

This movement ultimately ended in the adoption of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan in 1956. However, the movement was not isolated to this as it sowed the seeds for the independence movement of the Bangladeshi people which resulted in the liberation of Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971. Language is not only the principal representative of a culture of one nation but it also creates sense of patriotism and nationalism in people's mind. Bengali and Bangla language is an appropriate example of that. Bengali people created one of the greatest political and cultural histories in the 20th century. The events of 21 February 1952 proved that a nation which is strong and powerful politically cannot destroy a spirited civilized nation if they have a unifying language like Bangla. Pakistani leaders forgot that Bengali people and Bangla have a history of thousands of years behind them. The Pakistani government wanted to deny the existence of a language like Bangla in the name of Islam. When they were not able to do that, they conspired in other ways against the Bangladeshis, such as, trying to replace Bangla alphabet with Arabic, banning 100 years birthday celebration of Rabindranath Tagore, prohibiting broadcast of *Rabindrasangeet* (songs of Rabindranath) in the government controlled media and so on.

But the occupied force did not realize the power of language. The power had been proved through the sacrifice of the people of Bangladesh. Thus it is logical that if world leaders want to select a day as a specific Mother Language Day, 21 February must be considered. This is because no other nation has ever sacrificed their lives in such a way as Bengali people did to defend their Mother language.

This small history also proves that Mother Tongue, for any nation in the world or minority groups within nations, is the most important part of their culture. It is also related to the existence of a nation. The liberty of Mother Language is the liberty of a nation. Bengali people have proved that and following the path of February 21 they liberated their country from the clutches of Pakistan.

The language movement was more than a fight to preserve a rich language dating back over 1,000 years. It was a fight for social and economic justice. It was a fight to maintain one's own identity at a time when official measures were taken to crush it. This fight had been taken up by ordinary people, who just wanted to establish their mother tongue. For Bengali speaking people worldwide, the language itself is a big part of their history. The very birth of today's Bangladesh is intimately linked with the Bengali language or Bangla. Today, Bangla is the 6th most spoken language in the world.

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The Formation of Awami Muslim League

Awami League is one of the oldest and major political parties in Bangladesh. It was founded in Dhaka on 23 June 1949 at a convention of the leaders and workers known to have been a faction of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and headed by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim. Formation of Awami League is one of the most significant and important events in the political history of Bangladesh. The East Pakistan Awami Muslim League emerged as the foremost opposition political party in Pakistan. Within a very short time the party justified its name truly after being the party of the common people as the meaning the word 'Awami' denotes the people of all classes. A constructive, proactive, progressive, moderate, conscious and non-communal young and energetic young people voiced their voice against the oppression, corruption, disparity and the use of the religion in politics by the Muslim League government. Common people also lost their faith and confidence from the Muslim league as well as the government. It was the first organization to voice against the authoritarian attitude of the central government to repress the legitimate interests of the people of East Bengal.

Background of the Formation of Awami Muslim League

From the very inception of the establishment of Muslim league it had been considered as a party of pocket and coterie. The leaders who led Pakistan to be partitioned from India and had been most devoted for the party (Muslim League) were not given any reasonable position neither in the ministry, nor in the party. In a much planned manner the Pakistani Constituent Assembly excluded some of the most charismatic leaders of Bengal (i.e. Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Abul Hashim, AK Fazlul Huq) from the cabinet. Of the seven ministers, only two were Bengalis who did not represent the Bengalis in the true sense. In the formation of various committees from provincial level to the union level, democracy was not followed. Moderate and non-communal leaders were not welcomed. After the independence of Pakistan Khwaja Nazimuddin became the prime minister of Eastern Bengal who kept himself out of the politics during the independence movement and even had been in London. Akram Khan was also not active in the politics. They got the blessings of Jinnah and Liaquat Ali which made them the top leaders. Ironically these people became the key figures after the independence and those very dedicated leaders got room neither in the mainstream politics nor in the government machine. Even some of them were arrested (Suhrawardy was arrested because of his non-communal characteristics in 1948) and lost membership from the Constituent Assembly). Liaquat Ali Khan marked Suhrawardy as an agent of India to spifflicate Pakistan. The leaders of East Bengal gradually became more frustrated.

