

MUJIB

THE VOICE OF FREEDOM



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British-Indian Empire 1947

PAKISTAN

Radcliffe
Partiton
Lines 1947Burma separated
from British India
1937BURMA
MyanmarEAST
PAKISTAN
BangladeshLEADER
GROWS UP

A young Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, fondly known as Mujib, hailing from a village named Tungipara under Gopalganj (formerly under Faridpur district) in undivided Bengal, stormed into the tumultuous political theatre of pre-partition Bengal during early 1940s. Keen interest in politics was evident from the early years of his life. Mujib expressed a strong antagonism to the colonial rule by the British Empire. Prior to the emergence of Pakistan in 1947, as a student, he joined Muslim League. He belonged to a faction of the party which was known as the “progressive group.”

From the very beginning, as a good orator and organizer, Mujib could attract people easily. During the early years of Pakistan, a state consisting of two wings – the East and West Pakistan, young Mujib participated in several anti-government movements which earned him the reputation of a “firebrand student politician.”

Mujib worked very closely with veteran politician Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy whom Mujib regarded as political mentor. When Awami Muslim League was formed in 1949, Mujib, a proactive student leader at that time, was given the post of a joint secretary of the party.



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a consultation with party coworkers.

Rise to leadership

Mujib soon garnered mass support, developed his own credentials as a leader to be trusted by his party members as well as the mass. In 1953, he was elevated to the post of general secretary of the party. During this period, he was evolving as an advocate of democratic politics.

Mujib helped organize the Awami Muslim League and briefly served as a provincial minister twice in the 1954 and 1956 governments. As a minister in the provincial cabinet, he was never particularly happy. In 1957, he decided to resign as a minister to work full-time for the party. He started advocating for adjustment in economic and political relations between the two provinces of Pakistan through constitutional means. He spent more than ten of the twenty-three years of united Pakistan in prison because of his restless campaign against West Pakistan's exploitation of the East.

SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

MILESTONES IN EARLY POLITICAL CAREER

1949

East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was established and Mujib was elected as one of the joint secretaries.

1953

Mujib was elected the general secretary of Awami Muslim League.

1954

Mujib joined the Jukto Front Government (a coalition of some progressive political parties) and was given the responsibility of the ministries of agriculture and forest.

1955

In the council session of the party, Awami League, at the insistence of Mujib, dropped the word 'Muslim' from its name to become a secular platform truly representing all Bangalis.

Mujib again became the general secretary of the party.

1956

Mujib joined a coalition government as the minister of industry, commerce, labor, anti-corruption and village aid but resigned in 1957 to work full-time for his party.

1966

Mujib became the president of Awami League.



The advent of the military rule of Field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1958 marked the starting of an era of extreme unrest in Pakistan. For a decade, Ayub ruled Pakistan in dictatorial manner. He had shown total disregard for the Eastern province and its inhabitants – the Bangalis and the rights they deserved being the majority of Pakistan. He put a ban on political activity for some years.

Mujib became a particular target of the dictator's wrath as he was vocal against the absence of democracy and political rights of the people of Pakistan. During the first half of the military rule, Mujib was arrested several times under the facade of seditious charges brought against him by the regime. But there were short periods in between when he used his freedom to organize his party activists and leaders of all ranks. In March 1, 1966, he became the president of Awami League - the political party that emerged during 1955 by dropping the word 'Muslim' from its early name.

Throughout his life, Mujib believed in democracy and was vocal about people's emancipation from exploitation and oppression. He also believed in peaceful non-violent movement. From 1947 to 1970, Bangali nationalist movement, under Mujib's leadership, became stronger day-by-day. He stayed within the bounds of democratic principles. He believed in coexistence and mutual tolerance of different groups and equal rights of all citizens.





As a man, what concerns mankind concerns me. As a Bangali, I am deeply involved in all that concerns Bangalis. This abiding involvement is born of and nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to my politics and to my very being.



SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

May 30, 1973 (page of a personal notebook)





VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

Following the partition of 1947, Pakistan inherited a federal structure of governance under which matters such as foreign affairs, defence and commerce were controlled by the central government whilst matters like education and health were concerns of the provincial governments. The Central Government of Pakistan was set up in West Pakistan. The center was dominated by the elite class of the West Pakistan who controlled the bureaucratic machinery and the armed forces. The Bangalis, mainly concentrated in East Pakistan remained vastly under-represented at the center.

Immediately after the birth of Pakistan, the West-Center tried to weaken its majority citizens – the Bangalis, through exclusionary policies. They were told that Urdu, a language spoken only by the political elites and some people of West Pakistan, would become the sole national language of entire Pakistan. A mass movement began almost immediately (1948 onwards) to introduce Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan. Mujib was one of the leading organizers of the movement. Mujib, who was proud of his Bangali identity, played significant role in all the progressive movements for linguistic, cultural, and economic rights of the Bangalis.

Two economies in one state due to discriminatory policies

Early in 1948, the Central Government of Pakistan, by a special ordinance, took away from the provinces the sales tax, income tax and a bigger share of import and export duties. Consequently, the Government of East Pakistan was forced to rely on land revenue and agricultural tax to finance education, health and various administrative expenses. This resulted in sheer inequality in regional income. The West Pakistan's larger urban population was the beneficiary of industrialization. The East Pakistan's agrarian economy suffered due to unfavorable policies of the Center.

Economic subjugation of East Pakistan, was one of the factors that led to the dissatisfaction of Bangalis. Discriminatory allocation of government budgets across provinces, led to big disparities in the development of infrastructure facilities which, in turn, resulted in marked disparities in economic status. The Center exercised economic hegemony over East Pakistan through control over provincial revenues.

Similarly, Bangalis were neglected in government jobs as well. Head offices of most of the government agencies and private companies were in the West and job advertisements were rarely published in East Pakistan newspapers.

Advent of military rule in Pakistan

The army chief General Ayub Khan took over power in 1958. Ayub governed in the most authoritarian fashion for a decade. Under the Elective Bodies Disqualification Ordinance (EBDO), he put all the well-known political figures out of equation. Young Mujib became one of the prime targets of Ayub's assault. Later, the military ruler introduced a preposterous electoral system called "Basic Democracy" with eighty-thousand "Basic Democrats", forty-thousand from each province of the country, empowered to

elect members of the national and provincial assemblies and the president of the country. In other words, in the absence of democracy, political decision-making remained non-representative, largely reflecting the interest of the ruling elites.

Call for autonomy

On February 5, 1966 in Lahore, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as the general secretary of the Awami League (AL), revealed a formula for regional autonomy for the federating provinces of Pakistan. The formula later was to be credited as the "charter of freedom" in the struggle for self-determination of Bangalis from the West Pakistan's domination.



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman presenting the Six-point formula.
February 5, 1966, Lahore

The Six-point envisaged a form of federal government, a parliamentary system directly elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise, two separate currencies or two reserve banks for the two provinces of Pakistan, and a paramilitary force for East Pakistan.

