

BANGLADESH :
A
Statement By Tajuddin Ahmed
The
Prime Minister



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Bangla Desh is at war. It has been given no choice but to secure its right of self-determination through a national liberation struggle against the colonial oppression of West Pakistan.

In the face of positive attempts by the Government of Pakistan to distort the facts in a desperate attempt to cover up their war of genocide in Bangla Desh, the world must be told the circumstances under which the peace-loving people of Bangla Desh were driven to substitute armed struggle for parliamentary politics to realise the just aspirations of the people of Bangla Desh.

SINCERE EFFORT

The six-point program for autonomy for Bangla Desh within Pakistan had been put forward in all sincerity by the Awami League as the last possible solution to preserve the integrity of Pakistan. Fighting the elections to the National Assembly on the issue of six points, the Awami League won 167 out of 169 seats from Bangla Desh in a House of 313. Its electoral victory was so decisive that it won 80 per cent of the popular votes cast. The decisive nature of its victory placed it in a clear majority within the National Assembly.

The post-election period was a time of hope, for never had a people spoken so decisively in the history of parliamentary democracy. It was widely believed in both wings that a viable constitution based on the six points could be worked out. The Pakistan People's Party which emerged as the leading party in Sind and Punjab had avoided raising the issue of six points in their election campaign and had no obligation whatever to its electorate to resist it.

In Baluchistan, the dominant party, National Awami Party, was fully committed to six points. In NWFP, the NAP, dominant in the Provincial Assembly, was also a believer in maximum autonomy. The course of the elections, which marked the defeat of the reactionary parties, therefore, gave every reason to be optimistic about the future of democracy in Pakistan.

Preparatory to the convening of the National Assembly, talks were expected between the main parties in the political arena. However, while the Awami League was always willing, preparatory to going to the Assembly to explain its constitutional position and to discuss alternative proposals from the other parties, it is believed that the spirit of a true democracy demanded that the constitution be debated and finalised in the National Assembly rather than in secret sessions.

To this end, it is insisted on an early summoning of the National Assembly. In anticipation of this session, the Awami League worked day and night to prepare a draft constitution based on six points and fully examined all the implications of formulating and implementing such a constitution.

MAJOR TALKS

The first major talks over Pakistan's political future took place between General Yahya and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman in mid-January. In this session Gen. Yahya proved the extent of the Awami League's commitment to its program and was assured that they were fully aware of its implications. But contrary to expectations Yahya did not spell out his own ideas about the constitution. Gen. Yahya gave the impression of not finding anything seriously objectionable in six points but emphasized the need for coming to an understanding with the PPP in West Pakistan.

The next round of talks took place between the PPP and the Awami League from 27th January 1971 in Dacca where Mr. Bhutto and his team held a number of sessions with the Awami League to discuss the constitution.

As in the case with Yahya, Mr. Bhutto did not bring any concrete proposals of his own about the nature of the constitution. He and his advisers were mainly interested in discussing the implications of the six points. Since their responses were essentially negative and they had no prepared brief of their own it was not possible for the talks to develop into serious negotiations where attempts could be made to bridge the gap between the two parties. It was evident that as yet Mr. Bhutto had no formal position of his own from which to negotiate.

It must be made clear that when the PPP left Dacca there was no indication from their part that a deadlock had been reached with the Awami League. Rather they confirmed that all doors were open and that following a round of talks with West Pakistani leaders, the PPP would either have a second and more substantive round of talks with the Awami League or would meet in the National Assembly whose committees provided ample opportunity for detailed discussion on the constitution.

COMPLETE SURPRISE

Mr. Bhutto's announcement to boycott the National Assembly, therefore, came as a complete surprise. The boycott decision was surprising because Mr. Bhutto had already been accommodated once by the President when he refused Sheikh Mujib's plea for an early session of the Assembly on February 15 and fixed it, in line with Mr. Bhutto's preference, for March 3.

Following his decision to boycott the Assembly Mr. Bhutto launched a campaign of intimidation against all other parties in West Pakistan to prevent them from attending the session. In this task, there is evidence that Lt-Gen. Umer, Chairman of the National Security Council and close associate of President Yahya Khan, with a view to strengthening Mr. Bhutto's hand, personally pressurised various west wing leaders not to attend the assembly.

