

স্বাধীনতা দিবস

MARCH 26, 2022



Bangladesh Independence Day

Happy Independence Day, Bangladesh! Our revolutionary story is one of persistence, sacrifice, and resilience. Let's take a look back at our extraordinary history.

In 1947, India won its freedom from British rule. The drawback was Partition, splitting the country into Hindu majority India and Muslim majority Pakistan. Pakistan was composed of five provinces, one of these provinces being East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and the rest West Pakistan (now Pakistan). India stood approximately 1370 miles (2204 km) between East and West Pakistan.

Beyond the significant cultural and language barriers, East Pakistan held little to no economic or political power despite having the largest population among all the provinces. About 70% of Pakistan's overall exports were from East Pakistan but only 25% of that revenue was allowed in the province. Bengali people were viewed as the lowest class, used as a labor force to contribute to the nation's wealth.

In 1948, Muhammad Ali Jinnah declared Urdu as the official language of Pakistan at an educational summit in Dhaka. Bangla was to be removed as a subject entirely, an active attempt to erase Bengali culture. This blatant disregard birthed the Bengali Language Movement, a mass protest lasting five years largely led by university students. West Pakistani military forces fired live bullets, threw tear gas, and made mass arrests.

During the 1970 Pakistani general election, the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won an absolute majority of 160 of 300 total seats in the Pakistani National Assembly. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (former leader of the Pakistani People's Party) and Yahya Khan (former president of Pakistan) conspired and refused to hand power over to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This autocratic response confirmed the oppression of East Pakistanis. The struggle for independence crystallized.

West Pakistani authorities captured Bengali armed forces, NCOs, and enlisted personnel and caused forced disappearances. Until the evening of March 25, 1971, Sheikh Mujib had proposed open negotiations and a peaceful transfer of power for a united, democratic Pakistan. His appeals were met by a severe military crackdown throughout East Pakistan, Operation Searchlight.

The Pakistani army led a genocidal killing spree, murdering thousands of innocent civilians indiscriminately, elders and children alike. Nearly 10 million residents of East Pakistan crossed the border and sought refuge in India. There was no transfer of power.

Before his arrest on March 26, 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared Bangladesh an independent nation. Through the efforts of the Joint Forces of Bangladesh (Mukti Bahini) and the Indian Armed Forces, the fight for independence would ensue for nine brutal months. This struggle resulted in the deaths of about 3 million people, according to Awami League and Indian sources. This was known as both the Bangladesh War of Independence and the Bangladesh Genocide. The Pakistani army surrendered on December 16, 1971, Victory Day.

Today, we celebrate our history, culture, language, and heritage. Joy Bangla!

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