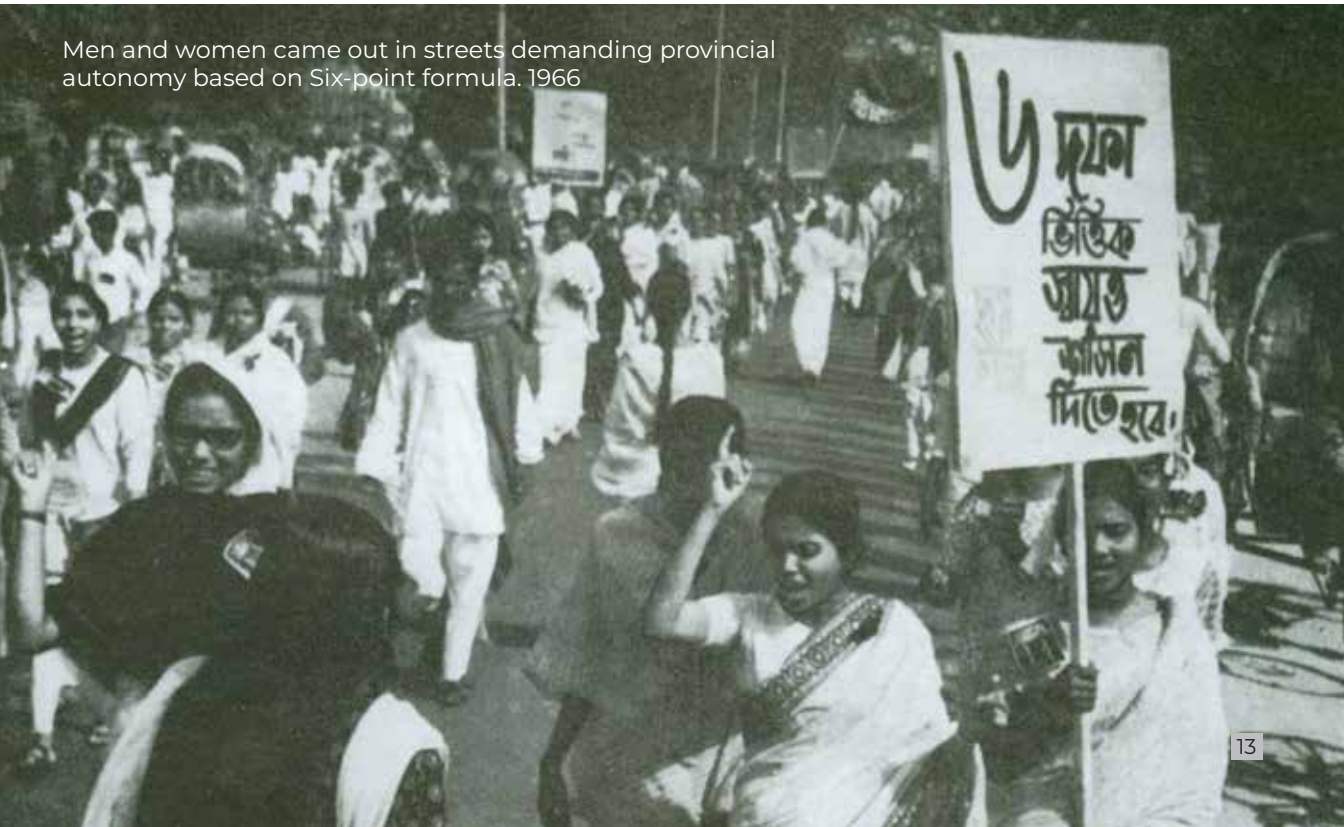
The Six-point, which Awami League formally adopted on 18 March 1966, were the following:

- Pakistan will be a federation in the true sense on the basis of the Lahore Resolution of March 1940, with the form of government being parliamentary in nature and elected through universal adult franchise.
- The federal government shall deal with only two subjects, namely, foreign affairs and defence, with all other subjects to be handled by the federating units.
- Two separate but freely convertible currencies for the two wings of Pakistan shall be introduced or a single currency may be used, with guarantees that there will be no flight of capital from East to West Pakistan, the guarantees being in the form of a separate reserve bank to be set up for East Pakistan.
- Powers of taxation and revenue collection shall vest in the federating units, with the federal government to be provided with its share of taxes through levies of a certain percentage from all state taxes.
- There shall be two separate accounts for foreign exchange earnings for the two wings.
- A separate paramilitary force shall be set up for East Pakistan.

Within weeks, the Six-point program took the center stage in the national politics of Pakistan. Between March and early May 1966, Mujib and his colleagues campaigned extensively throughout East Pakistan to draw support for the program. The formula generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the people of the East Pakistan. President Ayub labelled the Six-point as a scheme for secession and declared that he would respond “with the language of weapons.”