Soon after the establishment of Pakistan, the politically conscious students of East Bengal were disillusioned at the inefficiency and indifference of the Muslim League. At that time the Muslim League was in control of the central and provincial governments, towards looking after the interests of the Bengalis which had never been performed soundly since its independence. Maulana Akram Khan, the chief organizer of the East Bengal Muslim League adopted a conservative attitude and took the view that the role of the Muslim League adopted a over regarding its accountability to people for running the administration of the country, after the establishment of Pakistan and he closed its door for primary membership. On 4 January, 1948, with a view to venting their views, the students formed East Pakistan Muslim Students' League (later known as the Students' League) and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, at that time a student of the Dhaka University became its secretary. The formation of East Pakistan Muslim Students' League paved the way of a single platform for all the Bengalis of East Bengal.

Although the decline of the Muslim League started after the death of Jinnah in 1948 still it was virtually in control of the government both at the centre and in the provinces. It was the government of the Muslim League which commanded all the Muslim votes in the Constituent Assembly from 1948 to 1949. The opposition consisted only of the Hindus in the Pakistan National Congress. It could not become very effective. In the North West Frontier Province the Pir of Manki Shariff, who took a leading part in the creation of Pakistan, was forced out of the League and moved into opposition. In East Bengal, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani a former President of the Assam Provincial Muslim League found that the League had virtually ceased to be a mass party and felt the need for a new party that would speak for the common man. In the Punjab, the Khan of Mamdot was deposed as Chief Minister Primarily owing to rivalry within the League. Soon he formed the Jinnah Muslim League and started to build up an opposition to the ruling Muslim League.

Since 1947 an anti-government feeling as a result of the language issue was already manifested through resistance movement among the middle class in East Pakistan. The use of English and Urdu on money order forms, on postal stamps and coins with the exclusion of Bangla increased the apprehension of the educated section in East Pakistan which created an anti-government feeling among them. As the year 1949 began, the state of Pakistan remained in oblivion. It did not have a constitution and therefore elections were out of the question. A gathering crisis over the question of the state language was sapping its strength. More worryingly, in that early phase of the new state's existence, a cultural and political gap was developing between East Bengal and the Western half of Pakistan. In every sphere of life the Eastern wing had been deprived. Education sector of that part was going through in a fragile condition; no industry was set up, corruption in the administration reached to its top and the misery of the Eastern wing had been totally peaked.

After the creation of Pakistan, Congress was the only opposition party in the Pakistan Parliament. In the very first session of the Pakistan Legislative Assembly held on February 23, 1948 Dhirendranath Dutta, the representative from East Pakistan raised demand for recognizing Bangla as one of the languages besides Urdu and English used at the Legislative Assembly. Dhirendranath's proposal came under severe criticism. Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan said that it was a mistake on the part of Dhirendranath Dutta to raise the issue of language at the Assembly. It was question of life and death; he said and strongly opposed the proposal and declared that the Assembly should disregard such an amendment bill. He said that the proposal had been raised to create dissension among the people of Pakistan and to prevent the people from using a single language. Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Chief Minister of East Pakistan opposed the proposal made by Dhirendranath Dutta. Tamizuddin Khan, the vice-president of the Legislative Assembly and a representative from East Pakistan also spoke against the proposal. As a result the language made the Eastern part more proactive for the formation of a new political party here in Bengal to protect their culture as well as their rights.

The economic depression of East Bengal created a strong apathy among the people of the Eastern wing. Food situation in East Bengal worsened from August 1947. Inefficient management by the administration and communication problem were the main reasons for the problem. Fraudulent practices by government officials, black marketeering by traders and hoarding of food grain were other reasons for causing food shortage in 1948-1949. The people of the countryside particularly of Khulna, Faridpur, Sylhet and North Bengal fell victims to the famine. The situation also worsened in other districts. The condition of the poor in the cities also deteriorated. In some areas the peasants made organized attempts to resist government attempts to collect grain. But it was not possible for anyone to organize the famine-stricken people into a countrywide movement. There were sporadic demonstrations in certain famine-stricken areas. Severe food shortage between the years 1947 and 1949 was one of the main reasons for the spread of anti-government feeling. Like the peasants, the workers throughout East Bengal started ceaseless movements from 1947 against price hike, scarcity of food and low wages. Nonetheless, dissatisfaction of the workers and strikes called by them contributed to build up anti-government feeling in the Bengal province.

