

# Echoes of Liberation: Mujibur Rahman's Enduring Legacy in Bangladesh's Contemporary Political Tapestry

Amit Saha\*, and Nayandeep Sardar

PhD Scholar, Department of Politics and International Studies, Pondicherry University, India

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## ABSTRACT

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920–1975) played a pivotal role in shaping Bangladesh's political landscape during its liberation movement. This paper examines the contested legacy of his political vision in the context of Bangladesh's current political scenario. Mujib's vision for modern Bangladesh is rooted in four core principles: nationalism, secularism, socialism, and democracy, which remain foundational values in the country's Constitution, despite numerous challenges. The study explores how Mujib's concept of Bengali nationalism has evolved over the last five decades amidst internal and external challenges, including communal, extremist, and ethnic tensions in the context of South Asian and global politics. In August 2024, a student-led uprising led to the fall of the Awami League government under Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina. This uprising sparked significant discontent among political activists in Bangladesh regarding Mujib's legacy. However, this paper argues that underlying values shared by Mujib's vision and the goals of the uprising, particularly a commitment to liberal political ideals, are evident. The objectives of the new regime seeking to "reconstitute" Bangladesh can be traced back to Mujib's foundational vision of a modern nation. By analyzing the connection between Mujib's legacy and contemporary political developments, the paper seeks to enhance the understanding of Bangladesh's political trajectory. The study is based on content analysis of reliable primary and secondary texts, including statements by leaders of the July 2024 uprising. The primary aim is to explore the relevance of Mujib's ideals in today's political landscape and identify common aspects between his political vision and current trends in Bangladesh's political environment.

## 1. Introduction

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a prominent political leader and is considered 'the founding father' of Bangladesh. Born on March 17, 1920, in Tungipara village in the Gopalganj district of undivided Bengal in colonial India, he played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of Bengalees in East Pakistan during the tumultuous period leading up to Bangladesh's

\*Corresponding author's E-mail address: amit1995@pondiuni.ac.in, <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2951-7323>

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independence in 1971 (Jahan, R.,1998). Mujib was the second child of Sheikh Luthfur Rahman and Sheikh Sayera Khatun. Mujib hailed from a modest family, with his father being a prominent local politician and a member of the Indian National Congress (Biographybd.n.d.). This familial background instilled in him a sense of political awareness and responsibility from an early age. Mujib's educational journey began at the local school in Tungipara, where he demonstrated an early aptitude for leadership. He later attended the University of Dhaka, where he became actively involved in student politics. Influenced by the anti-colonial movements and the struggle for independence in India, Mujib's political consciousness deepened during his university years. He was particularly inspired by the ideas of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, which shaped his vision for a free and democratic society. Mujib was a key figure in the Awami League, a political party that pushed for greater autonomy for East Pakistan. His leadership and vision culminated in the historic 1970 general elections, where his party won a majority, demanding self-rule. However, the refusal of the West Pakistani government to transfer power led to widespread protests and ultimately the War of Liberation in 1971.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The article is based on certain theoretical framework prevailing in the domain of Political Science and International Relations. The political theories related to the crisis of nation-building in third-world countries provide a framework for understanding the challenges faced by nations like Bangladesh. These theories include the Modernization Theory and the Dependency Theory, each offering different perspectives on the complexities of nation-building in third world countries.

Third-world nations are supposed to adhere to a predetermined course toward industrialization, social modernization and democratization, according to the Modernization Theory which first appeared in the mid-20th century. Modernization is a broad process of significant societal change that tends to permeate every aspect of life, including political institutions, social interactions, and economic activities, in a self-reinforcing manner (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007). Factors such as natural and economic conditions, integration with the global market and technical advancement or transfer of technology from developed to developing nations are all taken into account by the Modernization Theory (Joseph, 2017). This perspective holds that Bangladesh must imitate Western models of political and economic growth if it has to succeed in nation-building. This idea highlights how crucial it is to create a democratic political order, embrace economic systems, and construct contemporary institutions through the ideals of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The quest for modernity has frequently come up in political discussions in Bangladesh, particularly in the early years following independence. In the 1980s and 1990s, the nation concentrated on developing an industrial economy centered on agriculture, which subsequently moved into the advancement of industries including technology, textiles, and ready-made clothing. But there have been difficulties in the shift from a traditional to a modern culture. These include persistent poverty, bad governance, political instability, and corruption, all of which have made it more difficult for Bangladesh to reach the levels of development that modernization theorists had in mind.

Dependency Theory, on the other hand, challenges the idea that all countries may grow in the same way, in contrast to modernization theory. Dependency theory is a synthesis of several theories, such as neo-Marxist theory, historical structure theory, and world systems theory (Joseph, 2017). Dependency theorists like Samir Amin and Andre Gunder Frank contend that third-world nations are imprisoned in a condition of underdevelopment because of their structural reliance on the global capitalist system. Dependency theory can be used to explain

Bangladesh's ongoing reliance on international markets, foreign financial institutions, and aid. Even while Bangladesh has made great progress in industries like micro finance and textiles, it still depends mostly on foreign aid, international investment, and remittances. Dependency theorists contend that this dependence prevents Bangladesh from having complete control over its own economic and political future and maintains its subservient status within the global capitalist system.

