly, a large part of the so-called

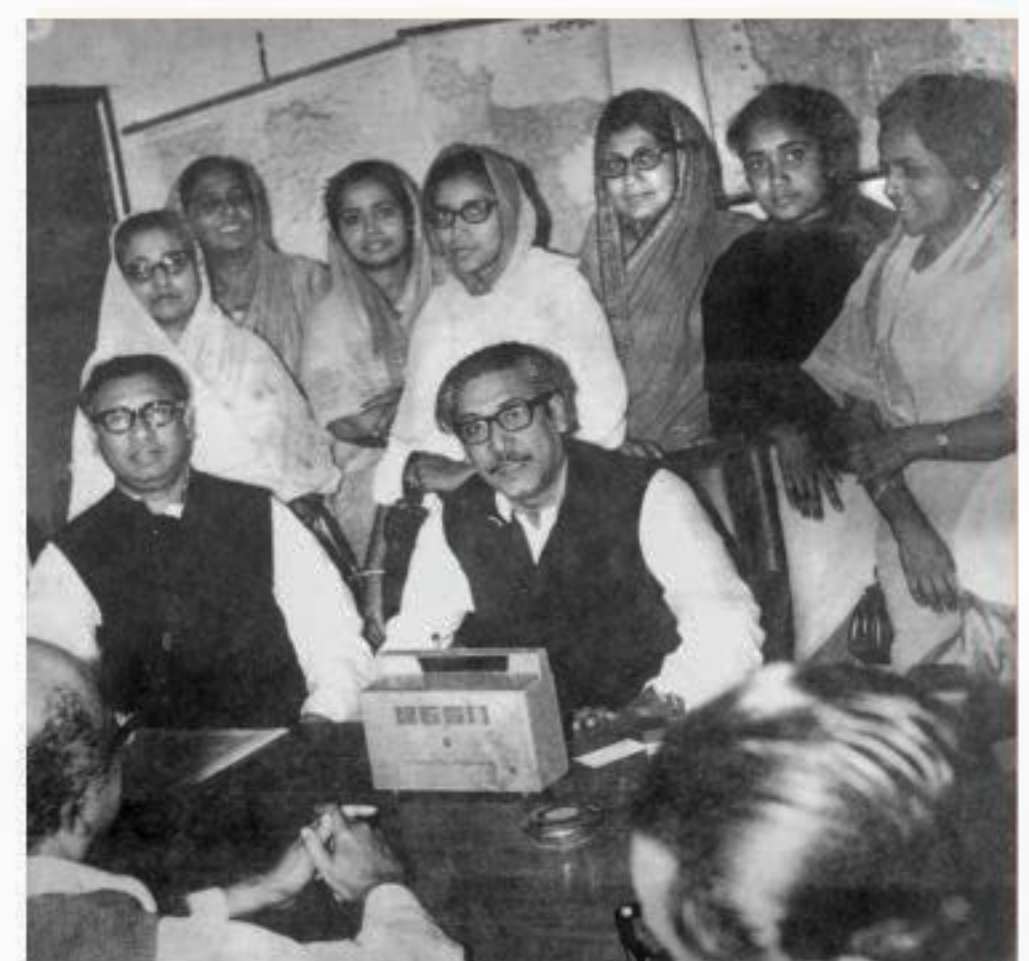
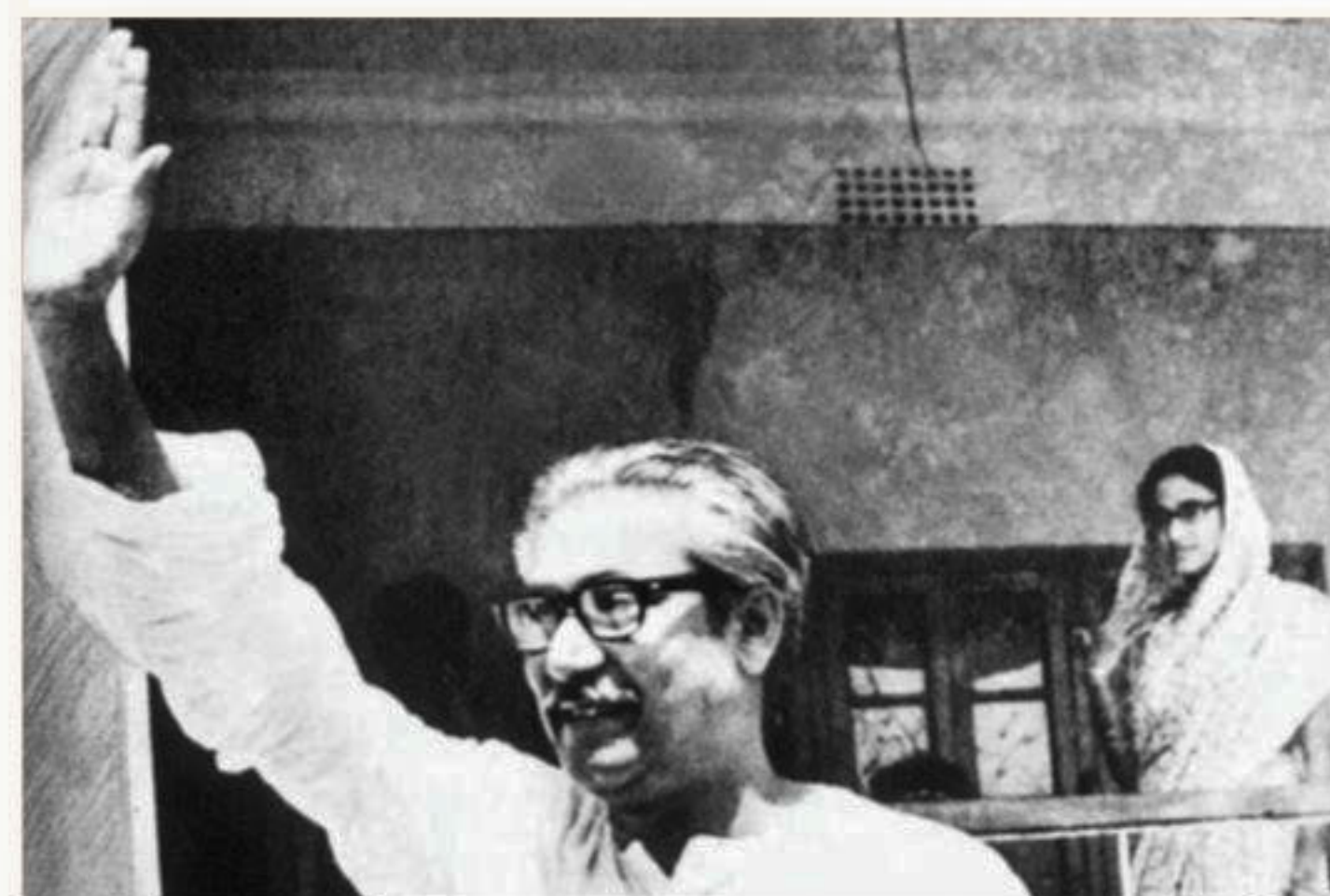
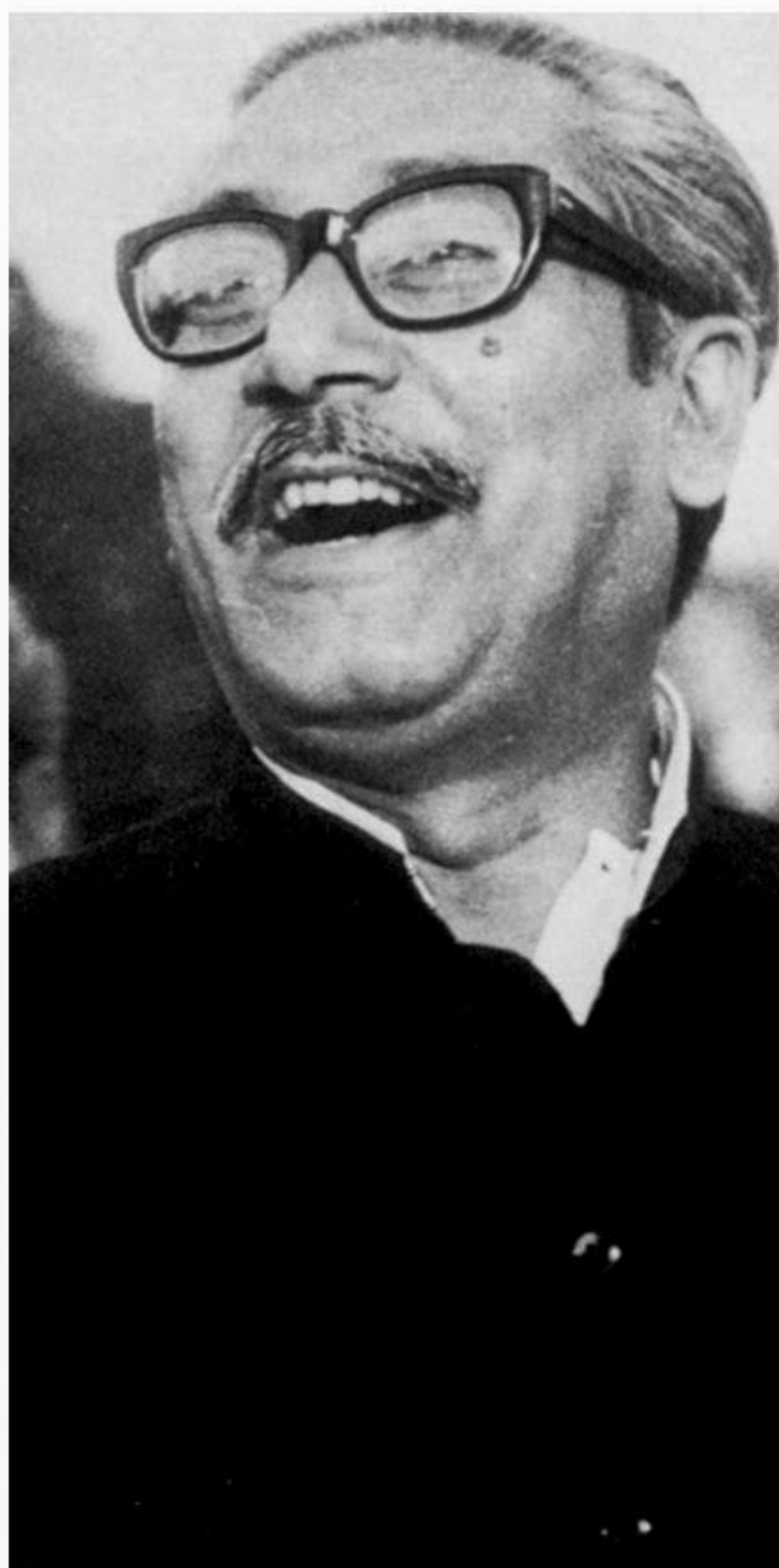
constitutional methods oriented politicians of undivided India were more occupied with their personal and material safety and hardly posed a threat to the British might.

