

on 3 March 1971. Welcoming this announcement, the AL said that it was a step forward towards achieving the goal of making a constitution. On 15 February 1971, Bhutto declared to boycotting the Assembly session beginning on 3 March, in Dhaka. In fact, the PPP Chief was of the opinion that the constitution based on the Six-Point "could not provide a viable future for the country". On 16 February 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was declared the leader of the Awami League Parliamentary Party in the National Assembly. On 21 February, President Yahya dissolved his cabinet in view of the situation prevailing in the country. Thus, the political situation became very gloomy by the end of February and consequences were in way that led to the Liberation War of Bangladesh in the same year.

### অসমূহ্য আন্দোলন 2.3 Non-Cooperation Movement

The Non-Cooperation Movement in 1971 was directed for autonomy of East Pakistan against the administration of the centre. It was a mass movement which was initiated under the directives of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the then East Pakistan against the Pakistan government. The movement continued from 2 March to 25 March 1971. March 1971 was a month that will never go down in the history of Bangladesh because, beginning on March 1, the course of history of one Pakistan changed very fast. In the first general election of Pakistan, the Awami League (AL) led by Bangabandhu won a landslide victory in the constituencies of East Pakistan. But instead of inviting Awami League to form the government, Yahya Khan postponed the session of the National Assembly on 1 March 1971 for an indefinite period. Bangabandhu 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 to establish their rights. Mujib gave a clarion call for non-cooperation movement against the dilly-dally attitude of the military junta to transfer power on the basis of 1970 General Election. The movement spread over the whole of East Pakistan and thus, in true sense, the fight for liberation got started as a consequence of non-cooperation movement and the nine months war resulted in the emergence of independent sovereign Bangladesh.

On 28 February 1971, the Awami League's draft Constitution embodying its Six-Point Program was placed before the Parliamentary Party for its consideration. Governor Ahsan who was sympathetic towards the interests of the Bangalis could feel the seething political pulse in East Pakistan regarding the underhand dealings for postponing the opening session of National Assembly. On the same day he sent a telex to President Yahya Khan in Karachi mentioning: "I beg you even at this late hour to give a new date for summoning of the Assembly and not to postpone it sine die, otherwise we will have reached the point of no return." Within half an hour Ahsan found himself dismissed for his advice to President Yahya Khan that it would be futile to control the people of East Pakistan by Martial Law. He was replaced by General Shaibzada Yakub Khan on 1 March when he left for West Pakistan.

The PPP Chief Bhutto proposed two alternatives to resolve the political crisis – postponement of the National Assembly session or removal of the 120 day time-limit for the Assembly to frame a constitution.<sup>47</sup> He worried that if the Assembly session was held on 3 March as scheduled without PPP's participation, it would start a popular agitation from one end of West Pakistan to the other. On 1 March 1971, President Yahya Khan undermined the democratic process with an announcement to postpone the National Assembly that was to meet on 3 March 1971. The March 1 announcement became a historical date for many reasons. First, it changed the whole perspective of the political movement that was taking place in East Pakistan; secondly, it was a new phase for the people of East Pakistan. This decision of postponement was the final blow to the confidence and trust of the people of East Pakistan towards the leadership of West Pakistan.

However, Yahya cited two reasons for such a step. Firstly, the major party of West Pakistan, the PPP, announced their intention of not attending the National Assembly session on 3 March 1971. Secondly, the general situation of tension created by India further complicated the position as a whole that necessitated such a step. He, moreover, assured the people that as soon as the environment would become conducive to constitution making he would have no hesitation in setting the session of the Assembly immediately. Yahya's arbitrary

decision resulted in an unprecedented mass upheaval in East Pakistan and a growing belief that Bangalis could never realise their just rights within the framework of united Pakistan. Radical elements among the students openly started demanding an immediate declaration of independence. For the first time the student leaders raised the slogan "Take up Arms, Heroes of Bengal" and clamored to hear what AL had to say about the crisis provoked by Yahya. The AL parliamentary Party was in a meeting in Dhaka when the news of the postponement reached. A spontaneous demonstration of public agitation soon grew up. The resentment which was first limited to the city of Dhaka soon began to spread to the main cities, districts and thana headquarters.

In a press conference soon afterwards, Mujib said that he could not allow the action of the President, for the sake of a minority party's disagreement with the democratic process of constitution-making to go unchallenged. He announced a program of action for the next six days including the observance of total strike in Dhaka on 2 March and throughout the province on 3 March. He said that a public meeting would be held on 7 March in Dhaka where he would place final program. He further alleged that when all the members of the Assembly from 'Bangladesh' including West Pakistani members were present in Dhaka for attending the session, its postponement had virtually thwarted the democratic process.

As the dawn broke on 2 March, Dhaka had the look of an embattled city. Barricades had been created overnight at key points to immobilize traffic. The strike was a complete success in Dhaka as well as in the district towns. In Dhaka, however, it was not entirely peaceful. Arms shop were plundered, which was perhaps understandable. Curfew was imposed in the city from 9 p. m. to 7 a. m. the following morning but it was widely violated. The Army had been called in to enforce the curfew and they fired on curfew violators at several places, resulting in nine deaths and fifty-one wounded. On 3 March, AL condemned the killing of unarmed people by the forces and urged the government to desist from this reckless course. By the morning of 3 March the entire province of East Pakistan had been paralyzed by the non-cooperation movement launched by Mujib. On March 3, Bangabandhu addressed a huge gathering at Paltan Maidan organised by Purbo Pakistan Chhatra

League where a national flag of Bangladesh was formally hoisted and a manifesto of the proposed independent new nation was announced. The national anthem of the would-be new country was also declared. Bangabandhu announced that on March 7, 1971 he would give the formal directives to the nation at Ramna Race Course about the future course of action.

Both Yahya and Bhutto were shaken by the complete success of the non-cooperation movement and Mujib's outright rejection of the proposal for an all party conference. Farman Ali was summoned to Rawalpindi to brief the President on the situation in East Pakistan. Before leaving, Farman Ali sought an urgent meeting with Mujib to get an idea of his thoughts. Farman Ali says, he asked a direct question without any preliminaries:

FARMAN: Please tell me if Pakistan can be saved?

MUJIB: Yes, it can be saved if somebody listens to us. So many people are being killed by the Army. They listen to Bhutto but not to me. Even after all this, we are willing to discuss.

At this point Tajuddin arrived to join in the talks. Mujib asked Tajuddin's view on Farman Ali's question. Tajuddin said, "Yes it could be, but under a new formula. We cannot bear all this butchery sitting with Bhutto under the same roof. He is responsible for all this. Let the Assembly be divided into two houses, one for East and the other for West Pakistan. Each Assembly should write the constitution for its own wing. Then the two Assemblies should write a constitution of Pakistan." It was a formula for confederation rather than federation, Farman Ali thought. Before Farman Ali left for West Pakistan on 4 March, Yakub Khan had resigned from his post, being no longer able to agree with the hard-line approach of Yahya to the problems of Pakistan. His replacement was Lt. General Tikka Khan, nicknamed, "Butcher of Baluchistan" as the Governor of East Pakistan but on 7 March, the Chief Justice of East Pakistan High Court, B. A. Siddiqy, refused to administer the oath to him. However, on 9 April, he administered the oath under threat. In the meanwhile, after holding five hours secret meeting with Bhutto, President Yahya on 6 March, in a national broadcast, announced the new date for holding the session of the National Assembly on 25 March 1971.

The people of East wing clearly saw the militant maneuver of Yahya Khan, his hidden place of transferring troops from West military build-up became evident in East Pakistan, and soon the army engaged in confrontation by widespread firing against unarmed Bengali civilians. The National Awami Party (NAP) and radical students became restive and demanded immediate declaration of independence. They chanted *Amar Desh Tomar Desh Bangladesh, Bangladesh and Joy Bangla*, hoisting Bangladesh flag. The students formed *Sadhin Bangla Kendrio Chhatra Sangram Parishad* (Central Students' Struggle Council of Independent Bangla). The AL secured the support from other top leaders, like Maulana Bhasani, Muzaffar Ahmed, Ataur Rahman Khan, Wali Ahad and Kazi Jafar Ahmed.

This was on historic 7 March, amidst the non-cooperation movement, Bangabandhu delivered a pre-scheduled speech in the Race Course with guidelines for movement. Bangabandhu demanded the withdrawal of martial law, retreating of the army to the barracks, investigating into the killing of the people in the province and transferring power to the elected representatives. In true sense, he made a clarion call to the people to get them ready for liberation movement and to make the utmost sacrifice. He declared the closure of all offices, courts and educational institutions sine die. The Non-Cooperation Movement got new momentum after 7 March. East Pakistani people and different public bodies began to follow the instructions of Bangabandhu. The East Bengal Communist revolutionaries urged upon the people to establish independent Bangladesh through guerilla fighting. Student League resolved the formation of Swadhin Bangladesh Chhatra Sangram Parishad whereas on the same day the Forward Student Block distributed a leaflet proposing to form Bangla Mukti Front with an object of establishing independent socialist Bangladesh. Other political parties also demanded including PDP and East Pakistan Muslim League demanded an immediate transfer of power. Tajuddin Ahmed, on behalf Awami League proclaimed 16 instructions as guidelines for civil administration on 9 March.

Ataur Rahman Khan and Maulana Bhasani asked for movement for independence under Sheikh Mujib. Instead of non-cooperation movement the Marxist-Leninist group of East Pakistan Communist

Party urged the people to liberate the country through guerilla warfare. The police, poets, artists, EPR, Intelligence Bureau and CID, the cultural groups and the technicians and the second class employees of the civil service expressed their allegiance to Awami League to go on with the non-cooperation movement. Movement spread over in each and every educational institutions of the province violating the martial law regulations. Some of the poets and artists, i.e. Ahsan Habib, Joynul Abedin, gave away their titles bestowed upon by the government of Pakistan. The resistance committees were formed in every district, subdivision, thana and union in East Pakistan with the students, youths, Bengali soldiers, para-military force, Police, EPR, Ansars started taking armed preparation and armed training. By violating the orders of the government the offices and courts, bank, insurance companies ceased to work and realization of land revenue and taxes was stopped.<sup>48</sup> The news of the non-cooperation movement was circulated across the world. Even the UN Secretary General U Thant himself instructed all the staff of the United Nations to report to the headquarters of the United Nations on 11 March.

By mid March 1971 with directives of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the direct control of the Pakistan government over East Pakistan was virtually ceased. The employees of government, semi government offices and of the autonomous bodies including CSP officers and the East Pakistan Civil Services Officers generated their full support to non-cooperation movement. The cinema hall owners of East Pakistan announced to keep the cinema halls closed for an indefinite period. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto demanded the transfer of power to the elected representatives of both the wings. 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. The 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. Awami League declared 35 points instruction for conducting the affairs of the

government. The newspapers of Dhaka published joint editorials under the caption 'Time is running out'.

President Yahya Khan came to Dhaka on 15 March accompanied by some army Generals and higher officials and decided to have discussion with the East Pakistan political parties on 16 March. Non-cooperation movement and the political dialogue were continuing simultaneously. Secret meeting continued between Awami League leaders and the government. Maulana Bhasani, on 17 March, from a public meeting in Chittagong, urged upon the people to observe 23 March as '*Swadheen Purba Bangla Dibash*' instead of observing the day as National Day of Pakistan. On the next day, Awami League rejected the report of the Enquiry Committee formed by Yahya and protested firing against the common people by the government law enforcers. Yahya-Mujib meeting was held on 19 March. Another meeting took place on the following day with the advisors of both government and opposition parties. Tragedy was that at the time when the meeting had been going on, the Pakistani army fired on the common people in different parts of Eastern Pakistan. The Bengali soldiers protested while being attempted to be disarmed even in many places (i.e. Dhaka, Gazipur) the common people created resistance in the face of firing by the Pakistan army.

Mujib-Yahya dialogue was held on 20 March, and on the following day another round of discussion took place between them along with their advisors. On 22 March Yahya 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. On 23 March, National Awami Party, led by Bhasani arranged street meetings for mobilizing the observance of *Swadheen Purba Bangla Dibash*. Besides, the *Chhatra League* and *Chhatra Sangram Parishad* arranged a similar program for the observance of Defence Day in East 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 East Pakistan. Major political parties of East Pakistan, including Awami League, NAP (Bhasani), Jatiya League, and many student organizations, participated in the movement for the establishment of an independent state. On the same

day the representatives of Awami League submitted the draft of the proposed constitution based on 6 point program.

Two meetings were taken place between the representatives of both parties regarding economic issues of the draft constitution on 24 March. The experts from both the parties discussed on all the Articles and Schedules of the draft provisions. In their arguments the Awami League representatives proposed insertion of 'confederation' instead of 'federation'. The government party protested and termed it as a basic change in the principles of Awami League. Awami League leaders were still in anxiety at the military activities in East Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib uttered a note of caution in a press conference that the Bangalis would not yield to any decision under pressure and thus he instructed the countrymen to carry on the movement with more determination.

