

# TIME

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## BANGLADESH: Mujib: Death of the Founder

When India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi decided to dispense with the irksome processes of democracy and arrogate all power to herself in June, she was able to take a few cues from her next-door neighbor. Last January Sheik Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh, impatient with the plodding progress and growing anarchy of his impoverished country, pushed legislation through Parliament changing the government to a presidential system giving him enlarged powers. The move surprised some and saddened others, since "Mujib" had long impressed observers as a man of reason and moderation as well as great courage.

Last week, accusing Mujib of ineffectual leadership, the armed forces seized the Bangladesh government in a predawn coup. The man the Bengalis called Bangabandhu (father of Bengal), who led the country to independence from Pakistan only four years ago, was killed and replaced by a longtime associate. Although communications with Dacca were cut shortly after the takeover and reports were sketchy, it was clear that the coup was bloody. In addition to Mujib, 55, Prime Minister Mohammed Mansoor Ali and two of Mujib's nephews were also killed. So reportedly were at least 200 other supporters. At week's end the coup's leaders announced that the slain President was buried Saturday in his home village near Dacca with "full honors." There were no other details on how he died.

Islamic Republic. The first signs of trouble came when gunfire was heard near Mujib's house in Dacca. At 5:15 a.m., a Major Dalim announced over Radio Bangladesh that the armed forces had taken over and changed the country's name from the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh. The new President, he declared, would be Khandakar Moshtaque Ahmed, 56, who had been Minister of Foreign Trade and Commerce in Mujib's Cabinet. Dalim further announced that martial law, as well as a 24-hour curfew, had been proclaimed throughout the country. "Anybody trying to resist the new revolutionary government or violating any instructions given so far will be dealt with severely," he added. By the time he had finished speaking, tanks were patrolling the streets of Dacca.

In a later broadcast, the new President claimed that the takeover had been prompted by "corruption, nepotism and attempts to concentrate power on one head." He charged that Mujib had failed to solve the country's economic problems. But when Khandakar announced a new 16-man civilian ministry, it turned out to be composed entirely of members of Mujib's Cabinet.

Some observers pointed out that while Khandakar had served as Foreign Minister in the government-in-exile during the Pakistani civil war, he may not have been loyal to Mujib. There were allegations after independence that he had participated in U.S.-initiated attempts to prevent the breakaway of Bangladesh. Mujib piqued Khandakar by relieving him of the foreign ministry, appointing Dr. Kamal Hossain, who was in Belgrade when the coup occurred.

A political conservative, Khandakar is said to favor closer ties with Pakistan. Late last week Pakistan President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the first to recognize the new government. But the reaction in India was one of dismay and grief over Mujib's death. Said a government spokesman: "We held him in high esteem in India as one of the outstanding personalities of our time."

The slain Mujib was a man of enormous magnetism and charm who frequently attracted million-strong throngs with his stirring and emotional oratory. "I have known the impact of Gandhi, Jinnah and Nehru," said one observer, "but the depth of feeling Mujib evoked in so many people and so effortlessly was something no other leader had ever done." Jailed for the first time as a seventh-grader when he agitated in favor of India's independence from Britain, Mujib spent more than ten years behind bars, joking, "Prison is my other home."

In 1949 he founded the Awami League, and took it to a stunning victory in Pakistan's first national election in December 1970. He stood to become Prime Minister of all Pakistan. But he was an East Pakistani, and the West Pakistanis, who had long held absolute sway in the geographically divided country, were not about to yield power. Relations between the two regions deteriorated swiftly.

"They have all the guns," he said of the West Pakistanis at the time. "They can kill me, but let them know that they cannot kill the spirit of the 75 million people of Bengal." Soon afterward, Pakistan's dictator, General Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan, packed Mujib off to a desert prison cell under sentence of death. In a brutal military pogrom, the West Pakistanis proceeded to massacre 3 million Bengalis; 10 million others fled to India for refuge. After India entered the war and crushed Pakistani forces nine months later, Yahya was himself placed under house arrest, and Mujib was released to become the leader of the independent nation of Bangladesh.

Mujib returned to the most tumultuous welcome Dacca had ever seen—and a staggering array of problems in probably the poorest (and most densely populated) country on earth. There were virtually no civil servants and little industry. Ports were clogged, railroads destroyed, the educated elite savaged. Worse, what had not been destroyed in war was soon destroyed by a devastating drought in 1973 and floods last year that inundated three-quarters of the country.

Laudable Objectives. Facing spreading violence—there had been at least 6,000 political murders since independence—Mujib declared a state of emergency last December. He subsequently banned extremist parties on both the left and the right, brought the press under government control, and cracked down on corruption.

The moves met with general favor in Bangladesh, but there were those who were critical. "Do not forget I have had only three years as a free government," he reminded critics. "You cannot expect miracles." Yet even he seemed impatient for miracles in the end. No one ever doubted that his objectives were laudable. Mujib wanted nothing less than to build a "shonar Bangla," the golden Bengal of the poem by Rabindranath Tagore that serves as the country's national anthem.

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