

**MARCH 15, 1971**

Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury resigned as Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, in protest of the killing of two students by the Pakistani army. In the afternoon, President Yahya Khan arrived in Dhaka from Karachi, under tight security, to hold "negotiations" with Bangabandhu. Governor Lieutenant General Tikka Khan had arrived to welcome him at the airport, but no journalists were allowed there. In a press conference in Karachi, Bhutto stated that the Awami League and the Peoples' Party should jointly form a new government. Bangabandhu made an announcement with 35 directives, calling for the continuation of the Non-Cooperation Movement, while introducing a fresh action programme for the third phase.

MARCH 16, 1971

Bangabandhu and President Yahya Khan held a closed-door meeting at the President's House (now Bangabhaban) for about an hour, without their advisors. Bangabandhu accused Yahya Khan of committing a grave mistake by ignoring the majority leader and deferring the National Assembly session which was to be held on March 1. Bangabandhu then asked Yahya Khan to avert the national crisis by fulfilling the demands made on March 7. Yahya Khan exclaimed that withdrawing martial law would lead to a constitutional vacuum, and so Bangabandhu sent his advisor, Dr Kamal Hossain, to meet the President's Principal Staff Officer Lt Gen SGMM Peerzada, to work out a solution to this together. **March 17, 1971.** This was the 16th day of the Non-Cooperation Movement. At President Yahya Khan's residence, another meeting was held between him and Bangabandhu, which lasted nearly an hour. Yahya Khan called upon Bhutto to arrive in Dhaka. The next meeting between Bangabandhu and Yahya Khan was announced to be held on March 19. That night, trucks of civilians in Tejgaon and Mohakhali came under attack by the military. The innocent civilians were mugged and tortured, infuriating the Bengalis further.

MARCH 18, 1971

The meetings between President Yahya Khan and Bangabandhu were a ruse to distract people as more military personnel poured into East Pakistan. Yahya Khan ordered the army to prepare for an attack on the Awami League leadership, and allowed General Tikka Khan to arrange for an ominous operation which East Pakistan was unaware of. Furthermore, Bangabandhu declined to accept the probe body on recent shootings in various areas of East Pakistan, set up by Martial Law Administrator Zone B Tikka Khan, since the report stated the shootings were carried out "to go into the circumstances which led to the calling of the army in aid of civil administration in various parts of East Pakistan between March 2 and March 9." He then sent a team from Awami League, including Captain Mansur Ali, to make an enquiry about the shootings.

MARCH 19, 1971

This was the 18th day of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Ninety minutes into another meeting between Bangabandhu and President Yahya Khan, news broke out of civilian and military clashes in Tongi, Joydebpur, and other areas. Two civilians were killed, with around 200 injured in the Joydebpur



Members of 24 employees' associations gathered at the gate of Baitul Mukarram to show their support for ongoing non-cooperation movement on March 12, 1971.



Bangabandhu speaking at a gathering of press workers in front of his house at Dhanmondi 32 on March 14, 1971.

clash, after which a curfew was imposed by the Pakistani authority. Bangabandhu condemned the clashes, and processions were brought out by enraged Bengalis. It was becoming even more evident that these meetings were mere distractions, but Bangabandhu continued the talks, after a break.

MARCH 20, 1971

A fourth meeting between Bangabandhu and Yahya Khan was held, where Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad, Muhammad Mansur Ali and Kamal Hossain were present. Bangabandhu began a heated discussion on the military attack in

Joydebpur, but Yahya Khan blamed the civilians for setting up a barricade on the road to prevent a military commander from travelling to Dhaka from Joydebpur. Yahya Khan also urged Bangabandhu to invite Bhutto to Dhaka for negotiations, which he refused.

MARCH 21, 1971

Peoples' Party Chairman, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, arrived in Dhaka on the request of Yahya Khan. Bhutto was brought up to speed on the contents of the meetings between Bangabandhu and Yahya Khan. The junta informed Awami League of a draft proclamation, and sent the party a copy. Awami League found various

loopholes in the draft proclamation, and suggested some alterations; one of which was that the proclamation should come into force seven days after being issued, or seven days after five new governors for the provinces had taken the oath of office.

MARCH 22, 1971

Yahya Khan postponed the National Assembly which was to be held on March 25, claiming the need for more unity amongst the leaders. Therefore, the leaders, Bangabandhu, Yahya Khan, and Bhutto, held their sixth meeting. Bangabandhu brought up the enforcement and alterations to the draft proclamation, which Yahya Khan said would not be possible unless Bhutto was also on board. Bhutto stated in a news conference later in the day that he would reach an agreement on the proclamation soon.

MARCH 23, 1971

Instead of the Pakistani flag, the Bangladeshi flag was seen over every house, despite it being Pakistan Resolution Day. Alternatively, Independent Bangladesh's Central Student Agitation Committee and Central Workers Agitation Committee celebrated this day as "Protirodh Dibosh" (Resistance Day). Awami League submitted draft final proposals regarding rightful power transfer. As it became more and more obvious that the Bengalis could no longer tolerate West Pakistan rule, President Yahya Khan suspiciously spent the day in the cantonment instead of in the President's House. Operation Searchlight had been authorised on this very day by Yahya Khan, and preparations had already been made.

MARCH 24, 1971

Mayhem had begun. The Pakistan army surrounded the Saidpur Cantonment and Botlagari, Golahat and Kundul villages. They attacked and killed nearly 100 civilians, and injured 1,000. A battle broke out in front of Rangpur Medical College, and the army shot and killed 50 unarmed civilians in surrounding regions. Curfew was imposed. The nation could not wait any longer. "We don't want any more discussions; now we want an announcement," said Bangabandhu.

MARCH 25, 1971

Bangladesh witnessed the most horrific night in its history. Operation Searchlight had begun in full swing. Yahya Khan quietly left Dhaka in the evening, refusing to listen to Bangabandhu's demands, while leaving behind orders for the most heinous acts. At around 11 pm, the Pakistani army became ruthless. Innocent civilians were mercilessly attacked and killed, helpless women were raped, and countless houses were burned down and looted. Hindu areas were the most heavily attacked. Troops from the 22nd Baloch Regiment attacked Pikhana EPR, which triggered attacks on the entirety of Dhaka, including Rajarbagh and Shankhari Bazaar. Students and intellectuals of Dhaka University were brutally massacred. After midnight, Pakistani forces infiltrated Bangabandhu's residence and opened fire.

ON MARCH 26, AT 1:30 AM

Bangabandhu was captured and taken to the Sher-e-Bangla military office premises, and later transferred to the cantonment. It was only a matter of time until every Bengali would hear the declaration they had all been waiting for.



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested and taken to West Pakistan shortly before the start of Operation Search Light on March 25, 1971. Bangabandhu, the undisputed leader of the Bengali nation, surrounded by Pakistani troops at Karachi airport (April 4, 1971).