Awami League, by a press release on 25 March, circulated some of the administrative instructions for the people. At this juncture army fired on the people who were creating resistance against the unloading of arms from the Pakistani ship 'Swat' in the Chittagong port. In various places of the province the Pak army fired and curfew was imposed to control the demonstration and preventing the violence. Mass protest against the government action took place across the province and as part of this protestation Awami League called a province-wide dawn to dusk hartal on 27 March. The scheduled meeting for submitting the final draft of the constitution to the President was cancelled. Yahya left Dhaka secretly on 25 March without giving any solution to the ongoing crisis. At the time when the plane carrying Yahya safely reached within the air space of West Pakistan, in Dhaka the troops were expected to be in their target areas an hour after midnight. "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 program. The Non-cooperation movement came to an end through the proclamation of independence."<sup>49</sup>

#### 2.4 Historic 7 March Address: An All-Out War to Win Over

The historical 7th March speech by the Father of the Nation will act as an inspiration for all the oppressed and exploited people of the world for centuries to come. Taking everything into consideration, the 7th March speech by Bangabandhu is the greatest of all known speeches to date.<sup>50</sup>

Keeping you all in mind, I am leaving the story  
Of that splendid afternoon, the best of ours<sup>51</sup>

The '7<sup>th</sup> March 1971 Historic Address' delivered by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Ramna Race Course has become synonymous with the history of Bangladesh. Awami League secured absolute majority in the National Assembly in the general election held in 1970. At the time of transferring power, the non-Bengali Pakistani rulers started conspiracy against the transfer of power to the Awami League in the centre. Unexpectedly, the already scheduled 3 March inaugural session of the National Assembly was suddenly postponed through a Radio announcement by President General Yahya Khan on 1 March 1971. With that unilateral decision Yahya proved that he was dancing to Bhutto's tune who was the lynchpin in the conspiracy against the people of East Pakistan. The postponement of the sitting of the parliament was the last nail in the coffin of a united Pakistan. A former Pakistani bureaucrat writes in his memoir,

The decision to postpone the session of National Assembly triggered an immensely negative response. Dhaka Radio Station broadcast Mujib's call for public protest in the province against the postponement. But people were unable to restrain themselves and showed spontaneous and forceful resentment by coming out on the streets within half an hour of the announcement... About 150 people showed up in my office and respectfully asked me to order the closure of the office because their democratic rights had been violated. I ordered accordingly.<sup>52</sup>

The East Pakistanis came out in streams onto the streets on hearing the news of postponement. They started a relentless movement for establishing their rights. As a protest to the decision of the Pakistani rulers Bangabandhu called a hartal in Dhaka on 2 March and a province-wide strike on 3 March. Bangabandhu addressed a rally at Paltan Maidan on 3 March where he announced a program for non-cooperation. He also set a public meeting at the Ramna Race Course Maidan (presently Suhrawardy Udyana) for 7 March. On 6 March Yahya Khan announced his decision to convene the National Assembly on 25 March but Mujib put forward the condition of transferring power to the representatives of the people. There was slightest possibility of either Yahya or Bhutto conceding to that

demand which meant that there was practically no possibility of upholding the National Assembly session on the announced date.



Fig. 7: Bangabandhu's Historic 7<sup>th</sup> March Speech

Photographer: Rashid Talukder; Courtesy: Liberation War Museum

The events in the first week of March were developing under such disparate compulsion that neither Mujib nor Yahya was in a position to freely go the way they wanted. Pakistani ruling clique were determined to pursue their secret agendas. In an account on the Yahya-Mujib relation on the eve of Bangabandhu's 7 March address GH Choudhury observed that,

But even at this stage Yahya and Mujib were still talking to each other by long-distance telephone. On the eve of Mujib's public meeting on 7 March when many people thought that he would finally announce the independence of Bangladesh, Yahya had lengthy talks with Mujib over the phone. The tone was still cordial, both still seemed eager to negotiate. Mujib invited Yahya to come to Dhaka and see the explosive situation for himself, while Yahya appealed to Mujib not to take a step from which there would be no return. I was present in Yahya's office when the telephone call came. I wanted to leave but Yahya indicated that I should stay.<sup>53</sup>

Before the March 7 address, the air of the country was pregnant with speculations about what Bangabandhu would announce.<sup>54</sup> Would it be a unilateral declaration of independence or would he announce some sort of compromise? Before Mujib left for the 7 March meeting various pressure groups surrounded him at his residence in order to pressure him to declare independence from the podium. In the morning of March 7, leaders of Chhatra League proposed to him that he should unilaterally declare an independent Bangladesh and take over the cantonments. The US Ambassador in Pakistan, Joseph Farland, met Mujib and in unequivocal terms warned him that if he declared independence the US would not endorse or support it. Bangabandhu using his extraordinary political wisdom "worked out a formula to partially accommodate the demands of the students and the people on the one hand and the wishes of Yahya on the other, while still keeping more than one option open for himself."<sup>55</sup>

On that day Bangabandhu very methodically addressed a mammoth gathering of more than a million people at the Ramna Race Course in Dhaka. The day has become a red-letter day in the history of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu gave everyone a patient hearing but said very little. He knew exactly what his options were and their possible outcomes. By midday the vast Ramna Race Course was teeming with millions to hear from Bangabandhu, the 'Pcet of Politics'. Syed Shahid Husain writes:

I had noted in my diary that Sheikh Mujib was likely to declare independence on March 7. As a matter of fact I had heard this on the BBC. On March 7, Mujib addressed a mammoth really but did not declare independence. Yahya must have been disappointed as he had probably hoped that Mujib would proclaim independence and thus provide him the justification to arrest the East Pakistan leader.<sup>56</sup>

Bangabandhu's arrival at the meeting was delayed and the vast crowd was kept waiting eagerly. He arrived at the venue at 2.45 in the afternoon and spoke for only 18 minutes. It was electrifying 18 minutes. Not only the people of entire Pakistan and East Bengal were glued to their radios but the world was holding its breath. However, on orders from the central government, both the radio and the TV had to abstain from broadcasting the historic speech. In protest, the staff of the radio and TV walked out of their broadcasting stations. The

speech was extempore, and became one of the memorable speeches ever given by a politician. On his 7 March address Sheikh Mujib responded with Yahya Khan's moves and announced four pre-conditions for attending the session of the National Assembly. The demands were-

- a. Immediate transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people, before the Assembly met on 25 March 1971
- b. Immediate withdrawal of the Martial Law
- c. The establishment of an inquiry into the army shootings upon the Bangalis during the general strike
- d. Immediate return of the troops to the barracks



Fig. 8: Bangabandhu's 7th March Speech headlined on the 13 March 1971 issue of the weekly newspaper *Swaraj*, Edited and published by Faiz Ahmed; Courtesy: Liberation War Museum

Bangabandhu very boldly declared that until these demands were not addressed, the question of attending National Assembly did not

rise at all. He said, the Assembly had been convened on 25 March but the bloodstains had not yet dried up and he could not go to the Assembly stepping over the bloodshed by the Martyrs. He said that he did not aspire to become the Prime Minister of the country; what he wanted was the realization of the rights of the people. He announced the closure of all government, semi-government offices in East Pakistan and the stoppage of all rents and taxes. He further declared, "Let every house in Bangladesh be turned into a fortress and I would ask you to get ready with whatever weapons you can lay your hands to resist the enemy."<sup>57</sup> Bangabandhu directed the countrymen in his speech-

The employees of the Radio and Television; please bear in mind that if our words are not broadcasted by the radio, then no Bangali shall go to the radio station. If our news is not broadcasted by Television, then no Bangali will go to the Television station. The ban shall remain open for two hours every day so that the people can get their salaries. But from East Bangla, a single paisa will not be allowed to be remitted to West Pakistan. Telephone and Telegraph service will remain operative in our East Bangla. They shall keep on sending our news to foreign news media. But if there is any sinister move to annihilate the people of this country, the Bangalis, you will have to keep very careful watch. I am requesting you, you are my brothers. Do not make this country a hell and destroy it. We will not see each other's face in the future. If we can solve things in a peaceful manner, we can at least live as brothers. That is why I am requesting you: do not try and run military rule in my country. Secondly, in every village, every locality, every union and every sub-division establish 'Resistant Council' under the leadership of the Awami League. And be ready with whatever you have.

Sheikh Mujib's speech on 7 March was a political watershed. By all definition East Pakistan was lost and the world was witnessing the slow emergence of a new independent nation. Bangabandhu declared a program of non-cooperation unless their demands were met. He directed the people not to pay any taxes, and to observe complete shutdown. All transport vehicles would run, banks would remain open till 2 p.m. and all buildings would fly black flags. As a matter of fact, it was Bangabandhu who was running the civil administration of East Bengal and not Yahya Khan. Bangabandhu, eventually, declared

the independence of Bangladesh which reflected the temper of the workers, students, and the broad masses of the people who were no longer prepared to compromise the interests of East Pakistan under threats from any West Pakistani military junta.<sup>58</sup> While Bangabandhu was speaking the Dhaka garrison was preparing for an assault on the unarmed civilians in case there was a declaration of independence. Bangabandhu did not disappoint the waiting millions, but said what he had to in an intelligent and statesman-like way. A straight declaration would have branded him a secessionist and he would have lost world sympathy. Mujib concluded his speech by these stirring words:

Bear in mind that since we have given blood, we will give more. By the grace of Allah, we will surely liberate the people of this country. The struggle this time is the struggle for our emancipation. The struggle this time is the struggle for our independence. Joy Bangla!<sup>59</sup>

The mood and temperament of the common people who attended Bangabandhu's 7 March address was that they could have been easily roused by him to storm the Dhaka cantonment which might have fallen without much resistance. This was not the way the great leader Sheikh Mujib was thinking about. He had no plan for the forcible occupation of the citadel of power; rather he had been continuously trying to rise to the aspirations and expectations of the people. He was the strong advocate of non-violent non-cooperation movement. He, therefore, was trying to restrain the countrymen from an armed uprising. The crowd went wide with cheering and went away resolving to preserve fully his civil disobedience program. Still Mujib's 7 March speech feels short of a declaration of secession and independence from Pakistan. From now on Mujib was running a parallel government in East Pakistan. In all, 35 directives were issued which operated as laws, for about three weeks governing all departments of the government except defense. On 9 March at a public meeting, showing a pointed finger passed and Pakistan would no longer remain a united country. Bhasani urged the President to recognise the independence of East Bengal and pledged his support to Sheikh Mujib.<sup>60</sup>

On 13 March 1971, two days before the President was to arrive on Dhaka for talks with Mujib, Tikka Khan, the newly appointed Governor of East Pakistan issued a martial law order. This was a clearly provocation for all and the order had come to the AL leaders as well as to the general public as a surprise since the AL chief had already called for the withdrawal of martial law. Locked in this situation, all focus turned towards Mujib and Yahya's arrival in Dhaka. Yahya arrived Dhaka under heavy security measures with some generals on 15 March for talks with Mujib, and his arrival in Dhaka made it look like the visit of the commander of an occupying army than of the leader of a country. For some days a steady flow of battle, ready troops had been ferried from the cantonment area around the airport. Mujib and Yahya met on March 16 and 17 but reported no progress other than an agreement to investigate the killing of demonstrators by troops. When the government proposed that a commission appointed by general Tikka Khan inquire into the deaths of the demonstrators, Mujib said it was merely a way to mislead the people. He then appointed his own three-man inquiry commission.

Yahya-Mujib talks continued in Dhaka with Yahya hinting on 20 March that he would agree to a draft proclamation. The salient features of which were: lifting of martial law and transfer of power to civilian government by a presidential proclamation and to transfer of power in the provinces to the majority parties. It was also connoted that Yahya would remain as interim President, that East Pakistan would be given autonomy on the ground of Six-Points and the Provinces of the Western wing would have power as provided in the 1962 constitution.

Such a constructive understanding between Yahya and the AL alarmed Bhutto. Bhutto, earlier refused an invitation from Yahya to come to Dhaka, now hurriedly arrived in Dhaka on 21 March. After a long briefing session with Yahya within hours of his arrival, the three key figures of Pakistan military in the Eastern front met with him in the next day on 22 March. The meeting, however, proved futile. It appears that by this time a clear collusion came into existence between Yahya and Bhutto. Famous daily, *Economist* published an editorial under the title 'Does Pakistan exist?' "He (Yahya) left it to Bhutto to try to get concessions out of Mujib." They felt strongly that

their language of weapons could maintain the integrity of Pakistan. By March 24 in East Pakistan, the build-up of troops increase to 60,000, according to local reports; only 25,000 troops had been present before the crisis.

On 23 March, the people of East Pakistan, frustrated by the inflexibility of the Yahya's military machine, decided to observe 23 March (the National Day of Pakistan) as a day of resistance. In a tumultuous mass gathering in Dhaka the students ceremoniously hoisted the newly designed Bangladesh flag instead of the Pakistan flag. The AL leaders met Yahya for the last time in the evening of 24 March before he flew out of Dhaka for West Pakistan the next day. Nothing positive came out from the meeting. The whole process of political settlement came to naught when in the morning of 25 March, Bhutto communicated to Yahya Khan to convey his disapproval for any further political negotiations. In the late afternoon, Yahya left Dhaka under heavy security leaving East Pakistan at the mercy of the 'butcher' Tikka Khan and his blood-thirsty soldiers.