In spite of this display of pressure tactics by Mr. Bhutto and Lt-Gen. Umer, all members of the National Assembly from West Pakistan, except PPP and the

Qay-vum Muslim League had booked their seats to East Pakistan, for the session of March 3.

Within the QML itself half their members had booked their seats and there were signs of revolt within the PPP, where many members were wanting to come to Dacca. Faced with the breakdown of this front against Bangla Desh, Gen. Yahya obliged Mr. Bhutto on March 1 by postponing the Assembly, not for any finite period, but sine die. Moreover he dismissed the Governor of East Pakistan, Admiral S.M. Ashan, who was believed to be one of the moderates in his administration. The Cabinet with its component of Bengalis was also dismissed so that all power was concentrated in the hands of the West wing military junta.

In these circumstances Yahya's gesture could not be seen as anything but an attempt to frustrate the popular will by colluding with Mr. Bhutto. The National Assembly was the only forum where Bangla Desh could assert its voice and political strength, and to frustrate this was a clear indication that parliament was not the real source of power in Pakistan.

SPONTANEOUS REACTIONS

The reaction to the postponement in Bangla Desh was inevitable and spontaneous and throughout the land, people took to the streets to record their protest at this arbitrary act. People now felt sure that Yahya never really intended to transfer power, and was making a mockery of parliamentary politics. The popular mood felt that the rights of Bangla Desh could never be realised within the framework of Pakistan, where Yahya could so blatantly frustrate the summoning of an Assembly proclaimed by his own writ and urged that Sheikh Mujibur Rehman must go for full independence.

Sheikh Mujib, however, continued to seek a political settlement in calling for a program of confrontation against the army of occupation as an attempt to bring them to their senses. This was in itself a major gesture in the face of the cold-blooded firing on unarmed demonstrators on the March 2 and 3, had already led to over a thousand casualties.

The course of the non-cooperation movement is now a part of history. Never in the course of any liberation struggle has non-cooperation been carried to the limits attained within Bangla Desh between March 1 and 25. Non-cooperation was total. No judge of the High Court could be found to administer the oath of office to the new Governor, Lt.-Gen. Tikka Khan. The entire civilian administration, including the police and the civil service of Pakistan, refused to attend office. The people stopped supply of food to the army. Even the civilian employees of the defense establishment joined the boycott.

Non-cooperation did not stop at abstention from work. The civilian administration and police positively pledged their support to Sheikh Mujibur Rehman and put themselves under his orders.

In this situation the Awami League without being a formally constituted

government, was forced to take on the responsibility of keeping the economy and administration running whilst non-cooperation lasted. In this task they had the unqualified support not only of the people but the administration and business community. The latter two subordinated themselves to the directives of the Awami League and accepted them as the sole authority to solve their various problems.

MODIFIED TACTICS

In these unique circumstances the economy and administration were kept going in spite of the formidable problems arising out of the power vacuum which had suddenly emerged in Bangla Desh. In spite of the lack of any formal authority, Awami League volunteers in cooperation with the police maintained a level of law and order which was a considerable improvement on normal times.

Faced with this demonstration of total support to the Awami League in this historic non-cooperation movement, Gen. Yahya appears to have modified his tactics. On March 6, he still seemed determined to provoke a confrontation when he made his highly provocative speech putting the full blame for the crisis on the Awami League and not even referring to the architect of the crisis, Mr. Bhutto.

It seems that he expected a declaration of independence on March 7. The army in Dacca was put on full alert to crush the move and Lt-Gen. Tikka Khan was flown to replace Lt-Gen. Yakub to signify the hardening of attitudes within the junta.

Sheikh Mujib, however, once again opted for the path of political settlement in spite of massive public sentiment for independence. In presenting his four point proposal for attending the National Assembly he not only had to contain the public mood but to leave a way open for Yahya to explore this last chance for a peaceful settlement.

