

# **You cannot suppress us anymore**

**Zafar Wajed**

Standing amid a sea of people numbering millions on a huge ground below the open sky, he had urged the 75 million Bangalis to join the struggle for independence and freedom. Responding to that call, the Bangalis had flocked to the battlefield for rescuing the country. Seventy million souls were awakened by that call; they materialised the golden dream of independence by shedding blood. The Seventh March of 1971 arrived in the lives of Bangalis as a message for new revelation in life. And treading that path, they brought about a liberated motherland by spilling fresh blood from their bosom. Overall, the objective of 7 March speech was the independence of Bangladesh. There might have been slight variations in the wordings of the address, but the meaning was one and the same – independence; struggle for freedom. That speech motivated the Bangali nation anew. A new vitality was generated among the Bangalis. History says, the relevance of the Seventh March Address shall last forever. Despite the fulfilment of national hopes and aspirations, this address will live on as an ‘institution’. ‘The struggle this time is for independence’ – it was not merely an inspirational speech, it was something more.

The speech that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered fifty-one years ago at Ramna Racecourse on 7 March 1971 is now a symbol of the Bangalis. That symbol of the nation and its continued existence shall invigorate over the ages not only the people of Bangla, but also citizens of the world. This address is now a part of the global heritage. It has been translated into 50 languages across the globe. The new generation of Bangalis become emotional when they listen to that speech; it has been incorporated as a world heritage by UNESCO for justifiable reasons. It can be comprehended through research, discussion and review of this address how extensive and far-reaching the historical significance of a political speech can be. The researchers have said that the importance of this address is multidimensional, eternal; it was fully successful in creating a history of independence. According to historians, the 7 March Speech was a declaration in advance for independence; it became the incentive and provided the direction for the liberation war. As a consequence, the speech became an inseparable part of the great liberation war.

That spontaneous address ultimately became an irrevocable and paramount document of the liberation war. It did not remain confined to merely being an inspiration for the people of this country during 1971 liberation war, it continues to inspire the repressed people across the globe in their independence struggles and liberation wars. At the same time, it makes important

contributions to comprehending the courage, patriotism, resolute leadership and attractive voice of the founder of the state of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Not only in crafting the history of independence of this nation in 1971, it shall play a historic role till eternity in nation-building, history-creation and reorganization. That a speech could tremendously motivate a nation for joining the liberation war was a rare event in world history. The speech that inspired and taught the Bangali nation the core ideals of independence generated a fresh narrative for the whole world. And this speech showed the people of Bangla how to wage an indomitable war against the enemy. It showed the way forward and how to accomplish that. Those directives were present in that vital speech of Bangabandhu by showing historical trends. It can be easily gauged from its translation into half a century languages of the world, how important and significant that speech was.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had delivered the most influential address of his whole political career on 7 March. Without declaring independence directly, he made people understand clearly that the Bangalis should remain prepared for dedicating themselves to the struggle for independence and freedom. Consequently, the path was kept open in essence for achieving independence through discussions, even if not through legal means. History clearly shows that the history of the Bangalis reached a critical juncture on 1 March 1971 when the military ruler of Pakistani junta Yahya Khan suspended the opening session of the parliament. The Bangalis started to secede from the state structure named Pakistan from that day. And the control of East Pakistan or Bangladesh was apparently thrust into the hands of Bangabandhu and Awami League through continuous struggle and non-cooperation movement starting from 1 March. It became obvious during that tumultuous month of March that the Bangalis were a heroic nation and they could not be subdued twenty-three years after the emergence of Pakistan.

The Seventh of March arrived in the lives of Bangalis with the message of a nation's emergence. That perspective was created after the landslide victory of the Awami League in the election of 1970. Humiliated, repressed, exploited and tortured – the Bangali nation wanted the people whom they elected to form the government and frame the constitution after assembling at parliamentary session. But this aspiration was crushed under the boot on March 1. When the March 3 session of parliament was suspended, the Bangalis understood that the electoral mandate given by the Bangali population – who were the majority in Pakistan – was being trampled under feet. The whole of Bangla was in flames, getting ignited by a spark of fire after this single announcement by Yahya. The fire spread in all directions like wildfire. The Bangalis

descended onto the roads by leaving their homes and burst out in anger. The whole of Bangla was filled with processions. On their path to freedom, the Bangalis could realize that the Pakistanis were determined to nullify their electoral victory as well as their spirit of self-determination. By breaking free from their age-old shackles, the Bangalis did not bow down to this injustice and insult.

The war began from March 3 of 1971. By then, the Pakistani army were standing face to face before the fury of Bangalis. There were 120 deaths and 335 injuries in Chattogram alone on March 3 and 4. On 4 March, 6 civilians were killed and 22 wounded in Khulna. On 5 March, 4 people were killed and 25 injured when Pakistanis opened fire in Tongi. Two were killed in Khulna and one in Rajshahi on the same day. There were frontal clashes between the army and civilians throughout the country during observance of strike on March 6. On the same day, 7 persons were killed and 30 wounded by bullets when 341 prisoners tried to flee from the central jail of Dhaka. All these were indications of an imminent war. And Sheikh Mujib was anxiously pressing for trial of the killings of these martyrs. He also said in his 7 March speech that he could not join the parliamentary session by trampling on the blood of the martyrs.

There were revolts after revolts across Bangladesh after the announcement of the suspension of parliamentary session on March 1. At that juncture, an independent ethos was waking up by breaking the 23 year-old chains. On March 2, a spontaneous strike was observed at the call of Bangabandhu. And in accordance with his directive, the map-carrying flag of independent Bangladesh was hoisted at a gathering of students on the same day at Arts Faculty compound of Dhaka University. On March 3, Bangabandhu informed at a public meeting held at Paltan Maidan that he would announce a future action-plan on March 7 if the Yahya Government did not accept his demands by March 6. The 75 million people of Bangladesh became energised after this announcement. And the Pakistani rulers as well as international community including the USA became anxious to know what announcement Bangabandhu would make on March 7. Even then, the Pakistani rulers did not soften their stand. Yahya only announced a fresh date of 25 March for holding the parliamentary session. Bangladesh was turbulent from the first day of the fiery month of March in the wake of this announcement by Yahya and the controversial statements of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

At the same time, the arrivals of soldiers in the cantonments were rising. The situation became explosive due to the warlike posturing of the army and the tendency to kill unarmed Bangalis at different places. In this backdrop, the previously announced public meeting of

Bangabandhu became very important and highly significant. And the rebel Bangla gradually became very agitated. On March 4, the word Dhaka was erased from Radio Pakistan Dhaka. The new name was Dhaka Radio Station. The television station was named as Dhaka Television Centre. Various motivational programmes like songs, plays were broadcast from these mass media in support of independence. Bent on following Sheikh Mujib's directives word by word and imbued with a steely resolve to achieve freedom for the Bangali nation, the Bangalis were motivated to receive training at various places in order to become armed. The non-cooperation movement had imbibed the Bangalis with an irrepressible and thunder-like courage. Songs of the masses were floating across the country. The language of protest and the fire of resistance were burning in the minds of the Bangalis. After much bloodshed, the battlefields were beckoning the Bangalis. The seventy million souls had become one and were engrossed in annihilating the enemy.

The 7 March Address was not a sudden event. Before this speech, Bangabandhu had gradually energised the nation in favour of independence through speeches delivered at various gatherings in January and February. He pointed finger to the conspiracies of the Pakistani military rulers and specified what should be done to nullify that. Sensing that the Pakistani ruling coterie was hatching a deep conspiracy inside, Bangabandhu had said after uttering words of oath following the laying of floral wreath at the Shaheed Minar on 21 February, "None had the power in the world to suppress the Bangalis. Those who seek to enslave Bangalis by making them beggars and foiling their demand for self-determination, attainment of their objective shall be thwarted at any cost".