Finally, the failure of the talks, the presence of sizable contingents of Pakistani troops, and Yahya's decision to use them against the Bangalis by force produced a reign of terror beginning on March 25. It became obvious that a political and military storm had already loomed on the horizon of East Pakistan and Pakistan started crumbling pushing East Pakistan to blood bath and the eventual independence of the Bangalis, which they lost two centuries back at the Battle of Plassey.

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### 3.3 Formation of the Mujibnagar Government

সূচনা করা

The AL leaders took the responsibility of mobilizing the people without delay for resistance and formal attack on the Pakistani occupation force. More than eighty per cent voters had already given their mandate to decide the fate of the nation and legitimately AL led the Liberation War in absence of Bangabandhu. The leader with considerable foresight, Tajuddin Ahmad visited India in the first week of April. He established a strategic contact with the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and was able to convince Indira of the determination and the capacity of the Bangalis to free their nation from the Pakistani juntas. He stayed in Delhi from 2-7 April 1971 and secured some crucial commitments e.g., safe shelter for the provisional Bangladesh Government in Exile, assistance with arms and in training the Bengali freedom fighters. On his return, Tajuddin Ahmad systematically took initiatives to form a provisional government to lead the liberation movement.

Ahmad faced some "problems in reaching a consensus on formation of the government, particularly with the youth and student leadership of the independence movement, who had played a dominant role in the circumstance leading to the resistance and on to the Liberation

War.<sup>32</sup> The Mujibnagar Government was formed at Mujibnagar within three days of his return to conduct the Bangladesh War of Liberation. On 10 April 1971 in Mujibnagar, the elected parliament members of 1970's election from East Pakistan formed Bangladesh Government. A formal swearing in ceremony was held on 17 April at a mango orchard in the border town of Baidyanathatala (Bhoborpara), Meherpur, Kushtia [Present Name is Mujibnagar] in northwestern Bangladesh. Baidyanathatala was also renamed Mujibnagar (City of Mujib) by the provisional government as a tribute to the immense popularity of Sheikh Mujib, whose fate was unknown at the time as he was detained in West Pakistan awaiting a trial for treason.

The government in exile came to be popularly termed as the Mujibnagar Government. The cabinet took oath on 17 April at liberated area in mango grove of Baidyanathatala. Mujibnagar became a kind of symbolic capital of the new Bangladesh. The mango orchard was near the site of the Battle of Plassey, in which the British defeated the last independent Nawab of Bengal in 1757. The oath taking ceremony was conducted by Abdul Mannan MNA and the proclamation of independence was read out by Professor Mohammad Yusuf Ali. In this place a guard of honor was given to Syed Nazrul Islam, the Acting President of the newly formed government. This government took all policy decisions with respect to Liberation War. Bangladesh government adopted "Declarations of Independence." This has been the legal basis of Bangladesh constitution after final victory. Senior leaders of the Awami League and Bengali defectors from Pakistani civil and armed services formed a provisional government for Bangladesh.

This provisional Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was established following the declaration of independence of East Pakistan. It was the supreme leadership of the Bangladeshi liberation movement. It included the first cabinet of Bangladesh; the nascent Bangladeshi diplomatic corps; the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh; the Mukti Bahini military, paramilitary and guerrilla forces; and the Independent Bangladesh Radio. The Mujibnagar government was headed by Tajuddin Ahmad during the Bangladesh Liberation War. The Mujibnagar government confirmed the declaration of independence of East Pakistan made earlier by Bengali

nationalist leader and the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 26 March. Sheikh Mujib was subsequently detained in West Pakistan while the leaders of the Bengali liberation movement led by the Awami League fled Dhaka amid a brutal crackdown by the Pakistan Army. Although Sheikh Mujib was absent from the scene he was the head of the government and supreme leader of the state. The decision was taken for the credibility of government and to inspire the entire nation during the liberation movement. In its hour of the gravest crisis Bangabandhu's slogan of "Joy Bangla" unified the nation.

The provisional exile government's capital was in Kolkata, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal and the former capital of British India, which hosted thousands of Bangladeshi refugees escaping the 1971 genocide. The provisional government included many defectors from the Pakistani government, Foreign Service and Military; as well as leading intellectuals and cultural figures from East Pakistan. The chief executive of the Mujibnagar government, Tajuddin Ahmad was the first Bangladeshi Prime Minister. A worldwide campaign was undertaken by the Provisional Government to garner support for Bangladesh's independence, genocide victims and refugees. The Mujibnagar government coordinated war efforts from a colonial mansion on 8 Shakespeare Sarani in Kolkata with the active support of the Indian government.

India worked closely with the self-declared Bangladeshi government in exile ... planned camps where the Indian army would train Bengali nationalist guerrillas ... General [J. F. R.] Jacob remembers, "The [Indian] government asked us to train the Mukti Bahini, so we set up camps, with the BSF [Border Security Force] at the border areas."<sup>33</sup>

During the course of the war, the majority of Bengali civil servants and diplomats serving Pakistan began defecting. They subsequently joined the Mujibnagar government, and operated a secretariat in Kolkata as well as foreign missions in several Asian, European and North American capitals. It appointed special envoys and operated representative missions in New Delhi, Washington D.C. and London among many other cities. A group of leading Bengali intellectuals were appointed Special Envoys and began touring western capitals

advocating the Bangladesh cause while leading Bengali cultural figures and activists operated the radio station Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Free Bengal Radio Station).<sup>34</sup>

Although the government was formed on 10 April and its oath was taken on 17 April 1971, the portfolios were assigned among the ministers on 18 April. The incumbents of the government were:

**Table 9: Mujibnagar Government Office Holders**

Name	Portfolio/Office Holder
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman	Nominal president. Detained in West Pakistan throughout the war
Syed Nazrul Islam	Vice President, (Entrusted with the powers, functions and responsibilities of the President since the President himself was then detained in Pakistan).
Tajuddin Ahmad	Prime Minister, Principal wartime political leader, In charge of Defence, Information, Broadcasting and Communications, Economic Affairs, Planning Division, Education, Local Government, Health, Labor, Social Welfare, Establishment as well as other affairs the responsibility of which was not yet entrusted to anyone.
Khondakar Mostaq Ahmad	Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Law and Parliamentary Affairs.
M Mansur Ali	Minister, Ministry of Finance, Industry and Commerce.
AHM Qamaruzzaman	Minister, Ministry of Home, Civil Supplies, Relief and Rehabilitation, Agriculture.
Abdus Samad Azad	Foreign Minister, Khondakar Mostaq Ahmad was removed after attempting secret talks with Islamabad
Colonel M. A. G. Osmani	Commander-in-Chief of the Mukti Bahini
Nurul Islam	Head of the Planning Commission and Chief economic Policy Maker

Mujibnagar government was divided into fifteen ministries and divisions. Besides, some divisions were placed under the Cabinet.) In the Ministry of Defense, MAG Osmany was the Commander-in-Chief; SA Samad was the Defense Secretary and Colonel Abdur Rab

became the Chief of Staff. The military wing of the provisional government was the Mukti Bahini. The Bangladeshi liberation guerrillas were based in camps on the East Pakistan-India border. In December, it joined Indian forces as part of a combined Bangladesh-Indian allied offensive against Pakistan, which resulted in victory.

~~H~~ The Ministry of Defense divided the war zone into eleven sectors and appointed a sector commander for each of the sectors. But there was no sector commander for sector No 10 or naval sector. Commandos used to fight under the command of the concerned sector commander whenever and wherever they carried out the operation in a particular sector. Besides, there were three brigades called Z force, K force and S force. Major Ziaur Rahman, Major Khaled Mosharraf and Major KM Shafiullah were the commanders of the brigades respectively.

~~H~~ Ministry of Foreign Affairs sought to obtain support of the foreign governments and people at large for the cause of liberation of

~~2~~ Bangladesh by establishing Bangladesh mission abroad and by sending diplomatic emissaries to various countries. With this end in view diplomatic missions were established in Kolkata, Delhi, London, Washington, New York, and Stockholm. Diplomatic delegations were sent to the UNO, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and Japan for gaining their support to the Liberation War. Humayun Rashid Choudhury worked as an Ambassador-at-Large in New Delhi, Abul Maal Abdul Muhith as an Ambassador-at-Large Washington D.C., Rehman Sobhan as Special Envoy to Washington D.C., Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury as the Chief Overseas Representative, London and Abul Fateh was appointed as an Ambassador-at-Large in Calcutta.

Ministry of Finance, Industry and Commerce was headed by M Mansur Ali and Khondaker Asaduzzaman was its secretary. Cabinet Secretariat placed various proposals about the operation of the Liberation War to the cabinet meeting, implementation of the decisions of the meeting, and monitoring and recording these decisions. HT Imam was the secretary of the ministry. General Administration Division was formed under the Ministry of Establishment to deal with appointment, transfer, promotion and framing of service rules. Nurul Qader was the secretary of the Establishment Division. Zonal Administrative Council was formed

under General Administration Division. Nine administrative zones with a chairman for each were formed to look after administration of Liberation War activities. Each zone had a headquarters, and a chairman.

Ministry of Health and Welfare worked under a Director General. Later the position of the Director General was elevated to the status of a secretary. The functions of the health department was divided into two sectors: a) to impart medical treatment to the freedom fighters under the army ie under the Ministry of Defence and b) to render medical treatment to such civilians or persons who did not participate in the Liberation War directly with arms. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting played important role to build up public opinion in favour of the Liberation War. This ministry used to perform its functions through four divisions: a) Radio (Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendraserved as the cultural propaganda wing of the Bangladeshi provisional government), b) Films, c) Publications, d) Fine arts and design.

Ministry of Home was responsible for maintaining law and order in the liberated areas. This ministry selected the uniform, badge and monogram of the Bangladesh police force. Abdul Khaleque was made the first IG of the police and was later appointed as home secretary. Relief and Rehabilitation Division was created under the supervision of the Ministry of Home and Ministry of Relief with a view to rehabilitate the refugees taking shelter in India. Parliamentary Affairs Division worked under the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Law and Parliamentary Affairs. The main task of this division was to solve various problems of the members of Provincial and National Assembly and to engage them in various activities. Agriculture Division worked for finding ways and means for taking measures to overcome food crisis by increasing food production in the post-war Bangladesh, introducing scientific cultivation and providing loans to farmers under easy terms in view of the wartime losses.<sup>35</sup> Many Bengali members of the Civil Service of Pakistan defected to the government of Bangladesh. Dr. Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, Nurul Kader Khan, S. A. Samad, Khondker Asaduzzaman, Dr. Sa'dat Hussain and Dr. Akbar Ali Khan were early leaders of the newly formed Bangladesh Civil Service. The provisional government established an

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elaborate structure of administrative departments. Yusuf Ali and J. G. Bhowmik served as the chief Relief Commissioners for Bangladeshi refugees. The noted artist Quamrul Hassan served as Director of Art and Design. Calcutta and Agartala were the main centres of the government-in-exile.

To strengthen the national unity, the Mujibnagar Government took initiative to form an Advisory Council on 9 September 1971. Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad became the convener of the Council and Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was made the Chairman. The Council was a body of eight members which included the representatives from Government of Mujibnagar, Bangladesh Awami League, National Awami Party (NAP-pro-Moscow and pro-China), Bangladesh Communist Party (CP) and Bangladesh Congress. Along with Chairman and Convener, other members of the Council were Prof Muzaffar Ahmed (NAP), Mani Sing (CP), Monoranjan Dhar (Congress), Mansur Ali (Awami League) and AHM Qamruzzaman (Government). The decision to constitute the national advisory council was an important and time-worthy step in building up the people's war in Bangladesh.<sup>36</sup> For a central command and political leadership the need for a government was immense. The formation of Mujibnagar Government under the leadership of Tajuddin Ahmad really fulfilled the expectation of millions of freedom-loving Bangalis.<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2 The Declaration of Independence: A Phenomenal Step to Fixing Fate

The Bangali nationalism emerged as a product of British colonial control system and the 'Two Nation Theory' advanced by the Muslim League leaders. Pakistan as a state came into being based on the Two Nation Theory although this very theory proved to be illusive after the creation of Pakistan. In a relatively short time, a consciousness of Bangali nationalism was developed amongst the Bangalis. They were now realized that Bangalis were different from the West Pakistanis historically, culturally, linguistically, economically and even religiously.)

বাংলা

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Religiously, East Bengal Muslims belonged to a genre very different from that of West Pakistan. These inter-linked and interactive thoughts and activities fundamentally played the key role prior to the Declaration of Independence on 26 March 1971.