The post-partition scenario in Pakistan did not witness much of a change. The military-civil bureaucracy conspired with the business oligarchy and the landed gentry to protect their vested interests. People's emancipation did not figure seriously in the politician's scheme of things. It was in these circumstances that Bangabandhu could galvanise a somnolent people to unprecedented political activism for achieving real freedom.

Bangabandhu was gifted with extraordinary organisational acumen and had the inkling of the brutality of the Pakistani military junta. Accordingly, he exhorted the people for an imminent armed struggle. His historic 7th March speech bears an eloquent testimony to that. Precariously positioned as he was in the extremely demanding tumultuous days of March 1971, Bangabandhu as a constitutional politician acted with supreme forbearance.

Bangabandhu could never be covered into submission. The trappings of power did not allure him and he remained a solid rock in the shifting sands. It is time once again to gratefully remember and pay homage to the great patriarch.

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## A visionary leader

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

THE Legal Framework Order (LFO) was issued as President's Order No. 2 of 1970 by the President of Pakistan and Chief Martial Law Administrator General A.M. Yahya Khan on March 30, 1970. The Order provided some basic principles for the future Constitution of the country. On the time limit on framing the Constitution, the LFO explicitly stated in Article 24 that it must be done within a period of one hundred and twenty days from the date of the Assembly's first meeting and on its failure to do so it shall stand dissolved. Furthermore, Article 25 went on to stipulate: "The Constitution Bill, as passed by the National Assembly, shall be presented to the President for authentication. The National Assembly shall stand dissolved in the event that authentication is refused".

The LFO as a whole, and these two provisions in particular, created a great degree of scepticism among politicians and members of the civil society. Many questioned the propriety of participating in such a straight jacketed election and asked Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to boycott it. In response, Bangabandhu declared, "Let me get the mandate of my people. I will tear the LFO into pieces. The Constitution would be drafted incorporating the Six Point programme, Awami League's election manifesto".

In the process, it could be affirmed in unqualified term that the election of 1970 was the main source of our internal strength, external support and the only legal basis of the proclamation of our independence. By taking part in the election, Sheikh Mujib not only exhibited his foresight but also elevated himself from a politician to a statesman. Without taking part in an election there is no other valid and trusted mechanism to prove the popularity of a political party, its leader and support for its

platform. There was widespread belief in the military camp and their allies among the Bengalis that Sheikh Mujib would not get more than 60 percent of the national assembly seats allotted to East Pakistan. This was reaffirmed by Yahya Khan to Henry Kissinger, who wrote, "I took the opportunity to ask Yahya what would happen to powers of the President after the election. Yahya could not have been more confident. He expected a multiplicity of the parties to emerge in both West and East Pakistan, which would continually fight each other in each wing of the country and between the two wings; the President would remain arbiter of Pakistan's politics".

However, the election results were a big surprise for both the rivals, and to some extent, the friends of the Awami League. In the words of General Fazal Muqueem Khan, "The election results have placed the President on the horns of dilemma. The scheme of things he has worked in his mind, with aid and advice of his advisors, has been shattered. He had to make a fresh plan".