There is no one particular theory or method that can adequately handle the complexity of Bangladesh's nation-building dilemma. A number of other reasons, such as problems with legitimacy, economic inequality, cultural diversity, external interference, and political corruption, frequently contribute to nation-building disasters. A multidimensional strategy that takes Bangladesh's particular circumstances and requirements into account is needed to address these issues, fostering social cohesion, economic fairness, and inclusive government.

The Yunus led interim government of Bangladesh has recently urged for an amendment of the constitution. The Constitutional Reform Commission proposed significant changes to the principles of Bangladesh's Constitution originally established in 1972 after the country's liberation following a nine-month war against Pakistan in 1971 (Dhaka Tribune, 2025). The Commission recommended incorporating equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism, and democracy into the constitution's principles while removing nationalism, socialism and secularism (Dhaka Tribune, 2025). The constitution also recommends changing the name of the state of Bangladesh. The head of the reform commission, Ali Riaz, has officially submitted their recommendation letter to Chief Advisor Yunus, and has mentioned the constitutional name of the state as 'People's democratic Bangladesh' instead of 'People's Republic of Bangladesh' (Anandabazar Patrika, 2025).

These constitutional amendment reforms have sparked heated debates and widespread discontent across the nation. The prominent opposition political parties i.e. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Communist Party of Bangladesh, the Nationalist party, has expressed their resistance to these proposed amendments.

While the government justifies these amendments as necessary steps toward modernization and inclusivity, a large portion of the population views them as an unsettling departure from the values that have long defined the country's identity.

The three principles are among the four enshrined as "fundamental principles of state policy" in the country's constitution. Under the new proposals, only one -- "democracy", remains unchanged (Hindustan Times, 2025). "We are proposing five state principles -- equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism, and democracy -- for reflection of the great ideals of the 1971 Liberation War and the people's aspiration during the 2024 mass upsurge," commission chairman Ali Riaz said in a video statement (Hindustan Times, 2025). In addition to changing Bangladesh's political and ideological climate, this change has raised concerns about the country's founding ideals' legacy and the direction of its future government.

Notwithstanding the contentious discussions surrounding the proposed constitutional modifications, the interim government has also advanced modernization and inclusivity concepts that are consistent with Mujib's ideas and were originally present in the 1972 constitution.

### **3. Statement of Purpose**

At the dusk of the long rule by the Awami League government who patronise Mujib's vision in ruling the country the dusk emerged with a new set of visions which can make the country a bettered place for living. The article serves as a medium of better understanding of the

transition and the major reforms initiated by the interim government. The work has been crafted with the help of several authentic sources where the chances of biasness tames to be lesser. The theoretical background has been chosen consciously for better understanding of the context in the light of political developments occurring in the third world countries. The authors dedicate this piece of work for better understanding of the current political situation and Mujib's legacy despite of severe actions exhibited in the recent past. As the recent developments in the political arena of Bangladesh is spontaneously changing authors could only refer to the online publications and news media as the prime source of data. There is no such reliable print media sources found to refer to the day to day events in order to understand the recent political developments.

#### **4. Historical Context**

##### **4.1 The Genesis of Bangladesh**

The 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh against Pakistan continues to play a crucial role in shaping the frame of mind of Bangladeshi people until now. This historical event has fabricated the sense of nationalism among the people of Bangladesh and also moulded the contemporaneous Constitution (European Foundation For South Asian Studies efsas,n.d.). The Bangladesh which we witness today is an outcome of the liberation war of 1971. To comprehend the existing political, social, economic condition of Bangladesh one must look into the history of Pakistani colonialism and the events leading to 1971 liberation war, which finally formed Bangladesh into an independent sovereign state (efsas, n.d.). The demand for a separate Muslim state emerged much before the partition which was strongly demonstrated through the Lahore resolution in the Lahore session of All India Muslim League in 1940 (Anisuzzaman, & Mamun, 2022). The desire for creation of a separate Muslim state was the result of the fear of Muslims becoming minority in Hindu majority India. This resolution which served as a political demand for the creation of a separate Muslim state was a joint effort of the Muslims of present-day Pakistan as well as the Muslims of Bengal (efsas n.d.).

Finally, the desire for the creation of separate Muslim state was attained through the various political processes like the Lahore resolution, Quit-India movement, passage of the Indian Independence Act in 1947 leading to the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan (Gull, 2014).

But the partition was dreadful as it led to migration of thousands and millions of people, thousands of deaths, and communal violence. After the partition in 1947 Pakistan was further divided into two regions: West Pakistan and East Pakistan (Intergovernmental Research and Policy Journal,irpj n.d.). After the adoption of Constitution by Pakistan in 1956 the provinces of Pakistan were amalgamated into the regime and came to be known as 'Purbo Pakistan' or East Pakistan. Both the West and East Pakistan differed from each other in terms of geography, culture, language, politics, economy and ideology.

As the Muslims of Bengal experienced inferiority to the Hindu landlords in India they hoped for better standards of living in the new Muslim state and expected the government of Pakistan to ensure and protect their fundamental rights but it proved to be even more discriminatory in all spheres.

