



"You Cannot Keep Down Seventy Million People"

World's Documentary Heritage

The Historic 7th March Speech



PRESIDENT
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
BANGABHABAN, DHAKA

23 Falgun 1430
07 March 2024

Message

7th March is an unforgettable day in the history of Bangalee's Liberation Movement and Independence. On the occasion of the 'Historic 7th March' I remember with profound respect the architect of our Independence, the greatest Bangalee of all time Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. On this day in 1971, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered an ageless speech in a thunderous voice in the then Race Course Maidan which was the charter of Independence of the Bengali nation. The entire Bengali nation was mesmerized on that day by the eternal poem of the great Poet of Politics Bangabandhu. In this epic, lasting only 18 minutes, the great mantra of liberation of the Bengali nation was resounded. Bangabandhu's lucid and dazzling speech shook the throne of the Pakistani dictator. The oppressed and persecuted Bengali nation found the desired path of freedom from exploitation from the speech of 7th March of Bangabandhu. Therefore, the historic 7th March speech is the epic of Bangalee's liberation.

Independence is the greatest achievement of Bangalees. However, it has not been achieved in a day. In the long rugged path from the great Language Movement to the achievement of final victory in 1971, Bangabandhu's immense courage, boundless sacrifice, intrepid leadership and right guidance led the nation towards the desired goal. Although Awami League secured absolute majority in the General Election of 1970, the Pakistani ruling party started dilly-dallying the process of handing over power. Under the leadership of Bangabandhu, the non-cooperation movement was started on March 01, 1971. In continuation of the agitation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a historic speech at the mammoth gathering in the Race Course Maidan by ignoring the blood curdling eyes of the then Pakistani ruler. In that effulgent speech, with his unique eloquence and political wisdom, he united the emotions, dreams and aspirations of the Bangalees and declared in a thunderous voice, "The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation, the struggle this time is the struggle for independence". In continuation of that historic speech, Bangabandhu declared the long-cherished Independence of the Bengali nation on March 26. We achieved our independent-sovereign Bangladesh through a nine month long armed struggle.

Bangabandhu's speech on 7th March is one of the most perpetual speeches in the world. How an address can awaken the whole nation, inspire them to participate in the war of liberation for independence, the historic 7th March Speech by Bangabandhu is its unique example. Bangabandhu had a spiritual bond with the people of Bengal. So in his speech, Bangabandhu essentially portrayed the inner words of people's heart. UNESCO has recognized the 7th March Speech of Bangabandhu as part of the 'World's Documentary Heritage' and included it in the 'Memory of the World International Register' on 30th October 2017. This is our great achievement as Bengali nation. The historic address of Bangabandhu on March 07 will be an eternal source of inspiration not only for us but also for freedom-loving people around the world.

Bangabandhu's lifetime dream was to turn the independent-sovereign Bangladesh into a happy and prosperous 'Golden Bengal'. We must continue our efforts to fulfill that dream of our great leader. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has undertaken 'Vision 2041' to make Bangladesh a developed, prosperous and smart country by 2041. I call upon all to contribute from their positions irrespective of party affiliation in materializing Bangabandhu's 'Golden Bengal' as well as 'Smart Bangladesh' of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Joi Bangla.
Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Md. Shahabuddin
Mohammed Shahabuddin

The Immortal Epic of Independence

TofaelAhmed

March 7, 1971, stands as a monumental day in the collective history of the Bengali nation. This year marks the 53rd commemoration of the historic March 7. As the calendar turns to this significant date each year, it invokes reflections on the profound spirit of the Liberation War and the ideals championed by Bangabandhu, bringing forth a stream of thoughts and images. For this one day, Bangabandhu struggled throughout his life, enduring 13 long years in the darkness of prison.

Soon after the inception of Pakistan, he came to the realization that 'this Pakistan is not for Bengalis. One day Bengalis would shape their own destiny.' Foreseeing this and driven by the vision, he laid the foundation for the Chhatra League on January 1, 1948 and the Awami League on June 23, 1949. Taking a significant step on March 11, 1948 he initiated the momentous language movement to elevate his beloved mother tongue, Bangla, to the status of a state language, an endeavor that led to his imprisonment. He rejected the path of compromise or power-sharing and chose the gallows for the sake of nation's freedom to achieve the six-point demand through autonomy and self-governance based upon the seeds of language-based Bengali nationalism and established the six points as the 'Charter of Freedom' for Bengalis.

