

MUJIB

FATHER OF A NATION



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A POLITICAL PROFILE



I will sacrifice my life, if
necessary, to eliminate all
injustice and exploitation
from the country.

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Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Mujib, fondly known as "Bangabandhu" (friend of Bengalis) – was born in Tungipara, a village in present-day Gopalganj district (formerly Faridpur district) of Bangladesh on 17 March 1920. Mujib spent his childhood in his native village.

Mujib's political career began while he was a student at Gopalganj Missionary School. Upon completion of his secondary education, Mujib moved to Kolkata for higher education. Whilst studying for degree at the Islamia College in Kolkata, Mujib got involved with the movement for the creation of Pakistan. However, when communal riots broke out across India, especially in Bengal, he took an active part in protecting Muslims and non-Muslims alike, often by risking his own life.



Upon returning to the then East Pakistan, Mujib took admission in the Department of Law at Dhaka University. He founded the Muslim Students' League in 1948. When the then Prime Minister of Pakistan declared that the people of East Pakistan must accept Urdu as their state language, Mujib put all his energies in building a movement against this declaration. He and some of his colleagues were arrested while holding a peaceful demonstration in support of the demand for Bengali to be one of the state languages of Pakistan.

In 1949, Mujib extended his support to the striking "Class Four" employees of Dhaka University to press home their various demands. The university authority imposed a fine on Mujib for leading the movement. He refused to abide by the unjust order. He was arrested for staging a sit-in protest in front of the Vice Chancellor's residence. While in prison he was elected as one of the joint secretaries of the newly formed East Pakistan Awami Muslim League.



Mujib began to travel the country to canvas for the rights of Bengali people of the then East Pakistan, and condemn the military rule in Pakistan. His uncompromising stance against the military rulers and championing of the causes of the Bengali masses led to continuous harassment and imprisonment by the Pakistani military regime.

Indeed Munayem Khan, the then governor of East Pakistan (between 1962 and 1969), boasted:



Whilst I am the governor of East Pakistan, Mujib will spend the rest of his life in the prison.

Munayem Khan

True to their words, the Pakistani military regime kept Mujib behind bars for over half of the twenty-four years that they ruled in what is today Bangladesh. He was incarcerated no less than twenty times and faced the gallows twice. It became routine affairs of the state to arrest Mujib at every turning of political

events in the country between 1949 and 1971. Incarcerations, all of which were under the façade of seditious charges.

Mujib was elected as the general secretary of East Pakistan Awami Muslim League on 9 July 1953. Under his leadership on 21 October 1955, Awami Muslim League decided to drop the word "Muslim" from its name to reflect its secular and progressive vision.

In 1966, Mujib launched his "Six points" program, demanding political and economic parity with West Pakistan and regional autonomy for East Pakistan. He then embarked on a ground spree to mobilize the public opinion, which incurred subsequent arrests.





Realizing that Mujib was unstoppable, the military regime - led by General Ayub Khan - filed the notorious Agartala Conspiracy Case against Mujib and 34 Bengali civil and military officers. The defendants were charged for conspiring to secede East Pakistan from the rest of Pakistan. However, after facing demonstration across the country the conspiracy case against Mujib and co. was unconditionally withdrawn.

Soon after the collapse of Agartala Conspiracy Case, and the release of Mujib, Ayub Khan resigned and handed over the power to General Yahya Khan on 25 March 1969. Yahya Khan promised to hold a general election in Pakistan on the basis of adult franchise. The election was held between 7 December 1970 and 19 January 1971. The Awami League, under Mujib's leadership, won an absolute majority.

As a majority leader in the parliament, Mujib should have been the next Prime Minister of Pakistan. But it never happened. Instead, the Pakistani army prepared for war against Bengali people in East Pakistan. The Bengalis, under Mujib's leadership, responded by declaring non-cooperation movement, which paralyzed the country. In this context, Mujib delivered the historic 7th March speech. The speech in all its essence called for the emancipation and freedom of the Bengali people.



On the night of 25 March 1971, the Pakistani army started “Operation Search Light.” The heinous operation was elongated over the course of nine months.

Receiving the news of the massacres in Dhaka and elsewhere, Mujib concluded that the people of Bangladesh had no option but to declare independence, which he did in the early hours of 26 March 1971. His message was:

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This may be my last message; from this day onward Bangladesh is independent.