After the partition the Muslim league was virtually fragmented due to internal conflicts among the top leaders of the party. That conflict was aggravated after the failure of Muslim league candidate, Khurram Khan Panni in the by-election of 1949. In the Tangail by-election the Muslim League candidate was miserably failed to Shamsul Huq, a young politician of Bengal. The cornerstone of the Muslim League was really shattered after

their failure in the election. The Daily Azad marked that defeat as a red signal for the league. Suhrawardy termed the victory as a welcome kickoff for their journey against the undemocratic gesture of Muslim League. The Daily Mirror, published from London reported that it was not only a victory of Mr. Shamsul Huq but it was threatening to the reactionary government all over of the world.

Suhrawardy and other political leaders who were eliminated from playing any important role in the Muslim League after the establishment of Pakistan found that the Muslim League had been transformed into a conservative organization blocking all political progress in the country. With a view to creating a healthy democratic political opposition in the country, a new political party was badly needed. They started the actions for creating a new political party that would represent the common people of Bengal. When they started the procedures in this regard Muslim League got threatened and oppression towards the progressives was incepted by the central government. Prime Minister Kwaja Nazimuddin scolded the plan of framing Awami League as a party of six months enduringness. The sabotaging created by the central authority accelerated the formation of a latent and potential political party in Bengal.

The top leaders of Eastern Bengal i.e. Bhasani, Suhrawardy, Shamsul Huq, Sheikh Mujib were arrested time and again. Young leader Mujib was jailed for two years. Criticizing them as traitor Chief Minister Nurul Amin on 8 July 1949 threatened against the conspiracy of formation of any new political party in Pakistan. Bengal Provincial Muslim League President Akram Khan ordered his party men to strike back the new party. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan jeopardized them even with taking actions by slaughtering. Many of the progressive student leaders' studentship was called off. At that very articulation the formation of a new party became inevitable in Bengal.

With the political crisis, the economic condition in East Pakistan also deteriorated. People of East Pakistan started losing faith in Muslim League and a new political party was to be formed. Finally the frustrated Bengalis formed the "East Pakistan Awami Muslim League" (popularly shortened to 'Awami Muslim League', People's Muslim League) on 23 June 1949 at the East Pakistan Muslim League Workers Convention held at the Rose Garden (residence of Kazi Mohammad Bashir Humaiyun), Dhaka. The party was floated as the first ever provincial opposition party that opposed the Urdu policy. It was founded by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. They were all former members of the Muslim League. 300 representatives were there in the convention. Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the former President of the Assam Provincial Muslim League, was elected as the President of the

party, whilst Aatur Rahman Khan, Ali Ahmed Khan, Ali Amzad Khan, Sakawat Hossain and Abdus Salam Khan were appointed Vice-President, Shamsul Huq as General Secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ((who was 29-years at that time and interned in jail) as Joint Secretary, and Khandakar Mostaq Ahmad and AKM Rafiqul Islam as Assistant Secretary. There were some forty members in the first committee of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League.

The key figures in the committee of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (1949) were as follows.

Table 5

East Pakistan Awami Muslim League Committee: 1949

Name	Post
Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani	President
Aatur Rahman Khan	Vice-President
Ali Ahmed Khan (MLA)	Vice-President
Ali Amzad Khan	Vice-President
Sakawat Hossain	Vice-President
Abdus Salam Khan	Vice-President
Yar Mohammad Khan	Treasurer
Shamsul Huq	General Secretary
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman	Joint Secretary
Khondakar Mostaq Ahmad	Assistant Secretary
AKM Rafiqul Islam	Assistant Secretary

Source: Dr. Abu Md. Delwar Hossain, *Bangladesher Itihash* (In Bangla)

Programs of the Awami Muslim League at its Birth

In the true sense Awami Muslim League was the first opposition party in the then Pakistan. The organization adopted a draft manifesto in support of Islamic order, provincial autonomy and Bengali as a state language of Pakistan. At its birth the party adopted a 42-point program with special emphasis on the demand for provincial autonomy. Main programs of the Awami Muslim League these had been the popular demands of Awami League were as follows.