This declaration is the final and inevitable outcome of the rise of Bengali nationalism. The arrest of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from his residence on the night of 25 March and the massacre of civilians within the ambit of "Operation Searchlight" however set forth a new dynamics in the political process. Despite the strict precautions taken by the Pakistani Military, the arrest was followed immediately afterwards by a message from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib declaring independence of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu's message was passed on the wireless available with the then EPR. The "Message embodying Declaration of Independence sent by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Chittagong shortly after midnight of 25 March, i.e., early hours of 26 March 1971 for transmissions throughout Bangladesh over the Ex-EPR transmitter" was as follows,

This may be my last message: From today 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 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.<sup>22</sup>

বাংলা



মুক্তিবাদী  
কুস্তি দল

প্রক্ষেপণ

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a message form, declared independence. The message is said to have been made available to EPR shortly after midnight and it was duly broadcast through EPR radio communication system. Because the system was VHF frequency crystal controlled; not very many people did listen to the declaration. This message was received by number of Politicians, Journalists, and Deputy Commissioners and by many police stations on 26 March 1971. On the same day, Abdul Hannan, the General Secretary of Chittagong Awami League read out the declaration of independence by Bangladesh from the Swadhin Bangla radio station at about 14.30 hours.

On 26 March 1971 a group of radio engineers, technicians and program organizers of Chittagong Centre of Radio Pakistan, on their own initiative, made necessary arrangement for broadcasting in favor of the Mukti Bahini. With protection provided by the Mukti Bahini, these radio personnel took control of the transmitter station at Kalurghat (Chittagong) and made a few broadcasts. The centre was renamed as "Swadhin Bangla Biplobi Betar Kendro (Free Bengal Revolutionary Radio Centre)." In the afternoon of 27 March 1971, Major Ziaur Rahman made the announcement by reading out the independence of Bangladesh on behalf of the great leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from this radio station.

The next day, i.e., on 27 March, at about 19.30 hours, the radio people brought in Major Ziaur Rahman, to the transmitting centre from a nearby camp "where he had halted his troops on their way to a safe haven in India."<sup>23</sup> Major Zia read out the declaration again at the request of the radio people. There are discrepancies between the version of declaration has been brought up in the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of the Documents of Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1982 and the version printed in 2004 during the BNP regime. According to the version of 2004 Zia's announcement (referring the record of the Biplobi Betar Kendra, Chittagong, 27 March 1971) was as follows,

Dear fellow freedom fighters,

I, Major Ziaur Rahman, Provisional President and Commander-in-Chief of Liberation Army do hereby proclaim, independence of Bangladesh and appeal for joining our liberation struggle.

Bangladesh is independent. We have waged war for the Liberation War for liberation of Bangladesh. Everybody is requested to participate in the Liberation War with whatever you have. We will have to fight and liberate the country from the occupation of Pakistan Army.

Inshallah, victory is ours.<sup>24</sup>

In the version printed in 1982 (on the basis of the tape-records of the programs of the Shadhin Bangla Radio Station telecast on 27 March 1971, *The Statesman*, Delhi, 27 March 1971) Zia's announcement published thus,

I, Major Zia, Provisional Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Liberation Army, hereby proclaims, on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the independence of Bangladesh.

I also declare, we have already framed a sovereign, legal Government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which pledges to function as per law and the constitution. The new democratic Government is committed to a policy of non-alignment in international relations. It will seek friendship with all nations and strive for international peace. I appeal to all Governments to mobilize public opinion in their respective countries against the brutal genocide in Bangladesh.

The Government under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is sovereign legal Government of Bangladesh and is entitled to recognition from all democratic nations of the world.<sup>25</sup>

On 30 March 1971, Major Ziaur Rahman made another broadcast. On this day in the afternoon, two fighter aircrafts (F-86 Sabre Jets) of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) from Dhaka knocked down the transmitter station. No further broadcast from this station could be made after that. Kalurghat transmitter was a low powered radio station. Yet these broadcasts were heard by the people of Bangladesh and members of Mukti Bahini. It had a tremendous effect since Mukti Bahini was fighting battle so long on their self-motivations and they were not aware as to what others were doing. This broadcast brought an end to all the confusion and sense of isolation prevalent at that time. Within hours of the first declaration on 27 March 1971, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), Radio Australia and All India Radio also picked up this transmission and broadcasted their contents through their media.

On 30 March 1971 from the Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra Major Ziaur Rahman again declared that the Pakistan army, air force and navy had launched a combined operation against the civilian and started killing them indiscriminately. He announced, "I once again request the United Nations and the big powers to intervene and physically come to our aid. Delay will mean massacre of additional millions."<sup>26</sup>

This is important to connect the official record of the Mujibnagar Government vis-à-vis the Declaration of Independence. It was on 10 April 1971 that many of the elected members of the National Assembly (MNAs) and Provincial Assembly (MPAs) assembled in Kolkata and formed the Constituent Assembly in exile and drafted the Proclamation of Independence. This was ceremoniously declared on 17 April at Baidyanathatala (renamed after the proclamation Mujibnagar, a border area in present Meherpur district), where Professor Yusuf Ali, an MNA read out the Proclamation of Independence. The early part of the Proclamation states the background of the War of Liberation. Then it goes,

We the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh, as honour bound by the mandate given to us by the people of Bangladesh whose will is supreme duly constituted ourselves into a Constituent Assembly, and having held mutual consultations, and in order to ensure for the people of Bangladesh equality, human dignity and social justice, declare and constitute Bangladesh to be sovereign Peoples' (sic) Republic and thereby confirm the declaration of independence already made by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and do hereby affirm and resolve that till such time as a Constitution is framed, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman shall be the President of the Republic and that Syed Nazrul Islam shall be the Vice-President of the Republic, and that the President shall be the Supreme Commander of all the Armed Forces of the Republic...<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2.1 Debate over Declaration of Independence

There is a nagging controversy with regard to the declaration of Independence which is no longer unimpeachable. Mujib-Zia dichotomy regarding the declaration of Independence of Bangladesh should come to an end with the verdict of the Bangladesh Supreme Court on 21 June 2009. The fact as well as the reality is that nobody was worthy of the declaration of the Independence of Bangladesh

except Mujib. What Zia did was just reading out a declaration note on behalf of Mujib. This is surely based on hard fact, and the reading out of the declaration note could not be considered as the formal declaration of the Independence of Bangladesh, which was made on March 26, 1971. There is as such no room for fabrication in these two distinct facts.

It is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and only Mujibur Rahman who, for the first time, formally made the declaration of the Independence of Bangladesh on March 26, 1971. On 26 March in the early morning the wife of MR Siddiqi was given an urgent message by Moinul Alam, the correspondent of *Daily Ittefaq* over telephone. This message was received from Bangabandhu through the wireless operators of Chittagong. The message reads as follows:

Message to the people of Bangladesh and the people of the world. Rajarbagh police camp and Peelkhana EPR suddenly attacked by Pak Army at 2400 hours. Thousands of people killed. Fierce fighting going on. Appeal to the world for help in freedom struggle. Resist by all means. May Allah be with you. Joy Bangla.<sup>28</sup>

This message from Bangabandhu was then taken as the declaration of independence, which was read out by M.A. Hannan, general secretary of district (Chittagong) Awami League at 2:30 p.m. On this basis, March 26 was declared Independence Day. The declaration of independence made by Major Zia took place on the following day (March 27, 1971). As a matter of fact, Zia made two speeches. In the first speech, he claimed himself as the president of Bangladesh, and urged upon the people to fight the Pakistan army. When this unauthorized speech created confusion among the people, the Awami League leaders asked Major Zia to read out a text prepared by AK Khan to nullify the effect of the speech he had previously made. Zia followed the suggestion, and made a second speech, where he categorically mentioned that he was speaking on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the great national leader.

Zia's speech, however, had an electrifying effect among the fighting men and the civil population. But it was more to the credit of an ex-officio person than to the credit of Zia, the very person. In other words, it was an on the spot demand which Zia happened to meet. Had there been some other army officials, say, a major or a colonel.

or the like, the effect would have been the same. So, Zia should not be said to have declared independence of Bangladesh. He only read out the message of declaration on behalf of Mujib, which, too, has an historic significance and that was duly recognized by the Mujibnagar Government. But that should not be manipulated into usurping Mujib's position in the declaration. Zia never claimed himself the declarer of independence, and once vehemently opposed a proposal by one of his henchmen to establish him as that.

The constitution, which was accepted as the "Declaration of Independence" on April 10, 1971, by 403 elected MPAs and MNAs also bears the testimony to the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu. Under that constitution was formed the first government of independent Bangladesh (Mujibnagar Government) with Mujib as the first president. The constitution of 1972 was later written in the light of that constitution. As it is put in the sixth section of that constitution (Declaration of Independence): "Whereas in the facts and circumstances of such treacherous conduct Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of 75 million people of Bangladesh, in due fulfillment of the legitimate right of self-determination of the people of Bangladesh duly made a declaration of independence at Dacca on March 26, 1971 ..." Again, in Section 10 of that constitution, Mujib's declaration of independence is confirmed: "We the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh ... thereby confirm the Declaration of Independence already made by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" That Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared independence is an historical truth, which is properly substantiated by the Proclamation of Independence of April 10, 1971, which can be considered as the precursor to the constitution of 1972.

With the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Constitution of Bangladesh dated 30 June 2011 the Proclamation of Independence has been included as the Schedule of the Constitution which is the 7<sup>th</sup> Schedule. According to this Schedule Bangabandhu declared independence of Bangladesh prior to his arrest by the Pakistani military on 26 March 1971. The world famous dailies i.e., *The Baltimore Sun*, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* attributed the credit of the declaration of independence to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to carry the news of the

Proclamation of Independence. In an archival document of the Defense Intelligence Agency of the US-Government which was submitted to the White House reveals that, "Pakistan was thrust into a civil war today when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed the east wing of the two-part country to be "sovereign, independent People's Republic of Bangla Desh."<sup>29</sup>

The CIA Chief JC Helms reported to Henry Kissinger in the first meeting of the Washington Special Action Group after the Pakistani Military Crackdown in East Pakistan on 26 March that, "A clandestine radio broadcast has Mujibur Rahman declaring the independence of Bangladesh."<sup>30</sup> The Pakistani military officer as well as journalist Siddiq Salim recorded that General Tikka Khan ordered Sheikh Mujib's arrest only after hearing the declaration of independence. Salik farther writes that at the dark night of operation searchlight,

When the first shot had been fired, the voice of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came faintly through on a wavelength close to that of the official radio. In what must have been, and sounded like, a pre-recorded message, the Sheikh proclaimed East Pakistan to be the People's Republic of Bangladesh.<sup>31</sup>

## **Chapter 7**

### **BIG POWERS' POLICIES ON BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR**

Bangladesh, the then East Pakistan, was a unique geopolitical reality with its own coherent reasons for a successful separation from Pakistan. It was destined to be an independent nation-state soon after the separation of Indian sub-continent in 1947. In addition, Bangladesh was struggling for independence at a time when global politics was experiencing strategic shifts. The part the big powers played in the sanguinary birth of Bangladesh was defined by those strategic shifts that occurred in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Since those times spectacular changes in the international world order transformed the world. Each of the major powers played its role in accordance with the very notion of political realism. Their involvement can be explained in terms of their regional, global and above all national interests. Ideological differences and global power parity also led the major powers involve in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

#### **7.1 The Soviet Union**

USSR was not only the first great power to recognize Bangladesh as an independent country but also was the first great power to criticize publicly the Pakistani crackdown began on 25 March 1971. The reaction of the Soviet Government was immediate. Soon after a week of Pakistani crackdown President Podgorny, in a letter to President Yahya, urged to halt the bloodshed and repression, noting that the Awami League had an overwhelming majority of seats in the election of December 1970. In this letter to Pakistani President on 2 April 1971, the Soviet Union President warned him to stop the continuation of repressive measures and bloodshed in East Pakistan. Podgorny also showed his concern and sympathy for the Awami Leaders who got victory in the general elections. He was also very much concerned about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's arrest and prosecution and appealed Pakistani President to recognize the humanitarian principles recorded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>1</sup>

In reply of Soviet President's letter, the Pakistani President assured him that, to transfer power to the elected representatives of East Pakistan he would start talk with them when the opportunity arises.<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning Soviet Union wanted a political solution of the conflict. They were deeply concerned with the status quo and political situation of the region of South Asia.<sup>3</sup> When the Indian Minister for External Affairs, Swaran Singh, visited Moscow in June 1971, the Soviet Prime Minister Alexi Kosygin emphasized the need to resort a peaceful method to achieve a political settlement of the Pakistan crisis. In a joint statement they called for an immediate measure to ensure the stoppage of refugee influx from East Pakistan. They also agreed to adopt measures to restore peace in the region and to create conditions of security for the return of the East Pakistani refugees to their homes.<sup>4</sup>

For any learner of global studies, it is easy to explain the response of USSR with regard to the intention and the response of US and vice-versa. To contain the US influence in Asia and to deter China being the prime rival in the Third World were perhaps the main among many reasons for why USSR involved itself with one of the most dead-list crises during the cold war era. USSR had its desire to counter American, Chinese and Japanese backed schemes and their influences in this region. The ideological polarity between USSR and US, started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, made them rival in almost every single phenomenon in the global stage centered on national interest. It was thus no wonder that the two stood on the other side regarding the very issue of Bangladesh in 1971.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the relation between USSR and China severely deteriorated. China wanted a political and economic style of its own that differed from that of USSR. The emergence of China as the main rival in this region and the growing influence of Washington on Beijing instigated Moscow to act against the other two. USSR's close tie with India was a very crucial factor in determining its response towards the crisis. As the dominant power in the subcontinent, India could be built up as a useful counterpoise to China and thus could help Moscow to contain Beijing.<sup>6</sup> The Indo-Soviet Treaty's prime objective was to checkmate China and to promote Indian interests in South Asia and Soviet interests in Asia generally.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of May 1971 big powers like France, Britain and Canada had stopped supplying arms to Pakistan although there was a serious charge by the world media against the USSR on arms supply which was very much embarrassing for the country.<sup>8</sup> These allegations were embarrassing for Soviet Union for many reasons. USSR could not be sure about the consequence of political conflict in Bangladesh and, therefore, it did not want to take sides prematurely.<sup>9</sup> Soviet goodwill in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent had been achieved after a careful revision and replanning of its policies towards the two countries and it did not want to jeopardize its position as a confidant of both India and Pakistan. Originally, USSR sided with India against Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir. Gradually, Moscow changed its foreign policy in an attempt to win the confidence of Islamabad.<sup>10</sup> The termination of Soviet policy towards the subcontinent was reached during the Indio-Pakistan war of 1965, when Moscow got the opportunity to act as mediator between the two countries and the final peace agreement was signed under Soviet sponsorship on Soviet soil, in Tashkent. The USSR had considerable economic stakes in India, to whose present level of industrialization it has contributed considerably. After Tashkent era, Moscow gradually established its economic influence on Pakistan through different economic assistance programs. When the American oil companies gave up hope of finding great oils in West Pakistan, the Soviet drilling operations produced very little success. But the Soviets nevertheless won the goodwill of the West Pakistanis, particularly of the military junta. The West Pakistani junta also received military assistance from the USSR to a considerable extent. Moscow had not followed the British action of cutting aid to Pakistan; rather they continued, until a realistic political settlement was achieved.