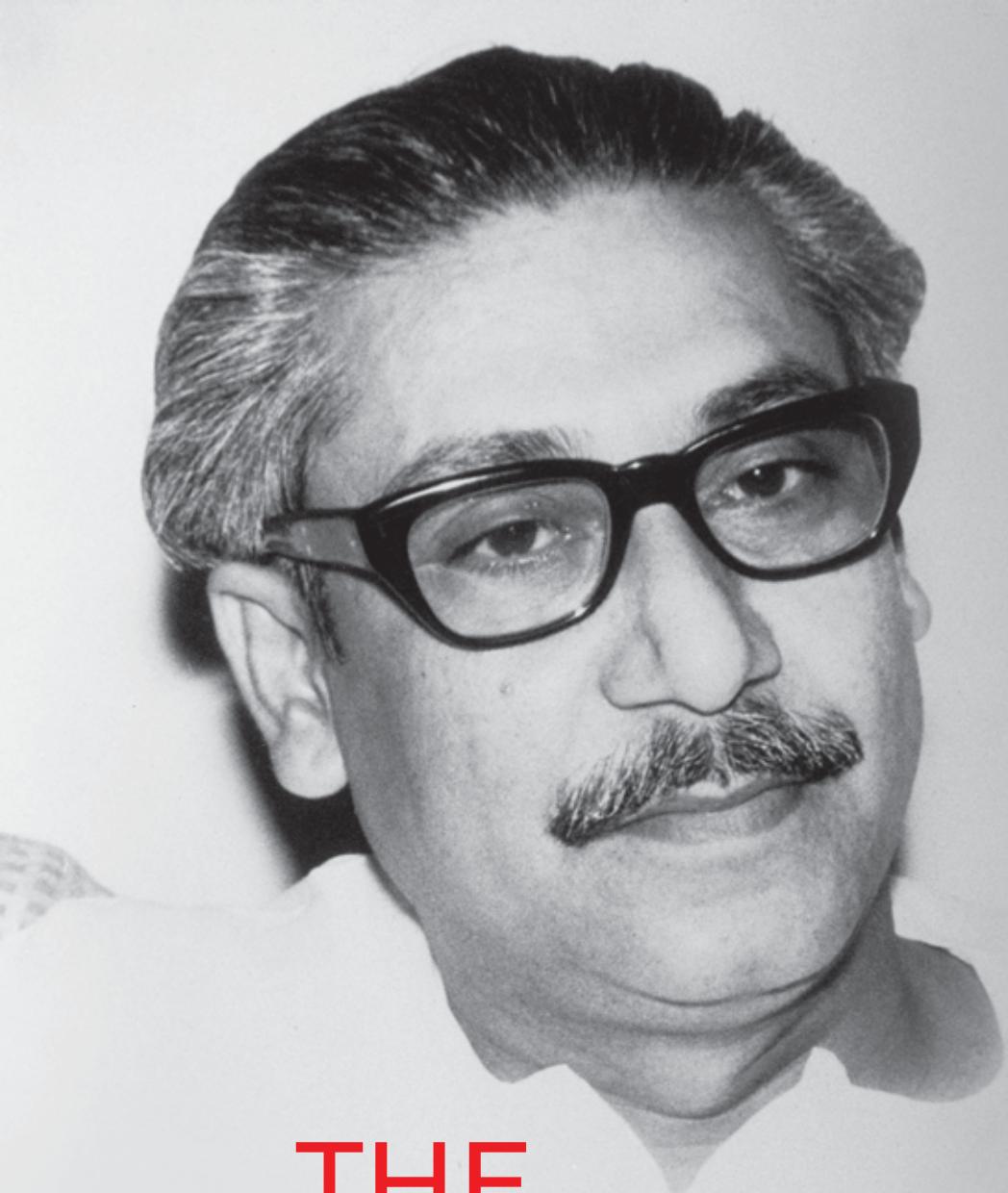
I call upon the people of Bangladesh wherever you might be and with whatever you have, to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your struggle must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh. Final victory is ours.

Soon after dispatching the text and the recorded messages, Mujib was arrested and taken to West Pakistan. As per Mujib's advice many of his close associates, notably the organizing leaders, were able to cross the border into India. They thereafter, on 17 April 1971, formed the government in-exile for the "People's Republic of Bangladesh."