1. Recognition of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan,
2. One man one vote on the basis of the Universal adult franchise

3. Democracy to be ensured in all aspects of the state
4. Framing of a constitution
5. Parliamentary system of government
6. Regional autonomy and framing two wings of Pakistan namely East and West Pakistan
7. Removal of disparity between the two wings
8. Provincial autonomy on the basis of the Lahore Resolutions
9. Compulsory education for every citizen of the nation
10. Ensuring the accountability of the government officials and employees
11. Equal rights of the people will be confirmed where the countrymen will enjoy their freedom of speech, formation of political parties and movement.
12. Equal participation in the defense for the people of both the units of Pakistan

Significance of the formation of the Awami Muslim League

The foundation of the Awami Muslim League was laid on two conflicting forces. On the one hand, there were the frustrated and dissident Muslim Leaguers whose political philosophy and ideology were not fundamentally different from those of the Muslim League. On the other hand, however, the Awami Muslim League had a large number of followers, mostly young who were secular in their attitude and anxious to establish true democracy in the country. This younger group opposed the communal nomenclature and demanded removal of the word 'Muslim' from the name of the party. Seeing that the Convention was about to end in confusion over the nomenclature of the party, Bhasani gave his ruling against the secular group. He argued that switching over to secularism straightway at that time would make them unpopular as the masses still were steeped in communalism. However, his consolidation of the dissident Muslim League forces in the province against the ruling party completed the process of developing an opposition. Meanwhile, H.S. Suhrawardy, a leader of proved parliamentary experience and ability, came to the forefront to crush the ruling Muslim League.

Suhrawardy soon undertook the task of organizing the small opposition group into an All-Pakistan party. By his remarkable ability to maintain support and outmaneuver his opponents, the Awami Muslim League gradually assumed the character of a mass opposition party. In distinguishing the Awami League from the Muslim League he maintained

that the Awami League did not believe in identifying the state with the party, the ministry and administration, it believed in democracy as opposed to fascism. While the Awami League considered the existence of an opposition party necessary for the proper functioning of democracy, the Muslim League labeled opposition as disruption demanded that there should be no parties other than itself and all other parties must be crushed out of existence. Thus the Awami Muslim League was formed out of frustration caused by the closed door policy of the Muslim League in Pakistan.

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East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950

The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 also known as the East Pakistan Estate Acquisition Act 1950) was a law relating to tenancies to be held under the state and other matters connected therewith. The law was passed by the newly formed East Bengal government in the Dominion of Pakistan. The bill was drafted on 31 March 1948 during the early years of Pakistan and after a long two years of debate over the bill it was passed on 16 May 1951. Before passage of the legislature, landed revenue laws of Bengal consisted of the Permanent Settlement Regulations of 1793, Rent Act 1859 and the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 is the most significant land reform act in the history of Bengal.

Background

Prior to enactment of the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950, there were agrarian law of Bengal mainly consisted of the Bengal permanent settlement regulations of 1793 and the Bengal tenancy act 1885. These acts could not meet the demand of any portion of the Bengal part very fairly and as a result a never ending prevailed across Bengal in course of time. The East India Company administration as well as the British government took some initiatives to solve the problem which were basically beneficial to maximize their own interest. Finally with the Land Reform Act of 1950 the problems related to the zamindari system and the land reform acts were resolved.

The Permanent Settlement, 1793

The Permanent Settlement regulations made zamindars owners of their land subject to payment of a fixed amount of their land revenue to the government and they were entitled to collect rent from their subordinate tenants, who were again entitled to create subordinate interests. Permanent Settlement regulations 1793 created a landed aristocracy which was supposed to be loyal to the British regime. Under the contract of the