The election results formed the core basis of our formal and legal declaration of independence on April 10, 1971. To justify transition from six-point to one point, it used seven "whereas" clauses to declare: "We the elected representative of the people of Bangladesh... declare Bangladesh to be a sovereign Republic and thereby confirming duly made declaration of independence already made by Bangabandhu on March 26, 1971".

On March 31, 1971, the Indian Parliament passed a resolution pledging sympathy and support for the people of East Bengal in their struggle for the transfer of power to their legally-elected representatives.

To what extent the election results were used to drum up support by many members of both Houses of the US Congress against the hostile policy of the

Nixon administration could be understood when senators and congressmen in the Capitol Hill led by Senator Kennedy asserted, "Sheikh Mujib's only crime was the winning of a free election sponsored by a military regime that later refused to abide by the election mandate. In those elections the people of East Pakistan had spoken in one voice. They had massively elected the candidates of the Awami League, endorsing a platform, which called for autonomous East Bengal. Bangladesh was the rallying cry in those elections, as it remains the rallying cry today".

It is only rational to conclude that in the absence of the election mandate of 1970, our freedom struggle would be absolutely devoid of legal, democratic and moral basis and it would face the same eventuality as experienced by Biafra (of Nigeria). Anyone, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leading the nation to that self-inflicting catastrophe would meet the same fate as meted out to Colonel Ojuku of Biafra.

It would be appropriate to cite the sentiment of one of our illustrious sons, Dr. Mohammed Yunus, while a student in USA, about the arrest of Bangabandhu. He recollected, "While speculating what might have happened to Sheikh Mujib, finally a news came that he has been arrested at Chittagong railway station while he was fleeing from the army. We were in tears after hearing the news. Until then we were making all kind of possibilities of Sheikh guiding the nation at war from some underground bunker. All that the nation needed was his live voice over the radio. Pakistan had no chance with all their sophisticated fire-power against his voice". Similar feelings had also reverberated in the minds of millions at the outset.

During the nine-months of genocide, armed struggles and untold sufferings, Sheikh Mujib's name resonated

ceaselessly in the hearts of millions of Bengalis, not only within the geographical boundaries of Bangladesh, but all over the world, and he remained a demigod to the people of Bangladesh. In the words of General Rao Forman Ali, "Ninety percent of the people of Bangladesh were taken in by the magical power of Sheikh Mujib, and they were ready to sacrifice their lives for the creation of Bangladesh". Sheikh Mujib was not a revolutionary guerrilla leader like Che Guevara or Mao Zedong; the source of his strength did not come from the barrel of the gun, rather, from the mandate and trust of his people. He rose to such a stature in the eyes of his people that he realised that it would have been cowardly if he sought shelter in a safe haven, leaving his people in the midst of death, destruction and genocide.

Moreover, while he was in the enemy's custody, there were worldwide demands for his release and pressure on the Pakistani junta to come to a political solution through dialogue with the elected leader. In November, even US President Richard Nixon, an unblinking ally of Yahya, in order to rescue his friend from the impending catastrophe, asked Henry Kissinger if it would be wise for him to advise Yahya to have a dialogue with Sheikh Mujib. Kissinger's response was, "That would be absolutely suicidal for him, Mr. President. He will be overthrown the next day". So a Mujib in the enemy's custody proved to be a thousand times stronger than a free Mujib fleeing to a neighbouring country, which happened to be the arch enemy of his former country. This decision once again highlighted Bangabandhu's vision, which, as the words scripted by the 17th century Irish writer Jonathan Swift, "is the art of seeing what is invisible to others".

The writer is the Convener of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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#### A legend passes away

Pakistan's former test cricketer Hanif Mohammad, popularly known the "Little master" died at the age of 81 by plunging cricket lovers all over the world into mourning. The right-handed batsman was one of the country's early cricketers who played an integral role for Pakistan in achieving Test status. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2013 and had been receiving treatment for respiratory complications when he passed away in Aga Khan Hospital in Karachi. He played for the Pakistani cricket team in 55 Test matches between 1952-53 and 1969-70 and averaged 43.98, including twelve hundreds. At his peak, he was considered one of the best batsmen the world. His 337 against West Indies in Barbados in 1958 lasted 16 hours 10 minutes, which remains a Test record.

Many other members of Hanif's family were cricketers too. His brothers Mushtaq, Sadiq and Wazir played Tests for Pakistan, as did his son Shoaib. Another brother Raees was once twelfth man for Pakistan, and four of his nephews had first-class careers. His mother Ameer Bee was also a national badminton champion in pre-independence India.

In his passing, Hanif Mohammad will be missed by his family and millions of fans.

**Zeeshan Nasir**  
On email