The elites in power were keen to suppress Bangalis' quest for provincial autonomy through the use of repressive methods and devices. Obviously, Mujib became the main target of various forms of harassment and intimidation. The military dictator launched a vile propaganda campaign against him. While touring various districts in April 1966, he was repeatedly arrested on false charges. On May 8 of that year, Mujib was detained under the Defence Rules of Pakistan. Most of his colleagues were carted off to prison as well. The Awami League called a general strike on June 7, 1966 in East Pakistan to generate support for the Six-point and for the release of its detained leaders. With Six-point, the popularity of Mujib rose to a new height among the Bangalis.

Men and women came out in streets demanding provincial autonomy based on Six-point formula. 1966



A conspiracy case and its fallout

President Ayub and his associates were hell bent to ruin Mujib's political career and also in the way quell the agitation during the aftermath of the Six-point. They fabricated a story of 'Agartala Conspiracy' to implicate him in a case. Mujib was made the main accused of the case opened in 1968 with 34 others implicated.

The charge-sheet in the Agartala Conspiracy Case reads:

Some Bangali members of the armed forces formed a revolutionary organization, and that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had assured all kinds of help for an armed revolution. These armed officers planned to overwhelm the small contingents of West Pakistani troops, seize power and announce independence. For this, they raised money to buy arms from India. A three-member team of the plotters later went to Agartala (capital of the state Tripura in India) to finalize the arms deal.

The court was set up inside a military cantonment. In the course of the trial, the court heard the witnesses of the case which often turned into farcical shows. Meanwhile, expatriate Bangalis in the United Kingdom (UK) got together to organize Mujib's defence. In the end, it was Sir Thomas Williams QC (an eminent law practitioner in the UK) who was persuaded to defend the Bangali leader.

The people of East Pakistan perceived it as a conspiracy against the Bangalis to suppress their legitimate demand for self-rule and economic rights. Dhaka, the provincial headquarter of East Pakistan, turned into a city of processions and rallies. The city reverberated with anti-government slogans as protesters marched day and night. East Pakistan had never seen anything like that before. It was clear to them that Mujib was implicated because of his Six-point demand to end exploitation of Bangalis by the ruling elites of West Pakistan.



Agartala Conspiracy Case: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman being taken to the tribunal. January 1969



Mass uprising of 1969

Political agitation against Ayub Khan intensified to boiling point during 1969. As the Agartala case trial wore on, increasing numbers of social and political groups began to demand Mujib's acquittal.

In 1969, student wings of East Pakistan based political parties jointly formed 'Central Students Action Council' and declared an 'Eleven-point charter' of demand. The Eleven-point incorporated the Six-point of Mujib. Other leading politicians in East Pakistan demanded that Mujib be freed and the case against him be lifted. The youth, notably the students, banded together with the Eleven-point demand. The movement reached its climax after a shooting incidence on the protesting students. In the cantonment itself, one of the accused in the Agartala Conspiracy Case was killed by soldiers on the pretext that he had tried to escape from custody. In Rajshahi, a western city in East Pakistan, an academic was also shot to death.

Unable to contain the situation, the Pakistani authorities called for a roundtable conference and invited all political parties to discuss the situation. The united opposition parties, informed the government that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman needed to be allowed

to take part in the conference. The government proposed to free Mujib on parole, which he rejected right away. Finally, on February 22, 1969, the case was withdrawn and Mujib was released from prison. On March 24, 1969, in the face of mounting public unrest and agitation throughout Pakistan and particularly in the East wing, dictator Ayub decided to step aside. Yahya Khan, another General, took over from him.

On February 23, 1969, the people of East Pakistan bestowed the title – ‘Bangabandhu’ (the friend of Bangalis) on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at a grand public gathering at Racecourse ground (now Suhrawardy Udyan) in Dhaka.

