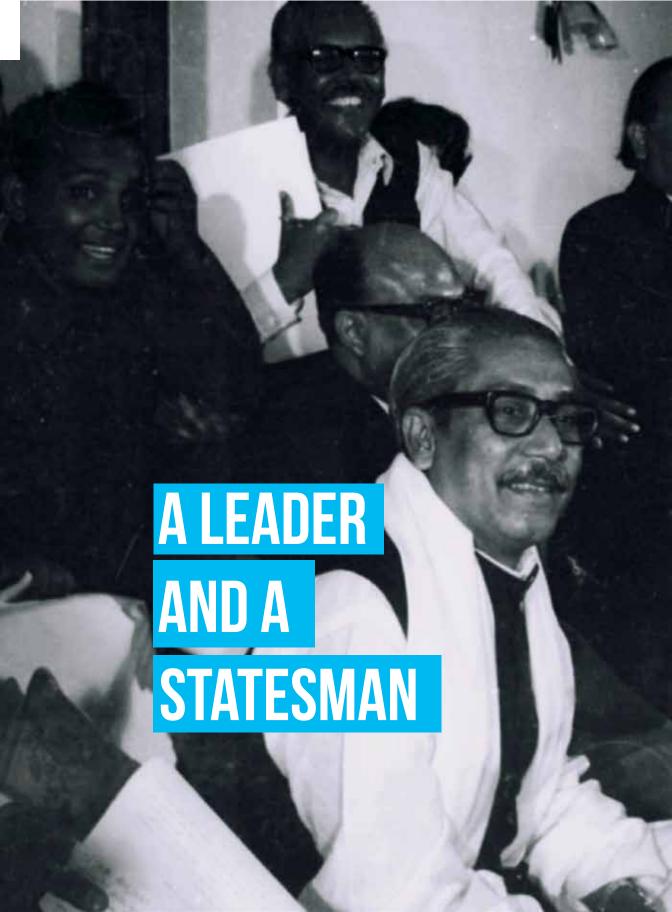


## MUJIB A NATION RISES





Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, affectionately known as Bangabandhu (friend of Bangalis), was a tall-standing statesman. Mujib, the founding father of the Bangali nation, provided the political leadership for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. The freedom was achieved through a nine-month long war and at the expense of 30 million lives and unprecedented devastation. Soon after the bloody birth of the new nation, Mujib took on the Sisyphean job of statecraft and building a nation from scratch.

At the early stage of Mujib's political career, he was greatly charged by the idea of politically empowering the masses. Eventually, Mujib as a student leader was proactive in the movement for creation of Pakistan. After the partition of British India in 1947, the present-day Bangladesh became part of Pakistan and remained so till 1971. Prior to 1971, Pakistan had two wings: the present-day Pakistan was West Pakistan and the present-day Bangladesh was East Pakistan. There was 1600 km of geographic distance between the two wings.

From its founding, the central government of Pakistan initiated a systemic cultural and linguistic discrimination towards East Pakistan – where Bangalis domiciled. The first attack was on their language: Bangla. The Bangalis were told that Urdu, a language spoken only by the political elites and some people of West Pakistan, would become the sole national language of entire Pakistan. A mass movement began almost immediately (1948 onwards) to introduce Bangla, which was spoken by 55% of Pakistan's population, as one of the state languages. The movement was led by Bangali students and politicians. Young Mujib was instrumental in that movement.

As Mujib became more politically active, he saw many faces of exploitation and discrimination against Bangalis, even though they were the majority. The central government was set up in

West Pakistan and dominated by the handful elites. The Bangali leadership started building a political movement against this systemic discrimination. The rise of Bangali nationalism was swift and relentless between 1952 and 1966. Mujib and his colleagues were instrumental in spearheading the rise. In 1958, the military coup d'état by General Ayub Khan was a telling event in the sense that Bangalis were further alienated by the discriminatory nature of a government led by politicians, army and bureaucrats based in West Pakistan.

Soon after, Mujib, who already rose to the leadership of Bangali nationalist-oriented Awami League, put forth a historic political program in 1966, the "Six-point demand." It was a policy prescription for regional autonomy. Mujib's non-Bangali western counterparts labeled it as a conspiracy which would secede East Pakistan from Pakistan. Mujib and his fellows were put to trial under the charges of attempts to break up Pakistan. The trial ended dramatically through an explosion of popular fury in East Pakistan. In 1969, the case, which came to be known as the Agartala Conspiracy case, was withdrawn and Mujib was freed.





Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the reception upon his landing at the Tejgaon Airport, Dhaka, January 10, 1972

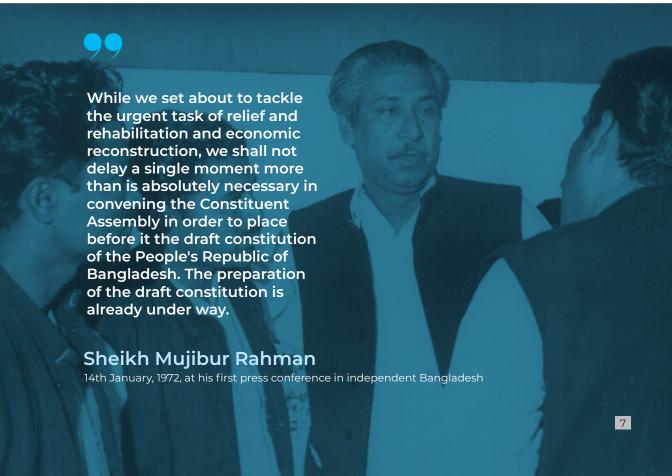
Mujib led the Awami League to victory at the first ever general elections of Pakistan in December 1970. Awami League won 167 out of 313 seats in the national assembly. The then military regime barred Mujib from forming the government. On 7th March, 1971, Mujib delivered a thunderous speech in Dhaka calling for complete freedom from the exploitation of West Pakistan. In the dark night of 25th March, 1971, Mujib was arrested by the Pakistani forces, exactly when a genocidal crackdown against the Bangali nation began. He was taken to West Pakistan and put in jail.

