

# **Lecture 12**

# 7th March Speech

- The **7th March Speech** was a speech given by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Ramna Race Course Maidan in Dhaka to a gathering of over two million people.
- He spoke at a time of increasing tensions between East Pakistan and the powerful political and military establishment of West Pakistan.
- The Bengali people were inspired to prepare for a potential war of independence.

# 7th March Speech

- The extempore speech lasted about 19 minutes, with more than 1100 words.
- In this speech, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib mentioned a 4-point condition before joining the National Assembly meeting on 25th March; these were:
  - The immediate lifting of martial law
  - Immediate withdrawal of all military personnel to their barracks
  - Immediate transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people
  - Proper inquiry into the loss of life

# 7th March Speech

- At the end, raising his fist, Sheikh Mujib cried out at the top of his voice :  
*“Our struggle this time is a struggle for our freedom, our struggle this time is a struggle for our independence. Joy Bangla.”*
- This historic address was a de facto declaration of Bangladesh’s independence.

# Articulated Directives From 7<sup>th</sup> March Speech

- Sheikh Mujib also articulated several directives to the nation as part of civil disobedience movement, such as:
  - people would not pay taxes and the Government servants would take orders only from him
  - The secretariat, government and semi-government offices, High court and other courts throughout East Bangla would observe Strikes. Necessary exemptions would be announced from time to time
  - Only local and inter-district telephone communication would function
  - Railway and ports might function, but railway and port workers would not cooperate if railway or ports were used for mobilizing of forces for the purpose of repression against the people of East Bangla

# Operation Searchlight

- **Operation Searchlight** was a planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan Army to curb the Bengali nationalist movement in the erstwhile East Pakistan.
- The original plan envisioned:
  - Taking control of the major cities on March 26, and then
  - Eliminating all opposition, political or military, within one month.

# The Operational Plan

- The plan was drawn up in March 1971 by Major General **Khadim Hussain Raja**, and Major General **Rao Farman Ali**.
- Before putting the plan into action, Lt. General **Shahabzada Yakub Khan**, and the governor of East Pakistan, Vice Admiral **Syed Mohammad Ahsan**, were relieved of their duties.
- On the morning of March 18, they wrote the plan at the **Dacca cantonment**.
- The plan was written on a light blue office pad with a lead pencil by General Farman containing **16 paragraphs** spread over **five pages**.

# Success Factors For The Operation

- Operation to be launched **simultaneously** all across East Pakistan.
- Maximum number of political and student leaders, and those among cultural organizations and teaching staff to be arrested.
- Operation must achieve 100% success in Dhaka. **Dhaka University** would be occupied and searched.
- Free and greater use of fire authorized for securing cantonments.



# Success Factors For The Operation

- All internal and international communications to be cut off, including telephone, television, radio and telegraph.
- All East Pakistani (Bengali) troops to be neutralized by seizing weapons and ammunition.
- To deceive the Awami League, President Yahia Khan to pretend to continue dialogue, even if Mr. Bhutto disagrees, and to agree to Awami League demands.

# Operation Searchlight

- President Yahya Khan at the February conference said

*"Kill three million of them (Bangladeshis) and the rest will eat out of our hands."*

- The main phase of Operation Searchlight ended with the fall of the last major town in Bengali hands in mid-May.

# Operation Searchlight

- The operation also precipitated the 1971 Bangladesh genocide.
- It caused roughly 10 million refugees to flee to India as well as the death of a number of civilians.
- Bengali intelligentsia, academics and Hindus were targeted for the harshest treatment.
- These systematic killings enraged the Bengalis to achieve the new state of Bangladesh.

# Declaration of Independence

- The **declaration of Bangladesh's independence** was proclaimed on 26 March 1971 during the beginning of the Bangladesh Liberation War
- The declaration was issued by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on midnight 26 March, prior to his arrest by the Pakistan Army.

# Text of Declaration

- Declaration of Independence message drafted by **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**:

*“Today Bangladesh is a sovereign and independent country. On Thursday night, West Pakistani armed forces suddenly attacked the police barracks at Razarbagh and the EPR headquarters at Pilkhana in Dhaka. Many innocent and unarmed have been killed in Dhaka city and other places of Bangladesh. Violent clashes between E.P.R. and Police on the one hand and the armed forces of Pakistan on the other, are going on. The Bengalis are fighting the enemy with great courage for an independent Bangladesh. May Allah aid us in our fight for freedom. Joy Bangla”.*

# Spread of The Declaration

- A telegram containing the text of **Sheikh Mujib's** message reached the **Mukti Bahini** in Chittagong.
- The message was translated to Bengali by **Dr. Manjula Anwar**.
- The students failed to secure permission from higher authorities to broadcast the message from the nearby **Agrabad Station** of Radio Pakistan.
- They crossed **Kalurghat** Bridge into an area controlled by an East Bengal Regiment under **Major Ziaur Rahman**.

# Spread of The Declaration

- **M.A. Hannan**, a local Awami League Leader and **Abul Kashem Sandeep**, Vice President of Fatiksori College declared independence of Bangladesh on behalf of **Sheikh Mujib** respectively at 2 PM and 7:30 PM on March 26.
- At 7:45 PM on 27 March 1971, **Major Ziaur Rahman** broadcast announcement of the declaration of independence **on behalf of** Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

# Text of Declaration

*“This is the Free Bengal Radio Station. I, **Major Ziaur Rahman**, at the direction of our great leader **Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**, do hereby declare that the independent People's Republic of Bangladesh has been established. At his direction , In the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, I call upon all Bengalees to rise up against the attack of the West Pakistani Army. We shall fight to the last to free our motherland. Victory is, by the Grace of Allah, ours. Joy Bangla!”*