There was nothing common among the two Pakistans which were essential to form a nation. In late 1950s though there was an increase in the public funds allocated to the East Pakistan the economic disparity between the two as reflected in their GDP growth rates remained evident (irpj n.d.). The government headquarters were all established in the Western Pakistan,

the political representation in central government was also not equal it was dominated by the elites of West Pakistan and the Bengali population was not significantly represented (efsas n.d.). While West Pakistan significantly desired to establish an Islamic state the East Pakistan strongly opposed the Islamic pattern imposed by West Pakistan. The Bengali language Movement began when Muhammad Ali Jinnah, one of Pakistan's founding fathers, proclaimed Urdu to be the country's official state language and forced it on the Bengali population, or East Pakistanis.

Since the Bengali language movement's impact on the liberation struggle is undeniable, it served as a turning point in the conflict's history. In 1952, this movement led to widespread demonstrations, hartals, and fatalities in Dhaka. East Pakistanis claimed that the Bengali language was being eradicated because West Pakistani elites attempted to pollute it by introducing terms from Urdu, Arabic, and Persian, as well as by eliminating Sanskrit and Bengali words and the original Bengali alphabets. The working classes as well the elites of East Pakistan took a lot of initiatives to secure the acknowledgement of Bengali as the state language of Pakistan along with Urdu and English (efsas n.d.). The rally on February 21, 1952, which sought to be obstinate against the order under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, was the most noteworthy. The purpose of this decree, which was issued on February 20, 1952, was to stop the Language Movement. Since the military opened fire on the students and demonstrators involved in this campaign, February 21 is observed in Bangladesh as Language Martyrs Day. Later in 1999, UNESCO declared it as the international mother tongue day to commemorate the sacrifices rendered by Bengalees. After two years finally 7th may 1954, Bengali was finally granted the official status (efsas n.d.).

#### **4.2 Mujibur Rahman's Ascendancy in Politics**

Another remarkable event was the India Pakistan war of 1965 after which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared, 'the question of post-war autonomy seems more important' (Anisuzzaman & Mamun, 2022). Mujib, leader of Awami league, aimed at making East Pakistan self-sufficient which was demonstrated through the 'six points'. He proposed the six-point demand on 16th January 1966 in the Working Committee of the Awami League which was adopted in unison. They were as follows:

- The Constitutional Structure and nature of the state: He demanded for a parliamentary form of government and a federation based united nations and its basis would be the Lahore resolution (Anisuzzaman & Mamun, 2022).
- Power of Central Government: He demanded that the power of the central government would be limited only to two cases i.e. foreign policy and national defence all the other subjects would be looked after by the member states (Anisuzzaman & Mamun, 2022).
- Monetary power: According to Mujib there were two options regarding this matter: either two separate but freely exchangeable currencies for the whole country or only one currency to be circulated throughout the country (Anisuzzaman & Mamun, 2022).
- Power related to revenue, tax or duties: According to his demand the states would have the power to impose taxes, collect revenues but the central government would have no power in this regard (Anisuzzaman & Mamun, 2022).
- Powers of foreign trade: He demanded that separate accounts of foreign trade would be maintained by each state of federation and also the exchange rate would be earned through foreign trade would remain under jurisdiction of the states (Anisuzzaman & Mamun, 2022).

- Power to form regional armies: According to Mujib the constitution should empower the states to form regional armies in order to maintain governance and regional integration (Anisuzzaman & Mamun, 2022).

The popularity of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's six-point demands infused a fear among the government of West Pakistan during General Ayub Khan's reign. The Ayub Khan government arrested Mujib along with 34 other Bengali officers in June 1968 for conspiracy charges against Pakistan and this came to be known as the Agartala conspiracy case, as according to the Ayub Khan government Mujib and others planned a conspiracy in Agartala, Tripura with the Indian Government to create Independent Bangladesh (efsas n.d.). As a response to it the people of East Pakistan started to protest against the false conspiracy charges and arrest of Mujib and the protest turned into mass movement and revolt which finally led to the withdrawal of charges and release of Mujib along with the others by the West Pakistan government in 1969. This event is considered to be one of the greatest victories of East Pakistan against West Pakistan. After his release he was given a reception by the students at the Race Course Maidan and was also conferred the title of 'Bangabandhu' (Ahmed, 2004).

#### **4.3 The Liberation War of 1971: From Struggle to Freedom**

The genesis of the political crisis which led to the liberation war of 1971 was sowed on 7th December 1970 (Strahorn, 2021). The General Elections of Pakistan was held on 7th December 1970 in which the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman secured a remarkable result (Anisuzzaman, 2022). However, this victory of Mujib in General Election of 1970 was followed by a planned genocide known as 'Operation Searchlight'. This genocide was planned by West Pakistan with the aim to eliminate force of Bengali nationalism from Pakistan. It was designed with the aim to punish the people of East Pakistan for not following the orders of the government of West Pakistan (efsas n.d.). Thus, on March 25, 1971, one of the most heinous and merciless genocides occurred, affecting the people of East Pakistan. That same evening, Mujib was arrested once more and detained in West Pakistan. Prior to his incarceration, he had stated that East Pakistan would obtain autonomy and become "Bangladesh," a sovereign, independent country. Though the declaration was made on 25th march but the dissemination took place after the midnight and from then onwards 26th march is celebrated as the independence-day of 'Bangladesh' (efsas n.d.). Thus, though the Operation Searchlight created a sense of terror among the people of East Pakistan but still encouraged the people of East Pakistan to secede from the exploitative, abusive and oppressive government of West Pakistan (efsas n.d.).