However, as tension grew, and war intensified USSR took Bangladesh side. With time passed, USSR support became more solid and undaunted. America's proxy involvement in the war was becoming clearer after Pakistan declared war against India. It began with preemptive aerial strikes on 11 Indian air stations on 3<sup>rd</sup> December that led India directly enter into the Liberation War of Bangladesh.<sup>11</sup> US started thinking that USSR might enter the war if they come to know this which definitely would cause a lot of destruction to Pak-US-China interest. Hence, US ambassador to the

United Nations George H.W. Bush (later 41<sup>st</sup> US President) introduced a resolution in the UN Security Council called for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of armed forces by India and Pakistan. Believing India can win the war and Indira Gandhi being determined to protect the interest of Bangalis, USSR vetoed out the resolution, thus letting India fight for the cause. It paved the way for the Indo-Bangladesh allied forces to march into Dhaka and secure the defeat and surrender of 90 thousand Pakistani troops on the 16 December 1971.

In response to the presence of US 7<sup>th</sup> fleet in the Bay of Bengal, led by the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise on 13 December, USSR dispatched a nuclear-armed flotilla, Pacific Fleet, from Vladivostok. It deployed two task groups; in total two cruisers, two destroyers, six submarines, and support vessels. A group of Il-38 ASW aircraft from Aden air base in Yemen provided support. Though the Russian fleet comprised a good number of nuclear-armed ships and atomic submarines, their missiles were of limited range (300 km).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, to counter the American deception Russians took a brilliant strategy of bluff. The Chief Commander ordered to lift the subs when the Americans appear. It was done to demonstrate that they had nuclear submarines in the Indian Ocean. Ultimately this bluff paid off; Russians encircled the US, not allowing the fleet to close in on Chittagong or Dhaka, securing the independence of Bangladesh. Soviet Union's positive role thus contributed immensely to the historic triumph of Bangladesh.

However, when Bangladesh got independence, Russia announced that they would meet with Mujib before they met Bhutto but after Pakistan's recognition of the new state. This offer was regarded as an attempt to mediate between Pakistan and Bangladesh similar to USSR's mediation between India and Pakistan after their 1965 war. The birth of Bangladesh with India's support and sympathetic Soviet supervision did indeed mark the emergence of the Soviet Union as "the military arsenal and political defender of India with access for (Moscow's) rising naval power to the Indian Ocean and a base of political and military operations on China's southern flank." On 25 January 1972 the Soviets recognized the new nation and simultaneously sent a plane load of relief supplies. Soon after

the arrival of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the Soviet Consul General, VF Popov quickly signed a barter agreement with the new government.

## 7.2 The United States

Governed by own national interest, US played a very complex and negative role in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Washington had developed an inherent bias against Bangalis struggle for self determination from the very beginning. After the sweeping victory of Awami League in the general elections of December 1970, the emergence of an independent Bangladesh became apparent. The US government started calculating all dimensions from their own perspective. In many documents they foresighted the birth of Bangladesh although the American concern for a united Pakistan remained constant through all the ups and downs in the US-Pak relations during that time. The prevailing global and regional situation reinforced the US concern in 1971 and the basic continuity in her position was thus pursued by a pro-Pakistan 'tilt' during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Washington's final statement was that Pakistan could remain united only through the use of military force.<sup>13</sup>

Since the beginning of the Liberation War of Bangladesh, US showed the uncompromising attitude that it was an internal affair of Pakistan, which did not require foreign intervention. On 25 March, 1971 an USA ship with \$35,000 arms aid was present in Chittagong. President Nixon did not want to offend his valuable ally Yahya for his ruthless military action against his own citizens. In this background the US leader failed to speak out publicly against the genocide in East Pakistan. They maintained continuing ties with Pakistan government. It was on 26 March the US Department of State Spokesman stated that the US was watching the development in East Pakistan with much anxiety.<sup>14</sup> When the American press published the news of genocide, killing of the civilian and reached the news to the wider public the Senators of the US Congress began to take note of the Government's calculated silence and called on the Administration to stop military aid in Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> The Senate passed resolutions to cut all arms aid and sales to the military regime and claimed that no American arms had been sold to Pakistan since the

outbreak of fighting in Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup> The US State Department and Pentagon strongly warned against letting ships and sail with US arms.<sup>17</sup> Most significant protest from the American people was to refuse to load a freighter carrying an arms shipment to Pakistan. International response to the US arms aid were even more severe,

... widespread international disapproval of the brutality in East Pakistan had made no impression on Yahya and his government. It may be necessary to proceed to sanctions, but how this can be done is questionable at the moment, especially since the United States, which ought to be championing the oppressed in Pakistan, is playing ambiguous part in permitting shipment of war material to that country despite an official ban on such shipment.<sup>18</sup>

US Democratic senator Edward Moore 'Ted' Kennedy, visiting refugee camps, found the situation extremely grave. He said that Pakistan was committing genocide. But still, the US under Nixon's administration decided to remain in favor of Pakistan. US did this for the sake of a sheer calculation of its national interest. There were two reasons, firstly, Pakistan belonged to American-led military Pact, CENTO and SEATO; secondly, US believed any victory of India and its allies would be considered as the expansion of USSR's influence in this region, even though both Bangladesh and India were non-aligned countries.

In addition, US needed China beside them and it was Pakistan that was helping US to become close to China. The Sino-Soviet misunderstanding had ripened. China had become a nuclear power and fought war with India in 1962. The US was also fighting against a nationalist communist force in Vietnam supported by USSR. Above all, the USSR had attained nuclear weapon. Calculating every detail US found China a better option to deter USSR's influence in the region. China maintained a close tie with Pakistan as a counterpoise against India; a potential opponent in its ambition to become a regional power. This very calculation led US support Pak-China alliance. Nixon administration thus offered unequivocal assistance to Pakistan till end.

Pakistan played an important role in providing links between the Washington and Peking where Yahya was the key player. Because of this, USA was profoundly grateful to Pakistan for being a channel to

China.<sup>19</sup> US supported Pakistan by all means whereas the Nixon administration's attitude towards India was marked by unfriendliness. It was reported that when US congress sanctioned any supply of arms or military equipments to Pakistan, Nixon administration used Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Jordan to give arms through these countries. Though, for pressure raised from public, newspapers and parliament, US donated 2.5 million dollars for refugees.

Among all its initiatives US took two bold steps; one being introduction of a resolution in the Security Council calling for cease-fire and another being sending USS Enterprise in the Bay of Bengal. When on 3<sup>rd</sup> December India-Pakistan war began, US proxy involvement in the war became clear. Thinking that USSR might enter into the war US ambassador to the United Nations George H.W. Bush introduced a resolution in the UN Security Council, calling for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of armed forces by India and Pakistan, but USSR vetoed out the resolution. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger pressurized Soviets to a large extent but all went in vain.

On 10 December, just six days before the end of the war, the US dispatched the Enterprise Task Force 74 and four escorts were ordered to sail from their station in the gulf of Tonkin towards Singapore. On 12 December, it sailed into the northernmost section of the Bay of Bengal and it remained in the Indian Ocean until 7 January, 1972. The U.S. sent its Seventh Fleet to maneuver in the Bay of Bengal, hinting that it might intervene to take Pakistan's side. In response, USSR also dispatched a nuclear-armed flotilla, Pacific Fleet. Russians encircled the US, not allowing the fleet to close in on Chittagong or Dhaka, securing the independence of Bangladesh.

Amidst the negative role of US administration, its society played a very positive role in supporting the cause of Bangladesh. Senator Edward Kennedy-led US congressional support for Bangladeshi independence is mentionable. On the other hand, there were some US political and intellectual leadership who put pressure on the Republican administration of Nixon, Senators Saxby and Church were particularly active in this regard. The Trans-Atlantic collaboration among the Bangladeshi expatriates and their friends also led to the organizing of the famous "Concert for Bangladesh" in New York in

August 1971 with the help of Pundit Ravi Shankar and George Harrison, a member of Beatles. It created public sympathy for those seeking liberation of Bangladesh. The American media played a significant role in restructuring the US public and administrative support to East Pakistan. A good number of journalists and both electronic and print media worked with dedication for the Bangladesh cause who kept the issue to the forefront.

In many ways, behind all that happened in the sub-continent over the 1971 Bangladesh struggle, it "was a power struggle between China and the Soviet Union and a strategic conflict between Moscow and Washington". In South Asia during December 1971 the Soviet Union seemed to have gained most from this three-cornered fight. A prominent political analyst in his research figured out some major points of the American response to the Bangladesh crisis that developed through several discernible phases. The first phase of quiet non-involvement began on 25 March and lasted roughly until 9-10 July 1971. During this phase the US posture was "neutral" and it described the problem in East Bengal as Pakistan's "internal matter".

The second phase started with the secret trip by President Nixon's National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, to China during 9-10 July 1971. This marked the real beginnings of the Sino-US detente and led indirectly to the formalization of Indo-Soviet alliance by a treaty in August. During this phase, which lasted until September, the United States pursued diplomacy of restraint, counseling India to desist from armed conflict with Pakistan and privately pressing Pakistan to thrash out a 'political settlement' of the East Pakistan issue.<sup>20</sup>

During the third phase, lasting from September until 3 December, when the Indo-Pak war over Bangladesh broke out, the United States attempted to promote a constructive political dialogue between the Pakistani military government and the Bangali nationalist leaders in India, but in vain. The fourth phase covered the period of the Indo-Pak war. During the 14-day sub-continental war, the United States backed Pakistan and blamed India for the escalation of hostilities and tried through the United Nations and other means to bring about a ceasefire and "save West Pakistan" from possible Indian attempts to destroy it militarily. Throughout the course of happenings of 1971 there was a great divergence between the policy and attitude of the

US administration and the American press, legislative bodies, and academic community. For the most part these entities openly and emphatically sided with the Bengali nationalists and supported the Indian role in aiding and assisting them.<sup>21</sup> It seems that, the US policy in subcontinent with the wisdom of hindsight, the only objection of Kissinger was that Bangladesh crisis did not fit into his world vision and an independent Bangladesh was emerging, under the tutelage of India with Soviet backing, despite his opposition.