After nine months of bloody war, Bangladesh attained its freedom. On 10th January, 1972, Mujib returned to the independent soil of Bangladesh. As the man who led the nation to strive for freedom, Mujib became the founding father of the new nation of Bangladesh. He became the head of the new government of the new country upon his return. After the war, Mujib's first and foremost job was rebuilding. From 10th January, 1972 to till the day of his assassination on 15th August, 1975, almost every day a major policy decision was undertaken or a new service initiated or a new institution was built.





The first order of business for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was providing a blueprint for governing the new state: a constitution. In the founding year of Bangladesh, one of the prodigious accomplishments of his government was formulating the constitution - the holy grail which would determine the country's future course of actions. Mujib was very quick to initiate the process of drafting the constitution. Bangladesh's first constitution was delivered in only 11 months. In comparison, Pakistan since its independence took 9 years to formulate a constitution.





Sheikh Mujibur Rahman takes oath as the Prime Minister of newly independent Bangladesh, January 12, 1972

There were numerous phases of the development of Bangladesh's constitution. Among them, two phases are major. Firstly, the Proclamation of Independence issued on 10th April, 1971 by the interim wartime government. The Proclamation of Independence served as the interim first constitution of Bangladesh. The second phase began with the homecoming of Mujib and formation of his government.

On 11th January, 1972, Mujib, as the President, issued the Provisional Constitution Order. Mujib stepped down as President and became the Prime Minister on the very next day. In his first press conference in Dhaka on 14th January, Mujib promised early drafting of the constitution. On 23rd March, 1972, the "Bangladesh Constituent Assembly Order" was promulgated to provide a Constituent Assembly. This was the first step towards making the constitution. On 10th April, 1972, the 430-member Constituent Assembly was called into a two-day session and on 11th April, 1972, a 34-member Constitution Drafting Committee was formed, which was headed by the Law Minister, and entrusted with the task of drafting a constitution. The Drafting Committee opened up an invitation to any institution or individual to send proposals and memoranda. The committee received 98 memoranda.

On 11th October, 1972, the text of the draft constitution was finalized. The next day, it - the Constitution Bill- was introduced in the Constituent Assembly. The draft of the constitution was published in all the important media outlets. The constitution was then taken up in the Assembly. After the third phase of reading on 4th November, 1972, the constitution was enacted amidst thunderous applause. The full-fledged constitution became effective on 16th December, 1972, exactly a year after the liberation of Bangladesh. The constitution established the Westminster model of political system.

Mujib was instrumental in every phase of the constitution making process. The constitution incorporated a progressive vision – a solid reflection of Mujib's principles and political experiences. The principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism were enjoined as fundamental principles of state policy in the constitution. It was one of the most progressive constitutions of its time. The constitution guaranteed the political rights, freedoms and provision of basic necessities as a fundamental responsibility of the state. It entitled an independent judiciary as guardian of the constitutional rights.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman speaks at the Constituent Assembly, April 10, 1972

# CONSTITUTION DRAFTING TIMELINE 1972

### 11th January

President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman issued the Provisional Constitution Order.

### 23rd March

"Bangladesh Constituent Assembly Order" was promulgated to provide a Constituent Assembly.

### 10th April

A 430-member Constituent Assembly was called into a two-day session.

### 11th April

A 34-member special Constitution Drafting Committee was formed, headed by the Law Minister.

### 11th October

Draft of the constitution was approved.

### 12th October

The Constitution Bill was introduced in the Constituent Assembly.

### 19th October

The constitution was taken up in the Constituent Assembly for reading.

### 31st October

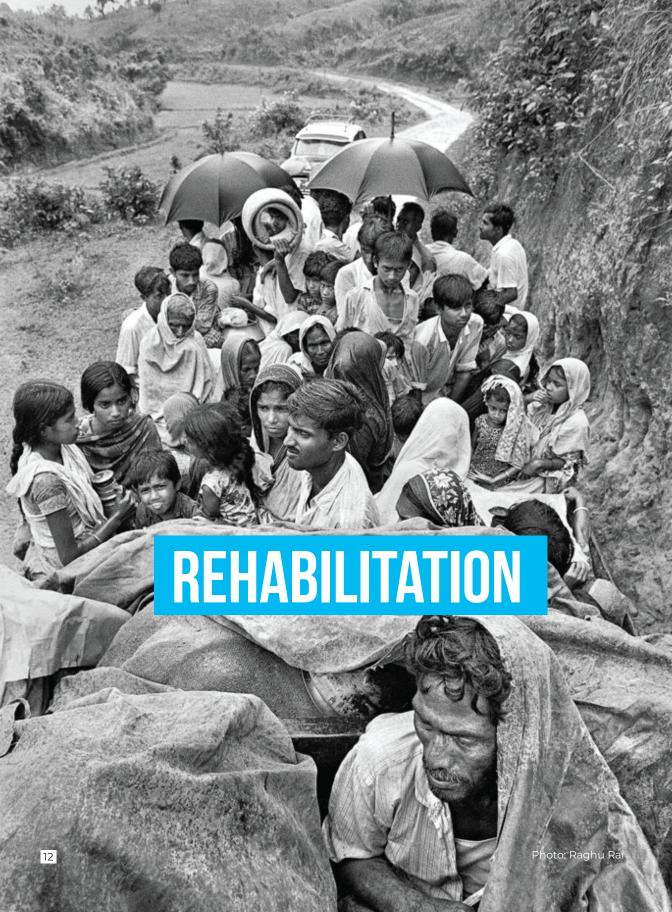
The second reading of the draft constitution began and continued till 3rd November, 1972.

