



# Non-Cooperation Movement, 1971

- The mass movement initiated under the **directives of Bangabandhu'** Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the then East Pakistan against the Pakistan government which continued from **2 March to 25 March 1971**. This movement was directed **for autonomy** of East Pakistan as **against the administration of the centre**.
- On **7 March**, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the programme of non-cooperation movement through his guideline **speech delivered in the Race Course Maidan**. Apart from this, Awami League organised this movement through various instructions for its activists.
- Awami League **achieved absolute majority in the election** of 1970. But instead of inviting Awami League to form the government, **Yahya Khan, the President of Pakistan, postponed the session** of the **National Assembly on 1 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. People at large started non-cooperation movement under the leadership of Awami League in order to establish their rights. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a call for non-cooperation movement against the dilly-dally attitude of the military junta(সামরিক জান্তা) to transfer power on the basis of election, and for direct non-cooperation of Pakistan People's Party, the major political party of West Pakistan. This movement spread over the whole of East Pakistan. The fight for liberation started as a consequence of non-cooperation movement and the nine months war resulted in the emergence of independent sovereign Bangladesh. At the outset of non-cooperation movement **the student organisations formed the Swadhin Bangla Chhatra Songram Parishad on 2 March**. The **flag of independent Bangladesh was hoisted** in the students

gathering at Dhaka University. Besides, **curfew was imposed from 7 pm to 7 am.** The programme of non-cooperation was announced on behalf of Awami League through a press release. Hartal was called from the day following in all the government offices. Besides **NAP, Jatiya Sramik League** expressed their solidarity with the movement. NAP (M) and Jatiya League held protest meetings at Paltan and Baitul Mokarram respectively. **Chhatra Sangram Parishad declared Swadhinatar Ishteher at Paltan Maidan on 3 March in presence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.** The pamphlet upheld the demand for establishing an independent and sovereign state named 'Bangladesh' with three goals: Development of the language, literature and culture of the Bangalis, removal of disparity and establishment of democracy. As a programme of the movement, proposal was placed for suspending the payment of land revenue and taxes, and for armed struggle. The poem of Rabindranath Tagore '**Amar Sonar Bangla... was selected as the national anthem** of the independent Bangladesh. National mourning day was observed all over the province on 3 March, the day on which the National Assembly was scheduled to be in session. **Half-day hartal was declared everyday beginning from 6 March.** The observance of hartal continued throughout East Pakistan. People from all walks of life including labourers, officials, students and teachers, lawyers, artists and litterateurs joined the movement. A large number of people were killed or wounded by army firing in Dhaka, Tongi, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Jessore, Khulna and in other places of the province.

- **On 4 March**, Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani demanded the right of the Bangalis on the basis of Lahore Resolution. PDP and Jamaat-e-Islami discarded the proposal of President Yahya Khan for a Round Table Conference scheduled to be held on 12 March. Air Marshall (Retd) Asgar Khan, chief of Tehriq-e-Ishteqtal Party, urged upon the government to transfer power to Awami League in no time. On this day, East Pakistan Journalist Union expressed their support to the non-cooperation movement.
- On 5 March, the Awami League activists staged demonstration with lathis in hand. Chhatra League, Bangla Chhatra League and Students Union performed gaibana Janaza in memory of the martyrs. The reaction shown by Awami League was termed as unreasonable by the Pakistan People's Party.
- President Yahya on 6 March again called the session of the National Assembly to be held on 25 March. But the Bangalis turned furious consequent upon the

appointment of Lt General Tikka Khan as the governor of East Pakistan, and the speech of Yahya Khan to the nation supporting the ruthless brutality of the government upon the activists of the movement. On that day, Sheikh Mujib had a meeting with the party high command and the leaders of the Chhatra League. The Jatiya League under the leadership of Ataur Rahman Khan, NAP under Muzaffar Ahmed, Wali Ahad and labour leader Kazi Jafar Ahmad organized separate public meetings under their party banners and had a call for continuing the movement. The Union of Journalists, teachers association, Mahila Parishad, Students Union, Krishak Sramik Samajbadi Dal staged protest meetings.

- On 7 March, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a pre-scheduled speech in the Race Course with guidelines for movement. In the speech he highlighted four vital points:
  1. withdrawal of martial law,
  2. retreat of the army to the barrack,
  3. to investigate into the killing of the people in the province and
  4. transfer of power to the elected representatives.

Besides, on the same day he **declared 10-point programme** of the movement for the following

week. He declared the closure of all offices, courts and educational institutions sine die. The

government press note accounted that

**172 persons were killed** and **358 persons were injured** during the six days of non-cooperation movement.

- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made a clarion call to the people to get them ready for liberation movement and to make the utmost sacrifice. The Non-Cooperation Movement got new momentum after 7 March. All the departments of the government of East Pakistan began to follow the instructions of the Awami League. The Purba Bangla Samanvaya Committee urged upon the people to establish independent Bangladesh through **guerilla fighting**. On the same day Golam Azam, Ameer of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami, criticised the People's Party and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.
- On 8 March, Tajuddin Ahmad on behalf of the Awami League divided the government press note . Chhatra League resolved the formation of Swadhin

Bangladesh Chhatra Sangram Parishad. Instruction was given to form eleven members Sangram Parishad . On this day the Students distributed a leaflet proposing to form Bangla Mukti Front. Leaflet on technique of guerilla warfare was also distributed on the same day.

- On 9 March, Tajuddin Ahmed proclaimed 16 instructions on behalf of Awami League as guideline for civil administration. Aaur Rahman Khan urged upon Sheikh Mujib to form the national government. Maulana Bhasani declared 14 points of NAP and asked for movement for independence under Sheikh Mujib. East Pakistan Communist Party had a call to the people to liberate the country through guerilla warfare instead of non-cooperation movement. Besides, the Police, EPR, Intelligence Bureau and CID were asked to disrupt their relation with the government.
- On 11 March, Tajuddin Ahmad proclaimed more instructions regarding the conducting of economic activities. Movement spread over in each and every educational institutions of the province. Students and youth of East Pakistan started taking armed preparation and armed training. Agitation started among the Bangali soldiers, para-military force such as EPR, Police, Ansar in East Pakistan. Resistance committees were formed in every district, sub-division, thana and union. The administrative structure of the whole province was shattered. The offices and courts, bank, insurance companies ceased to work and realization of land revenue and taxes was stopped. The government instructed the officers and staff to join their offices by proclaiming new orders and circulars. But the movement went on uninterrupted by violating the orders of the government. Non-cooperation movement got wide publicity not only at home but abroad also. On 11 March, the UN Secretary General U Thant instructed all the staff of the United Nations to report to the headquarters of the United Nations.
- On 12 March, Awami League had an instruction to its activists to form sangram committee in each union. The CSP officers and first class EPCS officers of East Pakistan rendered their full-throated support to non-cooperation movement. The employees of government, semi government offices and of the autonomous bodies joined the movement. The cinema hall owners of East Pakistan announced to keep the cinema halls closed for an indefinite period.
- On 13 March, the government through a martial law regulation instructed the defence personnels to join their offices on 15 March at 10 am failing which they

would be dismissed from service and would face court martial.

- On 14 March, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Karachi demanded transfer of power to the majority parties in east and west wing of Pakistan, which added new dimension to the movement. The West Pakistan leaders like former governor Azam Khan, NAP leader Wali Khan, Jamiatul Ulama-e-Islam leader Mufti Mahmud, Council Muslim League leader Miah Momtaz Daulatana, Sardar Shawkat Hayat Khan, Maulana Shah Ahmad Nurani, Jamal Mohammad Koreja of Convention Muslim League, Abdul Gafoor of Jamaat-e-Islami, Sardar Moula Bakhsh Sumro expressed their support to Sheikh Mujib and demanded transfer of power. But Abdul Qayyum Khan of Muslim League criticized the activities of Awami League. Sheikh Mujib, in response to army instruction made a vow at the cost of life to continue the movement in order to attain independence so that the next generation may lead a life in liberty with self respect. On that day, Tajuddin Ahmad on behalf of Awami League declared 35 points instruction for conducting the affairs of the government. Chhatra Sangram Parishad, as a part of containing the smuggling of wealth to West Pakistan installed check posts in several places of Dhaka. The newspapers of Dhaka published joint editorials under the caption 'Avmgq 'bB' 'Time is running out'. Nurul Amin, Abul Hashim, Wali Khan criticised dual majority theory of Bhutto and commented that the implementation of the theory would invite disintegration of Pakistan. After the directives of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the direct control of the Pakistan government over East Pakistan was virtually ceased. The control of Awami League was established everywhere save and except the army. Due to extreme pressure of the movement the government took a decision to have discussion with the political parties. President Yahya Khan came to Dhaka on 15 March accompanied by the Principal Staff Officer Lt General SGM Pirzada, Major General Khodadad Khan, Major General Golam Umar, Justice AR Cornelius, MM Ahmad, Deputy- Chairman of Planning Commission and Colonel Hasan. Yahya-Mujib discussion started in Dhaka
- on 16 March. But non-cooperation movement was continuing beyond the discussion table. Sheikh Mujib had discussion with the Awami League leaders.

- On 17 March discussion was again held. But neither the government nor the Awami League disclosed anything in detail. Maulana Bhasani, on this day from a public meeting in Chittagong urged upon the people to observe 23 March as 'Swadheen Purbabangla Dibash' instead of observing the day as National Day of Pakistan. A five member enquiry committee was formed by the government consisting of a Justice nominated by the Chief Justice of High Court, an army officer of the rank of a brigadier, a CSP officer, one police officer and an officer of the EPR of the rank of a colonel to make an enquiry into the reasons of calling of the army and the killing of the people.
- On 18 March, Awami League rejected the enquiry committee formed to submit report to the army authority. On the other hand, a separate three-member enquiry committee was formed consisting of Captain Monsur Ali, Khondakar Mostaq Ahmad and Abidur Reza. Syed Nazrul Islam, in protest against firing at Tejgaon, cautioned the concerned that Bangalis would not tolerate this kind of provocation. On this day there was no discussion between Yahya and Sheikh Mujib.
- On 19 March, Yahya-Mujib meeting was held and it was decided that Yahya-Mujib meeting would take place on the following day with the advisors of both the parties. Advisors of both parties had a separate meeting. AR Cornelius, Lt General Peerzada and Colonel Hasan on behalf of the President and Syed Nazrul Islam, Kamal Husain and Tajuddin Ahmad on behalf of the Awami League participated in the meeting. It was informed that they had this meeting to formulate the basis of discussion to be followed. When the discussion was going on the Pak army fired on the common people in Rangpur and Syedpur. But the people at Joydevpur created resistance in the face of firing of the Pak army. Bangali soldiers protested while being attempted to be disarmed.
- On 20 March, Sheikh Mujib along with six party leaders Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Kamal Hosain, Khondakar Mostaq Ahmad, AHM Qamaruzzaman and M Mansur Ali, and Yahya Khan with his representatives AR Cornelius, Lt General Peerzada and Colonel Hasan had two discussion meetings. Sheikh Mujib informed of some progress in the dialogue and

of the scheduled meeting with the President and the advisors on the following day. On this day the government instructed the civilians to surrender their licenced arms to the concerned police stations. Sheikh Mujib had meeting with Momtaz Daulatana, Mufti Mahmud and others.

- In the Yahya-Mujib meeting on 21 March Sheikh Mujib was assisted by Tajuddin Ahmad. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto came to Dhaka with 12 of his advisors to attend the dialogue. Sheikh Mujib sent a messenger to Maulana Bhasani. Bhasani had a call to the people in a meeting at polo ground in Chittagong to participate in the one point programme under the leadership of Awami League. National Awami Party arranged street meetings for mobilizing the observance of Swadheen Purba Bangla Dibash on 23 March and the Students League had similar programme for the observance of Defence Day.
- On 22 March, the President again postponed the session of the National Assembly through a press release. A discussion meeting of Sheikh Mujib, Yahya Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was held. Four advisors of the President and 5 jurists of the Peoples Party also had a discussion meeting. They opposed to the demand of the Awami League for withdrawal of martial law and transfer of power before the session of the National Assembly on the plea of legal complicity. Besides, President Yahya had discussion meeting with other leaders from West Pakistan.
- The Chhatra Sangram Parishad observed 23 March as Protirodh Dibash (Defence Day) and NAP (Bhasani) as Swadheen Purba Bangla Dibash. The flag of independent Bangladesh was hoisted throughout the whole of East Pakistan. The members of the Jai Bangla Bahini saluted the new flag in Dhanmondi in presence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. NAP (Bhasani), Jatiya League, student organisations and majority political parties of East Pakistan participated in the movement for the establishment of an independent state. The President cancelled his scheduled speech on the occasion of National Day because of political instability. As a part of Yahya-Mujib parley, a discussion meeting was held between the discussant of Awami League and advisors of the President. The Awami League representatives for discussion included Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad and Kamal Hosain while the advisors of the President included AR Cornelius, SGM Peerzada and Colonel

Hasan. On this day the representatives of Awami League submitted the draft of the proposed constitution. The draft Constitution based on 6 point programme recommended that defence, external trade, foreign affairs, currency, citizenship, central loan, standard of weight and measurement, central asset, inter-provincial and international communication would be under the jurisdiction of the central government, and the matter beyond this inventory would be under the jurisdiction of the province. They had discussion meeting again in the evening on the economic aspects of the draft constitution.

- On 24 March, two sessions of discussion meeting took place between the representatives of both parties regarding economic issues of the draft constitution. During the discussion while Awami representatives proposed insertion of 'confederation' instead of 'federation' in the draft constitution, the government party protested and termed it as a basic change in the principles of Awami League. On this day the experts from both the parties completed discussion on all the Articles and Schedules of the draft. Thereafter Tajuddin Ahmad in a statement said that since opinion has been already submitted on the table, there is no need for further discussion on the part of Awami League. He expressed his anxiety at the military activities in East Pakistan. In a press conference Sheikh Mujib uttered a note of caution that the Bangalis would not yield to any decision under pressure. He instructed to carry on the movement with more determination. A discussion took place between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Yahya Khan on this day. But majority of the West Pakistani politicians, experts and advisors left East Pakistan on that day.
- On 25 March, in a press release some addition and alteration were made in the administrative instructions made earlier by Awami League. In Chittagong port, army fired on the people creating resistance against the unloading of arms from the Pakistani ship '**Swat**'. As a consequence demonstration took a violent shape and in various places of the province firing took place and curfew was imposed. As a protest against firing of the army in Syedpur, Rangpur and Joydevpur, Awami League called dawn to dusk hartal on 27 March throughout the province. On this day the



scheduled meeting for submitting the final draft of the constitution to the President was not held. Without giving any solution to the crisis the President left Dhaka secretly on 25 March. The Pakistan army started indiscriminate attack on the people in the whole province including Dhaka on the **night of 25 March** under their **Operation Searchlight programme**. The Non-cooperation movement came to an end through the proclamation of independence.