

# A freedom fighter's journey to Mujibnagar

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KHASHRUZZAMN CHOUDHURY

The necessity that was felt a few days after the Declaration of Independence of Bangladesh was that of a Government which could take upon itself the burden of directing the liberation struggle. Because of the sudden attack and the resultant disorganisation, the Awami League leaders could not get together and work out the formation of such a government. Obviously, as the Awami League had received the mandate from the people, it was the party that could form the government. The necessity of the formation of the government was felt by everybody. The readers are aware that in its first broadcast over Swadhin Bangla Beter Kendra, Major Zia announced himself to be the President of the Revolutionary Government. Later on, he modified his announcement and declared that he was leading the armed struggle in the name and on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Mr. Zia's announcement only asserted the necessity of the formation of a government, but he and his colleagues did not obviously constitute the government.

We were sitting at Kishoreganj, like many others eagerly awaiting the formation of a government by



ILLUSTRATION: REHNUMA PROSHOON



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

Since Mr. Nazrul Islam's hometown was Kishoreganj, I was confident that he would have to come this way, even in hiding. This is what actually happened. It was possibly on the 6th or 7th of April that Mr. Mustafizur Rahman Khan had secretly approached me and told that Mr. Nazrul Islam was in hiding at the village home of his wife. Mr. Khan came to me with the request for transport and sufficient [sic] to cover Nazrul Islam's journey from Kishoreganj to Durgapur. Mr. Khan told me that Mr. Nazrul Islam was aware that all of us were in the freedom movement, he hesitated to come out in public because that could have many implications. From that day on, I knew the whereabouts and movements of Syed Nazrul Islam but I kept my promises in keeping this as top secret. The only information I gave was to Major Safiullah telling him that I had knowledge Mr. Nazrul Islam had proceeded towards the free zone. I told

of April that the All India Radio gave the news of the formation of a civilian government, announcing the names of the Ministers. I was sitting at the local police station when the Awami League Leaders rushed to that place with sweets even in those circumstances of trials and tribulations. All of us were really happy that after all, a government had been formed. I always had this belief that such a liberation struggle could not proceed in an organised manner if a top body like a government at the top did not guide the movement in a proper way. This is why I became extremely happy to know that a civilian government had been formed for Bangladesh.

The announcement of a government on the 10th of April was after consultation among different leaders of the Awami League. Later on, I came to know the whole story about the background of the government.

Though the announcement of the government was on the 10th of April, it was on the 17th of April that the actual government was placed to the journalists, both foreign and Indian. Few people know that the 16th of April was fixed for the ceremony of swearing in of the government at Chuadanga. This could not be done because of heavy bombing from Pakistani planes and attacks on the towns by the Pakistan army. It is in this context that Baidyanathata was selected for the ceremony on the 17th of April. I came to know about all of this from my friend Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chaudhury who was then SDO of Kusthia District, within the jurisdiction of which this Baidyanathata was situated. The place was only a few miles from the Indian border. The journalists were taken there without any notice. The ceremony was simple but impressive. The Ministers were sworn in on the 17th of April, and

that this time he had made no mistake and that the gentleman was really Syed Nazrul Islam. When all went to meet Syed Nazrul Islam, they found that he was really Syed Nazrul Islam, and quick arrangements were made for his movement from the border areas to another place where he could meet his other colleagues.

The S.P. Garo Hills, whom we met after coming over to Tura, was from Bihar. We had an interesting story to tell about Maulana Bhasani. As everybody knows, Maulana Bhasani had been hospitalized for bad health. On the 25th of March, Maulana Bhasani was at Mymensingh Medical College itself. Maulana was a clever man and he had his own source of information. This was evident when on the 26th the hospital staff and the doctors found that Maulana had disappeared from the hospital. When Maulana Bhasani entered India through Haluaghat, he was received at the border by the D.C. of Garo Hills, a Khasi gentleman named Mr. Cajee and S. P. Mr. Jha. The Maulana was driven away to Tura. Mr. Jha told me that when Maulana Bhasani sat with them at Tura, he started speaking a lot about massacres. He was all the time speaking against the Biharis who had committed a lot of crimes in Bangladesh. As Mr. Jha himself was from Bihar, he could not possibly join in the discussion in the same manner. When Bhasani saw that Mr. Jha did not sound as enthusiastic, he wondered what might have happened to Mr. Cajee. D.C. had been smiling all through. The Maulana was at his wit's end when Mr. Cajee told him that Bhasani was describing things to a person who was himself a Bihari. Mr. Jha told me later that as long as Maulana Bhasani stayed at Tura, he used to refer to this incident and cut jokes with Mr. Jha telling him that he was a Bihari and thus at the side of the Pakistani.

the Awami League. Awami League leaders at Kishoreganj were quite vocal about it, and some of them even grew impatient over the issue. All of us were anxious since the movement could not be guided if political forces did not take the lead for proper organisation and confrontation. The directives could only come from the elected representatives. Moreover, the formation of a national government could enhance the prestige of the struggle and raise altogether different hopes in the minds of the people. The foreign powers could then be persuaded better. We felt all these and eagerly waited for the formation of the government.