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## Chapter 8

# ROLE OF INDIA IN BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR

Government of Bangladesh, which had been formed in exile in India on 10 April 1971, was demanded by various state assemblies and organizations throughout India.<sup>12</sup> It was argued in India that in keeping aloof from conflict in East Pakistan, India would only cause additional burden on her exchequer by increased spending on defense and refugees, increased communal tension in West Bengal and elsewhere and erosion of India's credibility in West Bengal and Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup> Apart from media reports of pogrom in East Pakistan which instilled in people of India a deep commitment towards East Pakistan, Indian concern could be understandable in terms of Indo-Pakistan rivalry. It was believed in Pakistan that India displayed enthusiasm about events in that country because she had never acceded to the two-nation theory which gave birth to Pakistan.<sup>14</sup>

It was held that India's attempts at undoing the Two-Nation Theory through direct attacks on Pakistan in 1948 and 1965 had failed. The 1970-71 events offered her an opportunity to achieve objective and she did it by encouraging divisive forces in East Pakistan<sup>15</sup> and by creating unrest and chaos in East Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Pakistan maintained that East Pakistan crisis was masterminded by India. She regarded Indian response to the situation in Pakistan as interference in her internal affairs. *The white Paper*, issued by Pakistan government observed, "The reasons for Indian interference in Pakistan's internal affairs are the manifold and genesis of this problem lies in historical past. The root cause of Indo-Pakistan trouble is that India never really accepted the establishment of Pakistan."<sup>17</sup> However, apart from expressing sympathy for the cause of East Pakistan, India did not take any steps at this stage that could amount to involvement, in the strict sense of the term, in the crisis. India refused to take strong action which could have evolved world opinion against her. The Indian mass media had highlighted the tense situation in Pakistan yet India denied any interference on her part. Speaking in *Lok Sabha*, Mrs. Indira Gandhi said, "If there is a struggle between two parts of Pakistan, it is certainly not of our making but of the rulers of Pakistan."<sup>18</sup>

### 8.3 The Refugee Influx and Indian Response

Refugee problem is a stigma on the entire human history. During the Liberation War of Bangladesh India worked as the nursemaid

for millions of Bengali refugees who fled to her land and took shelter in different states adjacent to East Pakistan. The refugees from Bangladesh continued to arrive in India every day after the military crack-down on 25 March 1971. The refugee flow gathered momentum from the month of April and remained unabated till the month of November. The total number of refugees in the Indian camps in April was 655,807 and another 300,000 added in May. Bangladeshi refugees in India numbered 9.5 million in the month of October.<sup>19</sup> The refugees were spread out in camps in seven provinces. West Bengal contained the main burnt. The states of Tripura and Meghalaya had to accommodate more refugees than their own total population. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh had also stepped in to accommodate a good number of refugees.<sup>20</sup> The influx of refugees from Bangladesh to India, in particular to West Bengal continued in a large scale. It was estimated that the total number of refugees from Bangladesh to India as of December 1971 was 9,889,305.<sup>21</sup> Of the ten million refugees only 30 percent were Muslims.

It was an enormous destabilizing development for India to deal with millions of refugees from Bangladesh. The refugee flow was a great financial strain on India and it was so difficult for her to manage the social disorder and human tragedy. India spent Rs. 3.5 billion only half of which was received as aid. India received relief assistance of \$215 million.<sup>22</sup> India had to face a severe economic hardship due to a heavy pressure for the refugee exodus from Bangladesh. Despite the heroic efforts assembled by the Government of India and by voluntary agencies there was little hope that the gigantic mass of sufferings people would find their needs could be met. Yet another risk was that of communal tension in a city like Calcutta where the social fabric was brittle at best.<sup>23</sup> What the Indian government feared most was that the tension might have taken a communal color since most of the refugees were Hindus terrorized by Muslim West Pakistan army and touched off a nation-wide chain reaction in which India's majority would take revenge on country's 60 million Muslims.<sup>24</sup>

The health hazards, economic disequilibrium, social tensions, and the problem of maintaining law and order and an unbearable strain on the

local administration which had to be curbed by the Indian government. The outbreak of cholera in the refugee camps was a matter of grave concern. The communal character of the refugee problem was raising sentiments to the initial stage because lots of refugees were Muslims, but gradually predominantly Hindus were crossing the borders. The troubled North-East of India and fragile West Bengal were facing problems of political instability. Being transparent about the ground situation and allowing foreign observers access to the refugee camps made an impact on world public opinion.<sup>25</sup> Even world media recognized urgency of refugee problem and consequent pressure exerted on India. The tragedy of unprecedented proportions was published by the world media thus,

Senator Edward Kennedy, after an extensive tour of the refugee camps in India's West Bengal in his capacity as chairman of the US senate Judiciary Sub-committee on refugees, confirmed that the five-month-old conflict between East Pakistan and West Pakistan had driven over seven and half million Bangalis to take a refugee in India. On his visit to some of the refugee centers inside India, Kennedy said, "a scene which only can be described as most appalling tide of human misery in modern times". What the Yahya Government has accused of is the militaristic way with which it attempts to solve a political problem, one which since the period of Ayub Khan has plagued not East Pakistan alone but the entire republic as a whole. Yahya Khan is worse than his predecessor only because in this case he threw the full weight of his army against the unarmed millions of Bangalis driving them into India and inviting bloody clashes from a meaningless few.<sup>26</sup>

Julian Francis, in an eyewitness account of June 1971 reported in *Newsweek* at that time,

There are no walls to keep the rain from blowing in, nor any partitions except lines of washing to separate one family from the next. The thatched roof seems to sweat smoke, but just as the smoke drifts out the rain comes in at every pore, and the mud floor which is their bed gets wet and slimy. Regularly each hut disgorges a hundred refugees or more who form queues for their government rations, queues for the wells, queues for a place at the trench latrines. Those with dysentery seldom make it to the queue. The children form lines for their daily dollop of special nutritious food. This is the totality of life for nine million refugees-there is no work, there is no money. They knew what they were coming to.

They knew, that despite everything, it was better than what they were leaving, for here there is a chance of physical survival. We shall go on trying to help them survive here. Please do not give up at your end. But above all, please push, press and persuade everyone with influence until the refugees are safe again. Get them out of these monstrous camps.<sup>27</sup>

India had to accept the pain and cost of an unprecedented influx of refugees swamping West Bengal, Tripura and Assam and totally overshadowing short term outlook of the whole Indian economy. At one level it seemed as if they were involved in a dreadful contest to establish whether Pakistan's capacity to inflict suffering was greater or less than India's capacity to absorb it.<sup>28</sup> Speaking in the *Lok Sabha*, Mrs. Gandhi stressed on 24 May 1971,

So massive a migration in so short a time is unprecedented in recorded history... They are not refugees in the sense in which we have understood the term since 1947. They are victims of war who have sought refuge from the military terror across our frontiers.<sup>29</sup>

India desired a speedy solution of the problem. But as more and more time elapsed refugees would start settling in India and their repatriation would become a problem. Speaking in the *Lok Sabha*, the Indian Premier pointed out that,

Our experience of the influx of refugees and preposterous propaganda by Pakistan has reinforced the fact that what is happening in Bangla Desh does have many sided repercussions on our internal affairs. That is why I have said that this cannot be considered merely as an internal problem of Pakistan. It is an Indian problem. More, it is a worldwide problem.<sup>30</sup>

The Indian Premier categorically stressed that Indian economy could not bear the strain any more. Therefore, some voices were raised in India to go to war with Pakistan to stem the source of refugee influx.<sup>31</sup> It was observed that if Pakistan could not stop genocide which encouraged refugee influx, much detestable war would also prove less costly than being crushed under burden of refugees. However, the idea of war was not entertained at this stage. Addressing the nation, President VV Giri regarded the crisis as of 'a fundamental nature' which affected the future of India and of the

subcontinent and world at large. He made it clear that India was holding refugees from East Pakistan as trust on behalf of international community and they would all have to go back "once credible conditions are created for their return in safety and honor."<sup>32</sup> Truth is that, the ten million refugees that went to India in 1971 owe their survival primarily to the generosity of Indian citizens, the dedication of Indian relief workers and the resources of the Indian government.<sup>33</sup> Such was the staggering sacrifice demanded of India by refugee exodus.

people of East Pakistan and their already elected leader..."<sup>60</sup> It was observed that "India, in fact, did not approve of any initiative, which was likely to ease the situation in East Pakistan; she did not want to miss her 'chance of the century'."<sup>61</sup> India was also pressurized by USA to accept UN suggestion to observers but India sternly opposed, insisting on apolitical solution. A proposed Soviet veto halted the measure. "India insisted that only after a political settlement, which must be dismemberment of Pakistan and the creation of a new country, could the refugees return. It was an extraordinary demand."<sup>62</sup>

Pakistan could not have possibly accepted such a demand of voluntary division of the country. Yahya Khan appealed to the patriotic people of Pakistan to return home. He was not ready to welcome the rebels, meaning thereby the exiled Awami Leaguers and the members of the provisional government of Bangladesh. India would not accept UN mediation without Pakistan's prior approval of a political settlement. What was acceptable to one was not acceptable to other. Therefore, war seemed imminent. There was no room for a compromise. While Yahya Khan was preparing for a trial of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, India pleaded with big powers to exert pressure on him to get Sheikh Mujib released. At the same time, on the one hand, India was trying to force Pakistan to a political settlement with Awami League, on the other had it was helping the guerrillas and war preparations were going on unabatedly on the other. Yahya Khan made it plain that if India attempted to seize a chunk of her territory, Pakistan would declare all-out war on India.

### **8.6 The General War Triggered Off: Victory of the Joint Forces**

Military preparations were afoot in both India and Pakistan since the months of July and August. By September 1971, Indian troops had been stationed along eastern frontier. Pakistan deployed her forces on eastern and western sectors by first half of October. India then deployed her troops along western frontiers also. Tensions mounted up day after day. For several months, India and Pakistani forces engaged in daily skirmishes. Mukti Bahini activities aided by

India harassed and demoralized Pakistani army. With the border skirmishes assuming war proportions, and concentrations of troops along the borders, diametrically opposed positions held by India and Pakistan regarding origin and solution of the crisis, burgeoning refugee problem, guerrilla incursions against Pakistan, war could no longer be avoided. And now acceptable political solution had become total independence of East Pakistan. On 30 October 1971 Indian Defense Minister said, "War still could be avoided if the rulers of Pakistan will give independence to the people of Bangladesh."<sup>63</sup> Earlier, Pakistan called for mutual withdrawal, but India refused. President Nixon also proposed to India to withdraw her troops as Pakistan was prepared for doing so. Indira Gandhi remained adamant and observed,

I think that the troops that should be withdrawal straight away are the Pakistani troops in Bangladesh. This would be a positive response for Pakistan to show that they do want solution in Bangladesh... The very presence of Pakistani troops in Bangladesh is a threat to our security.<sup>64</sup>

A general war triggered off between India and Pakistan on 3 December 1971 following border violations. Who actually provoked for the break-out of the war is disputed. Both India and Pakistan approached UN and blamed the other for aggression. On 4 December, Tajuddin Ahmed, acting Prime Minister of provisional government of Bangladesh, wrote to Mrs. Gandhi that in view of the direct aggression committed by Pakistan against India on 3 December, the forces of Pakistan in Bangladesh were ready to fight in every sector or on any front. Tajuddin writes, "Our joint stand against the military machinations of Pakistan would be further facilitated, if we enter into formal diplomatic relations with each other." India recognized Bangladesh on 6 December to dispel any belief that India was out to annex Bangladesh. Speaking in *Lok Sabha*, Mrs. Gandhi said,

In the light of the existing situation and in response to the repeated requests of the government of Bangladesh, the government of India, after most careful considerations, decided to grant recognition to the People's Republic of Bangladesh.<sup>65</sup>

The first Chancery of Bangladesh was formally opened in Delhi on 9 December 1971. The big powers could not remain neutral to the conflict. Ultimately, it turned out to be "a power struggle between Moscow and Washington and strategic struggle between Soviet Union and China".<sup>66</sup> American attitude was guided by a paradigm—that India wanted to annex Bangladesh; India wished to carry the war to the west and annex large chunks of West Pakistan with Soviet Union's willingness; Soviet Union wanted to establish military and naval bases in India.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Pakistan, who figured prominently in American strategic calculations, won the US favor. At a meeting of Washington Special Group, Kissinger told his colleagues, "I am getting hell every half an hour from the President that we are not being tough enough on India... He wants to tilt in favor of Pakistan."<sup>68</sup>

Charles Bray, the US higher official announced on 3 December that US had cancelled all outstanding licenses for arms and equipment worth \$ 11.5 million to India as a result of her incursions into Pakistan.<sup>69</sup> Joseph Sisco, US Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs also observed, "We believe that since the beginning of the crisis, Indian policy in a systematic way has led to perpetuation of the crisis... (She) turned down all the proposals made by US in recent days to avert a major war."<sup>70</sup> During the war USA consistently supported Pakistan and assailed India for escalations of hostilities. She moved a draft resolution in the UN Security Council on 3 December, which called for cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of forces, stationing of observers on Indo-Pak borders, an affirmative response to Secretary General's offer of good offices and efforts to create a climate conducive to voluntary return of refugees. A veto from Soviet Union killed the resolution.

Soviet Union, due to her own calculations, supported India. She asked other powers to stay clear of the conflict, moved her own draft resolution in UNO appreciating Indian stand on the crisis. It stressed that cessation of hostilities in the subcontinent should unfailingly coincide with "conclusion of a political settlement in accordance with the wishes of the people of East Pakistan as declared through their already elected representatives."<sup>71</sup> A third draft resolution was put

forward on 7 December by a number of countries which called for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of troops coupled with efforts to "bring about speedily and in accordance with the Charter, conditions necessary for voluntary return of refugees."<sup>72</sup> A negative vote of USSR defeated this measure also.