CONTINGENCY PLANS

It is now clear that Yahya and his generals never had the slightest intention of solving Pakistan's political crisis peacefully but were only interested in buying time to permit the reinforcement of their military machine within Bangla Desh. Yahya's visit to Dacca was mere cover for his plan of genocide. It now becomes clear that contingency plans for such a crisis had already begun well in advance of the crisis.

Shortly before March 1, tanks which had been sent north to Rangpur to defend the borders were brought back to Dacca. From March 1 the families of army personnel were being sent off to West Pakistan on a priority basis along with the families of West Pakistani businessmen.

The military build-up was accelerated after March 1 and continued throughout

the talks up to March 25. Members of the armed forces dressed in civilian clothes were flown in PIA commercial flights via Ceylon. C-130s carrying arms and provisions for the garrisons flew into Dacca. It is estimated that up to one division, with complementary support, was brought into Bangla Desh between March 1 and 25. To ensure security, the airport was put under strict airforce control and heavily guarded with artillery and machine-gun nets whilst movement of passengers was strictly supervised.

An SSG commando group specially trained for undercover operations in sabotage and assassinations was distributed in key centers of Bangla Desh and were probably responsible for the attacks on Bangalis in Dacca and Saidpur in the two days before March 25 to provoke clashes between locals and non-locals so as to provide a cover for military intervention.

As part of this strategy of deception Yahya adopted the most conciliatory posture in his talks with Mujib. In the talks beginning on March 16, he expressed regrets for what had happened and his sincere desire for a political settlement. In a crucial meeting with Sheikh Mujib he was asked to positively state the junta's position on the Awami League's four-point proposal. He indicated that there were no serious objections and that an interim constitution could be worked out by the respective advisers embodying the four points.

BASIC POINTS

The basic points on which agreement was reached were:

1. Lifting of martial law and transfer of power to a civilian government by a presidential proclamation,
2. Transfer of power in the provinces to the majority parties,
3. Yahya to remain as President and in control of the Central Government,
4. Separate sittings of the National Assembly members from East and West Pakistan preparatory to a joint session of the house to finalise the constitution.

Contrary to the distortions now put out by both Yahya and Bhutto, the proposal for separate sittings of the Assembly was suggested by Yahya to accommodate Mr. Bhutto. He cited the practical advantage that whilst the six points provided a viable blueprint to regulate relations between Bangla Desh and the Centre, its application would raise serious difficulties in the west wing. For this reason west wing MNA's difficulties must be permitted to get together to work out a new pattern of relationships in the context of a six-point constitution and the dissolution of one unit.

Once this agreement in principle had been reached between Sheikh Mujib and Yahya there was only the question of defining the powers of Bangla Desh vis-a-vis the

centre during the interim phase. Here it was again jointly agreed that the distribution of power should as far as possible be approximate to the final constitution approved by the National Assembly which, it was expected, would be based on six-points.

NO BREAKDOWN

For working out this part of the interim settlement Mr. M.M. Ahmed, the economic adviser to the President, was specially flown in. In his talks with the Awami League advisers he made it clear that provided the political agreement had been reached there was no insuperable problems to working out some version of six points even in the interim period.

The final list of three amendments to the Awami League draft which he presented as suggestions, indicated that the gap between the Government and Awami League position was no longer one of principle but remained merely over the precise phrasing of the proposals. The Awami League in its sitting of March 24 had accepted the amendments with certain minor changes of language and there was nothing to prevent the holding of a final drafting session between the advisers of Yahya and Mujib when the interim constitution would be finalised.

It must be made clear that at no stage was there any breakdown of talks or any indication by Gen. Yahya or his team that they had a final position which could not be abandoned.

BELATED FABRICATION

The question of legal cover for the transfer of power is merely another belated fabrication by Yahya to cover his genocide. He and his team had agreed that, in line with the precedence of the Indian Independence Act of 1947, power could be transferred by Presidential proclamation. The notion that there would be no legal cover to the arrangement, raised subsequently by Mr. Bhutto and endorsed by Gen. Yahya, was never a bone of contention between Sheikh Mujib and Yahya.

There is not the slightest doubt that had Yahya indicated that a meeting of the National Assembly was essential to transfer power, the Awami League would not have broken the talks on such a minor legal technicality. After all as the majority party it had nothing to fear from such a meeting and its acceptance of the decision for a separate sitting was designed to accommodate Mr. Bhutto rather than a fundamental stand for the party.