During the eventful decade of 1960s, Mujib was pivotal in uniting the Bangalis against the ruling class concentrated in West Pakistan. It was Mujib who, in December 1969, proclaimed that henceforth his land (East Pakistan) would be known as "Bangladesh." The mass upsurge of 1969, spearheaded by Mujib, set in motion the preparation for an armed struggle for independence. He became the undisputed leader.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a train rally during a election campaign. 1970





Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with some journalists after a discussion with president Yahya Khan. March, 1971



CALL FOR INDEPENDENCE

During March 1969, soon after takeover, military ruler Yahya Khan promised to guide Pakistan to democracy through elections. He assured that towards the end of 1970, general election would be held to elect a National Assembly and thereby reinstate democracy in the country. Mujib and his party took the decision to participate in the election. Mujib thought that he will be able to fulfill all the rightful demands of the Bangalis once his party gets the mandate. The mass people of East Pakistan also started counting on the upcoming election for realizing their desire for autonomy (as proposed in the Six-point) and greater political and economic rights.

On November 12, 1970, a deadly cyclone struck the coastal belt of East Pakistan. It took lives of around one million people. The ferocious waves that came from the ocean flattened everything in their way on land. Mujib and his party volunteers launched a massive relief program for the victims of the cyclone. On the other hand, the military government of Yahya was apathetic towards the suffering people. Their inaction was severely criticized both by local political leaders in the East and by the international media. The apathy of the rulers added to the fury of the Bangali's mass movement for autonomy.

Election of December 1970

The Awami League led by its chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emphasized on forging a national unity during the election campaign across East Pakistan. Since Mujib and his party represented the aspirations of all Bangalis, all his candidates enjoyed overwhelming support from Bangali voters. The voting was held under the supervision of the military regime.

IN THE ELECTIONS OF

1970

The Awami League won 167 seats, out of 313 in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

The Awami League also bagged 288 seats out of 300 in the Provincial Assembly in East Pakistan.

Mujib was mandated to form the new national government of Pakistan.

Mujib was empowered to frame a new constitution.

Mujib was empowered to implement the Six-point program.

Mujib was mandated to form the new provincial government of East Pakistan.



In the elections, the people of East Pakistan mandated Mujib and his party to form a new government and to frame a constitution that would recognize plural identities and due rights of the people of all the provinces.

The ruling elites in West Pakistan did not accept the election outcome. In total disregard of the majority's mandate, Yahya Khan, on March 1, 1971, decided to postpone the inaugural parliament session, which was scheduled to meet in Dhaka on March 3, 1971.

Non-cooperation movement, March 1971

Processions in protest of delaying the parliament session were brought out immediately all over East Pakistan. Offices were shut down, employees walked out. The Bangalis looked up to Mujib for a fitting response to the deceitful action of the regime. On the other hand, the Pakistani authorities imposed a curfew. The Bangalis violated the curfew, and many were gunned down without remorse. Mujib condemned the attack. Awami League called a countrywide general strike on 7 March. After the success of the general strike, Mujib demanded that the president immediately transfer power to his party. Meanwhile, protests continued amid army actions claiming several hundred lives in the next few days.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was leading the informal policy apparatus to run the economic and administrative affairs of East Pakistan.

The people of East Pakistan despite military action, staged protest throughout the province. The non-cooperation movement created a stalemate situation in the socio-political arena of East Pakistan. The entire provincial administration automatically came under the command of Mujib. His private residence at Dhanmondi neighborhood in Dhaka, in effect, became the center of command in the East Pakistan during March 1971.



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addresses the historic gathering at Dhaka's Racecourse ground. March 7, 1971



The speech for independence

On March 7, 1971, Mujib addressed a million people at Racecourse ground in Dhaka. He called on the Bangalis to wage a decisive struggle against the Pakistani rulers. He condemned the killing of hundreds of Bangalis, and in a thunderous voice, uttered the words which would be etched into the hearts and minds of every Bangali for years to come. The speech effectively road-mapped the independence of 'Bangladesh' triggering millions of freedom-seeking Bangalis to prepare for a people's war.



Turn every house into a fortress, resist the enemy with everything you have... Having mastered the lesson of sacrifice, we shall give more blood. We shall free the people of this land. Our struggle this time is a struggle for freedom, our struggle this time is a struggle for independence. Joy Bangla (long live the spirit of the Bangalis).

SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

March 7, 1971

A midnight massacre and the declaration of independence

Mujib was trying to persuade the Pakistani authorities to handover the power to Awami League, which secured the mandate of the majority citizens. Yahya Khan, provoked by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (the then chairman of Pakistan People's Party) and other army generals, persisted with the delusion that a show of force would bring the Bangali leader and his associates to their knees.

Meanwhile, the people of East Pakistan - the Bangalis-had already vested their full trust in Mujib to spearhead a struggle for total independence.

Mujib tried to settle matter through negotiations but to no avail. Yahya used the cover of negotiations to move troops into the East. He had already given order to his commanders to launch a brutal crackdown on the Bangalis on the night of March 25, 1971. A brutal army assault 'Operation Searchlight', in the late hours of March 25, killing thousands of innocent people, essentially marked the birth of a new nation called 'Bangladesh'

In response to the military assault, Mujib proclaimed independence of Bangladesh in the early hours of March 26, 1971. The declaration was transmitted through a clandestine radio station located in the port city of Chittagong (now Chattogram).

Mujib was arrested from his residence in that night and was taken to a West Pakistan jail. Bangalis would plunge into a full-fledged war against the Pakistan Army for the next nine-months.



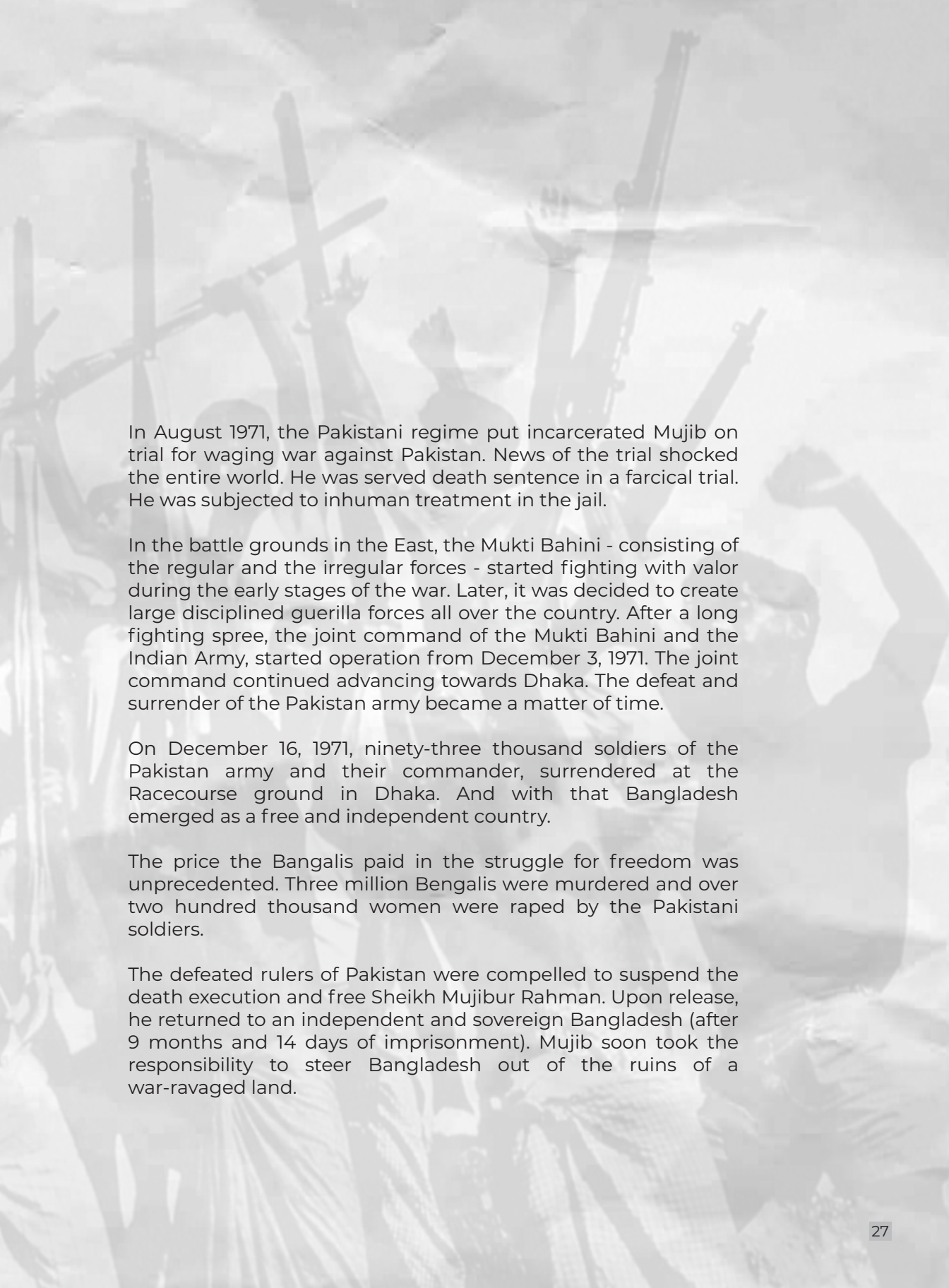
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested from his Dhanmondi residence at 1:30 am of, on March 26, 1971.

