

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF MUJIBNAGAR GOVERNMENT FORMATION

An eyewitness account of the Mujibnagar government's swearing-in ceremony



R P SINGH

ON April 17, 1971, the provisional government of Bangladesh was sworn in. I was lucky to have witnessed the historic event first-hand.

India was monitoring the developments in Bangladesh, particularly Pakistan army's build-up, from March 1, 1971 onwards. India had apprehensions that Pakistanis might create some mischief on the International Border (IB) to draw away the attention of Bangladeshis.

Rustumji by a special Indian Air Force (IAF) plane at night on April 1. In Delhi, they met other leaders who had reached there from Chattogram via Agartala.

Bangladeshi leaders met with Indira Gandhi on April 3 and asked for India's help in the liberation war, assistance in taking care of Bangladeshi refugees, and requested her to recognise Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign nation.

A press statement was issued on April 13 stating that, "A six-member war cabinet headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been formed in Bangladesh with Nazrul Islam as Vice President and Tajuddin Ahmad as PM, which would guide and coordinate the liberation war."

Barrister Amir-ul Islam, then a young, dynamic Awami League leader, selected the village Baidyanthala in Meherpur district for installation of the government. It was rechristened as "Mujibnagar".

charismatic daughter, barrister Tania Amir. We collected the events of March/April 1971.

Two major factors were kept in mind while preparing for the swearing-in ceremony—firstly, the venue was to be inside Bangladesh, and secondly, tight security arrangements were to be ensured.

The rundown of the events is as follows: On April 15, 1971, the GOC 33 Corps came to my unit by road from Kolkata after meeting with Lt Gen. JS Aurora, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command. He was received by my CO and 123 Brigade commander and headed to the unit operational room.



The Mujibnagar monument with 23 pillars and a brick square in the centre, which marks the spot where the Mujibnagar government ministers took their oaths.

PHOTO: MASUM AL HASAN/WIKIMEDIA

field of observation. They carried out a silent registration of targets off the maps. Wireless sets were kept on the "Listening Watch", i.e. on complete radio silence, which meant that anyone could pass a message only on spotting enemy activity.

All members of the National and Provincial Assemblies who had crossed over to India were taken there by road. A large contingent of journalists was also taken from Kolkata that included some foreign journalists as well.

Independence drafted by Barrister Amir-ul Islam was read by Professor Yusuf Ali on behalf of the people's representatives of Bangladesh. In order to keep similarity with Tajuddin Ahmad's broadcast on April 11, it was declared that this proclamation was made on April 10, 1971.

Time to declare a Republic Day in Bangladesh

ABDUS SATTAR MOLLA

ANY countries of the world have their "Republic Days". Some of these are "unique" in the sense that they are neither the Independence Day nor the Constitution Day.

Bangladesh was born as an independent state through the Declaration of Independence on March 26, 1971 (hence, the Independence Day) and began its sovereign life after emerging victorious on December 16 (hence, the Victory Day).



Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam speaking at the oath-taking ceremony of Mujibnagar Government on April 17, 1971.

PHOTO: ARCHIVES

Although fragmented "battles" with the occupation forces had started here and there after the brutal crackdown on unarmed civilians on early March 26, a more organised war effort ensued following the issuance of the Proclamation of Independence on April 10, especially after the formation of a provisional government for the People's Republic of Bangladesh and formal oath taking on April 17, 1971.

Independence Day, Victory Day or Constitution Day (November 4, 1972).

The most important part of the Proclamation of Independence is where it says: "We, the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh, as honour-bound by the mandate given to us by the people of Bangladesh whose WILL is supreme, duly constituted ourselves into a Constituent Assembly, and having held mutual consultations, and in order to ensure for the people of Bangladesh equality, human dignity and social justice, DECLARE and

CONSTITUTE Bangladesh to be a sovereign Peoples' Republic and thereby confirm the declaration of independence already made..."

Although this proclamation was made on April 10, 1971, the office-bearers of the new People's Republic took their oath a week later, on April 17. Thus, the Republic of Bangladesh actually started functioning on April 17.