He had even uttered in a grief-stricken voice, "We have hard days ahead. I may not remain present among you. Man is mortal. I do not know when I shall be able to stand before you again. Therefore, I am telling you and the people of Bangla today, prepare for the ultimate sacrifices. People of Bangla should not be exploited. They should not be humiliated, insulted. ..The dissatisfied souls of the brave martyrs are moving from door to door – Bangalis, please do not become cowards. Elicit your rights even by making supreme sacrifices. I urge the people of Bangla – get ready, we shall certainly realize our rights". He started the process of making people resolute immediately after the election of 1970. At the inauguration ceremony of the memorial meeting on the language movement held at Bangla Academy premises on 15 February 1971, the chief guest Sheikh Mujib said, "The Bangali nation has become united for the first time now. The Bangalis are today united for realizing their rights".

Bangabandhu had depended on the masses, the very people whom he had prepared bit by bit for the movement to achieve self-determination and independence. He had also said during a press conference on 29 January 1971, Bangladesh had been ruled and exploited during the previous 23 years. Traditional conspiracies were being hatched for sustaining that situation. But it was reassuring that the countrymen were fully conscious and awake, and they had the capacity to crush the vested interests by shattering the net of conspiracies. During a reception organized by the singers and musicians of East Bengal on 24 January, Bangabandhu said, "Although the people have won initially, but the apprehension of danger has not yet gone away. The path is still uncertain. ..Please remember, our danger has not passed away. The objective has not yet been achieved. The need may arise for extreme struggles. Get prepared for that day". Before that, he provided directions and uttered many important things during his long speech at the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary programme of the Chhatra League on 4 January. He said, "The Awami League shall fight to the last for ensuring the fruits of independence for the people". It becomes clear after reviewing the speeches and statements prior to 7 March that he had articulated the conclusion of those addresses through his 7 March speech.

Those who came to the public meeting of Racecourse Maidan on 7 March 1971 by pasting the mantra of independence on their chest for listening to the great leader's declaration, they knew that freedom would not come without a hard fight. When the Pakistani planes flew over the meeting, some of them even threw sticks thinking that enemy soldiers were present. A woman named Monwara Bibi sang, "I feel like dying, there is no end to my sadness, my heart rends as the golden Bangla becomes a graveyard".

Questions were posed even at the start of 1972 on why Bangabandhu had not made direct declaration of independence on 7 March. Bangabandhu himself answered this question during his interview with David Frost. Bangabandhu wanted the Pakistanis to make the first move. He was a politically astute and farsighted politician. He therefore did not make any direct declaration of independence, although he spoke about independence indirectly. If he had done that, the Pakistanis could have proved to the world that Sheikh Mujib was a secessionist. He did not provide that opportunity to the Pakistanis.

And the Pakistanis were already prepared with fighter jets and tanks. If there was a direct declaration of independence, then they would have pounced on the gathering of hundreds of thousands of people like Hyenas. David Frost had asked, "Did you want to declare Bangladesh's independence at Racecourse ground on 7 March"? In reply Bangabandhu said, "I knew what was

going to happen. I declared at the meeting that it was the right moment for independence and freedom". Frost again asked him, "If you had uttered 'I am today declaring the independence of Bangladesh' on that day, then what would have happened"? In reply, Bangabandhu said, "I did not want to say that specifically on that day. Because, they would have got the opportunity to tell the world that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had declared independence, therefore there was no option for us other than to attack. I wanted that they should strike first, my people were ready to tackle that assault".

History says, Bangladesh effectively became independent on 5 March. On that day, the reins of Bangladesh came into the hands of Bangabandhu. Whatever Yahya did after that, the people of Bangladesh viewed that as an aggression against a sovereign land. The independence of Bangladesh was not the result of any secessionist movement. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had himself said about 7 March during his address delivered at Suhrawardy Udyan on 26 March 1975, "I made a call to the people of Bangla. I prepared them on 7 March. When I saw that the attack had started, I made a call that very moment – no more, confront them. The occupiers must be evicted from the soil of Bangla. You cannot suppress the 75 million people of Bangladesh".

'Independence' and 'Freedom' were two favourite words of Bangabandhu. Therefore, he uttered in the middle of his 7 March address, 'The struggle this time is for freedom. The struggle this time is for independence'. The nation has achieved independence, the struggle for achieving freedom continues. In the words of Bangabandhu, 'nobody can suppress' the Bangalis in this struggle.

*The writer is Director General, Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB), and winner of Ekushey Padak for journalism*

**Translation:** Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed

03.08.2022

PID Feature