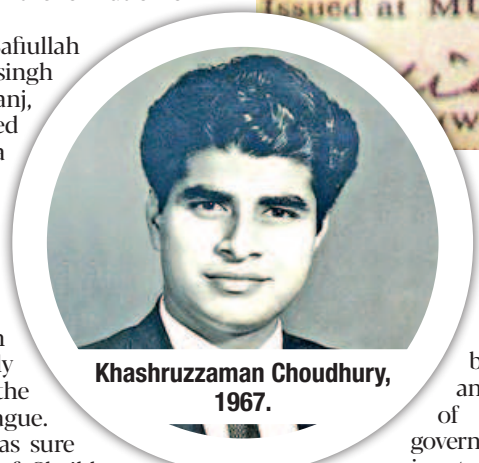
When Major Safiullah reached Mymensingh and Kishoreganj, he also agreed with us that a government should immediately be formed. There was, at that time, a frantic search for some elderly politicians of the Awami League.

Since nobody was sure about the fate of Sheikh, it became obvious that the only man who would be more suitable for the formation of a government was Syed Nazrul Islam, Vice President of the Awami League and the man next in command to the Sheikh. Syed Nazrul Islam happened to be from Kishoreganj P.S. itself and this is why Major Safiullah and all others put pressure on me to locate him so that he could take the initiative for forming a government. I must praise him for the foresight of Major Safiullah and others who rightly foresaw that the job of the armed personnel was simply to fight according to given directions. The directions could only come from a civilian government consisting of the elected representatives of the people.

Throughout the beginning of the liberation struggle, one of my aims has thus been the location of Syed Nazrul Islam. The scanty news we used to get from Dhaka implied that Syed Nazrul Islam had fled from Dhaka. But nobody could give details about where he could be. On many occasions, Major Safiullah and Major Nazrul Islam used to inquire about it from Brahmanbaria over wireless. When a few days had passed they became very anxious and repeatedly requested me to locate Mr. Nazrul Islam.



The identity card of Khashruzzaman Choudhury, Deputy Secretary at the Home Ministry of the Mujibnagar Government, 1971.



Khashruzzaman Choudhury, 1967.

Major Safiullah that things were gradually broadening up and the formation of a national government was eminent.

How Mr. Syed Nazrul Islam fled from Dhaka was an interesting story. While proceeding from Kishoreganj towards Durgapur, he was located 10 miles outside the town by my S.I., another Mr. Nazrul Islam. The S.I. was coming back after a survey of the area in the evening. From a distance, he could see that another jeep was coming from the opposite direction. As soon as Mr. Nazrul Islam's jeep saw the other jeep, its travel stopped and Mr. Nazrul Islam tried to hide to avoid identification. S. I. Nazrul disclosed the story to me on his return to Kishoreganj. He told me that soon he could understand that it was possibly Mr. Nazrul Islam who was in the other jeep. So, he cried out, giving his identity and requested them to come out from hiding. After repeated assurance, all of the passengers of the other jeep came out and Syed Nazrul Islam soon left towards Netrokona and Durgapur. He sent a message through S. I. Nazrul to me, thanking me for the cooperation I had extended to him. When I heard the story from Nazrul, I requested him to keep it as a secret and not to disclose it to anyone.

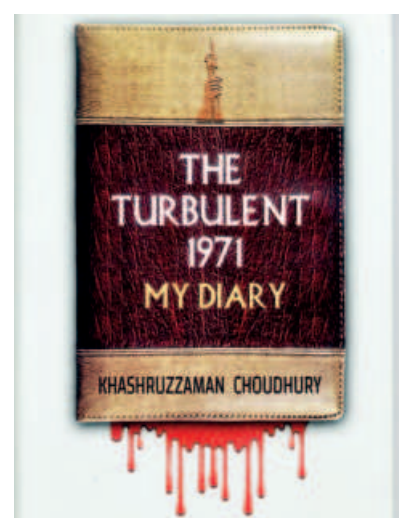
When Mr. Nazrul Islam could reach the free zone, the government was formed. It was possibly on the 10th

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Cover of the author's book 'The Turbulent 1971: My Diary'. It was published by Agamee Prakashani in 2020.

This article is an excerpt from the author's book "The Turbulent 1971: My Diary" (2020).

**Dr. Khashruzzaman Choudhury** joined the Liberation War while serving as a Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO). He involved himself with the Mujibnagar Government as Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs. Later, he served as a Professor of Economics in the USA. Khashruzzaman Choudhury was honored with the highest civilian award, the 'Swadhinata Padak,' in 2014 for his contribution to the Liberation War.