The Bengali population, or the people of East Pakistan, began to struggle against the military of West Pakistan after the massacre on March 25, 1971. The common people who lacked the skills and training necessary to fight a war risked their lives to ensure Bangladesh's freedom. The armed force formed by the Bengali nationalists came to be known as "Mukti Bahini" (the force of independence) who decided to conduct guerrilla operations against the military of West Pakistan by dividing entire East Pakistan into several sectors (efsas n.d.). In the meantime Mujib who was imprisoned in West Pakistan was made the President and Tajuddin Ahmed was made the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and this event led to the official declaration of independence of Bangladesh (efsas n.d.).

On December 3, 1971, the Indian military allied itself with the Bangladeshi guerrilla forces in East Pakistan to combat the West Pakistani military as they initiated raids on Indian territory. The military of West Pakistan anticipated assistance from China and the United States throughout this conflict, but they did not receive it, and when they were attacked, they were unable to maintain control of the areas they had taken.

As a result of the attack they had to surrender and accept their defeat which finally led to signing of the surrender agreement in the afternoon of 16th december 1971 by General Niazi of West Pakistan (Strahorn, 2021). Thus after 9 months of havoc bloodshed and horrific war Bangladesh ultimately attained its independence. Presently it celebrates 16th December as the its “victory day”.

## **5. Mujibur Rahman’s Political Ideology: Foundations of a Nation**

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is viewed as a "symbol of liberation." He was an extraordinary nationalist leader who emancipated the populace of East Pakistan (currently Bangladesh) from the tyranny of West Pakistan. As a leader, his accolades are limitless, and discourse about him knows no bounds. There is a scarcity of academic exploration regarding Mujib’s ideology and political philosophy; thus, the primary aim of this Research Paper is to

define and elucidate his philosophical and ideological concepts, which resonate with the foundational principles of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. A political ideology comprises a collection of ideas, beliefs, principles, and viewpoints that reveal a recurring pattern, intentionally or unconsciously clashing with public policy frameworks, to justify, elucidate, question, or modify the political and social arrangements and processes within a political society (Fishkin,et.al.1973).

During his tenure of three and a half years, Bangabandhu established a robust foundation for the nascent nation. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country’s founder, is hailed as 'the greatest figure' in Bengali history for his remarkable contributions to the demise of Pakistani colonialism in the country. It's noteworthy that Bangabandhu was a political activist throughout his life, advocating for the liberation of people from exploitation and oppression (Chowdhury & Nafis, 2019). In his writings from Karagarer Rojnamcha, he repeatedly asserts that authoritarian regimes inevitably lead to terrorism by constraining democratic freedoms. Mujib championed equal rights for all Bangladeshi citizens: Patriotism embodies a profound love, commitment, and connection to one’s nation, along with a bond with fellow citizens sharing the same dedication to nurturing a sense of community (Westheimer,2006). He believed in harmonious coexistence and mutual tolerance among individuals of varied identities and fought for equal rights for every citizen. He was a fierce critic of societal brutality.

Amid rising Hindu-Muslim tension across India in 1964, he initiated a civic campaign aimed at preventing communal discord in East Bengal (Islam&Islam,2018). He warned the populace about the risk of community violence during his address on March 7, 1971, stating, “Be vigilant, remember that adversaries have infiltrated our ranks, working alongside instigators; whether Bengali or otherwise, Hindu or Muslim, all of us are brothers, and we are devoted to their safety.” Bangabandhu opposed utilizing religion for political ends. He criticized the Muslim League for its actions, which he said undermined the working class, farmers, and laborers who sacrificed during the independence struggle, arguing that these actions contradicted Islamic principles and compromised the welfare of the people (Kabir, 1987).

Furthermore, in his Unfinished Memoirs, Bangabandhu declared, “I am not a communist, but I believe in socialism, not capitalism”. His visit to China left a significant impact on his worldview. He recognized stark contrasts in living standards between Pakistan and China, attributing these disparities to the differences in their political systems. Bangabandhu considered the government's role in alleviating disparity and liberating people from exploitation (Jahan, 2000). He really valued the Chinese government's efforts to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of its people. His focus on the populace transformed him into a pragmatist. He often documented scenarios affecting citizens’ daily lives, such as rises in essential goods' prices, tax increments, floods, or famine in his journals.

## **6. The Aftermath of the Assassination of Mujib: Political Upheaval and Suppression of His Legacy**

Bangabandhu represented the common people on one level; learning about their hopes and aspirations. On another, he was their leader, propelling those aspirations forward. He had faith in humanity. He was therefore able to urge the populace to join the liberation movement on March 7, 1971, using "whatever little they have." Bangabandhu's political thought is reflected in the four fundamental tenets of the Constitution: Nationalism, Democracy, Secularism, and Socialism. It is commonly recognized that in the story of Bangladesh's liberation, the phrases "Awami League," "Bangabandhu," and "Bangladesh" are closely related and interchangeable.

"The Unfinished Autobiography" and "The Prison Diaries," two important writings by Bangabandhu, are essential historical documents of the country. These books have revealed much about the history that was previously unknown. "After the establishment of Pakistan, I felt in my heart that this Pakistan was not meant for the Bengalees, Bangabandhu declared." "One day, the Bengalees will have to determine Bengal's destiny." He established Chhatra League on January 4, 1948, and Awami League on June 23, 1949, with this aim. The 15th of August is a day of national mourning. It is a day when all beings in Bengal, including nature, weep. For in 1975, this rainy August and the horrendous assassination of Bangabandhu seemed to reflect the heavens themselves lamenting in profound sorrow.

## **7. Revival of Mujibur Rahman's Ideals: Return to Democracy**

The resurgence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's political ideology has played a crucial role in shaping the political evolution of Bangladesh. This resurgence has led to the return of democracy in the 1990s. Mujib being the pivotal figure in the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 aimed at establishing a democratic, secular, and an independent nation. But after his assassination in 1975 the subsequent years of military rule led by Lieutenant General Hussain Mohammad Ershad overshadowed Mujib's ideology. The return to democracy in the 1990s has been significant to the political history of Bangladesh. After nearly two decades of authoritarian rule, a mass movement led by various political parties, civil society groups, and the general people resulted in the fall of the military regime in 1990. This movement witnessed the enduring desire to replace the military regime by democratic governance. The Awami League played a pivotal role in this transition from military dictatorship to democratic governance. The party immensely contributed in the social and political mobilization, along with other political parties, civil society groups, made the general people feel the need to demand for democratic reforms and the establishment of a civilian government. But the new democratic system was not flawless, it faced several new challenges like political instability and struggle for power among the various political parties.

Followed by the collapse of the military regime, the Awami League emerged as a significant political force in the 1991 general elections. The party won a notable number of seats, leading to revival of democratic governance and thus marking an end of military dictatorship. The revival of the Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Mujib who became the Prime Minister in 1996 for the first time, aimed to re-attain democracy, secularism, and social justice with the determination to restore the principles on which Mujib's political ideology was based. She highlighted the importance of a pluralistic society and peaceful coexistence of all religions and ethnicities thus reflecting secular vision laid by her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Hasina's emergence as the Prime Minister in 1996 was a remarkable landmark in the resurgence of Mujib's ideology. The government under her leadership framed policies with the objective of strengthening democratic institutions, promoting social welfare, and ensuring economic development.



The reinstatement of the 1972 Constitution and secular principles played a crucial role in the resurgence of Mujib's political ideology. The original Constitution, which was framed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1972 had been suspended and amended during the years of military rule was finally restored with its secular character intact by the government led by Sheikh Hasina. This move marked a return to the founding principles of Bangladesh which had been ruined over the years. The reinstatement of the Constitution was not only a legal or political act but also a symbolic reassertion of the country's commitment to the ideals of its founding father. It was a bold step that aimed to foster social harmony and prevent the exploitation of religion for political gain.

Secular principles, one of fundamental principles of Mujib's ideology, were re-emphasized during this period. The Awami League government under Hasina aimed to ensure that the state remained unbiased in matters of religion and sought to establish a secular ethos that respected all faiths equally. The government aimed to put an end to the policies of previous regimes that had sought to Islamize the state and society.

The resurgence of Mujib's ideology suffered from several challenges such as political opposition, social conservatism, and economic difficulties. The Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina formulated various strategies to address these challenges which included the promotion of economic development through public and private sector investments, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the implementation of social welfare programs aimed at alleviating poverty and improving education and health-care.

## **8. Mujibur Rahman's Enduring Legacy in Contemporary Bangladesh**

The political legacy of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is prominently manifested in the Awami League, the party which was founded by him has been a dominant force in the political landscape of Bangladesh. The party under the leadership of his daughter, Sheikh Hasina has consistently championed the democratic and secular principles that were laid by Mujib. The party's commitment to these ideals serves as a landmark of its political platform highlighting a continuity of vision that has resonated with the Bangladeshi people.

The governance of the Awami League has been characterized by efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, combat corruption, and ensure political stability. These efforts aimed to restore Mujib's vision for a democratic and inclusive Bangladesh. The success of the party in maintaining political power for significant periods has resulted in the implementation of policies that reflect Mujib's ideals, further soldering his legacy in the political landscape.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's economic vision for Bangladesh was based on socialism, with an emphasis on equitable distribution of resources and the alleviation of poverty. Contemporary Bangladesh has seen an amalgamation of socialist principles and market-oriented reforms reflecting the principles of Mujibur's economic ideology. The Awami League government, under Sheikh Hasina has formulated and implemented policies aimed at economic development, poverty reduction, and social welfare. Key economic policies include investments in infrastructure, education, and health-care, as well as initiatives to promote agriculture, industry, and technology. The government's emphasis on social welfare programs, such as food security and health-care for the poor, directly reflects Mujib's commitment to the welfare of the common people.

