

Electoral Politics, 1954



Foundation of Awami Muslim League

- ❧ The Awami League was founded in Rose Garden of KM Das Lane, Dhaka on 23 June 1949 at a convention of the leaders and workers known to be a faction of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League headed by HUSEYN SHAHEED SUHRAWARDY and ABUL HASHIM.
- ❧ The new party was named East Pakistan Awami Muslim League. It was established with Maulana ABDUL HAMID KHAN BHASANI as president, ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN, Sakhawat Hossain and Ali Ahmed Khan as vice-presidents, Shamsul Hoque as general secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (then interned in jail), Khondakar Mostaq Ahmed and AK Rafiqul Hussain as joint secretaries, and Yar Mohammad Khan as treasurer.



- ❧ From the very inception the Awami League has been a secular and non-communal party.
- ❧ As a mark of its secular posture, the term 'Muslim' was deleted from the name of the party at its third council meeting held on 21-23 October 1955.
- ❧ The party believes in welfare economy. It has front organisations among the students, labourers, peasants, youths and women.

Elections to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, 1954

- ❧ The general elections to the East Bengal legislative assembly due in 1951 could not be held until 1954. Several postponements of the elections under various pretexts only proved malicious motives, organisational weaknesses and vulnerability of the ruling party, MUSLIM LEAGUE.

United Front



❧ **United Front** an alliance of the opposition parties to contest seats in the elections to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly held between 8-12 March 1954. The result was a comprehensive victory for the alliance or front composed mainly of four parties of East Bengal, namely AWAMI LEAGUE, Krishak Sramik Party, Nizam-e-Islam and Ganatantri Dal.



❧ In fact, the United Front reflective of all shades of political spectrum in the province emerged mainly due to the failure of the Muslim League as a ruling party, and other historical, political and economic reasons. The decision to form a united front was initially endorsed on 14 November 1953 at the historic council session of the Awami League held at Mymensingh. Subsequently, the Front for a while dominated the political landscape of East Bengal and had its usefulness as an effective political platform to unite diverse political groups.

Campaign: goal and strategies

- ❧ The Muslim League was fighting elections on the issue of integrity and solidarity of Pakistan, demand for a strong centre and Islamic Constitution for Pakistan.
- ❧ Contrary, the opposition was demanding maximum autonomy for East Bengal.



- ❧ The Front campaigned on an election manifesto that incorporated a package of TWENTY ONE POINT PROGRAMME adopted by the Front in November 1953.
- ❧ In addition to full regional autonomy, the manifesto demanded that the central government should delegate to the eastern province all subjects except defence, foreign affairs and currency.
- ❧ It also called for recognition of Bangla as a state language, release of political prisoners, transformation of the then official residence (Burdwan House) of the chief minister of East Bengal into Bangla Academy,



❧ construction of Shaheed Minar at the site of the police firing in 1952, declaration of 21 February as a public holiday, more autonomy for Dhaka and Rajshahi universities, introduction of economic and social rights for industrial workers in keeping with the principles of ILO, nationalisation of jute, guarantee of fair prices for commodities, and public support for cooperatives and cottage industries.

21 points



- ❧ 1. To recognise Bangla as one of the State Languages of Pakistan;
- ❧ 2. To abolish without compensation zamindari and all rent receiving interest in land, and to distribute the surplus lands amongst the cultivators; to reduce rent to a fair level and abolish the certificate system of realising rent;
- ❧ 3. To nationalise the jute trade and bring it under the direct control of the government of East Bengal, secure fair price of jute to the growers and to investigate into the jute-bungling during the Muslim League regime to punish those found responsible for it;
- ❧ 4. To introduce co-operative farming in agriculture and to develop cottage industries with full government subsidies;
- ❧ 5. To start salt industry (both small and large scale) in order to make East Bengal self-sufficient in the supply of salt, and to investigate into the salt-bungling during the Muslim League regime to punish the offenders;



- ❧ 6. To rehabilitate immediately all the poor refugees belonging to the artisan and technician class;
- ❧ 7. To protect the country from flood and famine by means of digging canals and improving irrigation system;
- ❧ 8. To make the country self-sufficient by modernizing the method of cultivation and industrialisation, and to ensure the rights of the labourer as per ILO Convention;
- ❧ 9. To introduce free and compulsory primary education throughout the country and to arrange for just pay and allowances to the teachers;
- ❧ 10. To restructure the entire education system, introduce mother tongue as the medium of instruction, remove discrimination between government and private schools and to turn all the schools into government aided institutions;
- ❧ 11. To repeal all reactionary laws including those of the Dhaka and Rajshahi Universities and to make them autonomous institutions; to make education cheaper and easily available to the people;



- ❧ 12. To curtail the cost of administration and to rationalise the pay scale of high and low paid government servants. The ministers shall not receive more than 1000 taka as monthly salary;
- ❧ 13. To take steps to eradicate corruption, nepotism and bribery, and with this end in view, to take stocks of the properties of all government officers and businessmen from 1940 onward and forfeit all properties the acquisition of which is not satisfactorily accounted for;
- ❧ 14. To repeal all Safety and Preventive Detention Acts and release all prisoners detained without trial, and try in open court persons involved in anti-state activities; to safeguard the rights of the press and of holding meetings;
- ❧ 15. To separate the judiciary from the executive;
- ❧ 16. To locate the residence of the chief minister of the United Front at a less costly house, and to convert Burdwan House into a students hostel now, and later, into an institute for research on Bangla language and literature;
- ❧ 17. To erect a monument in memory of the martyrs of the Language Movement on the spot where they were shot dead, and to pay compensation to the families of the martyrs;
- ❧ 18. To declare 21 February as 'Shaheed Day' and a public y;

- ❧ 19. The Lahore Resolution proposed full autonomy of East Bengal leaving defence, foreign affairs and currency under the central government. In the matter of defence, arrangements shall be made to set the headquarters of the army in West Pakistan and the naval headquarters in East Bengal and to establish ordnance factories in East Bengal, and to transform Ansar force into a full-fledged militia equipped with arms;
- ❧ 20. The United Front Ministry shall on no account extend the tenure of the Legislature and shall resign six months before the general elections to facilitate free and fair elections under an Election Commission;
- ❧ 21. All casual vacancies in the Legislature shall be filled up through by-elections within three months of the vacancies, and if the nominees of the Front are defeated in three successive by-elections, ministry shall resign from office.



❧ In the elections of East Bengal Legislative Assembly held in March 1954, the United Front won 223 seats out of 237 Muslim seats, whereas the ruling Muslim League managed to bag only 9 seats.



Linkage between the election of 1954 and the growth of Bengali nationalism.



Thanks!