

## **The 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and its Background**

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The greatest Bangalee of all times Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a farsighted politician. He was the proclaimer of the Independence of Bangladesh, steward of the War of Liberation, architect of the Independent Bangladesh and the undisputed leader of the helpless, oppressed and suppressed, toiling and starving masses. The hard working people had always been close to him.

Bangabandhu, the War of Liberation and Bangladesh are tied in a single thread. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a legendary personality in the thousand year old history of Bengal. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is one of the memorable personalities who came out wreaking the darkness of our contemporary national life though their own shining achievements. He stewarded the Bengali nation to the right direction of liberation breaking the shackles of darkness, subjugation, reign, repression and exploitation. Because of his uncompromising struggle and courage, unparalleled love for the country and the countrymen and leadership, we are sovereign today.

The political situation of the East Pakistan became agitated for realizing various demands since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. From that time, he addressed public gatherings in many occasions for establishing rights of the mass people. The speech of 7 March of 1971 was a prominent address of those addresses. This speech was an ultimate directive for successive movements for liberation from the long exploitation, deprivation and belittling of the Bangalee nation. By that time, Awami League led by Bangabandhu won absolute majority in both the assemblies through the general elections held on the 7th and 17th December 1970. Before taking oath in the national and provincial assemblies, Bangabandhu and the members of his party set an example in the history of parliamentary democracy. On the 1st January 1971, they demanded that Pakistani military ruler Yahya Khan had to call parliament session without any delay, and that session would be held in Dhaka. On 3 January, Bangabandhu administered the oath taking of the members of parliament of Awami League in the Race Course Maidan. The party MPs took their oath to frame the constitution of the country on the basis of 6 points and 11 points charter and stay loyal to the people. Then till 13 January, there were meeting after meeting between President Yahya Khan and Bangabandhu. Yahya Khan while departing for the West Pakistan informed journalists in the Dhaka Airport, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would be the next Prime Minister of Pakistan soon. On the national parliament session, he said, the date of the parliament session had not been fixed yet, and for that if needed, he might come to Dhaka again. It was his ill-motivated speech.

On 16 January, Yahya Khan sat in a secret meeting with the officials of military and intelligence departments in Karachi and it was disclosed to media on that day that the President would leave Karachi on the following day to hunt birds. On 17 January, in the name of bird hunting, the large team boarding three helicopters landed in the garden of the palace of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in Larkana. On that night, they did not make plan for bird hunting, rather, they chalked out blueprint for Bangalee hunting. This was the meeting known as 'Larkana Conspiracy'. The Pakistani Ruling Junta kept themselves engaged in the following days just for implementing this conspiracy. They decided that they would never

handover power to the Bangalee and hundreds of thousands soldiers would be sent from the West Pakistan to Bengal. They continued discussions with Bangabandhu during this time so that their real plot could not expose to the public. In line with this conspiracy, the Pakistan government started taking actions one by one. They continued sending troops in the East Pakistan using the air force's flights, some aircraft of PIA and some hired from Holland and some large vessels (for example, MV Swat, MV Endurance) .In this side, they continued fruitless discussions so that their motive could not spread among the people. Replacing Lt. General Yakub, punjabi Lt. General Tikka Khan, a butcher of Balochistan, was posted as commander of the Eastern command. By this time, Bangabandhu came to know various information like the conspiratorial large scale troops deployment in the East Pakistan, postponement of the parliament session by Yahya Khan on 1 March. So, he called non-cooperation movement and hartal programme from 1 March. He then decided to deliver a speech on 7 March on the Ramna Race Course Maidan to prepare the Bangalee nation for the future movement by uniting them and giving directives.

As per earlier declaration, at the call of Bangabandhu, the Race Course Maidan became a human sea on 7 March. At the time of danger, the people want directives from a courageous and virtuous leadership. That is why, the whole nation was very eagerly waiting to listen to his address. Bangabandhu delivered his instructive address in presence of tens of thousands of people on the Race Course Maidan at 3.30pm. The speech delivered by him is considered as an outstanding address in the world history. The 7 March speech of Bangabandhu was an extempore speech without having any written script. On that day, he delivered what he believed and what he realized from the core of heart. He, in his address, called for forging movement to liberate the country, what means, he indirectly called upon the countrymen for the Struggle of Independence. He said, “ If I am not able to convey order, it is my request to you, build up fort in every house. Combat the enemy with what you have.....since we have already had to shed blood, we'll have to shed a lot more of it, by the grace of God, however, we'll be able to liberate the people of this land.....” Bangabandhu, in his address, urged the Bangalee nation to get preparation for the War of Independence to liberate the country and gave directive to continue the movement until the ultimate victory is achieved. This was his call for independence. This address by him inspired the countrymen resonating a deep revolutionary spirit. On that day, Bangabandhu, standing before a million of people, not only addressed 75 million more people deprived of rights in Bangladesh, rather through this address, he also triggered billions of exploited and oppressed people of the world to achieve independence and also would continue to do so in future.

Bangabandhu, in his address on that day said, “the struggle this time is a struggle for freedom---the struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation.” Fire sparked from his voice. Though Bangabandhu was not a linguist or philologist, he is memorable for the depth, clarity and articulation of his speech on that day. Since the delivery of this address, the administration of the East Pakistan including all the offices, courts, schools, colleges, banks started running as an individual state following the directives of Bangabandhu. The 7 March speech of Bangabandhu was a direction and call for the War of Liberation. Being a member of the public, keeping shoulder to shoulder with all on that time, he got involved

in the imbalanced war as a struggle for existence of a nation. As per instruction given in this speech, the nation headed towards the struggle from that day. He highlighted the struggle and deprivation of the people of Bengal in his address in a easy and spontaneous style. The only way for the Bangalee to be free from the military rule of the West Pakistan is achieving independence, this was the message he very strategically pinned at the heart of the audience through his speech. Each and every word of his address created a deep impression in the mind of the people. This address would give a guidance to the persecuted and the rights deprived people of the world era after era to their struggle for realizing their entitlement and materializing freedom. And that is why, UNESCO on 30 October 2017 included the 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu in the Memory of the World International Register as a World Documentary Heritage.