China, an emerging power, desired expansion of her area of influence in South Asia. In terms of long-standing Sino-Indian rivalry, China could not be expected to support India. She also could not tolerate building up of India as strong nation; therefore, she invested in Pakistan. Though China could not very much back Pakistan financially or militarily, but new-found Sino-America friendship lent a moral support. During November, a high-powered delegation led by ZA Bhutto was sent to China by Yahya Khan to seek Chinese favor. China readily extended her support. When Indian armed forces intensified their strength in the East, Chou-En-Lai, Chinese Premier expressed, "concern over military provocations carried out by India alone the East Pakistan border in few days."<sup>73</sup> On 5 December 1971, China, who had just been admitted to Security Council, moved her own resolution. She condemned India for subverting, dismembering and committing aggression against Pakistan to "cease hostilities and to withdraw respectively from the international border between India and Pakistan."<sup>74</sup>

In the meantime, Justice Abu Sayed Choudhury, leader of unofficial delegation, was sent by provisional government of Bangladesh to UNO. It was pointed out by India that since the matter concerned the people of Bangladesh directly, the leader of Bangladesh must be given chance to put forward his opinion. However, adverse Chinese decision in this matter prevented the hearing. On 12 December, George Bush from USA put forward another draft resolution in the UNO which called upon India to accept the resolution adopted by General Assembly on 7 December which had called for immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of troops, intensified efforts to create conditions for voluntary return of refugees and a political solution to realize this objective. Seeing an imminent victory, India opposed it. Soviet Union vetoed this resolution also. Samar Sen, India's representative in a letter to U Thant argued,

Where a mother state has irrevocably lost allegiance of such a large section of its people as represented by Bangladesh and cannot bring them under its sway, conditions for the separate existence of such a state come into being. It is India's assessment that this is precisely what has happened in Bangladesh.<sup>75</sup>

Then, perhaps, as a climax, US sailed Seventh Fleet with nuclear powered 'USS Enterprise' into the Bay of Bengal. It sailed towards the Bay of Bengal on the pretext of evacuating US officers although, presumably, it was a lame excuse because a UN spokesman confirmed that all the foreigners who wanted to leave Bangladesh had already been evacuated.<sup>76</sup> There were only 17 Americans in Bangladesh when the Seventh Fleet was sailed in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>77</sup> It remained in the Bay of Bengal from 12 to 20 December. The presence of the Seventh Fleet in the Bay of Bengal raised the hopes of the Pakistani forces during the period from December 10 to 15 as they hoped for an eleventh hour assistance from the USA. On the other hand, deployment of Seventh Fleet raised a serious question on India's own security. India then needed to divert its warplanes and ships towards the new threats posed by the US fleet which were positioned against Pakistan till then. In case of US participation in the war, India was exposed to nuclear destruction.

India then communicated with the Soviet Union after being alarmed by the presence of the US Seventh Fleet. Soviet Union promptly responded to the call of India by sending 20 Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean. The immediate backing rendered by the Soviet Union acted as an efficient impediment to the US attempts. The super powers' direct involvement into the war and looming nuclear threat to India was averted because the Pakistani forces did not receive the expected assistance from the US on time and had to surrender prior to the US fleet's participation in war.

Before developing into a war of super powers the feud came to an end. It was USA's belief that sending of Seventh Fleet as a threat to India only could prevent prolonging of war and attack against West Pakistan.<sup>78</sup> Pakistan surrendered unconditionally after 14 days of fighting. The instrument of surrender was signed in Dhaka on 16 December by Lt. General AAK Niazi on behalf of Pakistan Western

Command. Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora, GOC-in-Command of Indian and Bangladesh forces in Eastern sector accepted the surrender. Mrs. Gandhi declared,

Dhaka is now a free capital of a free country... We hail the people of Bangladesh in their hour of triumph. All nations who value the human spirit will recognize it as a significant milestone in man's quest for liberty.<sup>79</sup>

Although the Pakistani forces surrendered in Bangladesh on 16 December, the fighting was still going on near the borders of Punjab, Sind and Jammu and Kashmir in the western sector. The Indian Prime Minister offered unilateral ceasefire which was accepted by Pakistan on 17 December and thus the mutual ceasefire came into effect with the fall East Pakistan. China condemned Indian action as an inherent desire of India to break Pakistan, said Chou-En-Lai,

...the India aggressors and the social imperialist had better not rejoice too soon. The fall of Dhaka is definitely not a milestone towards victory for India but the starting point of endless strife on the Asian subcontinent and of their defeat.<sup>80</sup>

The emergence of Bangladesh was thus an expression of determination of the East Pakistanis to establish their identity. The strategic interests of India synchronized with this quest. The international melee presented a constellation of forces, which made it a reality. India's dominant role in birth of Bangladesh is obvious. Peter Lyon has said,

Bangladesh became an independent state in December 1971 mainly because India's armed forces decisively defeated Pakistani armed forces in east... and India was the first to recognise that independence.<sup>81</sup>

Indo-Bangladesh jointly gained victory in the war of Bangladesh independence against Pakistani forces was successful in its motive both in militarily and materially. Apart from help to Bangladesh nationalists, the victory gave India a moral boost to overcome the demoralization caused by the defeat of 1962 in the front of China. The war also enhanced India's image in the world politics as it emerged as a nation to defeat the emergent joint threat of US-Pak-China axis.

Immediate after the war, condition of law and order as well as the refugee crisis became the main challenges for a newly born state of Bangladesh. India took up the task along with the government of Bangladesh in a few weeks of liberation. The confidence of millions of refugees was gained and who now were confident of the peaceful conditions in the changing scenario prevailing in new born nation, and started returning back to their homeland.<sup>82</sup>

It will serve no good saying that India was guided only by humanitarian considerations for an oppressed community or for restoration of democratic rights to the people. Indian interests lay in having a friendly regime in the East. The continued Indo-Pak hostility also paved the way for India to become the patron of secessionist movement of East Pakistanis.<sup>83</sup> However, Indian action was not a calculated plan to rent Pakistan in India's inherent interests. It was a spontaneous reaction to developing scenario in regional and international sphere in which she exhausted political, diplomatic and finally military means. It will not be out of place to point out that India could achieve the most important, though unstated, goal of her foreign policy, the reduction of hostile Pakistan.<sup>84</sup> After the showdown the new born state of Bangladesh embarked on her external relations counting on India as the foremost friend. The new nation, Bangladesh was born out of Pakistan under the politico-military patronage of India. Without the all round help from India the Liberation War of Bangladesh would have been a prolonged one.

### 8.7 Liberation War of Bangladesh and Indira Gandhi

All history is made up of the actions of individuals, who are undoubtedly active figures. The political and personal role of the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 is inseparable from the country's history. Despite the many ups and downs in Bangladesh politics, Indira Gandhi, who extended unequivocal support to the people of former East Pakistan, has been cherished by its people. In the very begging of the Bangladesh Liberation War, the Indian Government clarified its position in the Parliament- "This house wishes to assure them that their struggle and sacrifices will receive the whole hearted sympathy and support of the people of India."<sup>85</sup> Indira Gandhi in a public gathering held on 15 May 1971 in Agartala declared that,

We must do our best to help our brothers and sisters who have crossed into India. But we have limited resources... The struggle of the people of Bangladesh would not go in vain. They would ultimately achieve independence and form a democratic government... India would welcome the formation of democratic government in East Bengal and would have friendly relations with it... people both in India and East Bengal would follow democratic way and guard themselves against the poison of communalism in the interest of their respective nations.<sup>86</sup>

As the regular Pakistani army launched a brutal crackdown in Dhaka, particularly on students, the Bengali police and paramilitary forces on 25 March 1971, without handing over power to Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the majority party, an unprecedented outburst of popular resistance shook Pakistan's integrity. It finally led to a full-scale war, in which India's support was crucial. On 26 March 1971, before being arrested by the Pakistan military, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, declared independence of East Pakistan and asked his people to continue the fight 'till the last Pakistani army' was driven away from Bangladesh.

President Yahya Khan and his military commanders committed atrocities on unarmed civilians, killing them in thousands. Bengali women were raped indiscriminately and their houses set on fire to crush the rebellion, which was termed an "Indian-inspired" conspiracy. The unprecedented atrocities led to a mass exodus to India, where an estimated 10 million people took refuge for nine months. India, under Indira Gandhi, opened its eastern borders allowing streams of refugees to take shelter. When the elected representatives of people formed a government in exile, with imprisoned Mujib becoming the President and Tajuddin Ahmed Prime Minister, India helped settle the provisional government and finally got involved in the war - first indirectly but later directly, when Pakistan opened another front in India's western region.

Supported by the then Socialist bloc, led by the Soviet Union, Indira Gandhi, despite being the lone voice against the mighty U.S., travelled across the world to mobilize support for the beleaguered people of Bangladesh. Indira Gandhi marked the Liberation War of Bangladesh as a just, democratic and a 'Peoples War' (*Janajudda*). In an interview with *Newsweek* Indira argued,

... the majority of people of the guerrillas are the para-military force of East Pakistan... and they are the ones who are training new people ... the Pakistani Army will have to kill all the 75 million people in East Bengal before they can have control over them... And I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that if I were placed in a situation like Bangalis, I certainly would fight.<sup>87</sup>

Indira Gandhi's grand strategies in constructing the world opinion in favor of Bangladesh Liberation War, sheltering and nurturing millions of Bangladeshi refugees in Indian territory, taking essential initiatives to release Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from Pakistani jail, recognizing Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign state, organizing training for the Bangladeshi freedom fighters etc. were very much crucial for the final victory of the Eastern Pakistanis against their counterpart. Indira Gandhi happily recognized Bangladesh as an independent nation on 6 December 1971 and titled Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the 'Father of Bangladeshi Nation'. The Indian Prime Minister in her *Rajya Sabha* speech declared,

I am glad to inform the House that in light of the existing situation and in response to the repeated requests of the Government of Bangladesh, the Government of India have after the most careful consideration, decided to grant recognition to the GANA PRAJATANTRI BANGLADESH. It is our hope that with the passage of time more nations will grant recognition and that the GANA PRAJATANTRI BANGLADESH will soon form part of the family of the nations. Our thoughts at this moment are with the father of this new State- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I am sure that this House would wish me to convey to their Excellencies the Acting President of Bangla Desh and the Prime Minister and to their colleagues our greetings and warm felicitations.<sup>88</sup>

Under Indira Gandhi's able leadership, India provided shelter, food and medicines to about 10 million people who fled their homes to the neighboring West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam, to escape the marauding Pakistani army and its hoodlums. Despite an adverse international atmosphere, the United States supported Pakistan whereas India extended full support to the Bangladeshi freedom fighters- providing them arms and training facilities. And, finally, it sent its troops to fight against the Pakistani forces under a Joint

personnel were first met and then another 3 battalions were raised during the war. These regular infantry battalions were 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10 and 11 East Bengal Regiment. Of them 9, 10 and 11 East Bengal Regiments were the newly raised units. By mid May 1971, the Liberation Army was more or less pushed away from the towns and cities of Bangladesh. Though the major portion of the Mukti Bahini concentrated throughout the country side and also along the borders, small groups of determined freedom fighters still remained in the interior of Bangladesh and resisted the occupation army.

Mukti Bahini at this stage lacked appropriate organization and coordination. The provisional Government of Sovereign Bangladesh which was officially formed on 17 April 1971 at Mujibnagar, decided to coordinate all activities of the Mukti Bahini. This responsibility was vested upon Colonel (Col) MAG Osmany, the Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Forces. Colonel Osmany immediately decided to bring under his control all elements of the Mukti Bahini. As mentioned earlier, the entire Bangladesh was strategically divided into 11 sectors with a sector commander for each of them. For better efficiency in military operations each of the sectors was divided into a number of sub-sectors under a commander. Every sector was given an operational responsibility.

### Sector 1

Sector-One was composed of the districts of Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the entire eastern area of the Noakhali district on the banks of the river Muhuri in the Belonia Bulge. The headquarters of the sector was at Harina. The sector commander was Major Ziaur Rahman, later replaced by Major Rafiqul Islam. The five sub-sectors of this sector (and their commanders) were: Rishimukh (Captain Shamsul Islam); Sreenagar (Captain Matiur Rahman, later replaced by Captain Mahfuzur Rahman); Manughat (Captain Mahfuzur Rahman); Tabalchhari (Subedar Ali Hossain); and Dimgiri (a subedar). A contingent of nearly ten thousand freedom fighters fought in this sector. They included about two thousand regular troops which comprised of 1400 EPR personnel, 200 policemen, 300 army personnel and 100 men from the navy and air force, and about eight thousand paramilitary troops. The guerilla fighters of this sector were deputed to operate inside the country in 137 groups.