Evidence that agreement in principle between contending parties had been reached is provided by Mr. Bhutto's own Press Conference on March 25. It is not certain what transpired in the separate session between Gen. Yahya Khan and Mr. Bhutto, but there is evidence that deliberate falsehoods about the course of the talks with the Awami League were fed to the PPP, who were told that Sheikh Mujibur was determined to have a showdown and was escalating his demands.



Needless to say, not the slightest indication of these misgivings had been raised in the meetings between the Awami League team and Gen Yahya Khan's advisers, where amicability and optimism had prevailed to the end.

MORE BAD SIGNS

Whilst hope for a settlement was being raised, more bad signs of the intentions of the army were provided by their sudden decision to unload the munition ship, MV Swat, berthed at Chittagong port. Preparatory to this decision, Brig Mazumdar, a Bengali officer commanding the garrison in Chittagong, had suddenly been relieved from his command and replaced by a West Pakistani. On the night of March 24, he was flown to Dacca under armed escort, and has probably been executed. Under the new command, notice was given to local authorities of the decision to unload the ship, in spite of the fact that the army had abstained from doing so for the last 17 days in the face of non-cooperation from the port workers.

The decision to unload was a calculated provocation which immediately brought 100,000 people on the streets of Chittagong and led to massive firing by the army to break their way out. This issue was raised by the Awami League with General Peerzada as to why this escalation was being permitted whilst talks were still going on. He gave no answer beyond a promise to pass it on to Gen. Yahya.

Following the final meeting between Gen. Yahya Khan's and the Awami League's advisers on March 24 where Mr. M.M. Ahmed passed on his amendments, a call was awaited from Gen. Peerzada for a final session where the draft could be finalised. No such call materialised and instead, it was learned that Mr. M.M. Ahmed, who was central to negotiations, had suddenly left for Karachi on the morning of March 25 without any warning to the Awami League team.

HEROIC RESISTANCE

By 11 p.m. of the 25th, all preparations were ready and the troops began to take up positions in the city. In an act of treachery unparalleled in contemporary history, a program of calculated genocide was unleashed on the peaceful and unsuspecting population of Dacca by the midnight of March 25. No ultimatum was given to the Awami League by Gen. Yahya. No curfew order was issued when the machine guns, artillery and cannon unleashed their reign of death and destruction.

By the time the first martial law proclamations issued by Lt-Gen. Tikka Khan were broadcast the next morning, some 50,000 people, most of them without offering any resistance, and many women and children, had been butchered. Dacca had been turned into an inferno with fires raging in most corners of the city.. Sleeping inhabitants, who had been drawn from their homes by the fires started by the military, were machine-gunned as they ran to escape the flames.

Whilst the police, EPR and armed volunteers put up a heroic resistance, the main victims remained the weak, the innocent and the unsuspecting, who were killed at random in the thousands. We are compiling a first hand account of the details of genocide committed by the Pakistan army on the orders of the President of Pakistan, which we will publish shortly. The scale and brutality of the action exceeds anything perpetrated in the civilised world.

Gen. Yahya himself left Dacca on the night of March 25 after giving the Pakistan army an open license to commit genocide on all Bengalis. His own justification for this act of barbarism was not forthcoming till 8 p.m. the next day, when the world was given its first explanation for the unleashing of this holocaust.

PAKISTAN DEAD

The statement was self-contradictory and laced with positive lies. His branding members of a party as traitors and outlaws, with whom he had only 48 hours ago been negotiating for a peaceful transfer of power, bore no relationship to the situation in Bangla Desh or the course of the negotiations. His promise to hand over power to the elected representatives of the people after banning the Awami League, which was the sole representative of Bangla Desh had held a majority of seats in the National Assembly, was a mockery of the freely recorded voice of 75 million Bengalis. The crudity of the statement was clear evidence that Gen. Yahya was no longer interested in taking shelter behind either logic or morality, and had reverted to the law of the jungle in his bid to crush the people of Bangla Desh.

Pakistan is now dead and buried under a mountain of corpses. The hundreds and thousands of people murdered by the army in Bangla Desh will act as an impenetrable barrier between West Pakistan and the people of Bangla Desh. By resorting to pre-planned genocide Gen. Yahya must have known that he was himself digging Pakistan's grave. The subsequent massacres perpetrated on his orders by his licensed killers on the people were not designed to preserve the unity of a nation. They were acts of racial hatred and sadism devoid of even the elements of humanity.

Professional soldiers, on order, violated their code of military honor and were seen as beasts of prey who indulged in an orgy of murder, rape, looting, arson and destruction unequalled in the annals of civilisation. These acts indicate that the concept of two countries is already deeply rooted in the minds of Gen. Yahya and his associates, who would not dare commit such atrocities on their own countrymen.

Gen Yahya's genocide is thus without political purpose. It serves only as the last act in the tragic history of Pakistan which Gen. Yahya has chosen to write with the blood of the people of Bangla Desh. The objective is genocide and scorched earth, before his troops are either driven out or perish. In this time, he hopes to liquidate our political leadership, intelligentsia and administration, to destroy our industries and public amenities, and as a final

act, he intends to raze our cities to the ground. Already his occupation army has made substantial progress towards this objective. Bangla Desh will be set back fifty years as West Pakistan's parting gift to a people they have exploited for twenty-three years for their own benefit.

This is a point of major significance to those great powers who choose to ignore this largest single act of genocide since the days of Belsen and Auschwitz. If they think they are preserving the unity of Pakistan, they can forget it because Gen. Yahya himself has no illusions about the future of Pakistan.

SEEKS SUPPORT

They must realise that Pakistan is dead and murdered by Gen. Yahya - and that independent Bangla Desh is a reality sustained by the indestructible will and courage of 75 million Bengalis who are daily nurturing the roots of this new nationhood with their blood. No power on earth can unmake this new nation and sooner or later both big and small powers will have to accept it into the world fraternity.

It is, therefore, in the interests of politics as much as humanity for the big powers to put their full pressure on Gen. Yahya to cage his killers and bring them back to West Pakistan. We will be eternally grateful to the people of the Soviet Union and India and the freedom-loving people of all countries for the full support they have already given us in this struggle.

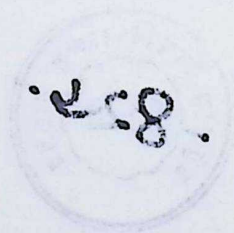
We would welcome similar support from the People's Republic of China, the USA, France, Great Britain and all Afro-Asian countries who have freed themselves from colonial rule and from all freedom-loving countries. Each in their own way should exercise considerable leverage on West Pakistan and were they to exercise this influence, Gen. Yahya could not sustain his war of aggression against Bangla Desh for a single day longer.

Bangla Desh will be eighth most populous country in the world. Its only goal will be to rebuild a new nation from the ashes and carnage left behind by Gen. Yahya's occupation army. It will be a stupendous task because of the destruction of the economy by Gen. Yahya's army in our already underdeveloped and overpopulated region. But we now have a cause and a people who have been hardened in the resistance, who have shed their blood for their nation and won their freedom in an epic struggle, which pitted unarmed people against a modern army. Such a nation cannot fail in its task of securing the foundations of its nationhood.

In our struggle for survival, we seek the friendship of all people, the big powers and the small. We do not aspire to join any bloc or pact but will seek assistance from those who give it in a spirit of goodwill free from any desire to control our destinies. We have struggled far too long for our self-determination to permit ourselves to become anyone's satellite.

We now appeal to the nations of the world for recognition and assistance, both material and moral, in our struggle for nationhood. Every day this is delayed, a thousand lives are lost and more of Bangla Desh's vital assets are destroyed. In the name of humanity, act now and earn our undying friendship.

This we now present to the world as the case of the people of Bangla Desh. Bangla Desh has earned her right to recognition at great cost, as the people of Bangla Desh made sacrifices of unequal magnitude and fought hard in order to establish the rightful place for Bangla Desh in the comity of nations.



The preceding statement was issued by Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh on April 17, 1971 after proclamation of Bangladesh as a sovereign republic.