

AGARTALA CONSPIRACY CASE

The **Agartala Conspiracy Case** was a sedition case in Pakistan during the rule of Ayub Khan against the Awami League, brought by the government of Pakistan in 1968 against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the then leader of the Awami League and East Pakistan, and 34 other people.

The case was filed in early 1968 and implicated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others in conspiring with India against the stability of Pakistan. The case is officially called State vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others but is popularly known as Agartala Shorajontro Mamla (Agartala conspiracy case) as the main conspiracy was purported to have taken place in the Indian city of Agartala in Tripura state, where Sheikh Mujib's associates met Indian military officials.

It may be mentioned that the six-point program of Bangabandhu in 1966 gained widespread popularity in East Pakistan. Autonomy of East Pakistan became the demand of the people. Meanwhile, a few Bengali officers and soldiers were getting organized for armed revolution to protest the existing disparity in the army. But the matter was uncovered by the Inter-Services Intelligence of the Pakistani government. 1500 Bangali were arrested in Pakistan. Bangabandhu was implicated as the main accused of this conspiracy. Bangabandhu was in jail. A case was filed in January 1968. The Government framed the charge saying Bangabandhu led a secret meeting with Indian government officials in Agartala, the capital of Indian State Tripura. In the meeting, a plan was designed to liberate East Pakistan through armed movement with assistance from the Government of India. This is why it became known as the Agartala Case. But officially the case was termed 'the State vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Gong'. On 9 May 1966 Bangabandhu was released from jail but he was again arrested under martial law at the jail gate and was taken to Dhaka Cantonment. 35 persons were accused in this case. Anti-Ayub agitation was gaining momentum in both wings of Pakistan during the trial. In East Pakistan people's voices became stronger to realize the demand for the release of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the withdrawal of the case. Gradually the mass movement in East Pakistan turned into a mass upsurge in 1969.

In a bid to tame the situation, Ayub Khan convened a round-table meeting on 19 February 1969 in Rawalpindi. Maulana Bhashani and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were among the others invited to attend the meeting. To pave the way for Bangabandhu to attend the meeting, the Government proposed to release him on parole. But the people of East Pakistan including Maulana Bhashani demanded the withdrawal of the Agartala Case rejecting the Government's proposal. At last in the face of the mass movement, the Ayub government was ultimately compelled to withdraw the Agartala Conspiracy Case. All the accused including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were released on 22 February 1969. On the occasion of the release of Bangabandhu grand public reception rally was organized at the Race Course Ground on 23 February 1969. In that mammoth rally, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was vested with the appellation of 'Bangabandhu'.

This case played a vital role in igniting nationalist consciousness among Bengalis. The purpose that inspired the Ayub Government to lodge the case did not gain any success; rather it acted as a boomerang against the Ayub Government. At this stage a public leader, Maulana Bhashani, came forward to lead political activities; and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was recognized as an unparalleled leader of the Bengalis for his role as the spokesman of Bengalis interest and autonomy.