

তারিখ MAR. 27 2000
পঞ্জি পঞ্জি কলাম

Our Liberation War In Retrospect

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THE independence of Bangladesh was not achieved merely through a nine-month long war. The war had in fact started many years earlier. The educated students and youths of East Bengal were gradually disenchanted at the discriminatory treatment of the Pakistan government after its emergence. So, they started to organise themselves in different ways to resist these discriminations. The first direct confrontation of the people of East Bengal with the government of Pakistan took place on the issue of denial of Bangla as the state language. The demand for state language Bangla intensified and assumed the shape of a movement after a proposal to this end by the Bengalee representative to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly Dhirendranath Datta was rejected by the Muslim League legislators in 1948 and after the first Governor General of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah arrogantly declared at gatherings in Racecourse Maidan and Curzon Hall in the same year that "Urdu and only Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan".

On 21 February, 1952, the police opened fire on a students' procession which was brought out from Dhaka University campus violating section 144 during a strike enforced throughout the province. As a consequence, Salam, Barkat, Rafiq and Jabbar embraced martyrdom on the streets of Dhaka. The whole province was afire with the flames of revolt as a result of these brutal killings and repression by the Pakistani regime. Ultimately, in the face of mounting opposition, the Pakistan government was forced to accord recognition to Bangla as one of the state languages.

various pretexts. However, the government was forced to hold elections in 1954 in the face of mounting pressure from the masses. A United Front was then forged by the opposition parties before the election led by the Haque-Bhashani-Suhrawardy trio. The Front won absolute majority in the election and a cabinet was formed headed by Sherebangla AK Fazlul Haque. But noticing that East Bengal could not be exploited if the United Front remained in power, the West Pakistani rulers resorted to palace intrigues to dislodge the government. The Governor's rule was ultimately imposed in 1956 under section 92-A.

Repression on the political leaders increased manifold when General Ayub Khan imposed martial law in 1958. Political activities were banned and thousands of Awami League leaders and workers including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were arrested. Political consultations, however, continued even after the leaders were sent to jail. From that time onwards, public opinion started to swing radically against the central government of Pakistan. After the death of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy in 1964, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took up the mantles of Awami League. He worked day and night to reorganise and strengthen the party.

Then, with the outbreak of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the Bengalees were shocked to discover that they remained more or less unprotected during the episode and the province of East Bengal was left at the mercy of India. As a result, the issue of East Bengal's security and its quest for political and economic autonomy consolidated into a mature and explosive move-

majority in the National Assembly of Pakistan. But in spite of this sweeping victory, Yahya Khan resorted to dilly dally tactic in order to avoid handing over power to the Awami League. Yahya Khan came to Dhaka in the month of January and sat for discussion with the Awami League leaders. At the end of the dialogue, he declared on 14 January that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the future Prime Minister of Pakistan and gave assurance that power would be handed over soon. He also summoned the session of the National Assembly on March 3.

But after this announcement, power-crazy Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto issued a threat that he would boycott the National Assembly unless the Awami League amends its six-points. He also said that as the majority parties in the two separate wings, Pakistan People's Party would rule in West Pakistan while the Awami League would govern East Bengal. In the face of such a threat by a minority leader, Yahya Khan postponed the session of the National Assembly for an indefinite period. On 3rd March, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for a non-violent non-cooperation movement until the basic democratic rights of the people of East Bengal were realised.

Through an announcement on 6 March, Yahya Khan again summoned the session of the National Assembly on 25 March. But after thoroughly analysing the pattern of the ongoing movement, Bangabandhu finally made the declaration of independence on 7 March at a mammoth public meeting held at Dhaka's Suhrawardy Uddyan (Ramna Racecourse) pronouncing that "the struggle this time is the struggle for freedom, the struggle this time is the struggle for democracy".

nate killings, the Pakistan Army was also trying to arrest the MNAs and MPAs of Awami League. Bangabandhu had made the declaration of independence of Bangladesh before he was arrested at around midnight of 25 March. The message of this declaration was sent to the Awami League leaders all over the country including Sylhet. One such wireless message also reached me. Bangabandhu gave me the directive not to surrender and to confront the Pakistanis. After getting this directive, I requested all sub-divisional and thana-level Awami League leaders of greater Sylhet to confront the enemy without surrendering.

The resistance- armed clashes and military preparations were in fact continuing throughout the country since March 1. Separate demonstrations were held by the Chhatra League and Chhatra Union in Sylhet after the deferment of the National Assembly session by General Yahya Khan on March 1. Later, leaders of various political parties sat for an elaborate discussion in my house and a decision was taken to monitor the situation very carefully. Although the situation in Sylhet heated up on March 2, no serious incidents took place on the day. On 3rd March, there was firing on a procession of students and youths from the EPR (now BDR) regional headquarter located at Nayasarak Khajanchibari of Sylhet town. Rumours spread immediately that one person died as a result. Instantaneously, the freedom-aspiring people rushed to the Deputy Commissioner's office in groups and gheraoed it. Curfew was then imposed for 12 hours from seven in the evening. But people came down to the streets ignoring that. This is when

A high-contrast, black and white halftone photograph of a landscape. The scene features a dense forest of tall evergreen trees in the foreground and middle ground. In the background, a large, dark mountain range is visible under a bright, overexposed sky. The image has a grainy, textured appearance typical of early photography or a heavily processed print.

The amul alliance is essential for 25,000, Sumant Biswas (35), son of House owner Monoranjan emergency cases. Each of the five