### Sector 2

Sector-Two was composed of the districts of Dhaka, Comilla, and Faridpur, and part of Noakhali district. This sector was raised from the nucleus of 4 East Bengal and the EPR troops of Comilla and Noakhali. The sector was located at Melaghar about 20 miles south of Agartala. The sector commander was Major Khaled Mosharraf, later replaced by Major ATM Haider. About thirty five thousand guerilla fighters fought in this sector. Nearly six thousand of them were members of regular armed forces. The six sub-sectors of this sector (and their commanders) were: Gangasagar, Akhaura and Kasba (Mahbub, later replaced by Lieutenant Farooq, and Lieutenant Humayun Kabir); Mandabhav (Captain Gaffar); Shaldanadi (Abdus Saleq Chowdhury); Matinagar (Lieutenant Didarul Alam); Nirbhoypur (Captain Akbar, later replaced by Lieutenant Mahbub); and Rajnagar (Captain Jafar Imam, later replaced by Captain Shahid, and Lieutenant Imamuzzaman). Due to the operations of this sector the Dhaka-Chittagong highway in between Comilla and Feni was denied to the Pakistanis throughout the nine months of war of liberation. One of the most successful operations of this sector was the defence of the Belonia Bulge. The entries Belonia Bulge was kept liberated by the combined forces of 1 and 2 sectors till 21 June. In this sector, a number of regular companies operated deep inside Bangladesh. These were the Noakhali Company under subeder Lutfar Rahman operating around Begumganj, the Chandpur Company under subeder Zahirul Alam Khan operating in Chandpur Matlab area, a large force under Captain Abdul Halim Chowdhury operating in Manikganj-Munshiganj area in Dhaka and a force under Captain Shawkat at Faridpur. The urban guerrillas carried out a number of successful operations in Dhaka city itself.

### Sector 3

Sector-Three was composed of the area between Churaman Kathi (near Sreemangal) and Sylhet in the north and Singerbil of Brahmanbaria in the south. The sector commander was Major KM Shafiullah, later replaced by Major ANM Nuruzzaman. This sector was formed by some of the troops of 2 East Bengal and the

EPR troops of Sylhet and Mymensingh. The sector headquarters was at Hejamara. Nineteen guerilla bases operated in this sector. By November 1971, the number of the guerilla fighters in the sector stood at nearly thirty thousand. They blew up a number of bridges on Comilla-Sylhet road which cut off Pakistan army's lines of communication. One of their most successful operations was the blowing up of a train by anti-tank mine near Shayestaganj. The ten sub-sectors of this sector (and their commanders) were: Asrambari (Captain Aziz, later replaced by Captain Ejaz); Baghaibari (Captain Aziz, later replaced by Captain Ejaz); Hatkata (Captain Matiur Rahman); Simla (Captain Matin); Panchabati (Captain Nasim); Mantala (Captain MSA Bhuyan); Vijoynagar (Captain MSA Bhuyan); Kalachhara (Lieutenant Majumdar); Kalkalia (Lieutenant Golam Helal Morshed); and Bamutia (Lieutenant Sayeed).

#### **Sector 4**

Sector-Four was composed of the area from Habiganj sub-division of Sylhet district on the north to Kanaighat thana on the south along the 100 mile long border with India. The sector was organised from amongst the EPR troops of Sylhet and student freedom fighters. The sector commander was Major Chittarajan Datta, later replaced by Captain A Rab. The headquarters of the sector was initially at Karimganj and later at Masimpur in Assam. The freedom fighters in this sector included about nine thousand guerilla fighters and about four thousand regular members of the armed forces. The six sub-sectors of this sector (and their commanders) were: Jalalpur (Masudur Rab Sadi); Barapunji (Captain A Rab); Amlasid (Lieutenant Zahir); Kukital (Flight Lieutenant Kader, later replaced by Captain Shariful Haq); Kailas Shahar (Lieutenant Wakiuzzaman); and Kamalpur (Captain Enam).

#### **Sector 5**

Sector-Five composed of the area from Durgapur to Dauki (Tamabil) of Sylhet district and the entire area upto the eastern borders of the district. Sector commander was Major Mir Shawkat Ali. The headquarters of the sector was at Banshtala. The sector was composed of 800 regulars and 5000 guerillas. The sector covered

most of the marshy areas of Sunamganj and Chhatak. The six sub-sectors of this sector (and their commanders) were: Muktapur (Subedar Nazir Hossain, freedom fighter Faruq was second in command); Dauki (Subedar Major BR Chowdhury); Shela (Captain Helal, who had two assistant commanders, Lieutenant Mahbubar Rahman and Lieutenant Abdur Rauf); Bholaganj (Lieutenant Taheruddin Akhunji who had Lieutenant SM Khaled as assistant commander); Balat (Subedar Ghani, later replaced by Captain Salahuddin and Enamul Haq Chowdhury); and Barachhara (Captain Muslim Uddin). Troops of this sector blew up a number of bridges on Sylhet, Tamabil and Sylhet-Sunamgonj roads. The most successful operation of this sector was the raid on Chhatak.

### Sector 6

Sector-Six composed of entire Rangpur district and Thakurgaon subdivision of Dinajpur district. The sector was formed mostly from EPR troops of Rangpur and Dinajpur. Wing Commander M Khdemul Bashar was the sector commander. The headquarters of the sector was at Burimari near Patgram, and this was the only sector which had its headquarters inside Bangladesh territory. The number of soldiers in this sector was 700, which rose to about eleven thousand in December consisting of 2000 regular force and 9000 Gana Bahini. The five sub-sectors of the sector (and their commanders) were: Bhajanpur (Captain Nazrul, later replaced by Squadron leader Sadruddin and Captain Shahriyar); Patgram (initially, some junior commissioned officers of the EPR, and later Captain MatiurRahman); Sahebganj (Captain Nawazesh Uddin); Mogalhat (Captain Delwar); and Chilahati (Flight Lieutenant Iqbal). The northern areas of Rangpur district were held by the troops of this sector. The guerillas of this sector established 35 bases all over Rangpur and Dinajpur.

### Sector 7

Sector-Seven was composed of the districts of Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra and southern part of Dinajpur district. This sector was organised from the EPR troops who had given the initial battles at Rajshahi under Captain Ghiyas and Captain Rashid. The sector commander was Major Nazmul Haq, later replaced by Subedar Major A Rab and Major Kazi

Nuruzzaman. The headquarters of the sector was at Tarangapur near Balurghat. About 2500 regulars and 12500 guerillas fought in this sector. The eight sub-sectors of the sector (and their commanders were): Malan (initially some junior commanding officers, and later Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir); Tapan (Major Nazmul Haq, later replaced by some junior commanding officers of the EPR); Mehdipur (Subedar Iliyas, later replaced by Captain Mahiuddin Jahangir); Hamzapur (Captain Idris); Anginabad (a freedom fighter); Sheikhpura (Captain Rashid); Thokrabari (Subedar Muazzam); and Lalgola (Captain Gheyasuddin Chowdhury). The troops of this sector raided Maheskanda and Paragpur in June and the Mohanpur police station in August inflicting heavy casualties to the enemy. Captain Idris, commander of the Hamzapur sub-sector, ambushed several Pakistani columns and blew up a train near Parbatipur.

### **Sector 8**

Sector-Eight was composed of the operational area of the sector comprised the districts of Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna, Barisal, Faridpur and Patuakhali in April 1971. At the end of May the sector was reconstituted and comprised the districts of Kusthia, Jessore and Khulna, Satkhira sub-division, and the northern part of Faridpur district. The sector commander was Major Abu Osman Chowdhury, later replaced by Major MA Manzur. The headquarters of the sector was at Kalyani. The sector had 3000 regulars and 25,000 guerillas. The regular forces held a number of liberated areas while the guerillas established several bases deep inside Bangladesh. In this sector a new tactics was followed. Regular troops were made to infiltrate 7 of 8 miles inside Bangladesh and take up all-round defence around a tactical feature, thereby inviting the Pakistan army to attack on them. By doing so, they inflicted heavy casualties to the attacking enemy. The seven sub-sectors of the sector (and their commanders) were: Boyra (Captain Khondakar Nazmul Huda); Hakimpur (Captain Shafiq Ullah); Bhomra (Captain Salahuddin, later replaced by Captain Shahabuddin); Lalbazar (Captain AR Azam Chowdhury); Banpur (Captain Mostafizur Rahman); Benapole (Captain Abdul Halim, later replaced by Captain Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury); and Shikarpur (Captain Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, later replaced by Lieutenant Jahangir).

**Sector 9**

Sector-Nine was composed of the districts of Barisal and Patuakhali, and southern part of Khulna and part of Faridpur district. The headquarters of the sector was established at Taki near Bashirhat. The sector commander was Major M Jalil, later replaced by Major MA Manzur and Major Joynal Abedin. The sector had about 20,000 freedom fighters. The three sub-sectors of the sector were: Taki, Hingalganj, and Shamshernagar. In this sector even regular troops operated deep inside Bangladesh. Captain Shahjahan Omar led a large group of guerillas in Barisal. Captain Mehdi Ali Imam operated in Patuakhali from an established base. Lt Zia organised a huge force in Sundarbans. Captain Huda commanded the bulk of the regular troops near the border. He captured Uksa border outpost in June and kept it liberated throughout. The troops of this sector also raided Debhata Shyamnagar police stations. The water channels of Barisal-Patuakhali area mostly dominated by river patrolling. Prior to the final offensive in December this sector was merged with sector 8 and placed under the command of Major Manzoor.

**Sector 10**

This sector did not have any territorial boundary. It comprised of the Naval Commandos only. These naval commands, specially trained, were sent to different sectors for carrying out commando operations against the enemy's naval vessels and crafts in groups. During the operations, these groups would come under control of the Sector Commander in whose area the naval operations were to be conducted. After successful completion of naval operations, they would fall back to their original sector, i.e., Number 10 Sector. Bangali officers of Pakistan Navy trained in France were the pioneers in forming this force. These officers were Ghazi Mohammad Rahmatullah (Chief Petty Officer), Syed Mosharraf Hossain (Petty Officer), Amin Ullah Sheikh (Petty Officer); Ahsan Ullah (M E-1), AW Chowdhury (RO-1), Badiul Alam (ME-1), AR Miah (EN-1), Abedur Rahman (Steward-1). These eight officers were given special training on the river Jamuna near Delhi under the auspices of the Indian Navy. They were joined by a number of sailors who had defected from Pakistan Navy. A group of 150 student volunteers

were selected from various sectors who were known to be good swimmers and sent to this camp for training. They were trained in fragmenting ship and use of limpet mines for destruction of ships and vessels. On completion of training in the first week of August, four groups were sent to the ports of Chittagong, Narayanganj, Daudkandi and Mongla for destruction and sabotaging of coastal vessels anchored there. On the day of independence of Pakistan, all the four groups struck simultaneously and destroyed a good number of ships and other vessels. The Chittagong group led by AW Choudhury destroyed seven ships including the Pakistani cargo ships MV Ohrmazd and MV Al-Abbas which were carrying huge tonnages of military cargo. Later in October and November, a few more similar operations were carried out successfully and a good number of sea-going and coastal vessels were sunk in the ports all over Bangladesh. The force was later commanded by Indian commander MN Sumanta.

### Sector 11

Sector-Eleven was composed of the districts of Tangail and Mymensingh excluding Kishoreganj sub-division. Major M Abu Taher was the sector commander. After Major Taher was seriously wounded in a battle, he was replaced by Squadron Leader Hamidullah. The headquarters of the sector was at Mahendraganj. About twenty five thousand freedom fighters fought in this sector. The eight sub-sectors of the sector (and their commanders) were: Mainkarchar (Squadron Leader Hamidullah); Mahendraganj (Lieutenant Mizan); Purakhsia (Lieutenant Hashim); Dhalu (Lieutenant Taher Ahmed, later replaced by Lieutenant Kamal); Rangra (Matiur Rahman); Shivabari (some junior commanding officers of the EPR); Bagmara (some junior commanding officers of the EPR); and Maheshkhola (a member of the EPR). Guerilla activities were predominant in this sector, and regular forces held liberated areas near the border. Subedar Aftab held a huge chunk of liberated territory at Rahumani throughout the nine months of the war. In this sector, even women took up arms to fight the Pakistanis. Besides, Quader Siddiqi, a renowned free lance freedom fighter from Tangail, organized 16,000 guerillas in his district and carried out a number of successful operations against the Pakistan army quite independently.

**Table 11: Sector Commanders**

Sectors	Commanders
1	Major Ziaur Rahman (April – June) Major Rafiqul Islam (June – December)
2	Major Khaled Mosharraf (April – September) Major ATM Haider (September – December)
3	Major K. M. Shafiullah (April – September) Captain A. N. M. Nuruzzaman (September – December)
4	Major Chitta Ranjan Dutta, Later replaced by Captain A Rob
5	Major Mir Shawkat Ali
6	Wing Commander M Khademul Bashar
7	Major Nazmul Huq (April – September) Major Quazi Nooruzzaman (September – December)
8	Major Abu Osman Chowdhury (April – August) Major Abul Manzoor (August – December)
9	Major M. A. Jalil (July – December) Major MA Manzur & Major Joynal Abedin
10	Commander HQ BD Forces
11	Major Abu Taher (Till 3 December) Flight Lt. M. Hamidullah Khan (3 December – 16 December)

Source: Abu Md. Delwar Hossain, *Bangladeshher Itihas*, 1905-1971, Dhaka, 2008, p. 433.

#### 4.5 Guerilla Warfare and Mukti Bahini (Liberation Force)

“The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.” (Mao Tse-tung, *A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire*)

“...used by the side which is supported by a majority but which possesses a much smaller number of arms for use in defense against oppression.” (Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*)

Guerrilla warfare is a form of irregular warfare in which a small group of combatants, such as paramilitary personnel, armed civilians, or irregulars, use military tactics including ambushes, sabotage, raids,