

Bangabandhu and the media

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We all know history is intimately bound up with social, political and economic institutions and it is equally closely with cultural life, that is, with television, radio, fiction, film, drama, art, news media and so on. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the great Bengali of the millennium, the great hero of history, the father of the nation was leader of visionary inspiration, courage, a sage of peace, and a champion of justice equity and equality. His political, socio-economic and cultural views of life were similar on the question of national ethos and the identity of the mass people which is making it into a positive and progressive country. We find that mass media plays a great role to raise about political life of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. William Crawley in recalling his own journalistic experience of Bangladesh's charismatic founder and leader, reflects on perceptions of 'Bangabandhu' in the British and the global press, said the emergence of an independent Bangladesh was without doubt, as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself recognised, the high point of that legacy and the one of which he was most proud. The media have been widely described as the fourth estate, agenda setter, force multiplier, watchdog and gate - keeper, all in all effort to demonstrate influence on society whereas, according to Gilpin, 'it cannot be said that states have interests, only moral agents can have interests.' Thus the objectives and foreign policies of states are determined priority by the interests of their dominant members or ruling coalition (Burchill, 2005, p.49). Thus Bangabandhu and mass media interplay within the national and international arena.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman worked for the welfare of the people of the country till his death. After independence, he started working to rebuild the country and build a war-torn Bangladesh. Naturally, it became very difficult to run the country. So he took the initiative to temporarily build a new platform in politics by passing the normal stream of his cherished dream-democracy.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a media friend since his student days. The location of the journalist and newspaper office was close to his heart. He also had many friends among the journalists. His immortal creation gratefully expresses his deep interest and faith in the media in the first book, the *Unfinished Memoirs*, and the second in the *Prison Diaries*. Because the role of media in all the movements and struggles of Bangladesh and in the great liberation war was infinite. This great leader termed the newspapers and electronic media during the liberation war as 'mass media' and not just 'news media'. Through his writings in those books, he has remembered not only the media, but also the media personalities with deep confidence and respect. The contribution of the media in the language movement, the outstanding contribution of the media in presenting the six-point demand as a 'demand for human survival' is also highlighted in his two books. Throughout his life, Bangabandhu spoke of freedom of expression. Talking about the importance of media in his *Unfinished Memoirs*, Bangabandhu said, "my father used to keep a newspaper; *Anandabazar*, *Basumati*, *Azad*, *MasikMohammadi* and *Saugat*. He then spoke about the media politics of east Bengal at that time and the history of the steps taken by the leaders of this section for the welfare of the people at that time. In these two books, he also spoke openly about the owners of various newspapers of that time and their role. Even praised a magazine. Never again did he stop criticizing the role of any newspaper in the field. "in the 1940s, *Dainik Azad* was the only Bengali newspaper to support the Muslim League and the Pakistan movement," he said. Maulana Akram Khan, the founder and owner of this paper,

was the president of the Bengal provincial Muslim League. Many of us started hawking in the streets and selling paper. The paper became very popular with the intellectual community. Many Hindus also read the paper. Its name was 'Millat'.

Bangabandhu relied on the news published in the media to get the news of his politics. He also wrote in his *Unfinished Memoirs* how the media helped Bangabandhu in establishing an independent Bangladesh. "my press conference statement was very well published in Nawai Waqt, Pakistan times, Imroz and other papers," he said. Pro-government papers also criticized my statement. I emphasized the state language Bengali, the release of political prisoners, the protest against the shootings, autonomy and economic problems. 'After the assassination of Bangabandhu on 15 august 1975, a group tried to portray Bangabandhu's weakness towards the media in a negative light. They began to sharply criticize the Newspaper Declaration Enrollment Ordinance, which was passed on June 16, 1975. But the law was made on the advice of journalist leaders. Bangabandhu ensured that journalists get regular salaries and allowances. He confirmed the salaries of journalists and employees who were shut down after June 16, 1975. They would go to the treasury one day and bring the salary.

William Crawley described that as a new recruit to the BBC external services radio services (better known as the BBC world service) in november 1970, I had a small part in the reporting of the events which marked Sheikh Mujib's crowning achievement, and in analyzing the events that followed up to and beyond his assassination. I did not know him personally, but I saw his public and political personality in action at an election rally in Narayanganj in 1973 and I took part in an interview with him for the BBC Bengali service on one occasion when he was passing through London as Prime Minister. I was able to see the charisma that he brought to his nationalist convictions and aspirations, and the admiration he inspired in his followers. What I can bear witness to is the way Sheikh Mujib emerged from the relative obscurity of a provincial east Bengali politician within the context of Pakistan, into the international limelight. He shattered Mohammed Ali Jinnah's dream – and 24-year achievement – of a united Pakistan. It is worth recalling the coverage of these momentous events in the British media, and the people who contributed to the BBC's reporting at the time. The election in December 1970 and the decisive victory in East Pakistan of Mujib's Awami League underlined a wider importance of the BBC. 'Sheikh Mujibur Rahman... was introduced to the world by the BBC,' recalled Musa, who was at that time also correspondent of *The Times* (London) and *The Sunday times*, and through them was appointed to the then newly established Asian news service based in Hong kong. Sheikh Mujib's arrest, and the crackdown on society and political activity by the military regime in East Pakistan in March 1971, made him even more of a household name in the international media. Of the british journalists, Simon Dring of the *daily telegraph* had managed to evade the expulsion of foreign correspondents, reporting on events for his paper and for the *Washington post* for several days. Martin Adeney had been in Dhaka for *the guardian*, while Peter Hazelhurst covered phases of the story for *the times*. The Pakistani journalist Anthony Mascarenhas, sent by the Pakistan government to report on the situation, defected and wrote a powerful first-hand exposé of the army repression for *The Sunday Times*. The distinguished American correspondent Murray Sayle some weeks later wrote an influential report in the same paper. The BBC World Service and the Bengali Service interviewed others who had managed to leave East Pakistan and their testimony both undercut local censorship and internationally added to a damning picture of the Pakistani army's role. His release and flight to London on 8

January 1972, in a Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plane, arranged by the new leader of west Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, restored him immediately to the centre of the political stage. After meetings with the British prime minister Edward Heath and Harold Wilson, then leader of the opposition labour party, and a meeting with the Indian high commissioner Apa Pant, Sheikh Mujib gave a memorable press conference at Claridge's hotel, in which he was questioned in detail about his present position and that of an independent Bangladesh. At an international press conference on 8 January 1972 at Claridge's hotel, London, a resolute and determined Bangabandhu sought support from Britain and international community to rebuild his war-ravaged country.

At present Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Silver Jubilee programme of Dhaka Reporters' Unity, urged that journalists work risking their lives and many inside stories come to light with their reports. As a result, necessary action can be taken to solve various problems. In fine, quoting Father of the Nation Bangabandhu, she said like politics journalism without principle can give nothing to the country and the nation.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the first to protect the freedom of speech of journalists. Bangabandhu has played an important role in strengthening the media. And he was the first person in the history of independent and sovereign Bangladesh to work for the media. And he also arranged salary allowances for journalists, freedom of the press and national recognition of the media.

In a word, Bangladesh and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the poet of politics is the ultimate emancipation whose spirit soared immeasurably in heightened expectations.

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