Later, the reinvigorated student community incorporated the 6-point demands into the 11-point demands and, through tumultuous mass movements based on public demands, raised the slogan 'We want Sheikh Mujib's freedom.' By shedding their blood on the streets, they secured his release from confinement and adorned him with the title of 'Bangabandhu' in the midst of a colossal gathering exceeding 1 million people. Cherished as a gem in the eyes of the people of Bengal, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib drew strength from the masses and dismantled the so-called 'parity'. He moved toward a sovereign parliamentary election based on population by advocating for universal suffrage and pressing for the reallocation of seats in the Pakistan National Assembly. Thus, through embarking on the arduous journey of the struggle for national liberation and garnering the support of the masses, he solidified himself as the unquestionable leader of the Bengalis. Amidst various manipulations and conspiracies orchestrated by the Pakistani military junta to transfer power to the majority party leader, along with the arbitrary postponement of the National Assembly session, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib emerged as the Father of the Nation and the paramount political figure through the leadership of a comprehensive non-cooperation movement in the democratic path in independent Bangladesh. The pivotal moment in reaching the pinnacle of numerous struggles and movements for the noble cause of independence was the historic March 7 of 1971.

On March 1, 1971, when Yahya Khan unilaterally postponed the session of March 3rd indefinitely, people took to the streets of Dhaka. Our parliamentary party meeting was underway at Hotel Purbani. As an elected member of the National Assembly, I was present there with Bangabandhu. The meeting was composed of members of both the Pakistan National Assembly and the Provincial Assembly. At that very moment hundreds of thousands of people gathered on the streets around Hotel Purbani in response to Yahya Khan's betraying announcement. Departing from a parliamentary party meeting, Bangabandhu, addressing a crowded press conference, said in English, "This time nothing will go unchallenged."

When asked by local and foreign journalists if he was speaking of independence, he replied, "Not yet." People surrounded Bangabandhu, eager to hear his speech. Instead of speaking, he sent us to Paltan Maidan. He specifically mentioned my name and said, "Tofael will go, he will speak on my behalf there." Meanwhile, thousands of people had already assembled at Paltan Maidan eagerly anticipating the speech of their beloved leader. Upon reaching Paltan, we delivered our speeches. We burned the Pakistani flag and hoisted the flag of our now-independent Bangladesh, raising slogans like 'Awake, awake, Bengalis awake.' Our address is 'Padma-Meghna-Jamuna', 'Heroic Bengalis, take up arms, make Bangladesh independent', 'Punjab or Bengal? Bengal, Bengal', 'Not Pindi, but Dhaka, Dhaka, Dhaka', 'My leader, your leader, Sheikh Mujib, Sheikh Mujib'. Addressing the gathered fighting masses at Paltan that day, I declared, "No more six points or eleven points. Now, the people of Bengal will embark on a struggle for one point, and that is the independence of Bangladesh. Today, we pledge anew to persist in our unified, disciplined struggle until the dream of Bangladesh's independence is realized."

All over Bangladesh, people took to the streets. Bangabandhu has united the entire nation. In response to Bangabandhu's announced action plan, a spontaneous general strike was observed on the 2nd and 3rd of March until 2 p.m. Meanwhile, Bangabandhu has instructed the student leadership to form the 'Independent Bengal Central Student Resistance Council'. Following this directive, the student leaders of Chhatra League, including Nurul Alam Siddique, Shahjahan Siraj, ASM Abdur Rob, and Abdul Kuddus Makhon, coordinated with DAKSU, established the 'Independent Bengal Central Student Resistance Council'. On March 3rd, at an assembly at Paltan Maidan, the 'Manifesto of Independent Bengal' was proclaimed by the 'Independent Bengal Central Student Resistance Council'.

In this historic event, Bangabandhu was titled the 'Father of the Nation', and Rabindranath Tagore's 'Amar Sonar Bangla' was recognised as the national anthem. In the presence of Bangabandhu, the national flag, engraved with the map of independent Bangladesh, was hoisted. On that day, I, along with the leaders of the 'Central Student Struggle Council for Independent Bengal', addressed the gathering.

Then came the historic March 7, a day with which I have numerous memories entangled. The leaders of the Dhaka City Awami League, including Gazi Golam Mostafa, Moni Bhai, Siraj Bhai, Razzak Bhai, myself, and the leadership of the Swadhin Bangla Central Student Struggle Council, all undertook comprehensive preparations to organise this gathering. Starting from the morning of March 7, a massive crowd started pouring into the Racecourse Ground, currently recognized as Suhrawardy Udyan. The essence of independence echoed on everyone's lips. One incident remains vivid in my memory. It was around one o'clock on the afternoon of March 7. Myself and another dear leader (I won't mention the name) had gone to Bangabandhu. Placing his hands on our shoulders, Bangabandhu was speaking to us. When that leader told Bangabandhu saying, 'Leader, today people will not accept anything less than a complete declaration of independence.' Bangabandhu took his hands off our shoulders, called his name and replied in English, 'I am the leader of the people. I will lead them. They will not lead me. Go and do your duty.' Saying this, he took leave of us and went upstairs.

We left Dhamondi at a quarter to three. We reached the Racecourse Ground at three fifteen. Bangabandhu started his speech at three thirty. The Racecourse Ground was filled with the deafening slogans of over a million people. I myself chanted slogans. That day, I had the privilege of announcing Bangabandhu's name at the meeting. Since the day of the conferment of the title 'Bangabandhu' on February 23, 1969, I have had the privilege of announcing the name of my dear leader at many public meetings. On March 7th, I also said, 'Now our beloved leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will deliver his speech.'

The central leadership of the Awami League, including four national leaders, was present at the podium that day. Bangabandhu stood up to give his speech and looked around. Placing his glasses on the podium in front of the microphone, he began his address. Infused with an unwavering belief set in the depth of his heart, the same belief that propelled his lifelong struggle, including facing the gallows for that conviction, Bangabandhu addressed the people of Bengal, saying, 'brothers of mine.' Without any interruption, for 18 minutes, he eloquently delivered the immortal epic of independence. His speech basically heralded the declaration of independence. There were two paths in front of Bangabandhu: one involved the outright declaration of independence, while the other entailed giving a well-thought-out statement without taking on the responsibility of partitioning Pakistan and avoiding the label of a separatist. Bangabandhu opted for both. Bangabandhu was well aware of the circumstances of that day, the details of which he had shared with us before.

The military forces were prepared, with bomber planes and helicopters hovering above. The moment Bangabandhu would say in this language, 'from today, Bangladesh is independent', then they would start shelling. Bangabandhu gave his speech knowing everything. Displaying the foresight of a leader who had faced numerous conspiracies against military rule. He imposed four conditions on the military rulers: 'withdraw martial law, return the army to the barracks, investigate the killings that have taken place in these days through a judicial inquiry, and transfer power to elected representatives.' These conditions thwarted the attempts to label him as a separatist. The Pakistani authorities had tried to brand him as such, but Bangabandhu remained vigilant and conscious. On the other hand, his entire speech was infused with the tactics of imminent people's warfare and the proclamation of independence for Bangladesh. He clearly stated, 'I don't want Prime Minister ship. We want to establish the right of the people of this country. I want to say in clear terms that from now on all courts, magistrates, offices and educational institutions in Bangladesh will remain closed sine die.' 'Face the enemy with whatever you have. In case I can't give you any further order, I tell you: close all roads and highway indefinitely. We will starve them to death.' He called for 'building a fortress in each and every home' and said, 'But the Secretariat, Supreme Court, High Court, Judge's Court and semi-government offices like WAPDA will not function'. He instructed, 'The employees will go and collect their salaries on the 28th.' He told the government employees, 'My instruction to government officials is that you must obey what I say. From now on, tax will not be paid till such time as the freedom of our country is achieved; no one will pay anything, prevent the suffering of the poor he urged the industrialists, 'During these seven days of the strike, every industrialist must ensure the payment of wages to their workers.' Upholding the deep democratic values that he cherished throughout his life, he told the opposition politicians, 'Even if we are in the majority, if there is even one person who speaks the truth, we will accept his truth.' And to the political leaders and workers, he said, 'in every village, every locality, every union and every sub-division establish 'Resistant Council' under the leadership of the Awami League. And be ready with whatever you have.'

He concluded his speech by virtually declaring independence. With a thundered-voice he said, 'The struggle this time is the struggle for our emancipation. The struggle this time is the struggle for our independence'. In short, it was a balanced speech by the leader of the majority party elected by the people with the goal of achieving national liberation. The memory of that day floats in my mind. An unprecedented sight, unimaginable. This is what the people expected. One thing comes to my mind repeatedly. How far-sighted a leader he was! He always knew how to take the right decision. I have not seen such an experienced person in my short span of life who knew so well when to say. I have noticed that Bangabandhu never made contradictory statements in his life.

In short, it was a balanced speech by the leader of the majority party elected by the people to achieve the goal of national liberation. The memory of that day floats in my mind. An extraordinary sight, unimaginable. This is what the people had expected. What I have noticed that Bangabandhu never made contradictory statements in his life. He never denied his statements later or contradicted himself. Because, what he believed, thought, and felt realistic, he said it thoughtfully. Moreover, what he once stated, he has upheld even in the face of death. I heard from the respected Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib that Bangabandhu strolled and thought about what to say on the night of the 6th. Bangamata said, 'Why are you so worried? You have been fighting for a goal throughout your life, you have spent your youth in Pakistani prisons, you have gone to the gallows. What you believe in, from that belief, you will deliver tomorrow.' Bangabandhu spoke that day from the deep faith he held in his heart.

Upon analyzing Bangabandhu's March 7 speech, it emerges as an unparalleled piece of oration. The speech, spanning 18 minutes and comprising 1,308 words, surpasses the brevity of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (written in 272 words, less than 3 minutes) and Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech (17 minutes, 1,667 words). No leader worldwide has addressed an audience of over 10 million unarmed individuals with such fervor. He delivered a stirring speech that inspired unity, transforming unarmed Bengalis into an armed force for the Liberation War. What a prudent leader! The ISI was positioning in front of the Dhaka Club on March 7th. They were eagerly anticipating the declaration that the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, made on March 26th through the declaration of independence: 'From today, Bangladesh is independent.' I have told earlier that Bangabandhu was cautious. He said it all, but did not fall into the enemy's trap. On the contrary, he trapped the enemy. As a



result, the ISI reported the next day, 'The cunning Sheikh Mujib gave a clever speech. On the one hand, he declared independence, and on the other hand, by imposing 4 conditions, he was not labeled a secessionist and did not take responsibility for the breakup of Pakistan. We had no choice but to play the role of silent spectators. The preparations we had taken were all in vain.' This was the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib.

Through a speech, he created a democratic state for a nation. Through a speech, he transformed the unarmed Bengali nation into an armed Bengali nation. Through this singular speech, he instilled the mantra of independence, revitalising and uniting over seventy million people of Bengal at a single point. The Pakistani military junta, in the name of talks, bought time and bypassing the legal process, imposed the premeditated genocide 'Operation Searchlight' on the 25th of March '71. As a result, in the early hours of March 26 morning in 1971, Bangabandhu, having the political mandate to declare independence, proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh and provided paramount leadership in the bloody war of liberation, ultimately establishing the independent and sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh. Following the guidelines of the 7th March speech, we achieved the greatest victory through nine months of people's war and guerrilla warfare at the cost of over 3 million lives and the sacrifice of over 2 hundred thousand mothers and sisters.

After the independence of the country, Bangabandhu worked tirelessly to bring smiles to the faces of the impoverished people of Bengal. Therefore, on 4th November 1972, a constitution for the independent and sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh was enacted in a pure democratic manner in the Bangladesh Constituent Assembly. Five fundamental rights - food, clothing, shelter, education, and healthcare - were also enshrined in the constitution. That is why we say, Bangabandhu and Bangladesh are synonymous. On October 30, 2017, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized the historic speech of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, delivered on March 7, 1971, as part of the World Documentary Heritage. This is a matter of pride and joy for the entire nation.

I am overwhelmed when I consider that under the leadership of his esteemed daughter, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and the elected government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, formed by the Awami League, the historic speech of March 7 has been established as the foundation of national consciousness and incorporated into the constitution. The government is gradually implementing the five fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution for the welfare of the people of the country. The 'Golden Bengal' of Bangabandhu's dream, established on the spirit of the great war of liberation and the ideals of Bangabandhu, is now moving towards the goal of transforming from 'Digital Bangladesh' to 'Smart Golden Bangladesh' under the leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter. □

Author: Member, Advisory Council, Bangladesh Awami League; Member of Parliament, Bangladesh National Parliament.
(Translated by Parikshit Chowdhury)



PRIME MINISTER
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

23 Falgun 1430
07 March 2024

Message

The 7th of March is an unforgettable day for the Bengali nation. Our great leader, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, crafted an extempore epic in his invigorated speech on 7 March 1971 at the historic Race Course Ground, now Shaheed Suhrawardy Udyan. On this occasion, I remember with most profound respect the greatest Bengali of all time, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. We gratefully recall the four national leaders, 3 million martyrs in the great liberation war, 2 hundred thousand mothers and sisters, and countless brave freedom fighters - at the cost of whose supreme sacrifices we achieved independent sovereign Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and Bangladesh are inseparable, like beads in a string. He fought against the Pakistanis for 24 years, endured prison-tyranny-torture and led all the movements to protect the just rights of the people of East Bengal and to establish an independent land for them on the world map. For thousands of years, he was the boldest voice among the exploited and deprived Bengalis. Under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's leadership, the Awami League won an absolute majority in the 1970 elections. However, the Pakistanis did not hand over the responsibility of running the country to the Awami League and started pouring various disputes. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib called for a non-cooperation movement against the Pakistani rulers with all the people of Bangladesh. In his 7 March speech, he uttered our most cherished word, 'Freedom,' and guided the path of liberation through struggle. He spelled out the inevitable victory of the brave Bengalis in the last two words of his speech- 'Joi Bangla'.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, the legendary Poet of Politics, handed over the country's governance to the people through this speech. He also explained how power could be allocated for the welfare of all, instructed defensive or preventive warfare, and guided wartime government and economy in transition. That thunder in his voice reached the hearts of 7 crore Bengalis instantly. A British newspaper compared Bangabandhu's residence to 10 Downing Street in London. Even the Bengali chefs at the President's residence in Dhaka stopped cooking for Yahya Khan after listening to the 7 March speech. Till 25 March, all the people in the country ignored Yahya's rule and obeyed Sheikh Mujib's orders precisely as he said. He was arrested by Pakistani authorities that night. He formally announced the Declaration of Independence before he was arrested. The irresistible people of Bengal took up arms. They fought for nine months, defeated the Pakistanis on every front in the territory of Bangladesh, and confirmed victory in the war of independence on 16 December.

The first president of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, was freed from captivity in Pakistan, returned to the country on 10 January 1972, and devoted himself to rebuilding an independent Bangladesh according to his dream. He transformed the war-torn country into a Least Developed Country in just three and a half years. Unfortunately, on 15 August 1975, the allies of the defeated enemies of 1971 avenged their defeat by killing the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and his family members. They banned the 7 March speech and the 'Joi Bangla' slogan and tried to erase Mujib's name from history.

After the Awami League assumed power in 1996, we repealed the indemnity ordinance brought by the murderer Mostak-Zia and started the trial of the killers of the Father of the Nation. Later, we formed the government four times in a row from 2009 and dedicated ourselves to the country's overall development following the ideals of the Father of the Nation. We established the rule of law in the country through the execution of the verdict of the murder of the Father of the nation. As a result, the nation was freed from shame. We enacted the Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act, 2011, to include the historic 7th March speech in the Fifth Schedule of Article 150(2) of the Constitution. In 2013, this speech was included as one of the best wartime speeches of 2500 years published by Jacob F. Field in the book 'We Shall Fight on the Beaches: The Speeches That Inspired History'. On 30 October 2017, UNESCO recognized the speech as part of the 'World's Documentary Heritage'. Not only that, UNESCO commented that the Father of the Nation eventually declared the independence of Bangladesh through this speech. Global recognition of the historic 7 March speech of the Father of the Nation today is a rare honor and a memorial of glory for the Bengali nation. Based on the verdict of our High Court, the Cabinet Division issued a notification declaring 'Joi Bangla' as the national slogan.

As a result of the initiatives taken by our government, Bangladesh has been recognized as a role model for development in the world today. We have established Digital Bangladesh. In 2041, we will transform the country into a 'Smart Bangladesh'. I believe the 'Joi Bangla' slogan and Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speech on 7 March will inspire the Bengalis to proceed with their heads high on the world stage.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever
Sheikh Hasina
Sheikh Hasina

Seventh of March

Tarik Sujat

A day commenced
Owing to a ceaseless call
Shackles in hundreds across thousand years
Were shattered by the song of a roaring voice
Seven crore pairs of eyes
Were fixed
On a lone blazing finger
The whole land was awakened
By a solitary voice
It commenced from then on
The din of marching ahead with pledge of blood
The birth of a nation-state – effusive and eager
To ensure the rights of freedom and survival
The sweet tales of struggles in hundreds
'The blood-drenched history of Bangla's people'
From time immemorial to impending quests
Life's eternal spring was opened
Since then, it all started

7 March –
The flame of a day's spirit
Has merged with eternity.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed