

Rahman, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur (1920-1975) Father of the nation and first president of Bangladesh (26 March 1971 to 11 January 1972). Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was born on 17 March 1920 in the village Tungipara under Gopalganj subdivision in the district of Faridpur. His father Sheikh Lutfar Rahman was a serestadar in the civil court of Gopalganj. Mujib, the third among six brothers and sisters, had his primary education in the local Gimadanga School. His early education suffered for about four years due to eye problems. He passed his Matriculation from Gopalganj Missionary School in 1942, Intermediate of Arts from Calcutta Islamia College in 1944 and BA from the same college in 1947.



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Mujib showed the potential of leadership since his school life. While a student of Gopalganj Missionary School, AK Fazlul Huq, the then Chief Minister of Bengal, came to visit the school (1938). The young Mujib is said to have organized an agitation in order to impress the chief minister about the depressed situation of the region. While a student in Islamia College he was elected general secretary of the College Students Union in 1946. He was an activist of the Bengal Provincial Muslim

League and a member of the All India Muslim League Council from 1943 onwards. In politics he had been a fervent follower of [suhrawardy](#).

During the general elections of 1946, Sheikh Mujib was deputed by the Muslim League to work for the party candidates in the Faridpur district. After partition (1947), he got himself admitted into the University of Dhaka to study law but was unable to complete it, because he was expelled from the University in early 1949 on the charge of 'inciting the fourth-class employees' in their agitation against the University authority's indifference towards their legitimate demands.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was one of the principal organisers behind the formation of the East Pakistan Muslim Students League (1948). In fact, Sheikh Mujib's active political career began with his election to one of the three posts of joint secretaries of the newly established East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (1949) while interned in jail. The other two joint secretaries were Khondakar Mostaq Ahmad and AK Rafiqul Hussain. In 1953, Sheikh Mujib was elected general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, a post that he held until 1966 when he became president of the party. It was due to Mujib's initiative that in 1955 the word 'Muslim' was dropped from the name of the party to make it sound secular. It is indicative of his secularist attitude to politics that he developed after 1947.

To give full time to the organizational affairs of the Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman resigned from the cabinet of [ataur rahman khan](#) (1956-58) after serving for only nine months. During the time of general Ayub Khan, Mujib had the nerve to

revive the Awami League in 1964, though his political guru, Suhrawardy, was in favour of keeping political parties defunct and work under the political amalgam called National Democratic Front for the restoration of constitutional rule in Pakistan. Mujib, after all, was already quite disillusioned about the concept of Pakistan. The impression that he got as a member of Pakistan's Second Constituent Assembly-cum-Legislature (1955-1956) and later as a member of Pakistan National Assembly (1956-1958) was that the attitude of West Pakistani leaders to East Pakistan was not one of equality and fraternity.

Sheikh Mujib was one of the first among the language movement detainees (11 March 1948). His address on 21 September 1955 in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on the question of Bangla language is noteworthy. Claiming the right to speak in his mother tongue, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said:

'We want to speak in Bengali here, whether we know any other language or not it matters little for us. If we feel that we can express ourselves in Bengali we will speak always in Bengali even though we can speak in English also. If that is not allowed, we will leave the House, but Bengali should be allowed in this house; that is our stand.'

In another address (25 August 1955) what Sheikh Mujib said in the Constituent Assembly in protest against the change of nomenclature of the province from East Bengal to East Pakistan is equally pertinent.

'Sir, you will see that they want to place the word 'East Pakistan' instead of 'East Bengal'. We have demanded so many times that

you should use [East] Bengal instead of [East] Pakistan. The word 'Bengal' has a history, has a tradition of its own....'

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman grew in political eminence in the early 1960s. Through his captivating organizing ability he was able to retrieve the Awami League from intra party politics and exits of a number of factions from the party's mainstream. A magnetic organiser, Sheikh Mujib had established his full command over the party. In 1966, he announced his famous [six-point programme](#) what he called 'Our' [Bangalis'] Charter of Survival'. The points are: 1) a federal State and introduction of parliamentary form of government based on universal adult franchise; 2) all departments except defense and foreign affairs will be vested in the hands of the federating units or provincial governments; 3) separate currencies for two states or effective measures to stop flight of capital from East Pakistan to West Pakistan; 4) transfer of all rights of taxation to the states; 5) independence of the states in international trades; and finally 6) rights of the states to create' militia or para-military forces for self-defense. In short, the programme envisioned a new approach to political life. In letters and spirit, the Six-Point Programme meant virtual independence for East Pakistan. Though conservative elements of all political parties looked at it with consternation, it roused the imagination of the younger generation right away, particularly the students, youth and working classes.

Following the presentation of the challenging Six-point programme by Mujib, the Ayub regime put him behind the bars. A sedition case, known as [agartala conspiracy case](#) officially named as State vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Others, was

brought against him along with 34 others. Majority of them were Bangali officers and servicemen in Pakistan Air and Naval forces. They also included three senior Bangali civil servants. As Mujib was already in prison he was shown arrested as number one accused. He was charged with conspiring against the state of Pakistan together with the other co-accused. According to the allegations, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the other accused were secretly planning to separate East Pakistan by force with the help of India. The counter-offensive move, however, proved to be counter-productive. The trial of the case in a special tribunal in the Dhaka Kurmitola Cantonment stirred up Bangali emotion and sentiment against Pakistani domineering attitude to East Pakistan. During the trial in the Agartala Conspiracy Case, Mujib's charisma grew further and almost the whole nation stood up in protest of the trial of their leader. The mass movement, organized especially by the younger generation, reached such a momentum in early 1969 that the Ayub regime tried to avoid an impending civil war in the country by withdrawing the case. Sheikh Mujib was released on 22 February 1969 unconditionally.

On the following day of his release, the Sarbadaliya Chhatra Sangram Parishad (All Parties Students Action Committee) which proved to be the most effective political and social force in compelling the government to free Sheikh Mujib unconditionally, organised a mass reception to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at [ramna racecourse](#) (now, Suhrawardy Udyan). On behalf of the Sangram Parishad Tofael Ahmed, the president of the Sangram Parishad, bestowed on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the title of 'Bangabandhu' (Friend of the Bangalis). In him, they saw a kind of sacrificing leader who suffered jail terms for about

twelve years during the 23 years of Pakistani rule. Twelve years in jail and ten years under close surveillance, Pakistan to Sheikh Mujib proved to be more a prison than a free homeland.

The first ever general elections of Pakistan in December 1970 made Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the sole spokesman of East Pakistan. Under his leadership, the Awami League won 167 (including 7 women reserved seats) out of 169 seats allotted to East Pakistan in the Pakistan National Assembly. The people gave him the absolute mandate in favour of his Six-point doctrine. Now it was his turn to implement it. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at a solemn ceremony held on 3 January 1971 at Ramna Race Course with all the East Pakistan representatives took an oath never to deviate from the six-point when framing the Constitution for Pakistan.

Under the circumstances, General Yahya's military junta and Z.A Bhutto, the elected leader of West Pakistan, conspired not to allow Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to form the government in the centre. On 1 March 1971, President Yahya Khan postponed unilaterally the Dhaka National Assembly meet scheduled to be held on 3 March. The announcement triggered off the general agitation in East Pakistan. In response, the Bangabandhu called for an all-out [non-cooperation movement](#) in East Pakistan. The whole province supported him. During the course of non-cooperation (2-25 March 1971), the entire civil administration in East Pakistan came under his control and moved according to his directives. He became, in fact, the de facto head of government for the province. In the words of Evening Standard (a London Daily):

'Sheikh Mujibur Rahman now appears to be the boss of East Pakistan, with the complete support of the population. Rahman's home in Dhanmondi, already known as Number 10 Downing Street in imitation of the British Prime Minister's residence, has been besieged by bureaucrats, politicians, bankers, industrialists and people from all walks of life' (12 March 1971).

During this time, on 7 March 1971 Mujib made a historic address at a mammoth gathering of a million of people at the Race Course which marked a turning point in the history of the Bangali nation. In his address Mujib made specific charges against the martial law authorities which failed to transfer power to the elected representatives. At the end of his speech, he declared:

'Build forts in each homestead. You must resist the Pakistani enemy with whatever you have in hand. ... Remember, we have given a lot of blood, a lot more blood we shall give if need be, but we shall liberate the people of this country, Insha Allah' [i.e., if God blessed]. ... The struggle this time is the struggle for our emancipation; the struggle this time is the struggle for independence.'

Meanwhile, President Yahya Khan and other leaders from West Pakistan came to Dhaka on 15 March to start a dialogue with the Bangabandhu and his party. The dialogue began on the following day and continued intermittently down to 25 March morning. During the period, non-cooperation and hartals continued unremittingly in East Pakistan. Students and leaders of various political parties had been declaring independence from March 2 and the spree continued. Against this backdrop, at mid-night of 25 March 1971, the Pakistan army launched its

brutal crackdown in different areas of Dhaka city including the University of Dhaka killing students, teachers and innocent people in the name of [operation searchlight](#). Thus a nine-month long genocidal killing was unleashed by the Pakistan occupation army. Sheikh Mujib was arrested on the night of 25 March and was kept confined at Dhaka Cantonment until he was taken to West Pakistan for facing trial for 'sedition' and inciting insurrection. Before his arrest Bangabandhu sent a wireless message to Chittagong over the ex-EPR transmitter for transmission declaring the Independence of Bangladesh. To quote his declaration:

'This may be my last message, from today Bangladesh is independent. I call upon the people of Bangladesh wherever you might be and whatever you have, to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh and final victory is achieved.'

Although during the [war of liberation](#) initiating in the wake of the 25 March army crackdown Bangabandhu had been a prisoner in the hands of Pakistan, he was made, in absentia, the President of the provisional government, called the [mujibnagar government](#), formed on 10 April 1971 by the people's representatives to head the Liberation War. He was also made the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Throughout the period of the War of Liberation, Sheikh Mujib's charisma worked as the source of inspiration for freedom fighters and for national unity and strength.

The trial of Bangabandhu by the Pakistani junta giving death sentence to him moved the world leaders to save his life. After

the liberation of Bangladesh on 16 December 1971 from Pakistani occupation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was released from Pakistan jail and via London he made a triumphant homecoming, arriving in Dhaka on 10 January 1972 in the midst of joy and jubilations throughout the country. Hundreds of thousands of people of all walks of life received him at the Tejgaon old Airport according him a heroic welcome. With his homecoming, all uncertainties loomed large around the leadership of the new republic, for that matter, the future of Bangladesh were removed, as Daily The Guardian (published from London) in an editorial on 10 January 1972 wrote: 'Once Sheikh Mujibur Rahman steps out at Dacca Airport the new republic becomes a solid fact.'

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman headed the first government of the post-liberation Bangladesh for a short period of three years and a half. Starting from scratch his government had to deal with countless problems of a war ravaged country. Under the leadership of Bangabandhu, the state-building and nation-building took off the ground covering all important fields. Restoring law and order, recovering illegal arms, rehabilitating the mukhtijoddhas, rebuilding the communication system, saving lives of the people hostile to the War of Liberation from the public wrath, and, most importantly, feeding the hungry millions and many others were the formidable challenges before his government.

In spite of all these problems, Sheikh Mujib never faltered to enact a constitution, which he did within ten months. Return of Indian allied forces was ensured within three months of liberation. Within a period of fifteen months general elections

were held (7 March 1973). As many as 140 countries recognized Bangladesh. Bangabandhu set forth the guiding principle of Bangladesh's foreign policy: 'Friendship to all and malice to none. Indeed, the Mujib government laid down the edifice of fundamental state institutions covering all important fields. However, despite all these achievements, the opposition mainly from the ultra lefts, who considered the War of Liberation as 'an unfinished revolution' taking recourse to arms, created a most difficult situation in the country. Law and order situation was deteriorating very rapidly, which was frustrating for all. At the top of all, a famine (1974) ravaged the country taking its tolls by the thousands. Bewildered Sheikh Mujib first attempted to confront the situation by creating a special security force called Rakshi Bahini. Depending on his charisma, his next move was introduction of a single-party (BAKSAL) system. Taking advantage of such a fluid and unstable situation, a group of disgruntled army adventurers assassinated him on 15 August 1975 along with all his family members present. [Harun-or-Rashid]

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