On 16 December 1971, after a nine-month long war, in which three million Bengalis were slaughtered, over ninety thousand Pakistani soldiers unconditionally surrendered to the joint command of Bangladesh's liberation army and Indian forces at the same venue "Ramna Racecourse" where Mujib made the landmark 7th March speech.

On 10 January 1972, Mujib returned to his country to a hero's welcome. He immediately set about rebuilding the country in accordance with the principles of secularity, democracy and social justice. The herculean task Mujib embarked upon, made him initiate a series of reforms and serial institution building. Under his supervision, the country was presented a constitution in 1972 - within a year of its foundation. Alas, a rouge military coup on 15 August 1975, backed by vested quarters rooted in benefits of Pakistan-era ruling, was staged, in which Mujib, along with most of his family members were killed.





THE FOUNDING FATHER

Very few personalities in history can be credited to accomplish what Mujib has done. Yet many students of world history know very little of this larger-than-life figure. To know Mujib it is important to know one anecdote: he is more than a politician, someone who was able to inspire a nation to make a fresh mark on the world map. It is an unfortunate fact of history that life and work of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman are little known outside Bangladesh. His ideas and legacies need to be debated and discussed in an open manner. As a historical figure, he deserves wider recognition.

Mujib led the challenging struggle for a democratic alternative to military rule, and subsequently for the independence of Bangladesh. In this, the challenges were perhaps greater than they were for most leaders of the other new nations of Asia and rest of the global South. His historic speech on 7 March, 1971, is among the liveliest speeches. His readiness to make great personal sacrifices: twelve out of twenty-four years of undivided Pakistan, he spent in jail, facing the gallows twice.

Mujib was a politician. But he was not just a politician. He was much more: he became the father of a nation. He stood out among many other leaders, who were also fathers of their nations, in several unique ways. Mujib was not from an elite background. He was born in a village in 1920. He was the son of a record keeper of a legal court in a small town in eastern Bengal. As a 20-year old student in 1940, at a college in Kolkata, he joined the movement for Pakistan. At the age of 23, while still a young student, he gathered the political experience to get elected as a councillor of the Muslim League.

Later, while studying law in Dhaka (the then largest city in predominantly Muslim eastern Bengal), he founded the East Pakistan Muslim Students' League. He also joined the Bengali language movement - resisting the imposition of Urdu as the state language of Pakistan. Pakistan was imposing Urdu, a language which most Bengalis did not understand. This did not seem fair to Mujib. First among a series of unfair things, yet to come.

Most of the people of Pakistan lived in East Pakistan. 56 percent of the people lived in East Pakistan, as opposed to 44 percent of



the people who lived in West Pakistan. In short, the majority in Pakistan were Bengalis. Mujib's campaigning in the language movement led him to be arrested twice by the newly independent Pakistani government in 1947. Two arrests within six months. After his release from jail, in 1949 he led a strike of the lowest paid workers of Dhaka University. He staged a sit-in at the Vice Chancellor's residence. Mujib's work for social justice of the poor, makes him unique as a father of nation.

After the sit-in, Mujib was again arrested. While Mujib was in jail, a new political party "East Pakistan Awami Muslim League" was formed. Mujib was made a party joint secretary while he was behind bars.

Mujib was shortly released. Soon upon his release, he started protesting again. He led a movement, protesting the food crisis in East Pakistan. He was jailed a few times thereafter. In fact, he was jailed five times by the Pakistani government between 1948 and 1949. All the jailings, is a reminder that he was prepared to make personal sacrifices. He was arrested at least 22 times in his life for his campaigning.

In 1953, Mujib was elected the General Secretary of his party the "Awami Muslim League." At the first provincial elections in 1954, a front of which his party was alliance to, won all seats in East Pakistan. Mujib was made a minister in the provincial government at the age of 34. Around the same time, he was re-elected as the top office bearer of his party. Upon getting the executive role, Mujib's core qualities as a leader emerged:

- In 1955, to stress his commitment to secularism, and his openness to all residents of east Bengal, including the large Hindu minority (which was some 20 percent around the time), his party dropped the word "Muslim" from its name. It called itself simply the "Awami League." He was not a narrow intolerant ethnic nationalist. This makes him unlike the fathers of many new nations. He was an open-hearted secularist.
- In 1956, he resigned as a minister to focus full-time as the General Secretary of his party - on building the party organization. Mujib knew that his party needed a strong organization, which would be beyond one-man rule. This, again, made him unlike many other fathers of nations. Mujib did not allow his personal ambition to overcome the need for a strong organization. As a result, Awami League then, and then long thereafter, inherited a solid organization capable of capturing people's mandate and for governing effectively. Mujib understood the importance of mobilizing the smallest villages and towns.
- Other than a strong campaigner, Mujib was a leader - unlike many of the fathers of new nations. Even when small opportunities emerged to make progress by negotiations, he was open to talks. In 1957, Mujib the firebrand who controlled the Awami League organization, he was recorded to be formal and helpful to his political advisories, including the then Governor General of Pakistan. Mujib showed that he was not a mere hard-head agitator. He was a mature and rounded leader, seeking for moderation.



Post 1957, Mujib reckoned that for a time it was worth adopting moderate postures. Mujib ventured on adopting moderate attitude to see if progress was possible with the West Pakistanis. Mujib knew that there might come a time when defiance and resistance would be necessary. He understood that in politics timing is extremely important. Mujib had a very fine sense of timing.

Mujib quickly learnt that progress through negotiations was not possible. The powerful elites in West Pakistan, were not sincere about compromise with the majority of their own countrymen - the Bengalis. The armed forces of Pakistan, along with the higher civil service and the main business houses, were compromisingly dominated by the minority - the West Pakistanis. The most powerful businessmen in Pakistan were not Bengalis. A huge portion of export earnings from East Pakistan, especially the exports of jute (the dominant export commodity), went to West Pakistan. Living standards were higher in West Pakistan. These injustices led Mujib to turn to defiance.

In 1958, army rule, i.e. Martial law, was imposed. Mujib was jailed on fake charges soon afterwards. He was jailed for 3 years. In 1961 he was released, and he immediately started building a horizontal Awami League organization - it was essentially an underground activity at the time. As a result, in 1962 he was jailed again. He was ready to face all these jailings because he was ready to make sacrifices - unlike other fathers of nations. Most fathers of new nations didn't face such serial jailings. Mujib was in jail 22 times, perhaps a record!

In 1968, a major legal case, the Agartala Conspiracy Case, was launched against Mujib and some of his allies. This was a false set of accusations trumped up by the Pakistani authorities, accusing Mujib and others of conspiring with India to break with Pakistan. It was simply not true. The charges that Mujib faced, carried the death penalty. The Pakistani authorities named Mujib as the main accused. The West Pakistani leaders, in fact, highlighted Mujib as the top leader of the Bengalis through these charges. The military regime, which trumped up these charges, soon broke down under protests - especially in East Pakistan. Mujib was then released in 1969, and the charges were dropped.

