

liberated areas."¹¹⁷ Besides Chittagong, resistance against Pakistani army sprang up spontaneously in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Sylhet and other places in East Pakistan. The people were up in arms and from that point there was no looking back.

The Mujibnagar Government.

The sudden ruthless attack and genocide by the West Pakistani army took politicians, the Bengali army and civilians completely by surprise. On the evening of March 25 when Sheikh Mujib had asked his colleagues and followers to go underground many went across the border to India. Among the top leaders it is believed that Tajuddin Ahmed was the first to cross over and to get in touch with the top officials of the government of India. Syed Nazrul Islam, Captain Mansur Ali, A. H. M. Qumruzzaman, Khandaker Mostaque Ahmed, Col. M. A. G. Osmany and others soon crossed the border and went over to India. The genocide also led to a massive exodus of civilian population mainly women, children and the elderly. The vast majority of the population including Sheikh Mujib however did not leave their motherland, they stayed back to fight with all they had. Furthermore indiscriminate killing of intellectuals, bureaucrats and common people continued. However the killings only strengthened the resolve and determination of the people of Bangladesh to liberate themselves. Without the help of these fighting forces that stayed back in East Pakistan it would not have been easy for the government formed in Mujibnagar to achieve the goal of liberation.

Tajuddin Ahmed reached India most probably on April 1 or 2. He met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi but could achieve little as he had no credentials that he was the spokesman of the people of East Pakistan. Tajuddin therefore took a momentous step. He formed the Bangladesh government in exile declaring himself as the Prime Minister and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the President. By this time other senior Awami League leaders were in Agartala. Tajuddin Ahmed met them there on April 10 and it was decided that a cabinet of ministers would be formed.

¹¹⁷ English translation of an address by Tajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh broadcast by Swadhen Bangla Desh Betar Kendra, April 11, 1971. *Bangladesh Documents* op cit. p. 283

The leaders were, apart from Sheikh Mujib and Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, Captain Mansur Ali, A. H. M. Qamruzzaman and Khandker Mostaque Ahmed. In the absence of Sheikh Mujib who by that time was known to have been taken to Pakistan, Syed Nazrul Islam was made the Acting President. Mostaque Ahmed was in charge of Foreign, Law and Parliamentary Affairs. Qamruzzaman was in charge of Interior, Supply, Relief and Rehabilitation and Mansur Ali that of Finance, Commerce and Industries. Col. (Rtd.) Mohammad Ataul Ghani Osmany was made Chief of Staff of the Liberation Forces with the rank of a cabinet minister and Col (Rtd) Abdur Rab Chowdhury the Deputy Chief. On April 17, at Meherpur, which was still free from the occupation of the Pakistan army, the cabinet was formally installed. Meherpur was hence forth known as Mujibnagar. Though theoretically Mujibnagar was the seat of Bangladesh government in exile it was actually in Calcutta where the cabinet ministers and the other top leaders were located during the war of liberation.¹¹⁸

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The Proclamation of Independence Order (PIO)

On April 17, 1971 a Proclamation of Independence Order (PIO) was issued. It was back dated to April 10 naming Mujibnagar as the place of issue. It was further stated that the Proclamation would be deemed to have come into effect from March 26, 1971. The Proclamation declared that in the elections held in Bangladesh from December 7, 1970 to January 17, 1971 the people elected 167 out of 169 representatives belonging to the Awami League. General Yahya Khan for the purpose of framing a constitution summoned the elected representatives of the people to meet on March 3, 1971 however, "the Assembly so summoned was arbitrarily and illegally postponed for indefinite period, and ... instead of fulfilling their promise and while still conferring with the representatives of people of Bangla Desh, Pakistan authorities declared an unjust and treacherous war." The PIO went on to state, "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ... duly made declaration of independence at Dacca on March 26, 1971, and whereas the Pakistan Government by levying an unjust war and committing genocide and by other repressive measures made it impossible for the

¹¹⁸ The politicians did not stay in Mujibnagar as they were sure it would become a target of attack by the Pakistani army, which at that stage they were not in a position to face.

treacherous
বিষমচারক
duly = ২৪
২৪ ঘণ্টা
levying
= ধর্মদণ্ড
repressive
= দমনকারী

arbitrarily = ইচ্ছামত
conferring = প্রদান
borned = বিবেচনাকার/বিচারক

elected representatives of the people of Bangla Desh to meet and frame a Constitution, and give to themselves a government and whereas the people of Bangla Desh by their heroism, bravery and revolutionary fervour have established effective control over the territories of Bangla Desh, we the elected representatives of the people of Bangla Desh ... duly constituted ourself into a Constituent Assembly declare and constitute Bangla Desh to be sovereign People's Republic and thereby confirm the declaration of independence already made by Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman", and "Do hereby confirm and resolve that till such time as a constitution is framed, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman shall be the President of the Republic and that Syed Nazrul Islam shall be the Vice-President of the Republic and that the President, shall be the Supreme Commander of all the armed forces of the Republic, shall exercise all the executive and legislative powers of the Republic."¹¹⁹ It was further resolved that the elected representatives would undertake to observe and give effect to all duties and obligations devolved upon them as a member of the family of nations and by the Charter of the United Nations.¹²⁰

Significance of the Proclamation of Independence Order.

1. The Proclamation of Independence Order declared Bangladesh as a *de jure* state to the world.
2. The Proclamation gave legitimacy and legality to the Bangladesh Government in exile and to the liberation war.
3. The Proclamation formed a Presidential system of government giving the President of Bangladesh absolute power till the constitution was framed.
4. Even though Sheikh Mujib was arrested and taken to Pakistan, the declaration of Mujib as the President of Bangladesh acted as a great unifying force. It brought all the different groups of Mukti Bahini (Liberation forces) under the banner of the Awami League, thus giving the liberation war a patriotic inspiration and a noble goal.

5. The Proclamation to abide by the Charter of the United Nation secured for the new government in exile the much needed support of the world community.
6. It provided the basis for eventual de jure recognition of Bangladesh by India and signing of Peace and Friendship Treaty with Bangladesh which provided the legal rationale for India's war against Pakistan in support of Bangladesh.

Colonel (General) M A G Osmany and the Mukti Bahini

Colonel Mohammad Ataul Ghani Osmany¹²¹ was born in Sunamganj, Sylhet on September 1, 1918. His father was Khan Bahadur Mofizur Rahman, who joined Assam Civil Service in 1898 and retired as the Director of Land Records, Government of Assam. Col. Osmany graduated from Aligarh Muslim University in 1938 and joined the British Indian Army the same year. He fought in the Second World War with high distinction and became the youngest Major in British Army in 1940.¹²² When the war ended he was a Lieutenant Colonel. In the Pakistan Army he was given only one promotion and made a Colonel and retired in 1967. His well-deserved legitimate promotions were denied by the Punjabi dominated army of Pakistan as he was a staunch advocate of the Bengali men and officers and their rightful cause.

Col. Osmany joined Awami League in 1969 and became a Member of Parliament in 1970. He was one of the key associates of Bangabandhu during the political negotiations for a constitutional solution to the problem caused by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's refusal to participate in the first session of the parliament in March 1971. On the fateful night of March 25, 1971, till about 10 p.m. Col. Osmany was with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his Dhanmondi residence in Dhaka. Mujib advised the top Awami League leaders including Col. Osmany to protect themselves and to escape the drag-net of Pakistani army. For reasons of personal security from March 4 till a few days before the 25, Col.

¹²¹ Gen. Osmany is the brother-in-law of the author and much of the informations are from family sources.