The foreign policy which was followed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was characterized by a desire for friendly relations with all nations with the aim to establish and maintain mutual respect and non-alignment. Contemporary Bangladesh has also tried its best to follow this approach maintaining balanced relations with major powers and regional neighbors. The

country has also actively participated in International Forums, advocating for issues such as Climate Change, Human Rights, and Peacekeeping, highlighting Mujib's vision of a responsible and engaged Bangladesh on the Global stage.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legacy is also manifested in the cultural landscape of Bangladesh. His vision of a secular and inclusive society has influenced the country's cultural policies and practices which has resulted in promotion of cultural diversity, religious harmony, and the preservation of Bengali language and heritage, by the government led by Sheikh hasina thus reflecting Mujib's commitment to these values. The celebration of national days, such as Independence Day and Victory Day, are celebrated across the country with the aim to commemorate the struggle for independence and pay tribute to Mujib who has played a pivotal role in the establishment of independent Bangladesh.

These celebrations bolsters national identity and pride among the people, ensuring that the legacy of the Liberation War and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's role is preserved. Moreover, the government's efforts to promote education, literature, and the arts reflect common goal like that of Mujib's belief in the importance of cultural development. The establishment of institutions like the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University and the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University are evidences highlighting that the legacy of Mujib has been preserved and maintained in the country's cultural and educational landscape.

## **9. Challenges and Controversies**

### **9.1 The Personality Cult: An Unhealthy Political Phenomenon?**

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, affectionately referred to as 'Bangabandhu' (Friend of Bengal), continues to be a prominent role in Bangladeshi politics (Badrul A,2014). However, the reverence accorded to him has not been without controversy. Critics argue that a "cult of personality" has developed around Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, potentially overshadowing a nuanced understanding of his legacy and Bangladesh's complex political history. The cultivation of Mujib's image as the sole architect of Bangladesh's independence has been a point of contention. While his role was undoubtedly pivotal, some scholars argue that this narrative diminishes the contributions of other key figures and the collective struggle of the Bengali people.

The government's efforts to enshrine Mujib's legacy through various means, such as naming institutions after him and erecting numerous statues, have been seen by some as excessive and potentially stifling to political discourse. Furthermore, the Awami League's continued reliance on Mujib's legacy as a political tool has been criticized. Opponents argue that this focus on the past may come at the expense of addressing contemporary challenges. The portrayal of Mujib as an infallible leader has also been questioned, with some historians calling for a more balanced assessment of his achievements and shortcomings. The "cult of personality" debate extends to the role of Mujib's family in Bangladesh's politics (Schendel,2020). Critics argue that this concentration of power within one family may undermine democratic principles and hinder the emergence of new leadership.

### **9.2 Controversies Over the Interpretation of Mujibur Rahman's Ideas**

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's political philosophy, often referred to as "Mujibism," continues to be a subject of intense debate in Bangladesh. While his core ideals of democracy, secularism, socialism, and nationalism remain influential, their interpretation and implementation have been contentious issues (Fowler & Riaz,2017). Secularism, one of the four guiding principles

of Bangladesh as envisioned by Mujib, is at the center of one of the most important discussions. The country has grappled with balancing its secular constitution with the religious sentiments of its predominantly Muslim population. The rise of Islamist politics and periodic Constitutional Amendments reflecting religious considerations have led to heated discussions about the true nature of Mujib's vision for a secular Bangladesh.

The interpretation of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's socialist ideals has also been a point of contention. While he advocated for a form of socialism tailored to Bangladesh's needs, the country has largely embraced market-oriented economic policies since the 1980s. This shift has sparked debates about whether current economic strategies align with Mujib's vision of social justice and equitable development (Lewis, 2011).

Another area of controversy is the implementation of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's vision for democracy. While he is celebrated as a champion of democratic values, critics argue that successive governments, including those led by his own party, have not always upheld these principles. Issues such as electoral integrity, press freedom, and the independence of democratic institutions have been subjects of ongoing debate, with different factions claiming to be the true inheritors of Mujib's democratic legacy. The concept of nationalism, as espoused by Mujib, has also been reinterpreted over time (Fowler & Riaz, 2017). While it initially focused on asserting Bengali cultural identity against West Pakistani dominance, contemporary debates center on how to balance this cultural nationalism with the rights and aspirations of ethnic minorities within Bangladesh.

### **9.3 Political Polarization and National Unity**

The legacy of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has become a focal point of political polarization in Bangladesh, significantly impacting national unity. The division primarily manifests between the Awami League, which positions itself as the guardian of Mujib's ideals, and the opposition, particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which offers alternative narratives of the country's founding and development. This polarization has led to a cyclical pattern of political confrontation, with each change in government often accompanied by attempts to rewrite or reinterpret national history (Jahan, 2020). The contestation over Mujib's legacy has sometimes overshadowed debates on pressing contemporary issues, hindering constructive political dialogue and policy formulation. The polarization extends beyond political parties to civil society, academia, and the media. Discussions about Mujib's role in history and the relevance of his ideals in contemporary Bangladesh often become highly charged, with little room for nuanced perspectives. Fostering a common national narrative that recognizes the successes and ambiguities of Bangladesh's journey as an independent nation has proven difficult in this environment.

The impact of this polarization on national unity is profound. It has created deep-seated divisions within society, sometimes along generational lines. Younger generations, born long after the liberation war, may find themselves caught between competing historical narratives, potentially leading to a sense of disconnection from the country's founding ideals. Moreover, the focus on political and historical divisions has at times diverted attention from critical developmental challenges facing Bangladesh, such as economic inequality, climate change, and governance issues. The inability to forge a consensus on fundamental aspects of national identity and history has made it difficult to mobilize unified efforts to address these challenges. The polarization has also affected Bangladesh's international image and relations. Different political factions have sometimes pursued divergent foreign policy approaches, leading to inconsistencies in the country's international engagements. This has occasionally hampered

Bangladesh's ability to present a coherent national position on global issues or in regional forums.