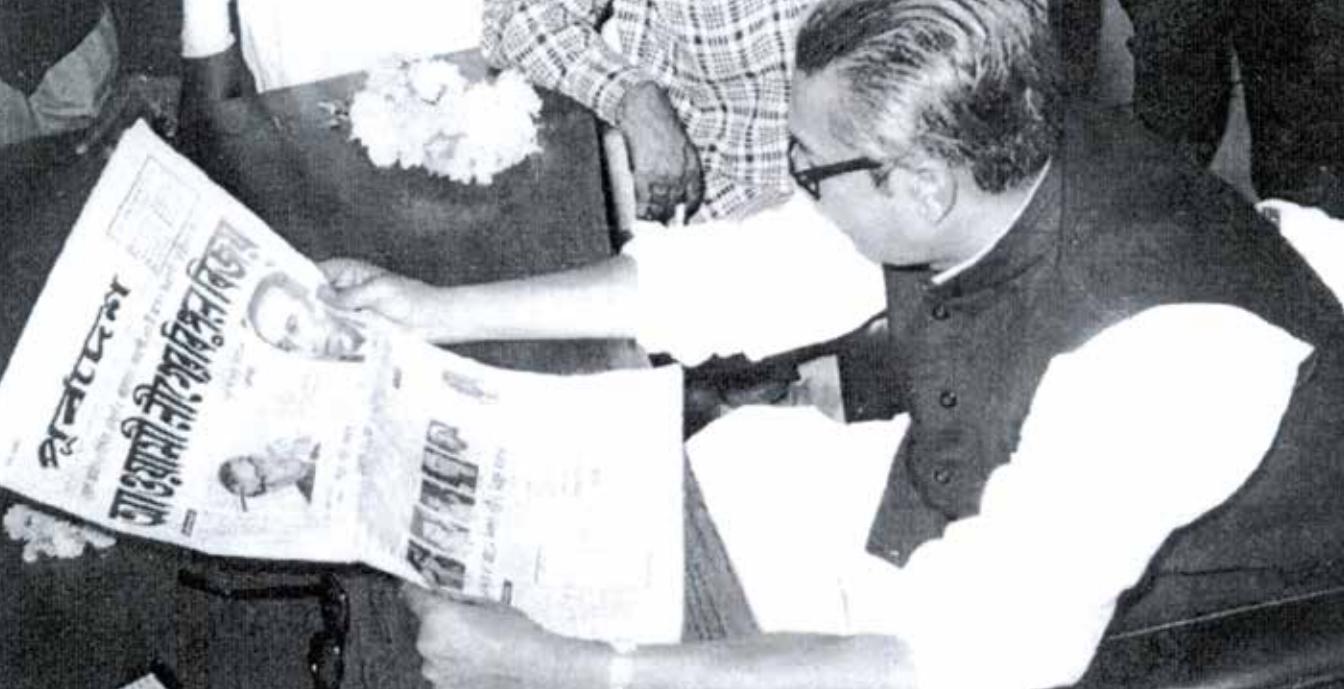
After the charges were dropped, Mujib was immediately taken to the Racecourse - the place for public mobilization in Dhaka. He made a defiant speech before a vast crowd. On that occasion he was given the honorific title "Bangabandhu." Bangabandhu meaning the friend of the Bengalis. Mujib earned a revered title as a living legend, similar to Nelson Mandela's "Madiba" or MK Gandhi's "Mahatma."





WAYS MUJIB STANDS OUT AS A LEADER

- HE WORKED FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF POOR PEOPLE.
- HE WAS NOT A NARROW INTOLERANT ETHNIC NATIONALIST.
- HE WAS AN OPEN-HEARTED SECULARIST.
- HE WAS A STRONG POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZER AT THE GRASSROOTS.
- HE WAS AN ACCOMMODATIVE LEADER.
- HE WAS OPEN TO NEGOTIATIONS.
- HE WAS NOT A HARD-HEAD AGITATOR.
- HE WAS A MATURE AND ROUNDED LEADER.
- HE HAD A FINE SENSE OF TIMING IN POLITICS.
- HE WAS READY TO MAKE SACRIFICES.



In December 1970 when the Pakistani military regime was compelled to hold the first genuine national elections of undivided Pakistan, Mujib's Awami League won virtually all, except for two, of the 169 seats in East Pakistan. This gave the Mujib-led Awami League the majority of the seats in the new national parliament of Pakistan. The military leaders and the powerful elites in West Pakistan did not anticipate such a landslide. They thought several different parties will win seats in East Pakistan - the Bengalis will split their votes. Thereby, West Pakistan will have more seats and can continue to control the Bengalis. But, they found themselves facing the prospect that the Awami League could actually rule the whole of Pakistan; if this new assembly was brought into being. The military leaders decided to postpone the meeting of this new parliament, since they did not want the new Mujib government to be ruling the country.

Mujib, who just won the position to be the Prime Minister of the country in the early days of 1971, replied by calling upon East Pakistan for a non-cooperation movement. It enabled his party, the Awami League, to holistically and peacefully take control over the administration of East Pakistan. He became the de facto head of government in East Pakistan. His persuasion and track record, made the civil servants, the police, the businesses, the banks, the entire labor force (the workers and the farmers) follow his instruction. Mujib was in control! Disclaimer: only the army units were not under his control.

West Pakistani leaders were determined to use this time to strengthen the troops and introduce weaponry by force. Mujib needed to response to this new tense situation. On the 7th of March 1971, before the sprawling crowd at the Dhaka Racecourse, he made the speech of his life! UNESCO has listed that speech as a cultural and political milestone, giving it an international legendary status. Details of the speech is instrumental. In the speech, Mujib recalled that earlier military actions by the Pakistanis have done great damage. He then said the important words: "the struggle this time is for our independence." He resoundingly repeated those words during the course of the speech.