### 4th November

With the third reading, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was adopted and enacted.

### 16th December

The constitution became effective and came into existence a year after the liberation of Bangladesh.

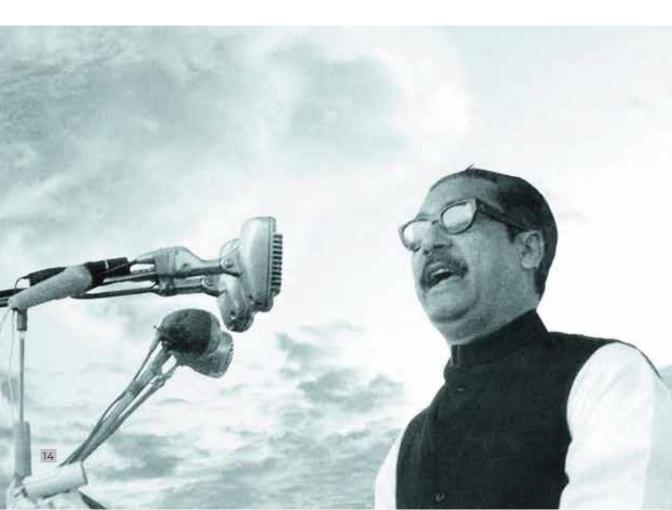


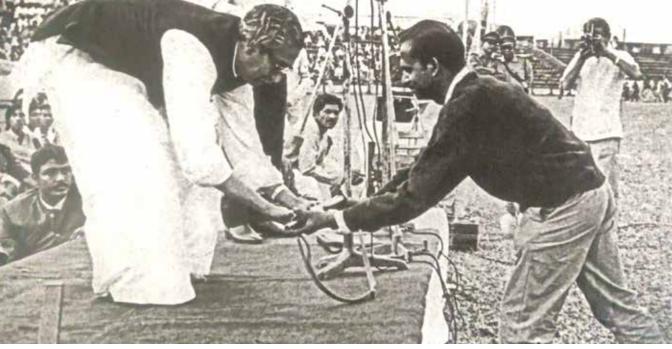
Bangladesh earned its independence through a war which caused unprecedented destruction and dislocation. The task of rehabilitation and rebuilding in the wake of independence was overwhelming. Among the hosts of challenges, rehabilitation of different war-affected groups was the most urgent and difficult one. It included the phenomenal task of rehabilitating nearly 10 million people who fled to India seeking refuge during the war, along with several million internally displaced people, the freedom fighters - particularly the injured ones, and over 200,000 women raped by the Pakistani forces.

Mujib immediately commenced a massive relief and rehabilitation program. His government outlined the program into two phases: short-term and mid-term. In the initial phase, a short-term program of six months emphasized rehabilitation and basic provisions for nearly 2 million displaced people. Mujib administration allocated USD 12.8 million for the immediate rehabilitation for six months till June 1972. During this period, the government distributed 530,000 tonnes of food grains, along with delivering a large amount of baby food, tents, tarpaulin and clothing.

Mujib initiated the second phase of rehabilitation program in June 1972. USD 82 million was allocated for the phase. Particular focus of this phase was to sort out problems affecting rural households and provide assistance to those who had lost their livelihoods in the war. Necessary fund was allocated for solving the housing problem. The government took up a plan to rebuild 900,000 destroyed houses and construct 166,000 houses in rural areas. It distributed 14 million tonnes of food grain in this phase. Destitute women and orphaned children were also targeted under this phase of rehabilitation. The public expenditure on the program between January 1972 and June 1973 amounted to USD 400 million – a significant amount for a war-rayaged economy.

It needed a strategic approach from Mujib government and coordination of stakeholders to carry out one of the largest relief and rehabilitation program in the world. Mujib immediately formed the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, as well as a new agency: the Relief Committee to manage the country-wide operation. A governance structure was setup to form relief sub-committees at local levels (from district to village). Mujib assigned the tasks of the rlief material distribution to the local relief committees consisting of members of government authorities, public representatives and private sectors. Rehabilitation Committees were formed consisting of five to ten members from local community. The extensive program of Mujib government was supported by the international development community and different UN agencies. Successful persuasion of the Bangladesh government secured around USD 130 million for relief and rehabilitation in 1972.





A freedom fighter surrenders arms to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Dhaka Stadium, January 31, 1972

### Rehabilitation of the returnee refugees from India

By January 1972, in just over a timespan of one month, over 5 million out of 10 million refugees from India returned to Bangladesh. The rest were expected to return by March. With a view to integrate the returnee refugees, a rehabilitation program was launched by Mujib. His government facilitated their direct return from refugee camps in India and arranged for temporary housing. The program included construction of 4.3 million houses, supply of food, medicine and other essentials. Many refugees upon return found their properties destroyed, burned or grabbed by others in their absence. To reclaim and recover their properties under a supportive legal framework, the government quickly issued the Restoration of Evacuee Property Order 1972.

### Welfare of the injured freedom fighters

Addressing the needs of the freedom fighters was among the top priorities of Mujib administration. On Mujib's call, the freedom fighters surrendered their arms from the warring days, and the disarmament process was carried in an orderly manner. This policy implementation was among the most decisive leadership-actions of his time. It essentially avoided the possibility of proliferations of small-arms in a new country during Cold-War era.

Freedom Fighters Welfare Foundation Act was passed on 7th August, 1972. It was a foundation for the welfare of injured freedom fighters. It was also entrusted with the task of ensuring welfare of the families of both deceased and the living freedom fighters. Mujib also strategized the fund-raising for the foundation. The responsibility of managing some post-war abandoned properties was entrusted to the Foundation, as a mean for income generation. Mujib oversaw the transfer of a one-time support grant from the Prime Minister's Fund to the families of the martyred freedom fighters. Under Muijb's patronage, the treatment of many severely injured freedom fighters was arranged in India and Eastern European countries.

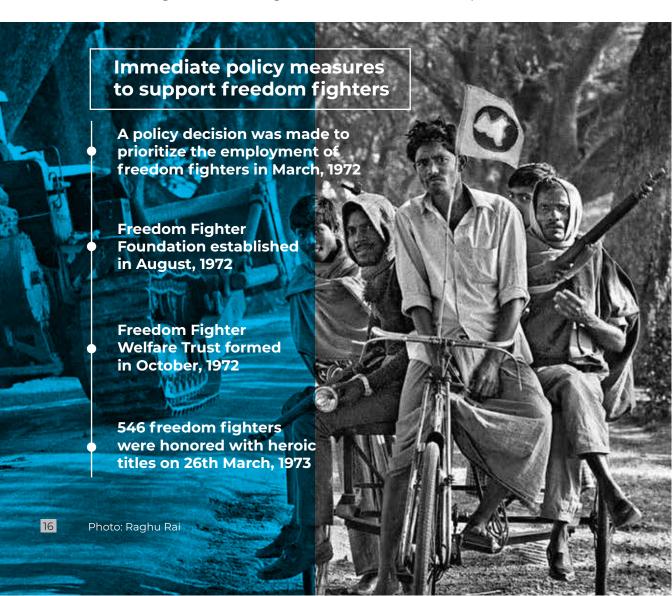




Photo: Kishor Parekh

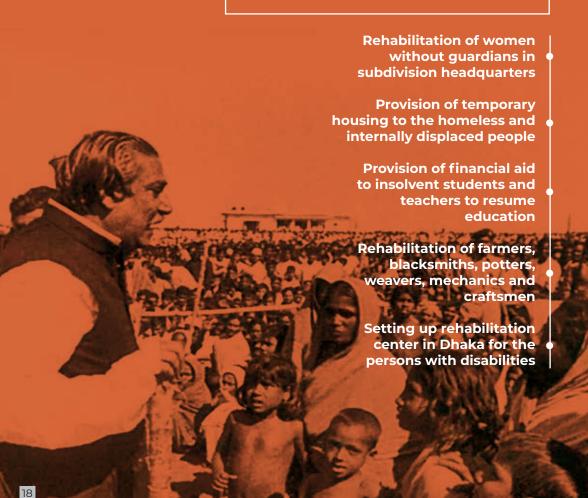
### Rehabilitation and reintegration of rape survivors

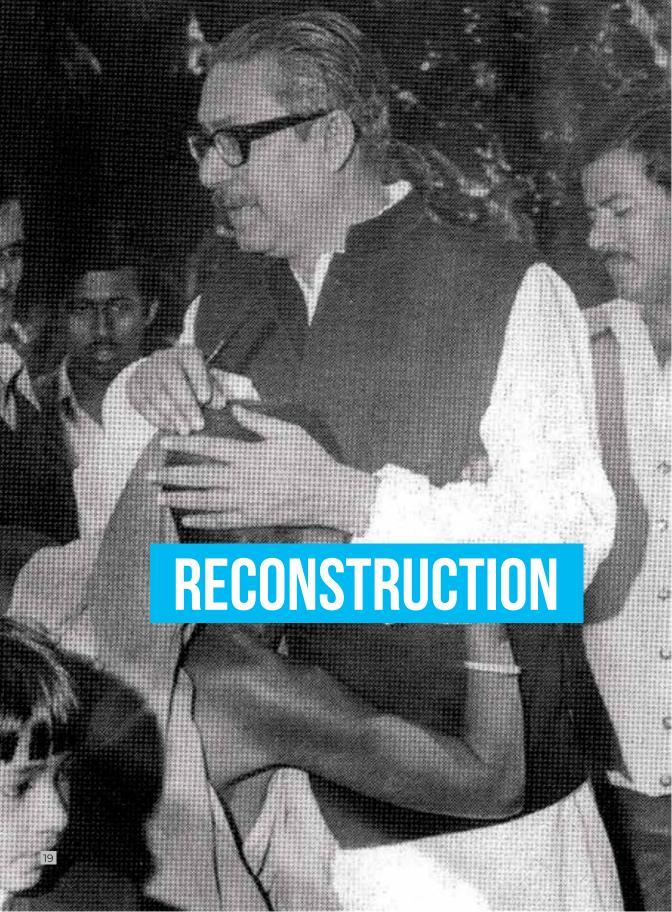
As part of their strategy, the Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators used mass-scale rape as a weapon of war. They systematically targeted Bangali women in order to cripple the moral of the nation. An estimated 200,000 women were raped by the Pakistani army during the 9-month long war . At least 50,000 rape survivors were pregnant. Mujib knew about the deeply held social stigma against the rape victims. He decided to immediately recognize the sacrifices of the rape survivors. He reached out to the rape survivors by calling them as "Birangonas" (the brave ones). It was a unique gesture on his part to restore their dignity and facilitate social inclusion.