In conclusion, while Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legacy continues to be a powerful force in shaping Bangladesh's political discourse, it has also become a source of significant challenges and controversies. The "cult of personality" surrounding him, debates over the interpretation of his ideals, and the resulting political polarization have had far-reaching impacts on the country's political landscape and national unity.

As Bangladesh moves forward, finding a balance between honoring its founding father's legacy and addressing contemporary realities remains a crucial challenge for its political leadership and society at large.

## **10. Contemporary Political Situation of Bangladesh and Future Prospects**

Bangladesh's political, social, and cultural fabric is still strongly rooted in the legacy of its founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. His leadership was crucial in forming Bangladesh's identity and directing its early years of self-governance as the country's architect of freedom.

Following a brutal liberation struggle with Pakistan, Mujib played a key role in the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971. The Constitution of the country reflected his vision of a democratic, secular, and socially just nation. His administration promoted Bengali nationalism and worked to create a socialist economy that benefited the average citizen. Even though his reign was plagued by political issues, including a trend towards a one-party state, the principles of social justice and national sovereignty that he upheld continue to play a significant role in Bangladeshi politics today (Riaz & Fair, 2011).

The most obvious example of Mujib's legacy is the Awami League (AL), his party, which has continuously referenced his principles of democracy, secularism, and economic equality. The AL still portrays itself as the steward of his vision, demonstrating the leadership's enduring impact. But at the same time, the governance of the Awami League under Sheikh Hasina, his daughter, has also progressively deviated from the principles of democracy and equity that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh and a symbol of hope for millions, espoused. Historical legacies, socioeconomic unrest, and political persecution can all be used to explain the recent student rebellion in Bangladesh that ultimately resulted in the overthrow of the Awami League government. Discontent with a government job quota system that reserved up to 30% of positions for the descendants of liberation war veterans which were cancelled by the High Court on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 served as the primary impetus for the recent student-led protests, which started in June 2024 (The Bangladesh Today, 2024).

This quota was perceived as favoring the elite and perpetuating a cycle of privilege among those already aligned with the Awami League (AP News, 2024). "The protestors termed the quota system as 'discriminatory' and conflicting with the motto of the Liberation War, and called for the elimination of this system immediately" (The Bangladesh Today, 2024). Hazifur Rahaman, "a student of the English Department said, whenever something happens against the interests of general students, they protest" (The Bangladesh Today, 2024). As the demonstrations strengthened, they evolved into a larger campaign against Sheikh Hasina's increasingly autocratic rule, which many young people believed suppressed dissent and provided few chances for Bangladesh's educated youth (AP News, 2024).

The demonstrations represented broader dissatisfaction with a political system that many saw to be corrupt and insensitive to the interests of the people, and they were not only about job quotas. Asif Mahmud, one of the coordinators of the Students Against Discrimination platform, has said "This popular uprising by students and the public has been initiated to repair the state

of Bangladesh and eliminate the fascist system”. he further added, “We fought for peace, and now we are taking responsibility taking responsibility to heal the damages of that war. I salute the students public who are taking responsibility for the country through voluntary activities”(Dhaka Tribune,2024).

Sarjis Alam, another key coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, issued a stern warning on 15<sup>th</sup> August,2024 against alleged attempts by the Awami League and its affiliates to incite a counter-uprising, he said, “We want to firmly warn them that if they dare to make even the slightest attempt to reverse the gains of the August 5 student-public uprising, which toppled the fascist government, their existence will be at risk”(Dhaka Tribune,2024). He emphasized the determination of the student-public alliance to defend the country, saying: “We will do whatever is necessary to steer this country in the right direction. Any attempt to destabilize the nation will be met with immediate resistance”(Dhaka Tribune,2024).

Hasnat Abdullah, a coordinator of the Students Against Discrimination platform has said, “The unity of all anti-fascist political parties is essential at this moment to abolish the fascist system and ensure justice for the perpetrators of the ousted Awami League government. Therefore, we must replace mutual hostility, distrust, and factionalism with unity and cooperation”. He also added, “To achieve our shared goal, we will work together in the future, setting aside differences, students hold no division with any anti-fascist parties, including the BNP and Jamaat. Moreover, one thing has become crystal clear after this uprising: politics of division and discord will never bring welfare to the common people of Bangladesh” (The Business Standard,2024).

The Awami League's heavy-handed response to dissent, including the jailing of opposition leaders and violent crackdowns on protests, further fueled public outrage (RAND, 2024). There were many calls for Hasina's resignation as a result of the students, who had grown up during her lengthy reign, expressing a shared desire for a more democratic and egalitarian society. The idea that there was rampant corruption in the Awami League was an important contributing cause to the student movement. Numerous accusations of corruption involving ruling party-aligned business elites and government officials surfaced under Sheikh Hasina's leadership. A 2022 Transparency International report ranked Bangladesh as one of the most corrupt countries in South Asia, contributing to the growing dissatisfaction with the ruling party's inability to curb graft and improve transparency (Transparency International, 2022). Trust in the state system was damaged by this corruption, which permeated every level of government, from local councils to the highest positions.

