

Background of Liberation War

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The Liberation war began on 26 March 1971 and ended with the liberation of Bangladesh on 16 December 1971. The armed struggle was the culmination of a series of events, situations and issues contributing to the progressively deteriorating relations between East and West Pakistan. The questions of land reforms, state language, inter-wing economic and administrative disparities, provincial autonomy, the defense of East Pakistan and many other consequential questions had been straining the relations between the two wings of Pakistan ever since independence of the country from Britain in 1947. [M.A. Rahim et. al., Bangladesher Itihas, P. 480].

General Election

In the general elections held on 7 December 1970, the Awami League acquired an absolute majority. The Awami League secured 167 seats out of 169 National Assembly seats in East Pakistan (within total 313 seats) and won 288 out of 300 seats in the Provincial Assembly.

Events in 1971

- **On 3rd January 1971**, Shiekh Mujib conducted the oath of the peoples' representatives' at a meeting at the Race Course ground. Awami League members took an oath to frame a constitution on the basis of the six-point demand.
- **On 5th January**, Zulfiker Ali Bhutto, the leader of the People's Party, the majority party in West Pakistan, announced his readiness to form a coalition government at the centre with Awami League's Parliamentary Party at a meeting of the members of the National Assembly of his party.

Events in 1971

- **On 27th January**, Zulfiker Ali Bhutto arrived in Dhaka for talks with Mujib. The talks failed after three days of deliberations.
- **Announcement on 13 February**, President Yahya Khan summoned the National Assembly to sit in Dhaka on 3rd March. But **on 15 February**, Bhutto announced that he would boycott the session and demanded that power be handed over to the majority parties in East Pakistan and West Pakistan.

Non-cooperation Movement

Yahya Khan, the President of Pakistan, postponed the session of the National Assembly on 1st March 1971 for an indefinite period.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman termed this decision as 'unfortunate', and in protest he called hartal in Dhaka on 2 March and in the whole of East Pakistan on 3 March.

March 2, 1971: The first flag Flies

- March 2, 1971 is a historic day as on this day the very first flag of Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) was hoisted, sending a message to the world that Bengalis were striving for independent nationhood.
- A historic student rally was held at Bottola on the Dhaka University (DU) campus where the flag, with Bangladesh's map in the center of a red circle against a green background, was hoisted on the rooftop of the Arts Faculty.



March 2, 1971: The first flag Flies

- Hundreds of agitating students and general people cheered the raising of the flag.
- Youths led by the then vice president of the DU Students' Union ASM Abdur Rob hoisted the flag in the presence of such firebrand student leaders as Shahjahan Siraj, Abdul Quddus Makhan and Nur-e-Alam Siddiqui.



March 3, 1971: Hartal and Curfew

- On this day, back in 1971, a complete strike was observed all over East Pakistan. Dhaka observed the second day of hartal, with every office, court, factory, transport and education institute closed.
- Dhaka turned into a city of processions that converged in a rally at Paltan Maidan, organised by the Swadhin Bangla Chhatra Sangram Parishad.
- At different places in the country, spontaneous processions brought out by general people were fired upon, killing many in Dhaka and Chittagong. The then Pakistan government imposed a curfew in Dhaka, Sylhet and Rangpur.

March 3, 1971: National Anthem

- Chhatra Sangram Parishad declared Swadhinatar Ishteher at Paltan Maidan on 3 March in presence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
- The poem of Rabindranath Tagore 'Amar Sonar Bangla...' was selected as the national anthem of the independent Bangladesh.



Historical Speech of 7 March

During this time, on 7 March Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made a historic address at a mammoth gathering at the Race Course which marked a turning point in the history of the Bengali nation. In his address, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made specific charges against the Martial Law authorities which failed to transfer power to the elected representatives. At the end of his speech, he made a clarion call, saying:

**“The struggle this time is the struggle for our
emancipation,
The struggle this time is the struggle for independence.”**

Historical Speech of 7 March

In this speech, he mentioned a further four-point condition to consider at the National Assembly Meeting on 25 March:

1. The immediate lifting of martial law.
2. Immediate withdrawal of all military personnel.
3. An inquiry into the loss of life.
4. Immediate transfer of power to the elected representative.



Non-cooperation Movement

- ▶ **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** advised the people to prepare themselves for resistance movement against the enemy. He asked the people to continue the **non-cooperation movement** against the government of Yahya Khan.
- ▶ The entire nation carried out his instructions. Every organization including government offices, courts, banks, insurance companies, mills and factories obeyed his order. In reality, he ruled an independent Bangladesh from 7 March to 25 March.



Non-cooperation Movement

- ▶ Meanwhile, President Yahya Khan and other leaders from West Pakistan came to Dhaka on **15 March to start a dialogue with Sheikh Mujib** and his party. The dialogue began on the following day and continued intermittently down to 25 March morning.
- ▶ During the time, non-cooperation and hartals continued relentlessly. **Students and leaders of various political parties** had been declaring independence from March 2 and the spree continued down to 25 March.



Operation Search Light 25th March

While holding talks, the Pakistani military junta was bringing more troops to Bangladesh. No sooner the talks failed, the genocide began at mid-night of 25 March 1971, and the Pakistan army launched its brutal crackdown in Dhaka with operation Search Light.

Source: *Zunaid Kazi. "History: The Bangali Genocide, 1971"*



Operation Search Light 25th March

It was a planned military operation by Pakistan Army on 25th March. Before the beginning of the operation, all foreign journalists were systematically deported from East Pakistan.

Although the violence focused on the provincial capital, Dhaka, it also affected all parts of East Pakistan. Residential halls of the University of Dhaka were particularly targeted. The only Hindu residential hall – the Jagannath Hall – was destroyed by the Pakistani armed forces, and an estimated 600 to 700 of its residents were murdered.



Operation Search Light 25th March

The military forces killed everybody in sight on the footpath and destroyed everything on their way. The tanks roared through the streets of Dhaka blasting indiscriminately at the people and official and residential buildings.

They gunned down clusters of settlements and set fire on them. The student halls of **residence at Dhaka University** were raided and numerous students residing there were brutally killed. They also killed many teachers of Dhaka University.



Operation Search Light 25th March

The **Hindu concentrated areas** of old Dhaka were particularly targeted. They started killing the people, burnt their houses, looted their valuables and raped their women.

The genocide that was perpetrated on the unarmed people was flashed in the world press.



Operation Search Light 25th March

- According to the plan for operation Search Light two headquarters were established. **Major General Rao Farman Ali** with 57 Brigade under **Brigadier Arbab** was responsible for operation in Dhaka city and its suburbs while **Major General Khadim Raja** was given the responsibility of the rest of the province. **Lieutenant General Tikka Khan** assumed the overall charge of the operation.



Declaration of Independence

- ❑ Moments after the crackdown began, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared independence at 12:30 a.m., 26 March. His declaration was transmitted through wireless to every place in the country. He said,

"This may be my last message; from this day onward Bangladesh is independent. I call upon the people of Bangladesh wherever you might be and with whatever you have, to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your struggle must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh. Final victory is ours."

Declaration of Independence

- ❑ On 26 March 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested from his Dhanmondi residence at 1:30 a.m.
- ❑ Later Major Ziaur Rahman announced Bangladesh's independence on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from Kalurghat radio station at Chittagong on 27th March'1971.