The most important measure that Mujib had taken to integrate the rape survivors was the formation of the Women Rehabilitation Board on 18th February, 1972. The goal was to provide treatment to the injured women. The immediate priorities of the board were to conduct a survey to find out actual number of war-affected women and girls, and immediately bring them under healthcare. The board established 22 health centers across the country. As part of their reintegration process, the Mujib administration established 11 vocational training centers. The administration also set-up 62 centers at local-level for care and protection of destitute and homeless women.

Mujib's government faced manifold challenges in the post-war Bangladesh, which only a handful of new countries faced in the 20th century. The country was literally bankrupt, when Mujib took charge. In simple words, there was literally no money in reserve. Meanwhile, the world economy was witnessing a prolonged phase of recession. Yet, with limited resources and means, his government successfully carried one of the largest relief and rehabilitation operation in the history of mankind.







In the 1971 war, the Pakistani forces not only committed genocide, but also crippled the infrastructure. They operationally mass destructed properties. According to an estimate of World Bank, 4.3 million houses were destroyed only in the rural areas. An estimated 20 million people were internally displaced. The Pakistani forces had strategically destroyed all communication, socially-valuable, and industrial infrastructures in the country. Transport infrastructure (bridges, roads, culverts, buses, trucks, railways, waterways, ships, aircrafts, etc.) were particularly destroyed. More than 300 rail bridges and 300 road bridges were demolished. Estimated damage done in transport and communication sector stood at USD 160 million.

The Pakistani forces also destroyed the Chittagong port (the main port of the country) and wrecked 29 ships. The Pakistani soldiers planted mines in the channel of the port to make the port inaccessible after the war. The cost of damage done to public assets and properties stood at USD 350 million. They also targeted the agriculture sector, which they knew would hurt the agrarian economy of the newly independent Bangladesh. Estimated damage in the agriculture sector was worth USD 475 million. The power and energy sector was systematically destroyed. The production, distribution and electricity supply system were completely destroyed. Out of 237 industrial factories, 195 factories were severely damaged. Nearly 22,000 educational institutions, including 18,000 primary schools, had been damaged. They destroyed the entire production and supply chain of the economy.

The post-war Bangladesh government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was ready to shoulder the responsibility of rebuilding. Reconstruction was given top priority and a large-scale recovery

program took effect immediately. The government concentrated on reconstructing the social and communication infrastructure. It immediately started reconstructing the major roads, bridges, rail-bridges and telephone-connections for restoring connectivity which were critical to revitalizing the country's economy. The result of joint efforts for the rehabilitation of the transport sector was really remarkable.

Urgent steps were also taken for the reconstruction of the damaged transmission and distribution lines in the power sector. Sub-stations at different parts of the country - Ishwardi, Ullon and Khilgaon - were repaired. Soon afterwards the Siddirganj, Bheramara, Rupganj, Dinajpur and Meherpur power stations were also brought on stream and the grid lines were restored.

The reconstruction work for solving war-induced homelessness was divided into different sectors and necessary funds were allocated. A plan was also taken up in June 1972 to construct 166,000 houses for the families of people who lost lives and major properties during the war – such as the freedom fighters and other vulnerable people who were targeted during the war.



# Infrastructure revival at a glance

Mujib signed Bangladesh-India agreement on March, 1972 for rebuilding 4 railway bridges destroyed in the war

Mujib inaugurated a rail station in Dhaka (Banani station) to boost the reconstruction efforts

The war-destroyed Tista Railway Bridge and Hardinge Bridge, vital to connectivity in the northern region, were reopened by July, 1972

Of the total 295 destroyed railway bridges, 82 permanently and 198 temporarily rebuilt in 1972

61 power supply lines were restored, 24 loop lines constructed and 16 damaged lines reconstructed in 1972

Government rebuilt 1500 km power line and set up 300 megawat power plant

Of 74 damaged road-bridges, 55 permanently repaired and other 96 roads temporarily repaired in 1972

Damaged sea ports, mainly the Chittagong port (which conducted virtually all international trade), became functional within one year

1 million houses were rebuilt and repaired

Government rebuilt 98 food silos

Sub-district level hospitals destroyed during the war were rebuilt

Mujib's government repaired 900 college buildings and rebuilt 400 schools

# REVIVING THE ECONOMY



New planning machinery manned by the most competent professionals is undertaking the task of preparing a comprehensive blueprint for a new economy. Such a blueprint will involve institutional changes, in the fields of agriculture, industries and finance. These new institutions will seek to fully mobilize our material and human resources.

### Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

14th January, 1972, at his first press conference in independent Bangladesh

Immediately upon his return, Mujib decided that the economy must resume immediately. Years of colonial exploitation had made the newly independent Bangladesh, arguably the poorest country of the world. There was not a single dollar in the reserve of the central bank in 1972 and the total size of the economy was only USD 8 billion. Mujib decided that a laissez-faire economy will not work for a poor country like Bangladesh. Mujib's economic policies were guided by his vision of establishing a democratic state with a just and equitable social order. Hence, a planned economy with social welfare provisions was set forth. Mujib, in his task of rebuilding the economy, demonstrated commendable success. Within 12 months of the independence, the vital sectors of the economy had already recovered significantly from the losses of 1971.

The task of rebuilding was full of challenges since there were no functional institutions for the direction and management of the economy. One of Mujib's immediate responses was to fill the policymaking vacuum by setting up a National Planning Commission and the Bangladesh Bank (The Central Bank of

Bangladesh) within two days of his return to Bangladesh on 10 January 1972. The monetary system was reinstated by introducing banknotes in March, 1972. National Economic Council, which would become the major body for economic policy-decision making, was formed in January, 1972. Mujib advised the Planning Commission to prepare a long-term plan for the economy that could give expression to his commitment to building a self-reliant economy. Poverty-elimination would be its main target. The Planning Commission prepared the First Five-Year Plan which was unveiled for the period of 1973-78 with the amount of BDT 44.6 billion. The goal of the plan was to reduce poverty, boost the GDP growth to 5.5% per annum and raise the per capita income at the rate of 2.5% per annum.

At the early phases of rebuilding, economic policy-making was mostly reactive, designed to cope with the vast array of problems the government had to tackle as a consequence of the war. Continued emphasis was given to rehabilitation of the millions of refugees returning home. With a view to bear the expense of rehabilitation of the returnee refugees, internally displaced, injured freedom fighters, rape survivors and infrastructures revival, the government allocated BDT 1.1 billion from available

The soviet way removing mines to restore the operation of clintagoning port, 1972.

The Soviet Navy removing mines to restore the operation of Chittagong port, 1972

funds for completing the first phase of rehabilitation program by June, 1972. The second phase of rehabilitation program started from the end of June, also the first budget year. The first national budget for the 1972-73 fiscal year had an outlay of BDT 7.86 billion. The transport, power and industry sectors, which had suffered losses of about BDT 1.23 billion, got priority in the budgetary allocation.

Moreover, most pre-war industries (which were largely controlled by the West Pakistanis) were abandoned. The government had to rush-in to save them. On March 26, 1972, Mujib announced the decision to nationalize basic industries, banking and insurance. The professionals appointed to manage the nationalized banks and insurance companies reactivated the financial sector and initiated an agenda for financial inclusion through rapidly expanding banking services in rural areas.

In this backdrop, industrial production made a fast recovery. By August 1972, most of the sectors of industrial production regained over 90% of their 1969-70 output. Moreover, efforts were undertaken to create smooth coordination and engagement between different agencies. Special emphasis was given on access to working capital and supply of raw materials. Chittagong port was cleared and all damaged major bridges were repaired. Foreign exports edged-up, and by August, the balance of foreign trade stood at an optimal BDT 175 million.

In the agricultural sector, Mujib undertook policy measures to boost production. With a view to rebuild the agricultural infrastructure, Mujib's administration provided farm machineries, pumps and tube wells to the farmers. His government also distributed crop seedlings for free. Nearly 24,000 tons of IRRI-20 seeds and 800 tons of IRRI-8 seeds were distributed for free.

Mujib also waived the due cultivable land taxes along with interests. He raised the ceiling of tax exemption for agricultural land up to 25 bighas(825 Decimal). This was a big moral boost for the struggling peasants of newly born Bangladesh. These early measures helped avert serious food scarcity in 1972. To make agriculture more scalable and cutting-edge, Mujib established Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council in 1973.



Mujib stood for a total structural overhaul of the colonial administrative system. He did not want to inherit Pakistan era bureaucratic elitism of civil service in the newly independent Bangladesh. He was committed to establish a pro-people administrative machinery which would be able to serve the needs of a dynamic society. Mujib told the officials on the 1st February address in 1972 to change their bureaucratic outlook of the past and consider themselves as servants of the people.

In the manifesto of 1973 election, Mujib's party, Awami League made pledges to build a progressive administrative system, free of corruption, suitable for a socialist economic order. It also pledged to hand over local administration to elected representatives and reorganization of administration by turning the sub-division into districts. Eventually, Mujib took series of policy decisions to build an efficient and pro-people civil administration.



### Policy actions on governance reform

- Mujib's government proposed a restructuring of the administrative machinery and abolishes the elite cadres of the service.
- Mujib's government proposed to entrust the district administration to elect councils assisted by specialized staff.
- Mujib advocated for strengthening local government institutions, including widening the size of the basic administrative unit by converting sub-divisions into districts.
- Mujib's government proposed to create specialized professional cadres subject to a new framework service rules.
- Mujib's government intended to adopt effective measures for supervision and control of administrative action to eliminate corruption, nepotism and arbitrariness in the discharge of administrative functions.