Mujib shrewdly felt short of declaration for independence on that day because he was informed that if he declared independence, the Pakistani airforce had orders to bomb the meeting of millions of people. Mujib did not want thousands killed on the spot under an air raid. He subsequently, wanted to avoid widespread violence in pursuit for independence. In the speech, Mujib then addressed the Pakistani armed forces, "do not make this country a hell and destroy it. If we can solve things in a peaceful manner, we can at least live as brothers." The speech was a masterstroke!





After 7 March 1971, Mujib participated in extensive talks with Pakistani leaders, including the military dictator of the country Yahya Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who was the most popular politician in West Pakistan (but had fewer parliament seats than Mujib). Mujib quickly learnt that the West Pakistani leaders did not negotiate in good faith. They used the period of the talk to build up the military force for a crackdown. The crackdown began on the 25th of March, after a phony dialogue process. Mujib saw it coming!

Mujib urged other Awami League leaders to go into hiding, so that the organization does not get completely decapitated. When the crackdown began at the night of 25th March, at great risk to himself, Mujib remained in his house, and awaited arrest. He did not go into hiding. He offered himself to arrest, to minimize death and destruction. He reckoned if the military found it impossible to subdue the wide-awake Bengalis, Mujib needed to be under their grasp. He was also prepared to sacrifice with life.

Mujib said at the time: "if the Pakistani military ruler thinks he can crush the movement by killing me, then he is seriously mistaken. An independent Bangladesh will be built on my grave." He was

immediately arrested in his home, flown to West Pakistan and put in jail. West Pakistani authorities, instead of negotiating with Mujib, thereafter put him on trial for treason. Through a speedy trial he was convicted of treason and sentenced to death. Meanwhile, the Pakistani Army unleashed a brutal campaign to subdue the Bengalis, committing massacres on Bengali police, Bengali army officials who defected, Bengali students, Bengali intellectuals and other civilians. This campaign added up to an act of genocide.

The resistance from the Bengalis could not be overcome. A war of liberation followed. Over the next nine months, with limited arms and resources, Bengalis successfully resisted the forces of Pakistani military. Eventually, the Indian army joined forces with the Bengali liberation force, in the beginning of December 1971. On the 16th of December 1971, the Pakistani Army surrendered to the already formulating Bangladeshi and the Indian forces.



The death sentence on Mujib was held back. On 8 January 1972, he was released under international pressure. He arrived in Dhaka on the 10th of January 1972, to become the leader and the father of a new nation - Bangladesh. Later in 1972, Mujib introduced a new constitution. Next year, in 1973, an election gave the Mujib-led Awami League a landslide victory in Bangladesh.

It was not easy to govern. Bangladesh was badly ravaged by the war. Unlike other fathers of new nations, Mujib had to start the race from the last-end of the line. Bangladesh was arguably the poorest country at the time. Many leading Bengalis, who might have helped to rebuild, had been murdered. There were major problems due to dislocation during the war. Reviving the economy and restoring law and order was a challenge on multiple fronts. In the context of the Cold War era, Mujib started a series of bold diplomatic efforts to normalize relationship with all countries of the world. As Prime Minister, Mujib initiated a series of policy and relief-response initiatives. Meanwhile, quarters in military establishment plotted to oust him.

His nation building was cut short before he could serve a full term in the government. On 15 August 1975, a group of conspiring middle-ranking soldiers, backed by the Pakistani era vested interest groups, staged a military coup and murdered Mujib and 16 of his family members, including children. Only two of his children survived because they were not in the country during the time.