THE WALK TO FREEDOM

Bangalis irrespective of cast, creed and class took no time to retaliate the atrocities carried by the Pakistan army since the brutal night of March 25, 1971. The first resistance came from students, political activists and some Bangali members of police and border guards (known as East Pakistan Rifles) posted in Dhaka city. The army atrocities in that fateful night left the city of Dhaka to its ruins with dead bodies of civilians everywhere. The military ruler stunned everyone by terming the crackdown in East Pakistan as a measure to quash "some separatists" while Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was accused of treason.

Meanwhile, spontaneous uprising throughout the region followed the declaration of independence on March 26, 1971. For the next nine months, Mujib's unwavering courage spread through the ranks of the resistance groups consisting of political activists, students, workers, peasants, professionals and general mass. Albeit, he was not literally present in the midst of all the fire and bloodshed, it was his declaration and order which were being followed by all the resistance groups. Mujib in confinement became even a stronger presence and source of inspiration for the freedom fighters, who came to be known as "Mukti Bahini".

Mujib's associates and other Bangali politicians gradually joined forces with one another. By April 12, 1971 they had set up a governmental structure for Bangladesh in place. On April 17, a formal announcement was made of the formation of a government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. In the proclamation of independence, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was recognized as the in-absentia president of Bangladesh.



In August 1971, the Pakistani regime put incarcerated Mujib on trial for waging war against Pakistan. News of the trial shocked the entire world. He was served death sentence in a farcical trial. He was subjected to inhuman treatment in the jail.

In the battle grounds in the East, the Mukti Bahini - consisting of the regular and the irregular forces - started fighting with valor during the early stages of the war. Later, it was decided to create large disciplined guerilla forces all over the country. After a long fighting spree, the joint command of the Mukti Bahini and the Indian Army, started operation from December 3, 1971. The joint command continued advancing towards Dhaka. The defeat and surrender of the Pakistan army became a matter of time.

On December 16, 1971, ninety-three thousand soldiers of the Pakistan army and their commander, surrendered at the Racecourse ground in Dhaka. And with that Bangladesh emerged as a free and independent country.

The price the Bangalis paid in the struggle for freedom was unprecedented. Three million Bengalis were murdered and over two hundred thousand women were raped by the Pakistani soldiers.

The defeated rulers of Pakistan were compelled to suspend the death execution and free Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Upon release, he returned to an independent and sovereign Bangladesh (after 9 months and 14 days of imprisonment). Mujib soon took the responsibility to steer Bangladesh out of the ruins of a war-ravaged land.



MUJIB: THE VOICE OF FREEDOM
July 2020

Celebrating the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
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