Another major contributing element to the Awami League's downfall has been its tactic of suppressing opposition voices. The ruling party was able to consolidate power and repress opposition without accountability after the caretaker government system, which had guaranteed nonpartisan governance during elections, was abolished in 2011. People were generally unhappy as a result of this persecution, which produced a political climate in which dissent was not accepted. The Awami League's autocratic style of governing has drawn more and more criticism. Many leaders and activists have been imprisoned or exiled as a result of the severe persecution of the political opposition, particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and other minor parties. Furthermore, under Hasina's leadership, there have been worries about the decline of media freedom, democratic institutions, and the independence of the court. Thus, the public anger was exacerbated by the extensive use of the Digital Security Act which restricted the internet freedom and muzzled the critical voices ultimately leading to an outright violation of their rights.

Bangladesh's economy has grown, but lacked equitable distribution. Many young individuals, especially students, have discovered that there are few and unstable career options. The belief

that government jobs, which are among the most lucrative and stable, are given out primarily on connections rather than qualifications has exacerbated the frustrations and discontentment of the young people. One of the main causes of the student uprisings was the Awami League's inaction on important socioeconomic problems like increased unemployment, inflation, and the wealth gap. Even while Bangladesh's GDP increased, inflation rates skyrocketed, especially for necessities like food, gasoline, and medical care. These financial difficulties disproportionately impacted young people, particularly students. They had to contend with a declining labor market, high unemployment rates, and restricted access to reasonably priced education. Widespread disenchantment resulted from this economic dissatisfaction, which also increased the government's susceptibility to social mobilization.

Thus, these social, political and economic factors resulted in the downfall of the Awami League Party and the resignation of its leader Sheikh Hasina on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2024 which has affected the country's political reality. This downfall highlights the economic mismanagement, political corruption, the erosion of democratic norms, and the government's failure to address the specific grievances of students and the youth. Hence, notwithstanding Mujib's historical legacy, the Awami League eventually faced a crisis of legitimacy as a result of its incapacity to lead successfully in a shifting sociopolitical landscape.

In order to protect Bangladesh's future and ensure equitable progress, green policies must be incorporated into the nation's development strategy (Islam, 2018).

Mujib's legacy continues to influence Bangladesh's political system, but it still faces difficulties in balancing tradition and modernization. Both the country's Islamic background and its pursuit of democratic governance have shaped its political culture. Bangladesh's identity is based on Mujib's secularism, which must continue to inform political discourse, especially as the nation struggles with religious and cultural heterogeneity.

However, dynastic politics, political instability, and corruption have frequently impeded Bangladesh's political progress. In spite of Mujib's family's political domination, institutional reforms are urgently needed. Maintaining the democratic values that Mujib advocated requires bolstering democratic institutions, upholding the rule of law, and reducing corruption. Maintaining Mujib's inclusive democratic agenda in a fiercely competitive political climate will be difficult as political polarization increases.

## **11. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's ideology has profoundly influenced and impacted Bangladesh's politics. His legacy is not merely a historical footnote but a living force that continues to shape the country's trajectory. The importance of Mujib's legacy for Bangladesh's identity and future can never be overlooked. His vision of a democratic, secular, and prosperous Bangladesh has become the foundational basis of the nation's identity. The reassertion of his principles by the Awami League government led by Hasina was a clear indication of the enduring relevance of his legacy.

As Bangladesh steers the challenges of the 21st century, Mujib's legacy serves as a guiding light which helps the nation to prosper towards a future that honors the sacrifices and aspirations of its founding father. His vision for a pluralistic society, peaceful coexistence with all religions and ethnicities remains as relevant today as it was during his lifetime, reflecting his commitment to a secular and inclusive Bangladesh. In essence, it can be said that Mujib's legacy is a living legacy, deeply ingrained in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of Bangladesh. As the country looks forward to the future, his legacy serves as a reminder of the values of democracy, secularism, and social justice that are required for the prosperity,

growth and progress of a nation. His life and work are evidence to the enduring power of insightful leadership and the immense impact it can have on the identity and future of a nation.

The leadership that emerged from the July-Mass Uprising, a crucial event in modern political history provides the backdrop for the emergence of a leadership that emphasizes citizen rights and advocates for the comprehensive development, restoration and rejuvenation of the nation, drawing inspiration from the same principles which aligns with the vision that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, envisioned for the nation. While the underlying ideas are similar, there is a significant difference in their approach to action. The previous government has been criticized for being "fascist," while there is widespread hope that the current government will be "reformationist."

Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the current Head of State, has commented that the country is 'sick' and is experiencing a period of healing and rectification. He describes this as addressing historical mistakes, acknowledging past shortcomings in governance and social development. Despite the apparent continuity in the guiding ideals, Yunus stresses that the methods and intentions behind the current government's actions are distinct. While Mujib's principles are still upheld as a foundation, the key difference lies in the new leadership's emphasis on reform and transformation as a way to correct past errors. This suggests that the leadership is focused on correcting past injustices, reforming state structures, and improving the socio-economic fabric of the country in a more inclusive and progressive manner. Hence, we can find the same ideals which indicates Mujib's ideals are not rejected but it's being accepted in another way.

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