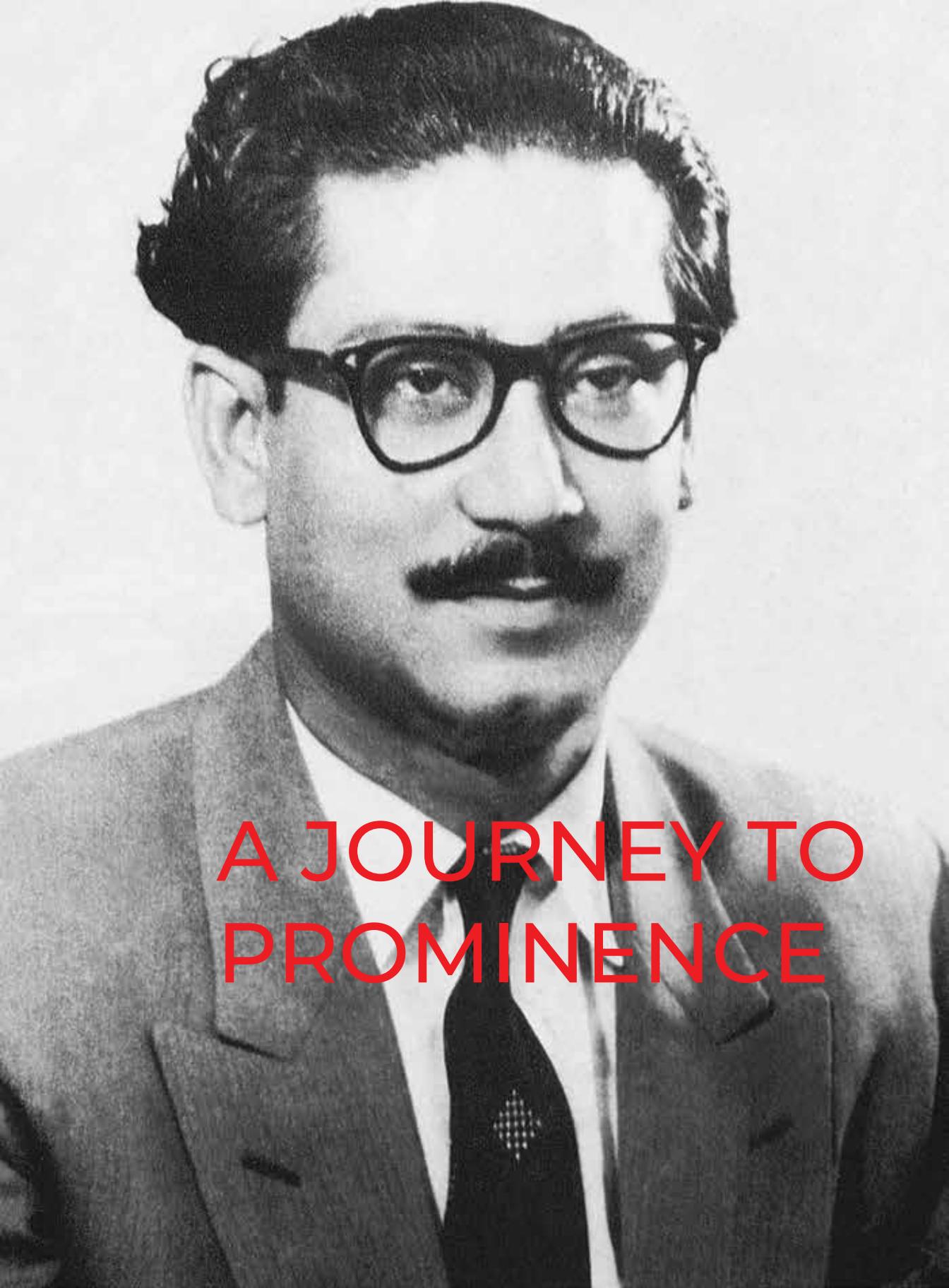


After the killing of Mujib, Bangladesh suffered one and half decade of inapt military rule. Mujib's passionately built Awami League was instrumental in ending the misgoverning military regime. Mujib's death was a tragic end to a remarkable struggle led by a remarkable man.

Mujib's account is a reminder that Bangladesh should be a country for focus, for so many across the globe. Mujib's Awami League was eventually reorganized. Through clash of history, it became led by his elder daughter Sheikh Hasina, who got saved from the killing spree in 1975.

Mujib's Awami League came to power four times, the majority of the administered timespan for Bangladesh by any single party, under the leadership of Hasina. The current Awami League government's track record has become an exemplary development success story, which other countries can learn from. Bangladesh and the legacy of Mujib need to be paid the attention that they deserve.

As Bangladesh makes its deep marks in the world economy, Mujib's legacy as a unique father of a nation will grow without a shadow of a doubt. The popular cries of "Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu" (long live the spirit of Bengalis, long live the friend of Bengalis) from Mujib era, has forever attached the fate of Mujib with the Bengalis. Mujib's values of fierce pluralism and social justice for the downtrodden live today as exemplary motivation for generations unforeseen.