Mujib understood that a functional civil administration is vital to governance. Mujib proceeded to reorganize the entire system of administration in order to establish a machinery which could effectively meet the urgent task of national reconstruction. The civil administration was re-established and immediately restarted from the disruption caused due to the 1971 war. He upgraded the former sub-divisions into districts.

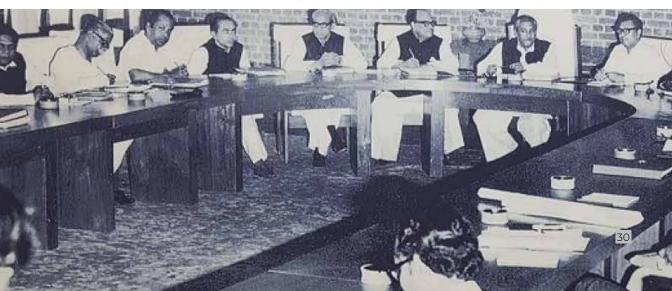
Within two months, district officers were appointed in all the districts. Moreover, 33,000 Bangalis, who were in the Pakistan government service (members of the armed forces or civil administration), were also integrated in the administration. While streamlining the civil administration, other aspects of governance needed to be focused on. Mujib thereon went ahead with a spree of institution-building, and setting legal frameworks for those institutions. He also had to set up a functional legal system which can deliver justice and settle disputes of myriad types.

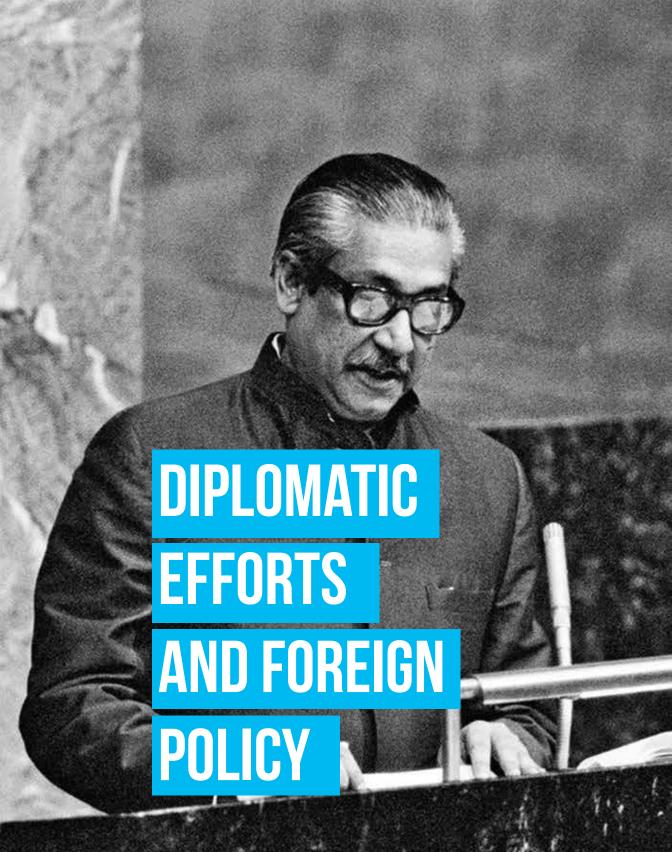
In the light of the reform agenda, the Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee was formed in March 1972 to examine the country's present administrate structure and to recommend a system which was efficient as well as consistent with the national aspiration. The Committee emphasized the role of the specialists in civil administration. It proposed that the general administration must specialize by choosing an area of administration and getting an intensive specialized training in that area.

The Committee also proposed that merit, not seniority, should determine the promotion of a civil servant. The evaluation of performance of the public personnel needs to be made objective, and promotion should be through testing system. The responsibility of public functionaries must be clearly defined and they must operate without any undue interference. The procedures of work must be simplified and streamlined.

Mujib's government continued to pursue its program of reorganizing the administration including the salary structure. In order to revamp the salary structure, Mujib set up the National Pay Commission charged with the responsibility of recommending a rational salary scale for the entire public sector, which would serve his progressive reform agenda. The commission soon proposed a salary structure by inculcating indicators such as existing living expense, government resources, essence to reduce inequality, efficiency, equity, motivation, and individual skill-set. The National Pay Commission had coordinated with the Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee while framing policy suggestions.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in cabinet meeting, January, 1975





Mujib outlined that the post-independence foreign policy should be far-sighted. His foreign policy was coined with the terms of "friendship to all, malice to none." As a newly independent state in the Cold War era, Bangladesh adopted a policy of bilateralism and pragmatism. He had been speaking of his vision to make Bangladesh the "Switzerland of the East," a country that would adopted a diplomatic posture that would not offend any other country. Mujib's first priority was to achieve global recognition as a sovereign state. He put priority on amicable relationships with the neighbors. As a regional strategy, Mujib was also keen to establish close relations with other South and Southeast Asian neighbors. The countries which supported the liberation movement (especially in the region), quickly recognized the newly independent Bangladesh.

