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COUNTING THE DAYS TO INDEPENDENCE

MAYABEE ARANNYA

"The struggle this time is for emancipation. The struggle this time is for independence." These historic words rang through the air of Race Course Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyana) on March 7, 1971, as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a speech which is now considered a UNESCO world documentary heritage. The leader laid down four conditions under which the Awami League would attend the National Assembly meeting on March 25: martial law was to be immediately lifted, all military personnel were to be instantly withdrawn, elected representatives of the people were to gain power, and the number of casualties during the conflict were to receive a proper inquiry. The Non-Cooperation Movement was strengthened with his new directives—no taxes would be paid, government servants would only obey his orders, the secretariat, government and semi-government offices and courts in East Pakistan would hold strikes, only local and inter-district telephone lines would function apart from a few exceptions, and railways and ports would not cooperate if used to repress the people of East Pakistan. The days which followed, documented in the timeline below, were a ticking time bomb, as Bengalis prepared to fight for the freedom and independence we revel in today.

MARCH 8, 1971

Dhaka's radio station aired the historic speech by Bangabandhu early at 8:30am, triggering processions of support in both East Pakistan and abroad. Ten thousand Bengalis in Britain assembled in front of the Pakistani High Commission in London demanding the independence of Bangladesh, while Bengalis working in Pakistani International Airlines led a procession from the airport to Bangabandhu's Dhanmondi residence. Chhatra League President Nure Alam Siddiqui, General Secretary Shahjahan Siraj, DUCSU Vice-President ASM Abdur Rab and DUCSU General Secretary Abdul Quddus Makhan showed full support, and jointly termed the struggle for independence as the "Freedom Fight," and Bangabandhu as the, "Father of the Nation." At night, the General Secretary



Artist and writers brought out a procession in support of the non-Cooperation Movement on March 10, 1971

of Awami League revealed in a statement that the press note released by military authorities portrayed a completely false and significantly lower number of deaths of innocent civilians fighting for their rights during their crackdown.

MARCH 9, 1971

Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani made a public address at Paltan Maidan, showing support for the Non-Cooperation Movement, and demanded that Yahya Khan hand over power to the rightful majority winner, Bangabandhu. Air Marshal Asghar Khan demanded the same. Leftist forces in exile formed the Bangladesh Jatiyo Mukti Songram Somonnoy Committee (Bangladesh National Freedom Struggle Organising Committee) in West Bengal, India. Meetings were held at army headquarters in Rawalpindi to apparently figure out how to tackle the ongoing Non-Cooperation Movement.

MARCH 10, 1971

Peoples' Party Chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto sent a telegram to Bangabandhu, saying that the present state and future of the country were in serious uncertainty, and that they were both responsible for doing whatever was needed to protect the nation. The Non-Cooperation Movement continued in full swing under Bangabandhu's orders, with the Bangladeshi flag bearing our yellow map hoisted over every house, police station, High Court, and Justice residence.

procurement of necessities by the military authorities; one convoy supplying rations was intercepted by civilians in Sylhet. This led to the enforcement of military order 114 that night, stating that if any civilian willingly or unwillingly harmed government property or hampered military work, they would be punished by law.

MARCH 12, 1971

Air Marshal Asghar Khan said in a press briefing in Lahore that fate was playing an odd game, where the fault was of Lahore, yet shots were being fired in Dhaka. National Committee member Mohammed Zahiruddin gave up his title, which was given by the Pakistan Government. Twenty-seven prisoners escaped in Bogra; one was killed in open fire while 15 were injured. Influential women, including poet Sufia Kamal, declared full support for Bangabandhu.

MARCH 13, 1971

Military authorities enforced military order 115, which stated all employed civilians had to join the Defence Ministry by 10am on March 15. Failure to do would lead to them being termed as fugitives, and court-martialled. Artist Jainul Abedin gave up the title given to him by the Pakistan Government, in solidarity with the Non-Cooperation Movement. Former National Committee member Afazuddin Fakir asked the Defence Ministry of the East to be coordinated by a Bangladeshi, and all battalions of the Bangladesh Regiment to be managed by Bangladeshi officers.

MARCH 14, 1971

This was the last day of the second phase of the Non-Cooperation Movement. National Awami Party leader Abdul Wali Khan and Bangabandhu held a meeting at the latter's residence. Meanwhile, in Nishtar Park, Karachi, Peoples' Party Chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto addressed a rally, calling for power to be transferred to the majority parties: The Awami League in East Pakistan, and the People's Party in West Pakistan. He also urged Bangabandhu to sit with him for a dialogue. In a rally in Barisal, National League Chief Ataur Rahman Khan asked Bangabandhu to form a temporary government. Bangabandhu also announced new orders for the Non-Cooperation Movement.



Female students' parade at Dhaka University playground on March 11, 1971