A black and white head-and-shoulders portrait of a man. He has dark, wavy hair and is wearing round-rimmed glasses. He has a mustache and is dressed in a dark suit jacket over a white collared shirt and a dark tie. He is looking directly at the viewer with a neutral expression.

A JOURNEY TO PROMINENCE

1920

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was born to a Muslim family in the village of Tungipara of Gopalganj sub-division under Faridpur district on March 17, 1920.

1937

Mujib returned to school after a break of four years due to the severity of eye operation.

1938

Mujib married Begum Fazilatunnesa. Together they had three sons and two daughters.

1939

Two prominent politicians of national scale, Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq who was then the Prime Minister and Mr. Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy who was the Labor Minister of Bengal, visited Gopalganj. Young Mujib welcomed and accompanied the dignitaries.

Soon after his departure, Suhrawardy invited Mujib to visit Kolkata (back then known as Calcutta) for a meeting.

1940

Mujib took admission at Kolkata's Islamia College.

1943

The Muslim League broke into two factions, one of which was progressive and the other reactionary. Suhrawardy, along with Mujib, led the progressive section. They wanted it to represent the aspirations of the working-class Bengalis.

1947

Mujib attained his undergraduate degree from the Islamia College.

1948

After the formation of Pakistan, Mujib came to Dhaka in East Pakistan, and took admission in University of Dhaka. Shortly thereafter, he formed the East Pakistan Muslim Students' League.

1952

On 26 January, the then Pakistani rulers declared Urdu as the only state language. Mujib opposed it.

On 21 February, several student leaders were killed during the protests demanding Bengali language rights. In a statement released from jail, Mujib expressed his remorse.

Later in 1952, Mujib went to America. He was selected, and thereafter participate in the prestigious "International Visitor Leadership Program," a US State Department's student exchange program.

1953

Mujib was elected the General Secretary of Awami Muslim League.

1955

Under Mujib's leadership, the Awami Muslim League, unanimously removed the word "Muslim" from its name, in order to make the party more inclusive and secular.

1956

Mujib was reelected as the General Secretary of the party.

Mujib became the minister of industries, commerce, labor, anti-corruption and village-aid ministry in the coalition government.

1957

Mujib visited China on an official tour.

1966

Mujib presented the historic 6-point demand, which became the charter of freedom of the Bengali nation, in Lahore, West Pakistan. For the first three months alone, he was arrested 8 times.

1968

The Government of Pakistan filed the 'Agartala Conspiracy Case' accusing Mujib and 35 others of conspiracy to secede East Pakistan.

1969

Owing to the continued public demonstrations, the Pakistani government was forced to withdraw the Agartala Conspiracy

Case against Mujib and others.

Mujib was conferred the title "Bangabandhu" (friend of the Bengalis) at a reception rally of a million students at the Racecourse Maidan (currently renamed as Suhrawardy Udyan).

1970

In the run up to the much-awaited national election, Mujib campaigned for the Awami League on the basis of the 6-point demand.

In the national election, the Awami League snatched an absolute majority (winning 167 of 169 seats from East Pakistan), which gave the party a majority in the National Assembly.

1971

The Pakistani authorities forcefully delayed the initiation of the National Assembly. From 1 March onward, Mujib initiated a non-cooperation movement in East Pakistan.

On 7 March, Mujib delivered his historic speech at the Racecourse, considered to be his roadmap for the country's independence.

In the midst of an onslaught on Bengalis, Mujib declared the independence of Bangladesh in the early hours of 26 March. Mujib was immediately arrested and flown to West Pakistan. He was slapped with false charges and a speedily sentence to death.

1972

The Government of Pakistan was forced to release Mujib under international pressure on 8 January.

Mujib reached Dhaka on 10 January. He went straight from the airport to the Racecourse, where he addressed the free Bengali people for the first time.

On 12 January, Mujib took charge as the Prime Minister and embarked on the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Bangladesh.

1974

Under Mujib administration's persuasion, Bangladesh received official recognition on becoming the 136th member of the United Nations on 13 September.

1975

In the pre-dawn hours of 15 August, Mujib was assassinated by a handful of renegades backed by a larger national and international political vested alliance prolonged from the Pakistani era.



MUJIB: FATHER OF A NATION

June, 2020

Celebrating the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
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