Many people compare the 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu with the addresses of great world leaders like 'Gettysburg Address' by US President Abraham Lincoln, 'I have a dream' by Martin Luther King, 'Give me liberty or give me death' by Patrick Henry. However, they had not to address under a pressure of the sky-high aspiration of 75 million people facing gun-point of military government in a very unprotected condition as Bangabandhu did. Bangabandhu, through his speech, transformed the unarmed Bangalee nation into an armed nation. On that day, the expectation from Bangabandhu as well as also a pressure on him from the people was declaring straight independence. The nation was waiting, would he call for independence just today! The people of the world was also anxious on that day. They could understand—Bangabandhu would no more negotiate with Pakistan, he would march forward to fulfill the long cherished dream of independence what he made the nation dream. But the very strategic Bangabandhu avoiding direct call for independence made the call for the same indirectly. Thus, he parallelly maintained the opportunity for discussion with the Pakistani military government. It was known to him that—a brigade of Pakistani soldiers ( 18 Punjab regiment, 32 Punjab regiment, 22 Baloch regiment, 31 field regiment, 30 frontier force, 4 armoured trunks), 16 fighter planes and 18 armoured helicopters were kept ready on that day at the cantonment near Dhaka for launching attack. If there was a direct declaration of independence, this huge regiment have had attacked hundreds of thousands people. Moreover, there was also a risk that the Pakistani intelligence agencies would impose riot through creating anarchy in the meeting venue. He could realize that strength of the people is much more powerful than that of lethal weapons. He was ready to sacrifice himself despite having information on cruelty, deadly conspiracy and inevitable military combat by the Pakistanis and the terrific efforts by the Pakistanis to halt the emergence of the Bangalees. Bangabandhu delivered this speech staying accountable to a tyrant nation. What an extra-ordinary patriotism might lead him to deliver such a speech damn-caring life in an enemy cordoned environment! He delivered this speech expressing solidarity with the people in the struggle of existence. The great leader earned a profound position for him in the heart of the people. The valiant leader of the independence stood beside the deprived people and it gave rise a new hope. He had anticipation power, inspiration and extra-ordinary wit. Though he did not proclaim independence directly in his speech, he made a call for independence very tactfully. He had two options on that day. Either making direct announcement of independence of Bangladesh or delivering a deliberate speech without taking the blame of breaching Pakistan and not being branded as a separatist. The Pakistani military government was

trying to find a pretext to brand him as a separatist. But as he was cautious regarding the issue, he did not give them any such opportunity. Through his speech, he proved that he was a very sagacious leader. The Bangalee nation opted for war on 7 March through the age winning spirit just with the delivery of the speech of 18 minutes 31 seconds containing 1108 words. The 7 March was a grave moment for the Pakistan state, a new era and the greatest time in the life of Bangabandhu and a decision making moment of independence for the Bangalee nation. The nation took its route under his stewardship. Bangabandhu reminded the ordinary toiling masses the torture, injustice and exploitation of long 23 years. On that day, he was a vivid film of turbulent time. After 7 March address, the Bangalee started taking preparation for struggle in the call of Bangabandhu. The context of this preparation was the movement built up by the Bangalee against the long exploitation and deprivation caused by the Pakistani ruling regime and dillydally to handover power despite victory in the elections.

There is no doubt that when the historians and the researchers will evaluate the 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu, they would draw different conclusions. But they will express unanimous views without any hesitation on a single agenda and recognize that it was a call for independence and it was proved by the address that Bangabandhu was a strategist statesman. The High Court verdict on the historic Ramna Race Course Maidan said, Bangabandhu ‘called for independence’ on 7 March and on the first hour of 26 March, he made ‘proclamation of independence’. In true sense, from 7 March to 25 March, Bangladesh was run as an independent state under the directive of Bangabandhu. Responding to his call, preparation for war and also training were continuing. As a sequence of this, with the attack on 25 March, a people’s war began in the soil of Bengal.

When the destiny of a nation was being inevitably shattered by the stormy wind of history, at that point of time, Bangabandhu, through forming unity among the people of Bengal, called upon all to get prepare for making supreme sacrifice. Because, the leader could understand, welfare of the people of Bengal, their family happiness and flourishing in life in future embedded in bravery and self-sacrifice. It was known to him, in this soil, a new entity is going to get its own identity involving much pain as well as immense potentialities. The people of Bengal have grown a vast golden rice field pouring blood drop by drop and they would not backtrack after advancing such a long way. He accomplished the unfinished song of freedom of the thousand year-old Bangalee nation. In this speech, he reminded his another speech delivered in the Pakistan Parliament on 25 August 1955 in which he told, “*Jhulum math koro bhai*”( brothers, stop torture). The more time will pass, the more the 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu will serve as the source of inspiration to the new generation of the world. On listening this speech, they would be imbued with patriotism to elevate the sonar(golden) bangla as dreamt by the Father of the Nation to the world arena as a developed country. And that is why, Cyril Dunn, a journalist of the London Observer said, “Mujib is a full blooded Bengali—his courage and charm that flowed from him made him a unique superman in these times.

Translated by Md. Saifullah, Senior Deputy Principal Information Officer, Press Information Department.