Successive governments of independent Bangladesh have so far observed April 17 as "Mujibnagar Day", a reference to the Mujibnagar provisional government formed on that day. There is nothing wrong with such observance, but in my view, it is not enough.

The formation of the republic, while clearing any remaining doubt about the legitimacy of our independence struggle, also greatly helped our war efforts by bringing the "fragmented" battles under a central command.

We know that the declaration of independence was first made by Bangabandhu himself just after 12 am of March 26, 1971 as the Pakistani forces cracked down on unarmed Bengalis. Then this message was reiterated by Mr. Hannan of Chittagong Awami League via Swadhin Bangla Biplobi Betar Kendro around 7:40 pm of March 26.

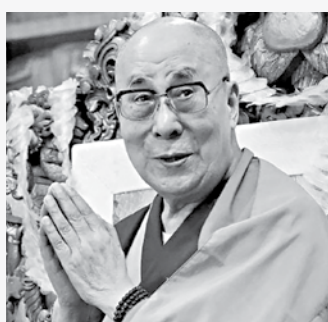
Even if a "government" was formed but it was not helmed by leaders like Tajuddin Ahmad and Syed Nazrul Islam, as prime minister and acting president respectively, what would happen then? If someone else assumed the position of prime minister, say Khandakar Mushtaq

Ahmed or anyone else of the student leaders' choice, and somebody else other than Syed Nazrul Islam assumed the position of acting president, the nation could probably not have achieved freedom that year. Or worse, we might have been trapped again in the Pakistani net with the "governors" likely preferring a quick fix and forming a coalition with West Pakistan, as Mushtaq would probably choose to do.

By declaring April 17 as the Republic Day and celebrating it in a befitting manner, the nation can show proper respect to all our leaders—not just those in the government-in-exile but also those who executed their plans on the ground—and their enormous contributions to the building of this nation. There can't be a better time for such recognition than on the occasion of the golden jubilee of our independence.

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QUOTABLE Quote

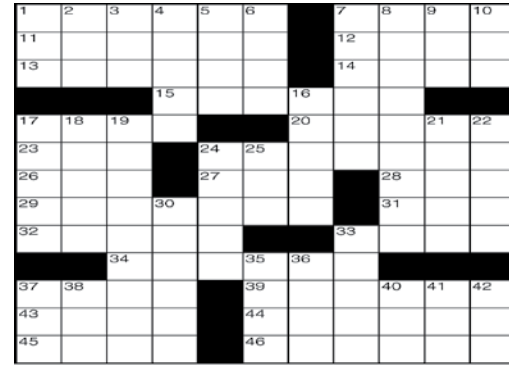


DALAI LAMA XIV Spiritual Leader of Tibet (1935—)

Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS: 1 Emerald Isle city, 7 Shoebox number, 11 Morphine, e.g., 12 Hunted animal, 13 Goose's mate, 14 Script bit, 15 Text additons, 17 "You know how...?", 20 Different, 23 Neither follower, 24 Gaelic wailer, 26 Mahershala of "Moonlight", 27 Ram's mate, 28 Horace's "... Poetica", 29 Gets comfy, 31 Carnival city, 32 One of the, 33 Gush forth, 34 Radio problem, 37 Roman censor, 39 Loves to pieces, 43 Plow pullers, 44 City on the Passaic, 45 Chapel seating, 46 Emerald Isle city, Down: 1 Pound occupant, 2 ... tree, 3 Storage site, 4 Stows cargo, 5 Article, 6 Notorious emperor, 7 Breaks apart, 8 Instrument on, some euros, 9 Buddhist school, 10 Retina setting, 16 Music's Quincy, 17 Laughable, 18 Apartment sign, 19 Mutton dish, 21 Like Poe tales, 22 Plant anew, 24 "Twilight heroine", 25 Stunned wonder, 30 Wyoming range, 33 Unhappy look, 35 Distinct flavor, 36 Notion, 37 Force member, 38 Log chopper, 40 Unrefined, 41 Pitcher's stat, 42 Sun setting



SUNDAY'S ANSWERS

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

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsoption@gmail.com.