### Gaining international recognition

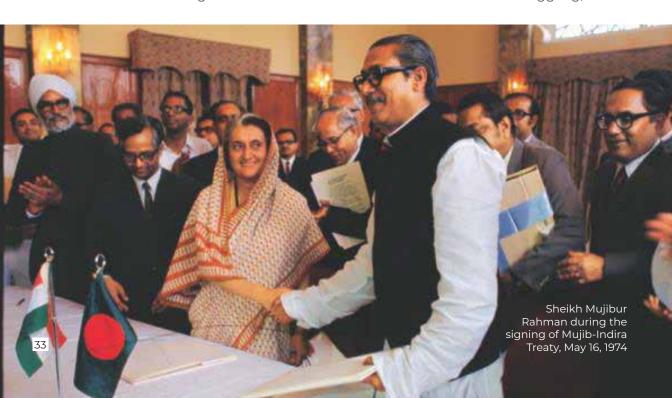
Mujib wanted Bangladesh to be recognized by the international community. Bhutan was the first country to recognize Bangladesh on 6th December, 1971. India also recognized Bangladesh on 6th December, 1971. Soviet Union recognized Bangladesh on 25th January 1972, being the first great power. Bangladesh was soon recognized by neighboring countries, Myanmar, and Nepal. The Central Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand recognized within one month of independence. United Kingdom recognized Bangladesh as an independent nation on 4th February, 1972. Between February and March 1972, 34 major countries from Europe recognized Bangladesh. Within

a year of independence, 97 countries recognized Bangladesh. Bangladesh became member of several international bodies including WHO, UNESCO, World Bank, and IMF.

### Friendship with India

Mujib had deep sense of gratitude towards India for its extended support during the struggle of independence. However, it did not cloud his diplomatic acumen. On 6th February, 1972, Mujib visited Kolkata for the first time as the head of independent Bangladesh. During his visit, he raised the issue of the withdrawal of war-time Indian troops which were still in Bangladesh. Bangladesh had about 150,000 Indian troops on its soil. Indira Gandhi, the then Indian Prime Minister assured Mujib that the Indian troops will be withdrawn very soon. The bulk of the Indian Army was withdrawn by the end of February 1972. On 12th March, 1972, farewell of units of the Indian Army were ceremonially reviewed by Mujib. Within 50 days of independence, there was a complete withdrawal of Indian troops, which would become a landmark diplomatic accomplishment for a statesman of any new country.

The then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Bangladesh on March, 1972. During her visit, the two countries signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship. On May 1974, an economic agreement was signed. It addressed issues of cross-border smuggling,





Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin after signing the joint declaration at Kremlin, March, 1972

connectivity, agricultural extension support and technical support for industrialization. Another area of Indo-Bangladesh cooperation was the establishment of a permanent Joint River Commission. The commission was to formulate plans for flood control and irrigation projects. It was also decided that, the representatives of the Bangladesh and India should meet periodically to identify new areas of mutual cooperation.

### **Relations with USSR**

The Soviet Union extended its full diplomatic support upon Mujib's outreach. Aeroflot became the first international airline to start an air service to Dhaka. On 2nd March 1972, Mujib visited USSR. Two agreements were signed on Soviet economic aid to Bangladesh. First agreement provided that the Soviet Union would make a soft loan to Bangladesh for constructing a thermal power station, broadcasting stations, an electrical equipment plant and exploration for oil and gas. Under the second agreement the Soviet Union would provide three large merchant ships, 10 trawlers, 50 locomotives (along with building a railway workshop), and food-aid. Trade ties were established with an estimated annual turnover of USD 435 million.



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with the United States President Gerald Ford at the White House, October 1, 1974

### **Relations with USA**

The United States of America (USA) recognized Bangladesh on 4th April, 1972. Keeping a balanced foreign policy approach, Mujib established diplomatic relations with the United States, one of the superpowers. Since US was a major foreign aid provider of the era, Mujib especially kept the necessity of food aid in mind. The government established a diplomatic office in Washington and officially it started operating on May 1972. Bangladesh received USD 90 million under a bilateral agreement signed on May 1972. As a major breakthrough, a long-term memorandum was signed among Bangladesh, the United States and OPEC on 17th January, 1975.

### **Recognition from Pakistan**

A diplomatic tension between Bangladesh and Pakistan was reignited prior to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) council meeting in February 1974. Mujib, keeping the essential prospect of recognition in mind, considered this an opportunity to put diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to get recognition from them (the former rulers of Bangladesh). It was needed as part of the legitimacy establishment of the newly independent Bangladesh. As a brilliant tactic, Mujib conditionally agreed to join the OIC council, provided that Pakistan had recognized Bangladesh beforehand. Following the pressure from various OIC members, Pakistan officially recognized Bangladesh as independent, sovereign state on 22nd February, 1974.

### Joining the international community

Bangladesh was admitted to the Commonwealth as its 32nd member on 18th April, 1972. The then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Abdus Samad Azad welcomed the admission declaring that the decision was an acceptance of the reality of new Bangladesh by the world's first community of nations. He added that Bangladesh will maintain good and friendly relations with all members of the Commonwealth of Nations on the basis of mutual respect of sovereignty, equality and fraternity.

In September, 1973 Mujib went to Algiers to attend the assembly of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) council. In the Cold War era, he found it imperative that Bangladesh maintain a neutral position with friendship with all nations, including superpowers. Moreover, after clearing all bilateral and multilateral recognitions, Bangladesh became the member the United Nations with unanimous approval of all countries on 18th September, 1974. This was a major success of Mujib's foreign policy strategy. On 25th September, 1974, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as the first Bangladeshi, delivered his symbolic speech in Bangla in the UN General Assembly.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addresses the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit Conference in Algeria, September, 1973







MUJIB: A NATION RISES

August, 2020 Celebrating the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman