# Introduction to 1st strand

**Roots and memory - the history of Bangladesh and the 1971 war of independence**

**Dialogue between first and third generation on the history of Bangladesh and the 1971 war of independence.**

We begin the oral history with people's memories of East Pakistan and events leading to the liberation war. We see here the importance of language as both a unifying and divisive factor. Bengali became a rallying point for those in East Pakistan who wanted a fairer political and social deal within Pakistan generally. Urdu became, in contrast, a source of division with the attempt to establish it as the national language very soon after the creation of Pakistan. Although the majority of Bengalis in East Pakistan were Muslims, similar attempts to forge national unity through the politicisation of Islam failed to unite the two wings divided by over a thousand miles of Indian territory.

As the interviews make clear, the liberation war was not just fought in the Bengal delta. By 1971 a small but growing Bengali community had been established in the UK and in many places, such as London, Luton, Birmingham and Manchester, they worked with or lived near Pakistanis, who had migrated from the Punjab and Kashmir. It is interesting to note that Bengalis were active in political activity before 1971 as they supported Awami League's Six Point programme (1966), which demanded greater autonomy for East Pakistan and campaigned for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's release after he was arrested in 1968 (the Agartala conspiracy case).

During the war of Bangladesh in 1971, the community played an important role in highlighting the atrocities taking place in Bangladesh, lobbying British government and the international community and raising funds for refugees and Bengali freedom fighters. It is said that some people donated their entire week's salary and at least in one case where a women donated her entire wedding gift of gold jewellery. There were even people willing to go and fight in Bangladesh. Many Bengalis talked about the prejudice they faced from Pakistanis in the UK. There were even physical clashes between Pakistanis and Bengalis as the war started. As we shall see in the Second Strand, a key feature of this period was the support provided by members of the white British majority – in this case, politicians, diplomats, lawyers and journalists.

The interviews then move on to exploring people's participation in the public events which commemorate the language movement and the liberation war. From there we proceed to their views about returning to their country of origin and what they think about contemporary Bangladesh. This section concludes with the interviewees discussing the importance of telling younger British Bengalis about the past.

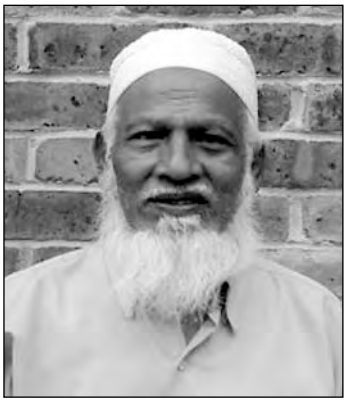
Ansar Ahmed Ullah and John Eade

P.S. from John Eade – One of the most enjoyable aspects of this project has been reading about the experiences of those who were directly involved in events which I observed distantly during 1970-1971. I was beginning a research career which eventually led me from a study of the social identity of the educated Bengali Muslim middle class in Kolkata (Calcutta) during 1970-71 to a doctorate on British Bangladeshi community representation in Tower Hamlets between 1980 and 1986 and subsequent research and publications on British Bangladeshi political and cultural developments.

I spent most of my time in Kolkata living with a Bengali Muslim family, whose relatives had left the city for Dhaka after the partition of British India in 1946 but had to flee back to Kolkata in 1971. For a short time eight of us were sleeping in a two room flat and there were lively discussions about what was going to happen over the next months. One idea eagerly debated was the possibility of a united Bengal but this flew against the realities of geopolitics in the region as events were to prove. Soon after I returned to the UK a new nation-state was born – Bangladesh – and the 'Greater Bengal' idealists were left with their dreams.

# Interviewees Profile

**Mr. Abdur Rashid**
Age: 70
Interviewed: 14 January 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr. Rashid was a diplomat. In 1971 he was Assistant of the Labour Attaché, Pakistan High Commission in Bradford. He left his job for the Independence war. He recollects memories of the racial discrimination faced by Bengalis in the Pakistani Foreign Service.



**Mr. Abdus Sami**
Age: 72
Interviewed: 12 June 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr. Sami remembers one of the biggest demonstrations held at Hyde Park. He donated money and campaigned against the Pakistani military rule in Bangladesh.

**Mr. Ajmat Ullah**
Age: 77
Interviewed: 23 June 2006, Luton
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal, Ansar Ahmed Ullah and Maliha Haque
Mr. Ullah owned a grocery shop and was based in Luton. Most of the Luton Steering Committee meetings were held at his flat above his shop. A dedicated campaigner and organiser, he took part in many demonstrations for the cause of Liberation. He used to have altercations with local Pakistanis and passionately defended the right of the Bengali people.

**Mrs. Anwora Jahan**
Age: 67
Interviewed: 4 July 2006
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah
Mrs. Jahan is one of the founding members of Bangladesh Women's Association. She personally handed in letters to different MPs in the House of Commons for support of the War of Liberation. She was closely linked to Michael Barnes (MP) and John Stonehouse (MP). She wrote letters on behalf of the BWA to different world leaders and attended the Labour and Conservative annual party conferences raising awareness among political leaders about the genocide in Bangladesh.

**Mr. Aziz Choudhury**
Age: 58
Interviewed: 01 February 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr. Choudhury on one occasion, during the war in Bangladesh, was placed before a firing squad by the Pakistani army in Dhaka airport. By a strange twist of fate his life was spared quite literally from the jaws of death. He was also an eye witness to the massacre of ordinary people by the Pakistani army in the streets of Dhaka in March 1971. Presently, he works for the Bethnal Green Training Centre in the East End of London.

**Mrs. Badrun Nesa Pasha**
Interviewed: 18 June 2006, Birmingham
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah
Mrs. Pasha was one the founding members of Birmingham Action Committee, a sympathetic supporter to the War of Independence. She is a courageous woman who donated her entire matrimonial jewellery, after she delivered a passionate speech in front of thousands of supporters, in a demonstration where the flag of Bangladesh was first raised in Smallheath Park. She also witnessed the panic which broke out when Pakistanis attacked 13 Bengalis at that demonstration.

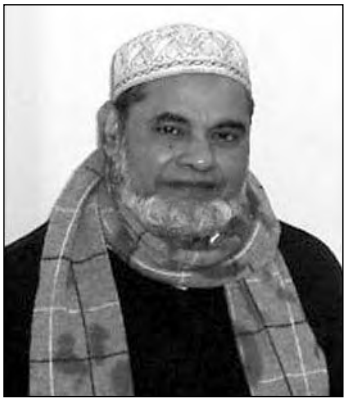
**Mr. C.A.S Kabir**
Age: 64
Interviewed: 27 February 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr. Kabir organised and sponsored two groups in Britain involved in the War of Independence. These two groups, 'Operation Omega' and 'Action Bangladesh' brought awareness among the non-Bengalis, British and Europeans, about the genocide in Bangladesh.

**Mr. F. Stephen Miles**
Age: 86
Interviewed: 17 March 2006
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah
Mr. Miles was the Deputy High Commissioner, Kolkata, India, 1970-74 and High Commissioner, Bangladesh, 1978-79. He witnessed the gathering of half a million people in Kolkota in January 1972 when Mujib flew from London on his way back to independent Bangladesh. As a diplomat he visited many refugee camps in Kolkata where the Indian Government accommodated roughly 10 million Bengali people who fled persecution from the hands of the Pakistani army.

**Mr. Gulam Mustafa Choudhury**
Age: 59
Interviewed: 10 June 2006, Manchester
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah
Mr. Choudhury was an ardent supporter for the Bengali cause. He was closely linked to the UK Awami League when it was first set up in 1969. He was involved in collecting donations for sending a twelve-seater vehicle to Bangladesh and raised Taka 10,000 for Awami League, Sylhet section for election purpose in early 1971.

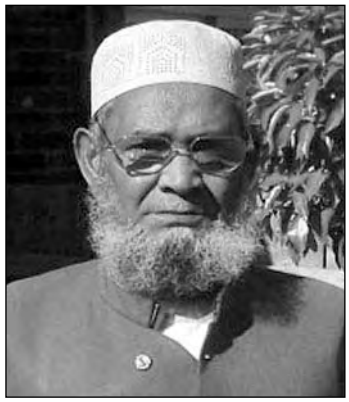
**Mrs. Husna Matin**
Interviewed: 30 January 2006
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah
A remarkable woman, who was not afraid to confront racist skinheads. In one incident she risked her life and ran after some skinheads with sticks in her hand. This happened after the skinheads attacked an elderly Bengali and his son.

**Mrs. Kulsum Ullah**
Interviewed: 28 January 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mrs. Ullah was the founding member and organiser of Bangladesh Women's Association in Britain. She was associated in raising fund and relief for the War of Liberation. On one occasion she organised a gathering of 150 women for a mass demonstration.



**Mr. Mathin Miah**
Interviewed: 03 January 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Description: Mr. Miah is the owner of Lime House Superstore in Bethnal Green Road. He was profoundly involved in the War of Independence and requested many ordinary Bengalis in Britain to take part in the mass rally in Trafalgar Square.

**Mr. Michael Barnes**
Interviewed: 23 February 2006
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah
Mr. Michael Barnes was a Labour MP (1966-1974) for Brentford and Chiswick in West London. He went to Bangladesh during the Pakistani crackdown. During the war the Pakistani cricket team was due to come to England for a tour and he thought this was most inappropriate. He tabled a motion in the House of Commons saying words to the effect that the Pakistani team should not come. In the parliament he gave a clear picture of the genocide that was happening in Bangladesh.



**Mr. Mohammed Ibrahim Baksh**
Age: 68
Interviewed: 09 July 2006, Luton
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr. Baksh was one of the founding members of Luton Steering Committee. He was also the chief auditor of the committee. He was an ardent campaigner and the committee collected donations to the amount of £23,000 for the cause of the War of Independence.

**Mr. Mohammed Israel**
Age: 63
Interviewed: 25 February 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Description: Mr. Israel was the accountant of the Bangladesh Steering Committee. The steering committee was formed in Britain, in April, 1971 to coordinate the activities of all the subcommittees formed in favour of the independence of Bangladesh. From his financial record, the total amount raised for the Bangladesh cause was £406,856

**Mr. Nikhilesh Chakraborty**
Age: 65
Interviewed: 31 April 2006
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Abdul Shahid
Mr. Chakraborty is a retired Head teacher. In 1971 he was politically involved for the war of independence in Britain. He was working for restoration of democracy in Pakistan, which later on was taken over by Democratic Front of Pakistan. This group that he was actively associated was a Left organisation, whose members were students, professionals and other individuals from the left. Through this organisation he took active part in the Independence war in Bangladesh.

**Mrs. Nora Shariff**
Interviewed: 16 February 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mrs. Nora Shariff is one of the British White campaigners who fought for the rights of the Bengali people. She organised campaigns, distributed leaflets and organised meetings in her flat. Bengali campaigners used to come to her flat and make placards for demonstrations. She was also directly involved in releasing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from prison after the Agartala Conspiracy Case.

**Mr. Sazzad Khan**
Age: 67
Interviewed: 09 March 2006, Manchester
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal, Ansar Ahmed Ullah and Charlie Sen
Mr. Khan visited Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan), in February 1971. He was caught up in the turmoil of the War of Independence and decided to become a freedom fighter to resist the Pakistani army's atrocities in his village. In May, 1971 he was captured and detained by the Pakistani army for six months.

**Mr. Shahid Ali**
Interviewed: 07 January 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr. Ali eye witnessed the memorable demonstration in 1971 where the flag of Bangladesh was raised for the first time in Smallheath Park, Birmingham. He was also an eye witness to the incident in the same demonstration where a Bengali was stabbed several times by a Pakistani.

**Mr. Sultan Shariff**
Interviewed: 16 January 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr. Shariff is the Advisor of UK Awami League. A political activist who came to Britain in the early 1960s. He was involved in the demands of the Bengali people back home. As an Awami League campaigner he organised and led demonstration in the UK. He demanded autonomy for East Pakistan.

**Mr. Tahir Ali**
Interviewed: 19 January 2006
Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal
Mr Tahir Ali was a local campaigner in East London. He is one of the few peoples who distributed leaflets and posters almost everyday during the nine month War of Independence in East London.

**Mr. Tunu Miah**
Interviewed: 17 January 2006
Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah
In 1971 Mr. Miah was a school student and attended a secondary school in Tower Hamlets, London E1. He joined the movement and participated in as much rallies and demonstration he could.

# 1st Strand interviews

### 1. Situation in East Pakistan and the Build-Up to Independence

**Abdur Rashid**
Pakistan was established on the basis of religion and we Muslims in [British] India … thought we are getting independence. At the same time we were getting Islamic principles in our free state. But now in … retrospect I suppose we made a wrong decision. Because when a state is built purely on a religious basis, it does not cover the entire humanity. And the world is becoming smaller and smaller, and in the present world we have to live in a mixed society wherever we live. In our time in [the] thirties and forties the world was much bigger, in the sense that the problem of communication and transportation was so poor. Being in a corner of Bangladesh - in a village or town - we could not think about say … London or America, or whatever other country. It was very hard to think about that, unless you thoroughly know geography. Even [if] you know geography, you have to think in book terms, in map terms - that this country is here and that country is there.

Over 50-60 years have gone by now [and] you can see that it has become like a small country. [The] entire world has become so mobile, people from any part can go to any part of the world just in [a] matter of days, when it used to take weeks and months or even a year. So in that sense taking the progression forward, in another 50 years' time it will be a small village. You can talk to [people] anywhere in the world as if you were living in the same house. So, in retrospect, I thought we made a mistake then but nevertheless we still carried on as a country. We didn't [know] … that a country [a] thousand miles apart, established on [a] purely religious basis, could not survive for long, because, except [for] religion, everything else was so different.

We became independent in 1947 … and in the mid '50s we started to think that we are different people. In '52 we had the problem of language. I need to tell you that that was the route of the problem; [it] didn't come in one day. … In 1952 we felt the difference very, very clearly that we have a major problem - what language we have to have for our country. And when we couldn't solve it, the young generation became furious. Who [is] the young generation? They were the students. In those days the older generation were non-lettered people - maybe [only] one per cent educated.

The younger generation were the people who were knowledgeable. You need to understand the gap. In … village after village you find one or two people educated, maybe 10 per cent [of] people can write. [The] 90 per cent non-lettered population … had to follow what their elders said. … [The] country became independent and we started to feel that we have to have a common national language. Which is what? Pakistani people wanted to say that we need to have Urdu and the East Pakistani people said: "No, how can we have [this]? We are [the] majority … so we have to have Bengali". Ok, but English was the medium so we carried on.

But it burst into flame in 1952, when the only … university was … Dhaka University and people from all over the country used to think that they are the cream of the country [if they studied there] … They are the only people getting Masters or PhDs or whatever degree … and they are the people coming out to administer the government. And these people are coming out to strike and … six, seven or eight people died in shootings. Their names are memorialised today in this independent history [Abul Barkat, Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Abdul Jabbar, Abdus Salam, Shafiur Rahman, Abdul Awal, Ahi Ullah and an unidentified boy]. They were killed by the shootings and the students became furious all over the country.

So that is really the start of independence. … The people who were talking in favour of this Bengali language were the East Pakistani leaders. … [In the] forefront was Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. He was the political leader who … broke away from the main Muslim League party to [form] another party [which] they named it *Awami League*. … Not only students, everybody who knew anything about politics in East Pakistan wanted to have Bengali, except probably the *Ulamas* … [or] those who studied in a *Madrasha*. A sort of movement started from that day [in] 1952. [The] Muslim League [wanted] Pakistan as an independent state [but] started to lose [its] strength because of this [language issue]. Although it was born in Dhaka in 1906, it got [its] strength in West Pakistan, when Quaid-e-azam [Mr. *MA Jinnah*] and other people joined in. But [the] East Pakistani Muslim League had to follow the advice of the hierarchy so they couldn't say openly that they wanted Bangla as the state language.

[The] younger generation, with the help of some leaders like *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy* and the very young politician *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, [was] very vocal. I was a lower high school student then. We didn't have much [knowledge] about all these things; we had to follow what our leaders, our elders said. So [the young students] organised all over East Pakistan from university halls and they explained … that we must have our language, Bangla [Bengali]. And the West Pakistani people wouldn't allow it. … They are adamant that we should have Urdu and we were adamant that we should have Bengali. So they mixed it up - they had to introduce two languages in the schools, Urdu and Bangla, side by side.

So the students as a result started suffering. … English you must learn, Urdu you must learn, Bengali you must learn, and being Muslim you should learn Arabic also. Four languages in the case of a high school - it's too much, isn't it? So those things were not for us young people to understand. But I can feel now that those were the subjects that were discussed … and this is the background, this is the poison.

Another thing that came … [in] the spotlight was the army. Punjab was a martial- based region and they were in the army predominantly. And when Pakistan was formed Punjabi people got [the] upper hand in the army. And [eventually they] got the state facilities more and more. It started to become visible as the years [went] by, and the East Pakistani people were not given proper treatment for various reasons, like you are short by nature and this and that. They make the measurement higher and higher. It is a natural thing that some populations in different countries are of different [heights]. But in national services like the army you should represent [the population] equally. … The measurement was one factor which disallowed 95 per cent of the Bengalis from the army.

As a result we Bangladeshis were left behind - from the army first and then from privileges. The government eventually started to take the shape of … army power when in 1958 … *Ayub Khan* took over martial law … and we in East Pakistan lost out. There were good people in East Pakistan and in West Pakistan, but these are the facts, nobody can cover it. When you come in to the foreign services and the lucrative jobs [in the] civil services you find West Pakistan dominating.

These people who were fighters in [the] 1950s, they were in the universities. That means … graduates in 1952 … were in the mainstream of the society by 1960. … And they have in their brain that these are the questions - how can we solve it? And there is no way to solve it, because the country [is] so far apart and the communication so far apart and there [is] plenty of room for misunderstanding. … So that's how we become embroiled … [and] then the political consciousness started to come along and these people, who were fighters, became leaders eventually and then the political party, Awami League, started to demand things.

They gave the Six Points finally to [the] West Pakistan government. From Karachi they moved the capital to Islamabad, so the power always remained in West Pakistan. [East Pakistan] started to look like a colony. Everything, every big decision had to come from Karachi and then to Islamabad which [looked like a] … Middle Eastern country to us. … And people who go there … lose half of their courage … and then, somehow they manipulate them and [they lose] … their power of expression or commitment to their people. So this way East Pakistani people started to suffer more and more and more and more and more. And the generals … are holding power one after another, one after another. So nobody could become head of state - like a real head of state. They gave … nominal power to *Nazimuddin* and this and that.

The Six Points … [demanded] not separation [but] equality. We have resources, we have population, and actually the numbers of people are higher in East Pakistan than West Pakistan, so we must have our jobs shared, army shared, Foreign Service shared, government shared. … We are far apart, we must have our things here and you can have [them] there, so we can have a sort of federal government. … But it is a nature of people always that … [they] do something better for [their] people rather than [for] the other people.

So you see the divide was there. … Awami League wanted [the] Six Points. And then they had a lot of negotiation [and] at last they agreed on an election. Awami League principally demanded self-governance and … [it was] agreed that if the East Pakistani people vote in favour of those principles, [they] can have it. There was an election in '70 and people's feelings were very, very clear. The … result showed that this is not one country, it is two countries virtually, because the Muslim League got one seat in East Pakistan and the rest went to Awami League. Muslim League got the only seat through [Khwaja Nazimuddin. All the rest of the] seats went to Awami League. The same happened in West Pakistan. Awami League got only two or three seats, the rest of West Pakistan voted for Muslim League. … The two people were thinking quite correctly in two different ways - that is Middle East and we are in South East Asia. We cannot live together; it's clear.

Now [a debate began] that as we [the Awami League] have a majority in the government we should run the government [and] Mujibur Rahman ought to be given premiership. They [West Pakistanis] thought if Mujibur Rahman gets the premiership, then we are going to lose our privileges. What are the privileges? Being in all these important positions, in foreign ministry, in the local government, in the important ministries, defence minister, this and that, and all the cronies, all the contractors and all the ways a corrupt government [operates]. So *Yahya Khan*, who was President then, thought that it is not good enough, and … declared martial law, instead of giving Mujibur Rahman the power he deserved.

That's the independence war. The East Pakistani people didn't want separation but they wanted their rights, as they wanted their rights from the British when the British left it in 1947. In [the] case of British they wanted them to go out, quit India, but in [the] case of Pakistan they didn't want Pakistan to break up, they wanted Pakistan to stay together, but democratically. But East Pakistan had more people than West Pakistan.

So [the] country was in limbo. … There was no plan to fight the Pakistani army as such. There was no plan involved, nothing. When [a] situation like this happens, everybody starts to think: "It is my country what should be my next job?" So people everywhere were heartless, crying and can't do anything. Nobody knows who is doing what. Within three days maybe *Ziaur Rahman* from Chittagong declared Bangladesh. Now I should give credit to him as … somebody [who] was able to say loudly that: "Yes, we are a country and we are going to fight". Of course, … all the leaders were taken from their home to detention, some run away to India, some run away wherever, God knows, because in the middle of the night the army cracked down, and Mujib, the main leader, was taken away.

So nobody knew whether others … are alive … So when he declared the independent Bangladesh … the people started to think that we have courage, we have a goal - to have our own country. … I am a witness of that. As … [an East Pakistani in the diplomatic service], I went to Bangladesh [then East Pakistan] for a single trip in July 1968. I took some of the items, which as a free luggage holder, you can take. A refrigerator, air-conditioner, and this sort of things you can take, but you don't normally. But in those days we had the option to take as a part of our luggage one refrigerator, one air-conditioner and a washing machine. These things were not available in … East Pakistan. … [I was] in a group which … wanted [to] make a few pennies out of the deal. We didn't need it for ourselves, but [I thought that] I can use my right and go there and sell it and make few rupees out of it.

It's not very correct, but people when they find a chance, like to make a few quick pounds out of it. I was part of it, and I became the leader of the group. Because these are illiterate people, they don't know anything. I said: "All right, … you take them and book. I am going to Chittagong and sell [them] and you [will] get your money back. So we [were about] 20 people … and I went there [and] spent about two weeks at my home. And then everybody said: "Yeah, ok, we are ready". I said: "Give me your papers and passports and I will go to Chittagong".

Nobody went with me. They trusted me [and] said: "You take it with you and we give you [the] train fare and help you or something like that." I said: "All right … I will release yours and if I sell mine, I will sell yours."... So I went to Chittagong, I had two things in mind: I will go to Chittagong and enjoy Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar and all these things, because I was going there after 17 years. I will see the country and also get some rupees with about 10,000 *taka* profit. It will give me a good holiday around Chittagong and the Hill Districts and all these things.

So I went to Chittagong, [went] to the port, released the goods, and took in a godown [warehouse] and started to sell. It's pure business, isn't it? I went to A. K. Rahman, who was [a] seller. They sell one refrigerator for 2,800 Taka in the shops. I went there and asked them how much they can give me for my goods. He said: "500 Taka per piece for refrigerator." "That is good business! You are selling it [for] 2,800 Taka and you want to buy it from me for only 500 Taka. What kind of business is that?" He said: "I can give you another 100 or 200 Taka, that's it." I said: "How it can be? Four times more you are selling, and people are buying." He said: "If you don't sell, get out." I looked at him, he was an Urdu-speaking man. …Business, how cruel.

I am telling you how I became [a] nationalist. I came out and started biting my nails and everything. And I said: "What is this? This man is selling it for 2,800 Taka in the shop and he wants me to give it for only 500 Taka or 600 Taka. So what is this? What is the percentage you want to make profit?" I started looking for other shops …until I know …. what the price should [be]. … I started looking for importers and exporters of commodities. The more I look the more I get irritated. Everybody is Urdu-speaking, either a *Bihari* or a Punjabi. Bangladeshi? No, none at all. You can think about me, being graduated in 1961, I was not a fool. [In] 1968 I lived in Britain for already five years, and I found these things happening in my country. I said: "[See] how commerce runs in East Pakistan, where all the Biharis and [all] the other people are running the importing things and selling."

I was dealing with the some of the friends, who were second class officers or upper class clerks in the Directorate. And I asked them questions after questions, and nobody could satisfy me. Most of their bosses are Urdu-speaking. I started [to] feel [like] crying, not because of political parties but because of … East Pakistan. I belong to East Pakistan and it is my country and everybody who runs the money business [is] the people from Pakistan.

Then I found out a way to sell my things. I asked my friends: "Can you get some commission [by selling] to your bosses"? Two of the three boys took up the job and said: "All right". I said: "Look, I give you at a price of say 2,200 and you take another 500". Rationally, I thought that could be the price. "So if I give the wholesale price of 1,800 or 1,700, that's good luck. We can't earn £2,250 or £2,300 [in the UK] a month, and you are getting per sale 500 rupees, plus the bosses are getting 600 to 800 rupee profit". … Within 24 hours they solved my problem. So I took [the goods to East Pakistan] at the rate of 1,700. That guy could [have given] me 1,700, you see? Instead he said: "Get out". What power he may had in his mind, when he asked me to get out? He is a businessman. He knows that the market is a captive one. Unless he thought it was a captive market, he couldn't have told me that. He should have persuaded me to come down, and negotiate sensibly.

So that is the story that made me [a] nationalist, a hundred per cent nationalist. The day after [that] I never spoke Urdu. I said: "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is right. If this is Pakistan then he should get his Six Points". When I came back I joined the High Commission. I started talking, I was still working. I talked and talked and talked, they looked at me badly, good way, bad way and I said: "I don't care." That is my experience and I told the story, maybe to thousands of West Pakistani people. If somebody tells you in Karachi or 'Pindi or in Lahore the same story, how do you feel?

The language of communication between Bengalis and Pakistanis working in the High Commission was Urdu. Because you are there people expect you to speak Urdu and you don't expect them to speak Bengali. And if you [speak Bengali] you are one of the miscreants, [a] nationalist. Even nowadays they sometimes think that we should talk to them in Urdu. But this is not a problem now, because the young generation have the language [of] English as the [medium of communication]. In our time [a] lot of [Bengali] people in this country were not able to speak English and they were not able to speak Urdu either. West Pakistani people wanted the East Pakistani people to speak Urdu rather then Bengali.

## 2. Coming to the UK

**Sazzad Khan**

I came to Britain in 1962. We knew that we are Pakistani, and we had it written in our passports also but in reality we saw that those who are Urdu speaking are the owners of Pakistan. They used to mention us as Bengali when they talked to us. In any case if you are to go to any bank or the High Commission, you have to talk in Urdu. I lived in the North-West at that time. They were not willing to mention us as Pakistani, they used to tell us [that we were] Bengali. All the positions and the offices, like some of the mosques - the West Pakistanis dominated them. They used to disregard the Bengalis even in the factories. …

I came to Britain with the help of my brother on February 1962. I was annoyed with the Pakistanis because of so many things. I used to write my home address as: East Bengal (East Pakistan). One day, my brother saw this and warned me about the consequence. He told me to use the bracket to East Bengal instead of East Pakistan. He warned me, this would create problems if they notice this. I was so annoyed with the Pakistanis. Many of our people used to tolerate this but I could not bear this, so I had frequent quarrels with them.

When the Six Point movement of *Bangabandhu* started, I took a close look at all the events. In 1969, when *Asad* was killed, I was living in a town called St Albans, we sent financial help from there. Afterwards we were hopeful as Ayub Khan was domed, and Yahya Khan came and declared the election schedule. We were very hopeful then.

**Mathin Miah**

I came to visit Britain in 1969, but when the war began, I applied to the authority that my life will be at risk, if I go back to the country. They accepted my appeal and allowed me to stay here in Britain, and later on they gave me the citizenship. At the beginning of the war of independence, we were not in favour of breaking the country, because it will make the country smaller and weaker. Some of us were against the division, and also some of the English people, including some learned persons, had the same idea, and they told us the effect of division. It will be harmful for both, West Pakistan and East Pakistan.

**Husna Matin**

At 1974 we all (me and my children) came to London, and shortly in 1975 there started another huge problem. We lost all our earnings and assets, which we earned during staying for seven years in Saudi Arabia, during the war. We first came to Surrey and stayed there for one year. And in 1975 we came to London. My husband worked for seven years with the Bangladesh High Commission here in UK, and then he left the job. We came to East London in 1976.

Mrs Husna Matin with her children at Trafalgar Square, 1975.

**Abdus Sami**

When I came to this country, there were no relatives of mine here. We came here by ship. In those days people used to have restaurants and take-away shops. There was an abundant number of mills and factories, so we had no shortage of jobs. I came here and lodged in 24 Great Windmill Street [Soho]. I had a relative of mine who had come here before me by … ship and he used to run a restaurant here. His name was Shawkot Ali from *Bishwanath*. … He provided me a job [and] used to get £7.00 as salary and £1.00 or £1.50 as overtime. He used to take £4.50 from me [for] rent and … food. … I had borrowed some money in Bangladesh … from my brother … I was [under] pressure [to refund] the loan and also save some money. So I used to work hard.

One of my nephews [called] Ahad … used to work in a restaurant and the owner of that restaurant … offered me job with higher wages and free accommodation and food. It was a good offer for me and I could easily save some money in this process. I agreed with him and worked in his restaurant for five to seven years. Working in the restaurant, I was able to pay [off] all my debt. I then came to Aldgate … and rented a room from one of my friends. The rent was three and a half pounds. I took one partner and brought two single beds [to] the room and we two were living here. … Then someone advised me [to get a] tailoring job and tailoring had more money. One can get one job in every 15 minutes.

Abdus Sami with friend's children, London E1 1962.

I was busy with work and it was always crowded. People had sympathy for each other, which has dried [up] now. And all the people were single and no families were there. We had to work and eat. On the weekends our job was to enjoy cinema in the cinema halls like *Naz Cinema*. … We always were waiting for the letters from [our] country. We used to pass the weekend answering the letters also. We used to have a bath once a week and we used to go to bathe in groups of four or five. In the evening we never used to go to bathe, because the white people used to attack us and beat us.

## 3. Independence War

**C.A.S. Kabir**

I can remember so many things regarding our independence movement, our language movement, movement against the military rulers like Ayub Khan. I think I should start from 1952. When I was a student, there was language movement in 21st of February. [A] few of the Bengali people were killed by the police, with the order of the Pakistani government at that time. From that time we had a feeling that some sort of Bengali nationalism arisen in my mind; that we are Bengali. We demanded [that] the state language should be Bengali, that's why that was the attack from the Punjabi-ruled Pakistani government on the people of Bangladesh. Since that time I had some sort of distaste for the Pakistani rule and afterwards against the military rule of Ayub Khan. In 1962, I was a student at that time, movements were going on against the military rule and the Ayub Khan's rule. I participated in it, and [at] some stage my parents advised me to leave the country for [the] time being and come back again and complete my university studies.

In 1962, I left the country, I came here and joined a company - they used to deal with finance. I worked there, and from that company I had a mate who once told me about the arrival of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in London. I had the opportunity to see Bangabandhu - at that time he was used to [be called] *Mujib bhai*. I heard discussion about the Bengali people, their condition in the then East Pakistan and Bangabandhu clearly told [me] that it would be impossible to live with the Punjabis within one country. And it was clearly in his mind and he mentioned it in front of [a] few other elderly leaders. From that time it was in my thought that East Pakistan may be separated or may be an independent country under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In 1966, we joined in the movement of Six Points by the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In 1969, the people of East Pakistan revolted against the military regiment and here we demonstrated and we participated in the movement. It was clearly in our mind, that we are Bengali and we are going to separate from Pakistan. On the 7th of March in 1971 when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his speech in Paltan, declared: "*Aberar shongram, muktir shomgram, aberar shongram shadhinotor shongram*". It means [that] Bangabandhu called for the independence movement. We took it that way in the UK and following that day according to the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that "You build up forts in every houses" throughout UK and many action groups were been formed, and they started the movement. And they clearly declared about the independence of Bangladesh from … Pakistani rule.

Mrs Husna Matin with her husband Abdul Matin, 1975.

So we participated, there were so many groups been formed, I also belonged to a group. My group was not with Bengali people; my group was English people, plus other European people. There were two groups actually. One was called 'Operation Omega' and the other one was called 'Action Bangladesh'. Action Bangladesh was led by *Paul Connet*, a school teacher and his comrade was *Meriatta Prokop*, who was an Oxford graduate, that organisation was run by their leadership, and 'Operation Omega' was run by [several people including] Roger Moody. And I was the sponsor of both the organisations and I was an organiser as well.

I worked throughout the nine months, full time, no break. I had my own business, I had my own house. I left them with other people, they looked after it, and I contributed my full time with the movement. Throughout the United Kingdom there were so many organisations. All the organisations came under one organisation that was called Action Committee for the People's Republic of Bangladesh. *Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury* was the leader of the organisation. On the other hand there was the Awami League party, they were also working, Mr. *Gous Khan* was the president at that time. There were other organisations like [the] Luton committee, Birmingham committee, Manchester committee, Swindon committee. There were 110 committees. All of them were working for the liberation of the country. And then the liberation war started. After nine months we got our independence, our land was freed from … Punjabi rule. We were directed for those nine months by the Prime Minister, *Tajuddin Ahmed*, who was the leader of the provisional *Mujibnagar* government situated in Kushtia. And according to my evaluation our independence war is a part of history. We demanded our independence and we deserved it.

**Husna Matin**

My husband was working in Pakistan embassy in Saudi Arabia before the war. From Saudi Arabia we came to Pakistan, that is the West Pakistan, and shortly, in about one month, the war started. We were very worried and anxious, because I had three very young daughters. There was police guarding all our [Bengali] homes [in Islamabad, Pakistan], it seemed to us that they were watching us. They have not treated us badly [within the embassy compound], but I was scared about my husband, as he was leaving the home in the morning, we had no assurance that he will return at evening, we were afraid of his life.

We were scared going out with our Bengali dress. We left our sarees for four, five months [and] … used *salwar* and *kameez* to hide ourselves, so that they couldn't recognize [whether] … we were Pakistani or Bengali. We could not collect our belongings that were sent from Saudi Arabia, bound to Karachi. We were not thinking of our goods sent from Saudi Arabia, rather we were thinking, how to flee West Pakistan with our lives. We were scared to listen to the Bangladesh radio, we listened to the broadcast, hiding the radio and taking it near the ears, and lowing the volume, and we were afraid of our life, and always afraid of attack on us, even at the dropping of a leaf, we were anxious.

One of our well-wishers within the office compound helped us very much. He helped us getting out of the West Pakistan. We applied for *Umra* visa and went to Saudi Arabia. We left our goods that possibly reached at Karachi seaport at that time. We came to Karachi from Islamabad, we tried to go to one of my cousins' home, who was a navy officer, but the security forces didn't allow us. So we stayed at a hotel near Karachi, the next day we went to Karachi to get the visa and flew to Saudi Arabia on the third day.

When we reached Saudi Arabia, my husband went to visit his office that is the Pakistan embassy at Saudi Arabia. They arrested him with the false allegation of connection with India. Some of his colleagues working in the [embassy] helped him and they assured his innocence, and he was released, and was kept in the embassy compound. After the independence the Pakistan authority got us out of the compound, and neither the Saudi Arabia accepted us, nor did the Bangladeshi authority accept us because, at the very beginning, Bangladesh had no tie with Saudi Arabia. The Bengalis in Saudi Arabia were meeting together on the seashore at night and were planning the next step, how to go to Bangladesh. India sent a ship to take back the *hajjis*, who were visiting Saudi Arabia at that time for *hajj* purpose. That ship took us - the 17 families who were in the Pakistan embassy, doctor, nurse and other stuff - to Bangladesh. It took 17 days to reach Bangladesh. We arrived at Chittagong seaport, but as we arrived it was low tide then, so we had to wait another day in the sea for the high tide. The custom officers didn't check us, they left us telling that Pakistan has destroyed everything in Bangladesh, if you have brought anything that is yours.
We met Mr. Moinuddin in Chittagong. He came to us [after] hearing the news of our arrival. He showed us the situation in Chittagong; we saw the big holes on the surface, which were made by the bombings of the Pakistan army. We were in Chittagong for four days, and then we left Chittagong for Dhaka by air. We were suffering shortage of money also.

After reaching Dhaka, we stayed at the residence of the governor of the State Bank, Ijajur Rahman, who was my cousin. The next day my husband went to the Bangladesh High Commission. They told him: "All who have returned from different foreign missions of Pakistan will be provided with your jobs again, but for the next few weeks you will have to wait for the call from us."

We then came to Sylhet, but we were nearly empty, and my cousin helped us. As we were coming to Sylhet, we were unaware of the condition of our homes. We hired a car from the airport, but the car was unable to reach to our home, as the road was badly damaged by the bombs, and the war. There had been a huge fight between the Pakistani soldiers themselves, [friendly fire] near our home, during the war. People at home were disconnected from us in the long nine months, so they were very glad to see us alive and safe again. We could not make communication from Dhaka also. We stayed at home for two weeks, and then again we came to Dhaka, my husband worked at Dhaka for nine months, and then he was transferred to London. My husband came to London, and we were back to home for two years.

We suffered a lot when we were staying at Bangladesh at that period. We had not enough food, no pure drinking water and no milk for the children, we suffered a lot. There was shortage of goods in the market and the price was very high. At that time we were staying at Dhaka

**Aziz Choudhury**

This changed my life, as I moved to the UK in 1971 during the war. Before the 16th October, I was in Bangladesh during the course of the fight for freedom. It was very difficult to leave the country [Bangladesh] at that time. I managed to be granted university admission, it helped that my uncle was already here in the UK. So I had the opportunity. I had applied for a passport long before the war. I was stuck in Dhaka from approximately March-May '71. I was working at the time and planned to go to Rajshahi on the 26th March, I had brought a coach ticket which I never used and was stuck in Dhaka until June. There were many problems to get around Dhaka, especially from one city to another. I managed to get a ticket on a small aeroplane from Dhaka to Sylhet in June, nobody at home was aware of where I was at this time.

There were no communication, but in June, after three months, my family managed to communicate with me, so they knew I was alive and well. It takes 35 minutes to get from Dhaka to Sylhet on the plane but after 30 minutes the pilot said there was a weather problem and we have to turn back. We noticed the sky was clear and the weather was fine so we got suspicious but were unable to do anything. The plane landed in Dhaka again, ended up in [the] bush, stopped eventually. [The] army surrounded [the] plane at gunpoint. As the plane stopped, two people guarded the plane and were searching everyone. They were not able to stand properly in the plane as it was so small, so we were asked to go down and stand in a line. There were machine guns placed on the ground and I was afraid if they found who they were looking for. They would have shot us and nobody will know where we were. There were only 18 passengers so after checking us thoroughly, they apologized and let us go. We got back in the plane and flew to Sylhet.

On another occasion I was at home on a quiet day speaking to my neighbor when the army suddenly came and seized the whole area - they were under the impression that there was a bomb somewhere nearby. I was quite young at the time. I was afraid of the house they were searching because they found a walkie-talkie. Everyone was active but if you were effective and got caught, you would be in a lot of trouble. The army didn't find anything but I was there and it was yet another experience.

I was affected by the war. Even 15 years after it, I used to scream sometimes in my sleep. In Dhaka, I used to work with a pharmaceutical company. It was an English company and because I was going to *Rajshahi* for the first time they paid me about 2 months wages plus bonuses, so in those days I think I had about 1500 rupees which was quite a lot of money for that time. All this money was always kept in the back pocket. We used to sleep with our trousers on because you never knew when you had to move.

**Mohammed Israel**

The independence of Bangladesh is the share of achievement of movement of the 'East Pakistan Liberation Front' here in the UK. This can be interpreted if we analyse the incidents chronologically. East Pakistan Liberation Front was formed in August 1969, at 15, Vine Street, Birmingham, with the target to make Bangladesh an independent state. The president was Abdus Sabur Choudhury, and the secretary was [the] late Azizul Huq Bhuyian. [The] East Pakistan Liberation Front used to publish a Bangla newsletter, every fortnight as the voice of the organisation. It was published from 171, Wright Street, Smallheath Birmingham. The name of the newsletter was *Bidrohi Bangla*. The long days of oppression of the East Pakistan by the West Pakistani administration was described in this newsletter chronologically.

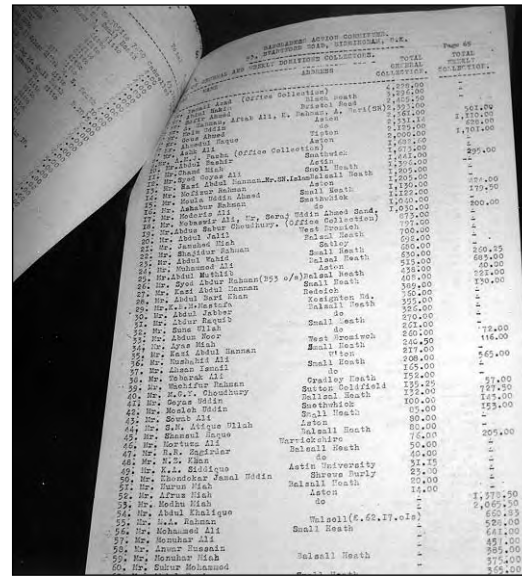
A huge public meeting was organised in Digbeth civic hall at Birmingham,on 29 November 1970. Lots of Pakistani and Indian elites attended the meeting.Tariq Ali,one of the student leaders of Pakistan,also attended the meeting. After discussing the oppression and the on-going,ill motivated administration policy of Pakistan,the meeting decided that there is no other way to solve the crisis but to make East Pakistan an independent state.The independence movement was strengthened from then.The situation in Bangladesh and the reactions of the other countries were also considered with due respect.

In March 1971, it was decided to demonstrate and burn the Pakistani flag in front of the Pakistan High Commission in London. On the morning of 5th March, we went to London by coach and surrounded the Pakistan High Commission. We brought down the Pakistan flag in front of the BBC photographer, and other media man of different countries. We burnt the photograph of Yayha Khan. We wrote '*Joi Bangla', 'Swadhin Bangla'* and other slogans on the wall of the High Commission. We declared … independence on that day. The memorandum of the independence of Bangladesh was handed over to [the] Pakistan High Commissioner Suliman Ali by Selim Ahmed and Mujahid Ali.

Afterwards we kept a close look on the events back in Bangladesh. On 25th March, we came to know [about] the genocide in Dhaka, and we instantly gathered in […] Smallheath Park to protest the killing. In that meeting, the East Pakistan Liberation Front was dissolved and Bangladesh Action Committee was formed. After forming the committee, we requested all to form Bangladesh Action subcommittees all over UK.

We tried in every way to find out the position and status of [the] missing Bangabandhu. We sent a barrister from London to Pakistan; we contributed £500 from our committee on this. The barrister found that Bangabandhu was alive and in Pakistani custody. We took steps to gather world support for the independence of Bangladesh. We started to find the countries [who] have [an] arms deal with … Pakistan. I was assigned to keep clear accounts of the money and expenses. I was the chairman of the Audit Committee of the Bangladesh Action Committee.

To gather and collect information of the world sentiment about the problem of East Pakistan was my responsibility. I gathered information from five international newspapers; namely 'The Times', 'The [Daily] Telegraph', 'The Guardian', 'The Observer' and the 'International Herald Tribune'. We were figuring out which countries are favouring Pakistan and which are not, and we took necessary actions according to our findings. We used to find out [each] country that is supplying arms to Pakistan and helping Pakistan in other ways; we then demonstrated in front of the foreign offices of those countries in London. I am still preserving those paper cuttings. On 30 June 1971, the ship 'Padma', loaded with arms and ammunitions, was preparing to leave the Montreal port of Canada, we came to know the information and we gathered in front of the Canadian High Commission at London, and we demanded the suspension of the supply. The shipment was stopped because of our demonstration. The 7th naval fleet of America started towards the Bay of Bengal to help Pakistan, we demonstrated against the move and later they suspended the advancement. We also succeeded to cancel the shipment of the 10-million arms according to the US arms deal by our protest.



Record of contribution.

The Bangladesh Steering Committee was formed in the month of April to coordinate the activities of all the sub-committees formed in favour of the independence of Bangladesh. On 21 June, there was a meeting of 12 donor nations of the World Bank to discuss grants to Pakistan. We 120 members of our committee went there and we had rallies, protests and demonstration there and later we were able to cancel the grants to Pakistan. On 11th August a special military court was set to convict Bangabandhu as a *Rastrodrohy* and later kill Bangabandhu. We protested against the plan and the court was postponed. On 27th April 1971, the Pakistan cricket team came to UK, we gathered at all the venues and protested where they played.

The British Parliament used to discuss the issue of the independence war of Bangladesh nearly everyday; it was due to our relentless movement. On 3rd May 1971, 300 British MPs voted in favour of Bangladesh in […] Parliament. The British aid to Pakistan was stopped. We, the Bengalis living in UK, [were] so united and so strong that our movement was successful to bring […] world sentiment in favour of Bangladesh. That is a very important reason that we got our independence within the 266 days of the beginning of the war. No other country of the world has got its independence in such a small period of struggle and fighting.

**Nikhilesh Chakraborty**

The independence war or *Mukti Judho* was for our liberation. It is not only a part of my history, it's [the] plot of my life as it were. We looked at this war of independence as liberation. We call it as Mukti Judho, liberation war. I was in Britain at that time. We were a politically active group working in Britain already. We were working for restoration of democracy in Pakistan, which later on [was] taken over by [the] democratic front of Pakistan. This group that we were actively associated was a left organisation, which had membership of students, professionals and other individuals from the left. Through this organisation we took active part in the Independence war that was waged in the homeland, Bangladesh. The impact, war had on my relatives was absolutely enormous. My expectant wife with her first child was in Dhaka on 7th of March 1971. And she had the little baby who was only few months old then with her, staying in Dhaka just to go through her viva voce exam in the university. Later on, she came back to my home district, which is Cox's Bazaar, and there they were the whole family; my six months old son, my wife, my mother and father, my brothers and sisters; they were all in the same house. Until the month of April when friends of my father and said, they could not stay in that house safe any longer, they must go away and hide. Hiding they did for about eight months until in the 7th of August 1971, they walked over 60 miles on foot, only in the night time resting in the day time in villages and crossed the border on to Agartala, India .

So the whole was part of the liberation war as it were; they ended up in the camps, where they met the freedom fighters, young people from home across the border, coming in asking their whereabouts, trying to know how they are feeling, how they are keeping.

And here in Britain, war has started – the 26th of March war was imposed on us. War was raised on a nation, which couldn't stay still, war started since that night. We did not have any information about what was happening in Bangladesh until the 3rd of April. [Liz Lohani, the wife of our] ... journalist friend ... Fazle Lohani ... was the first person who had a flight out of war raised country of Bangladesh. We had the first report from her, as there is a war on civilians, on ordinary people; there is a war on all fronts

**Abdur Rashid**
At that time, I was in UK, and I don't know exactly, what was happening there, I was only reading about the situation there. But from here we have a ray of hope, that at least for 48 hours, we were virtually crying. Now, when we people in Britain started to organise ourselves. I am talking now as a resident here in UK at that time. We had one problem, we don't have an umbrella. ... We need to have somebody who [would] be known to the local population and the British people, and who could [work well with 'respectable' people]. ... And [there were] ... very, very [few respectable Bangladeshi people], because the earlier generation of people were seamen deserters. That was the beginning of immigration here in the UK. The start of human deserters was in the '40s and '50s, and it is only in the '60s those people [who had] come 20 years or 15 years back were a bit more established. They had restaurants or business or groceries. […] small businesses were creeping up.

Not like today because Bangladeshi people have businesses all over. There are 12,000 restaurants, no, no, no. You can have but maybe 100 restaurants, that's all. They are also run by the people, who were seaman deserters, not like young entrepreneurs of today. The young men from university, schools and colleges, they have … not like that, don't think of that. They were seaman people; they had somehow owned a curry house. And that was the place of our seating. We don't have any other place to go. So these people, we can't present them as politicians. They can give money, they can give support, help but to present him as a national leader, it would be hard. We were lucky there, to get the man, a justice who was sent by Yahya Khan to Geneva, and he resigned the job and came over here. He was the past president of Bangladesh, Mr. Abu Sayeed Choudhury. So we were lucky that this man was a justice, and he came over here, but he was not a politician.

Then when the army jumped in, we stopped, lot of people stopped. We didn't have any heart to go to office virtually, but we didn't resign. Nobody knew what to do and how to react, it was a terrible time for 48 hours, two or three days; terrible for everybody. What could you say, what could you do, as a nation you don't understand. When a country voted 99 per cent to one party, one may differ, one may vote against, but when you have the 99 per cent people elected one man, this is virtually the whole country, isn't it? And that country has been raided by then. [In the] middle of the night … the leader is taken away. Not he was put in jail in East Pakistan, but he was taken away to West Pakistan. It is a tremendous blow. Unless you are in it, nobody could feel like that. As if your heart is taken away, if you are a conscious person, and you feel and you go with the country. Then your leader … is taken like [in the] middle of the night, and he is taken away not in your country, he is taken thousand miles away, and the army breaking everything, and raiding. It is a terrible time; I can't describe it in words. And there can't be a time like this again. At least I feel in this way, and I can feel for hundreds and hundreds of people I saw, because I was one of the men who should be able to give hope to the people. Lot of people came to me for news rather I went to lot of people.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman indirectly declared this in *Paltan Maidan* three month before in his speech, when he indirectly said: "If I am no longer there then you take … things in hand and fight". He [foresaw this] because he was a politician. He could foresee things coming up that way, because this is such a big clash. He was really a great man … and he didn't run away. He could have run away, but it was good of him that he stayed in, as a leader he should not run away.

Ok, so people started gathering information, and we found the news of this man. I left the job then or a little after that. All Bengali (working in the High Commission) left their jobs. I didn't resign but I left it. I said: "No, I will work in the street, clean the street, but will not work with you again." I became a nationalist. There is no room for compromise there. When I went to Chittagong, I learned it and to my heart I said, "Look, this is no country". … It was not for my personal gain, I don't have to have a life in Bangladesh, because I was already a resident of UK, and I know the future and I know that I can raise up my children, and I can be anything here. But after all you will feel for your nation. But I was posted in Bradford, and that was a city of Pakistani people. And I told them:

"How would you react if it happens in Karachi, Rawalpindi or Lahore? Do you have a sensible answer to me? Come back with it, or don't talk rubbish. Don't talk [about] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as [a spy] or as an Indian". Everybody said: "Your job will go" and I said: "Take your job today or tomorrow, whenever you like". Maybe five percent of the employees in the Pakistan High Commission were Bengali. [I said]: "Because you (West Pakistanis) had the power, and the cronies you take, you took your people. Sometimes for the sake of show, … you take here and there one or two but you [aren't] really willing to take Bengalis". There is a point in your life, you have an age, you have a future, and you can say and you can mould your life accordingly, as you are young enough, I cannot, because I am old.

I was 25 or 27. I was born in a village where I was the first graduate in five villages … so if I don't say, who else should say? If there were twenty graduates, I could say: "Ok, I hide behind and let the others fight". But in this case, if I don't fight, then who should fight? So I … said: "No, don't do the wrong thing. Whatever God give me I will live with it, but if I had the honesty I should say for my country. Even if I die tomorrow, forget it, but at least I have the consolation that I have spoken the truth. And I told not only to East Pakistan people, but I told this to West Pakistan people also, and in the offices, to the officers, whoever he was.

Then it is declared Bangladesh and we must need a name, because we young people talked [about] it very carefully. OK, we have lot of wealthy people, and we were making associations and things like that before, but these people will not be suitable at all […]. When it is a national figure, somebody of that status is welcome. And Bangladesh had a very good luck in having Abu Sayeed Choudhury accepted as a leader here.

[The] British media played a very important part in those days. Britain today is much lower stature, then on those days. In 35 years America has risen far above then Britain in international politics. [Briain] was then a very major power in international politics. What was happening in London, 99 per cent was happening around the world. Trafalgar Square gave all the new ideas. People who could master [a] demonstration in Trafalgar Square could master the policy in their country.

**Tunu Miah**

I was a school student at that time. I was living in Brick Lane and studying at Montefiore secondary school, now this is named as Osmani School. In 1967, I was at Christ Church School. I passed from the school and went to the secondary school. After I was admitted to the secondary school, I was the student of 5th year at that time, and then the independence war started. I was not very young but was young enough at that time. We were few in number at that time, my father and many other people who lead the movement, joined the independence movement. I also joined the movement and participated as much as I could […]. I was always with the movement all the time. We had fighting with the Pakistanis at that time here in Brick Lane - we … fought with them many times. I participated in all this but as I was a child, I didn't participate in the hostility but I supplied our men with sticks to fight. I was very much sensitive about my country, my language, because the Pakistanis behaved [to] us very badly - as if they are our elders and we are the servants. We had to respect them but they didn't respect us. If we asked them like: "*Aup Kaisa hai*" they answered: "*Tu Kaisa hai*". … The Punjabis did not respect Bengalis living in Brick Lane with the Pakistanis. I could not tolerate that. So as the independence movement started, we all joined.

It was a Sunday, I went to the school with a Bangladesh badge on my shirt. Some of my friends who were the first year students also had badges on their shirts. As we got to the school, the Pakistani students took the badges from the first year Bengali students and threw those on the ground. The badges were printed with a Bangladesh map and a picture of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The first year students were afraid and didn't protest, but as me and one of my friends [in the] 5th year came to the school, the first year student told us the incident, and we then went to them, and there was a huge clash between us in the school. The school authority expelled us all. On the same day [in the] evening near a street, there was a big factory [and] they attacked us again. We clashed with them and the police arrested us [but] our parents freed us from custody. My friend had a steel comb in his pocket [and] he injured one of the Pakistani boys with that comb. [The Pakistanis] are still known to me and on some occasions we meet together. Now they say that they had fun with us, and we also tell them we had fun with them. One of [the Pakistanis], still has a salon here.

The people were dreaming [about] only one thing, day and night … independence. The word 'Bangla' gave us an emotional courage. We were so involved and so desperate at that time. Nowadays people are not proud of [this] identity - they love the identity of being a Muslim. Of course, I am proud of being a Muslim but I am a Bengali in the first place. The Turkish are proud of being Turkish, Indians are proud of being Indians, but why we are afraid of being Bengali. Some of the Bengalis [in the] Young Muslim [Organisation] tell that we are Muslim, not Bengalis. They tell that Bengali is the name of a culture.

**Shahid Ali**
I came here in UK in February 1958. I was staying in Birmingham at the time of the independence war of Bangladesh. On the first day in the Smallheath Park when the Bangladesh flag was raised, there was a huge gathering of people in the park. Barrister Zuglul Pasha addressed the meeting at first. But there were very few police there, may be 15 or 20 of them, at the speech he was describing the massacres which was going on in Bangladesh, in the meantime, the Punjabis who were outside the compound, moving around and keeping an eye on us, they called one of our people "*bhaia, bhaia ither aow"*, when he went to them, they trapped him holding his hands from outside the railing that was surrounding the park, [the Bengali] was trapped and couldn't get free. The Punjabis took out the knife from their pocket and stabbed our man on his hands, they stabbed him four or five times. Then the Bengali man cried out for help and we saw him in that situation. There started a huge chaos and Mr. Pasha who was addressing the people, also started calling the police, the police came and captured the Punjabis. The police arrested the Punjabi. The crowd gone unruly, they were not listening to the speech of Mr. Pasha. At that time Mrs. Badrunessa Pasha, his wife, took the microphone and started talking to the people and then the people cooled down and started listening to the speaker again.

After that […] the British government people, who were there, were conscious, that the Punjabis are really torturing the Bengalis. The Pakistan military is torturing [them] in Bangladesh and the Punjabis, who were in the UK, were torturing the Bangladeshis there. The miscreants … were produced [in] court and they were punished … with £800 fine and six months imprisonment. From thereon the British government took very good care of us and helped as much as they could do. And we here in Britain were in huge mental anarchy. [There were] no letters or information from the relatives and loving ones who were back in Bangladesh. People were in great fear, they were in tension about their relatives in Bangladesh, and they couldn't even work quietly during that period.

After seven months of fight, the Punjabis surrendered at last. 93,000 of the Punjabi soldiers … surrendered and we became independent. After the independence Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came to UK and met us here. Then he went to India and at last he went to Bangladesh. He then shouldered the presidency.

**Gulam Mustafa Choudhury**
In 1965 during the war between India and Pakistan I got involved … with the independence movement. Tassadduq Ahmed had a restaurant [called] 'The Ganges'. I used to [respect] him very much, [because] he was an educated and intellectual person. He, Gous Khan, and other elderly people used to gather together and I used to serve them tea. It was in the 'Allahabad' restaurant. During '65 they formed the Pakistan *Shomiti* to help Pakistan in the war. The chairman was Tassadduq Ahmed. They made me the secretary … and we collected money to send to Pakistan.

On 7th June 1966, when Bangabandhu put forward the Six Points, I spent some days with Gous Khan to know the Six Points in detail. He brought the Six Points manifesto and we read it. The main point was … autonomy, which led to the independence of the country. After that [the] Pakistani authorities put Bangabandhu in the jail and he was arrested for few times during that period. We again formed a committee to raise funds. … Many of us were not actively involved with [the] Awami League ... There was a Welfare Association then also - Zillur Rahman was the secretary then and Gous Khan was the president … Before that, Barrister Nurul Islam was the president of the association.

We sent a lawyer to fight for Bangabandhu in the court. After that he came to this country. It was the first time I met Bangabandhu [and it was] in the 'Allahabad' restaurant … in 1968. I was not aware that Bangabandhu was a class mate of Tassadduq Ahmed. I came to know the information then. … Bangabandhu … instructed us to form [the] Awami League here in the UK. … He came to the UK again in 1969 when the UK Awami League was formed.

I can't explain … how I felt the first time I saw Bangabandhu. It was a wonderful feeling for me to make tea for Bangabandhu and he will call me by my name ... The most interesting thing was that we had a meeting in the 'Exeter [Hotel]'. Bangabandhu was due to participate in the meeting. He was residing in [that] …hotel [and] … I was given the responsibility to pick him up [at] 8 o'clock in the morning. I went to [his] suite and he was alone. [The] only other person present was his secretary in the next room. He was sitting and taking his breakfast. The room was totally silent and he was waiting for a telephone [call] from Bangladesh. In the …silence I was hesitating to talk with him. On the other hand, as I used to call Gous Khan *Mama* (Uncle), I was calling Bangabandhu Mama as well because he was a friend of Gous Khan. All of Gous' friends become my Mama. At last I broke the silence asking Bangabandhu about his jail life. … He replied [to] me: "Which one I should [talk] about? …Jail is always jail." That was the end of the conversation.

In 1970 [the] election was declared in Bangladesh. The UK Awami League donated one twelve seater vehicle to the Bangladesh Awami League for … election purposes and another 10,000 taka were sent to [the] Sylhet Awami League for election purposes. … I was going to Bangladesh at that time and I was given the responsibility to officially take the vehicle to Bangladesh. … I was going to Bangladesh for my own purpose. I took the key to Dhaka, and the Awami League office was at 92, Nowabpur Road, and I went there and met Bangabandhu and handed over the keys. He had [a] very sharp memory and he was calling me by name and I was also calling him Mama. …

I got married on 23rd March 1971. After [the] marriage I was [told] to go to Dhaka … [where] I met the leaders and they told me about the beginning of the war and also told me to go [into] hiding. I couldn't see Bangabandhu then. No one could trace [where] … he was. It was 24th March and they knew that the war was unavoidable. … In June 2, I flew to the UK. … I still had communication with Bangladesh and all the relatives and leaders. Communication broke down in the second week of December.

I joined the people who were working for [the] independence of Bangladesh in the UK. I took part in the demonstrations and all the activities that were taking place. … On June 20th we went to France to demonstrate in front of the World Bank [and demand them] not to release money for Pakistan. Lots of people went to France from the UK. …

Gulam Mustafa Choudhury with his newly wed wife Syeda Rowshanara Choudhury Shelly, 1971.

[After all the] meetings and demonstrations … the country was free on 16th December. The interesting thing was that we had no passport to go to Bangladesh and … a temporary High Commission was established in the … Bangladesh Centre [in London]. They used to provide a paper with a seal [declaring] our nationality and authorisation. We had chartered a flight for the first time - it was in December or in January. I was willing to go to Bangladesh with the first flight. …

We had our connecting flight to Dhaka the next day. We were 146 people on the chartered flight. We were very happy and our feeling is beyond explanation. We were [also sad] because we had lost so many of our relatives and friends. I had not lost any of my family members, however. Our village was saved by the Peace Committee chairman who was from our village.

I visited all the country including Dhaka, Sylhet, and Chittagong. We were [afraid] of getting attacked at any moment. In '72 Bangabandhu called [for the] surrender [of] all the arms. ... Before that there was no order and peace. … Some of the people … had some education and moral training, but many people who had arms didn't have enough morality. Some of them used [their] arms to take personal revenge … I came back to the UK after three to four months, most probably in June.

**Badrun Nesa Pasha**

On the day of 25th March I was … in London, attending [the] seminar 'UK immigrant advisory service'. On the lunch time we got the news of [a] disaster … in the then East Pakistan. … So many people have been killed and the women students in the Rokeya Hall [have] been raped. And it was not only Dhaka City [which] was surrounded by the Pakistani army. …

I returned to Birmingham in the evening with my two colleagues, because my director John Analsa, who is the brother of Martin Analsa of 'Amnesty International', suggested [that I should] not travel alone. Somebody should escort me because of the upheaval going on in East Pakistan. Something might happen to me, because I have got lots of Pakistani clients. So he was very … concerned about my security and return journey to Birmingham. When I arrived with my two colleagues … one of my friends, Intiaz Ali, collected me from the … station. And when I arrived [at my] house, I found [it] … full of people. … When I found so many of my friends in my house, I was rather amazed. Then I came to know that prominent community leaders like late Afroze Mia, who was the president of Pakistan Welfare Association, Jamshed Ali, Sabur Choudhry and other people were in my house for a meeting on the issue of Bangladesh. The leaders decided to have a meeting in an independent place, and they proposed my husband to provide the place and my husband agreed. …


Bangladesh Womens's Association marching from Hyde Park, 1971.

They had continued the meeting for the whole of the day. They asked me if I do mind or if I am upset. I said: "No, I am not. You all have the right to come to our house and try to feel comfortable, and whatever we can do, we will do." We never thought [about what will happen if anything] … like the liberation movement may go on and on and on. We could have been blacklisted, we could have been attacked or our future could [have been] doomed and ruined. …

We needed … money. First, we will have to decide how we can help our brothers and sisters, those who have engaged themselves in the liberation movement. We have to help them. I donated my jewelry – whatever I was wearing at that time. Everybody returned to the meeting after my appeal and most of them listed their names with the amount of their contribution. They were all … sending … money and there was a huge list [coming] to us.

**4. Campaigns in London and other Cities**

**Mohammed Israel**

I was involved in the campaign all through the movement. I went to Paris when the Paris Club was meeting to grant aid to Pakistan. We demonstrated there. We also protested the plan in front of the High Commissions of those countries.

China was in favour of Pakistan and against Bangladesh. Edward Heath and the then President of World Bank had a meeting with the Pakistan authority here in London. In that meeting he pressed [the] West Pakistan authority to give freedom to Bangladesh and leave Bangladesh. That was the main influencing factor that made them (Pakistanis) decide to leave Bangladesh, otherwise the Indian Army could never achieve freedom for Bangladesh. On the other hand, the freedom fighters were armed with light arms, so they could have done little.

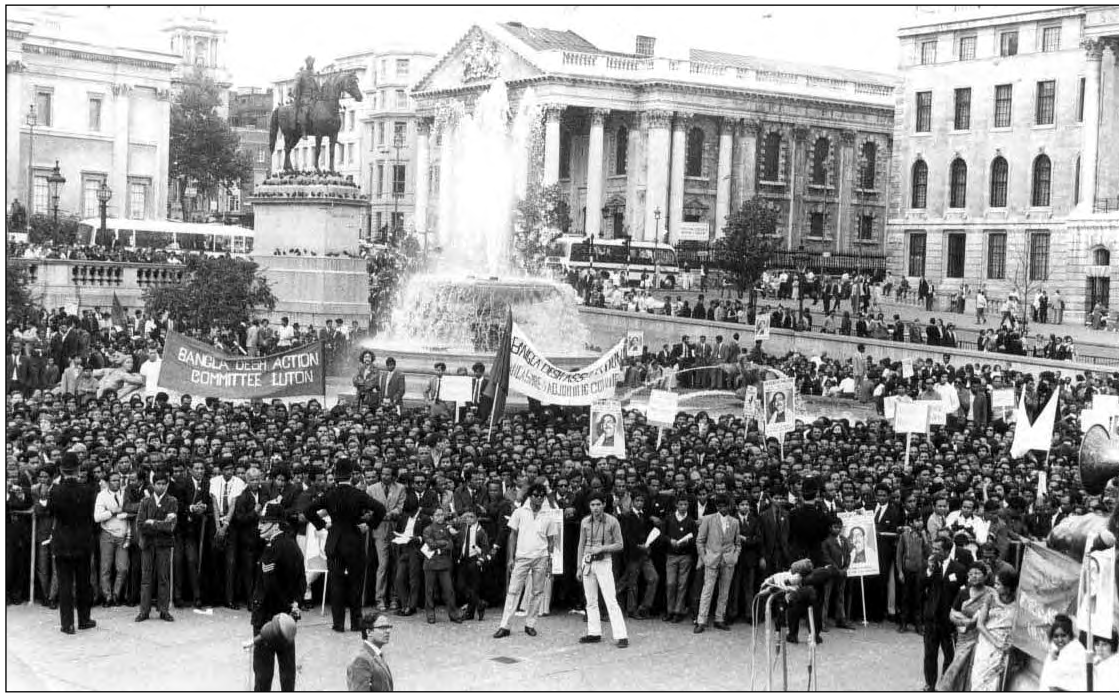
We wanted a war like that one of … Vietnam but I forecasted that Bangladesh would be independent in 1971. We demonstrated and rallied for long days, and the news of the movement was disseminated throughout the world. The world became anxious to know the latest in East Pakistan. The television in UK showed us and described the then present situation in East Pakistan, and also highlighted the ill practice of oppression by the West Pakistan for long days. All the Bengalis in UK raised their heads after seeing the incidents with us. An all-party meeting was called at Hyde Park on 7th March. People from all over the UK gathered at Hyde Park at about 10 am. The participants then marched towards the Pakistan High Commission after the end of the meeting. The High Commission was surrounded and the people showed their disappointment and anger in the procession. The procession chanted [for] the independence of Bangladesh. The number of participants was more than ten thousand.

**C.A.S. Kabir**

We were involved in campaigns, we sent so many goods, volunteers in Bangladesh, through Calcutta. They crossed the border of Bangladesh and they demanded the independence of Bangladesh. They declared clearly to leave Bangladesh. Bangladesh is for the people of Bangladesh. On the other hand, through Action Bangladesh, [on] the first of August we called the meeting in Trafalgar Square, that was the largest gathering in memory, Bengali gatherings. No other organisations in this country until now could call and gather 25,000 people - that was the great success of the leadership of Paul Connet and Marietta Prokop. By their call and their efficient organisational ability, we [were] able to gather 25,000 people and Justice [Abu Sayeed] Chowdhury was the chief guest of that meeting. Besides that we used to go and demonstrated against the Chinese Embassy, Pakistani High Commission and other High Commissions or embassy, who were against the independence of Bangladesh. We did demonstrate in front of Pakistani High Commission, our workers particularly the English people, had starved days after days for the independence of Bangladesh. The other things we used to do were the street drama, showing the way the Pakistani people were torturing the people of Bangladesh. How they were burning houses, how they tortured people, all those things were done in street dramas in the streets of London.

We organised those. I was not the main organiser but I was the sponsor, and I was the third or fourth organiser. The main [organiser] was Paul Connet and Marietta Prokop. There was one his name was Lutfur Jahan Choudhury, he was from *Noakhali*. He was a very good active worker. There were other about 30 Bengali people working for the organisation and we had about 250 people regularly working for us all over United Kingdom. [In] Action Bangladesh we had about 50 English and Bengali people. There were about 30 Bengali people who used to go and work. It was a huge organisation and their contribution, I will say, [was] the largest contribution [to] the [independence] movement in this country. We demonstrated against the cricket [series], which was [being held] - Pakistan was visiting at that time. We demonstrated in all the towns, in Manchester and in other cities. Wherever the Pakistanis were playing cricket, we demonstrated against the cricket match. But not only us, other organisations also worked. [The] Steering Committee was also working - they used to call meetings. [The] Streatham Committee … was a very strong committee and [the] Birmingham Committee was quite strong, and [the] Luton Committee was quite strong. They were really working for the movement, for the independence of the country.

The gathering of the 25,000 people in Trafalgar Square is a record. And I was one of the organisers. You can't organise this sort of big rallies in one day. That was in April. That was recorded by the TV and behind Paul Connet, Marietta Prokop was there with another Bangladesh flag. So there were two white persons demonstrating against the military attack on the people of Bangladesh. One interviewer at that time from the television questioned Paul that: "You are a single person, and you are an English man, how come you can free Bangladesh from the rule of the *military junta*?" Paul, at that time with his confidence, declared: "You watch and see what I can do".



I told you we had about 250 regular members of the two committees … in each and every town we had our people. We used to print our leaflets, our magazines, and we send them all those things and organise things. And four months before the meeting of the first of August, we fixed the date and we booked Trafalgar Square, and we were organising through all the media. That first of August we were going to have a rally in Trafalgar Square, and we declared the independence of Bangladesh. … Marietta Prokop … with Lutfur Jahan Choudhury, [who] was a very good worker, … visited the British parliament, and they invited each and every MP to join with the movement and took [the] signatures of about 200 people. 200 parliamentarians declared the independence of Bangladesh. That was a great task.

Veteran politicians like Tony Benn, Bruce Douglas-Mann, Michael Barnes, Sir Christopher May Row, Robert Silkin (trade union leader and he was very young at that time). Those are the people [who] actually worked very hard and they were giving directions what we can do, how we can do and they sought so many experiences and examples about Vietnam War and other world movement and politics. They used to guide us, that you are to do these things, that's the way you will achieve independence and that's the way, and you deserve it. Because you are Bengali people and you are a nation and you are separated from West Pakistan by about 1000 miles and in-between, there is another vast country called India. So this is a country - today or tomorrow it will collapse. That sort of advice we used to get from them. And we were very much inspired by their advice.

So that's the way things were being organised. Things were not … organised in one day, we had to go to different places, different people. Particularly I myself, I used to drive. At that time few people used to drive, and visited so many restaurants with the white people with my white comrades. I mention here 'white' only to describe it, nothing else - not of race.

We used to visit each and every restaurant, and we used to talk with the workers there, waiters and chefs and cooks, and used to inspire them that once there will be a Bangladesh. These people were very much inspired because at that time there were no media, no radio, and no television to speak for us. There was only one weekly, but at that time media was not so fast, news use to come late, one week, two week, 14 days, 15 days.

However, we used to get fresh news each and every day from the provisional government of Bangladesh, and through other media, magazines, booklets and leaflets. Personal visit was very important. People used to be very much encouraged, when the people see that the White people are supporting the movement. They were very much pleased, and they used to help, they made lot of contribution towards the organisation.

Also I should mention about the students, the students were involved and lot of them were studying law. Some of them were working, like Mohammad Hossain Monju, Shamsul Alam Chowdhury, A. K Nazrul Islam and Syed Muzammel Haque, and Prof Wadud, ABM Ishaq and lot of others. Actually they were the core people, who were working behind the movement. They are the enlightened ones who got academic qualifications. They used to know about … politics. They were experienced and when they used to speak with people, people took them with good faith; their words were taken with very good faith. So these sorts of things actually win us and inspired us. Also we got lot of support from the younger people. We got less support from the restaurant proprietors, because they were worried about their own properties in Bangladesh. We got help from ordinary Bangladeshi working class people. Saturday and Sunday used to be closed day, and they could give their time to organise things, go to people, go to restaurants, go to meetings.

So it helped in that way. So nobody can claim that he did something solely for Bangladesh - it was a collective support. It was a collective movement, people from each and every corner helped. But there [was] less coordination, but there [was] publicity. That is people gathered together, they talked. There were meetings, there [was]
publicity, but there were less coordination, which will be a different story actually. There was a steering committee made [up] by five people. They failed to form a full action committee. In nine months time they failed. Maybe they were very busy with the liberation war, or in movements or that sort of things, but that was a failure. Otherwise our people were behind the movement and they deserve credit for it. They were fully behind the movement.

**Mathin Miah**
I was too young for any job. But all my family and my parents donated huge amount of money. All the people participated and contributed to the fund, the participation was generous, and the people were very much glad to participate. The people contributed as much as they could. I have never seen so much unity of the Bengali before. Some *Razakers* (those who opposed the independence of Bangladesh) were also there but they were very few.

**Tahir Ali**
We all contributed at least, our one week's wages, but it was not everything, we gave a lot more, we gave cash and kinds. We collected clothing and sent them to Bangladesh.

**Sultan Sharrif**
First thing is that, every penny people earned, they spent on the liberation war. ... So nobody saved any money [during] that time, and the fund which was raised was a big figure, which was the first money for the government of Bangladesh. Bangladesh government had no foreign exchange, [so this] was the first foreign exchange from the money we raised. There is a government account, you have to look for the exact figure.

The fact is … the entire people [contributed]. It is not one person out of ten thousand people - everybody who had stake there. That means home, heart, family, brothers and sisters. The only thing they were dreaming of were, will they be ever able to meet them if the Pakistan army wins. No, so they have to do or spend everything possible to free it from the Pakistanis and that is what everybody was doing.

**Abdur Rashid**
We started an office in the East End and [set up] a committee … and all started working. … Everybody had to pay fund, wages all workers around the country, had to pay part of their wages. I have paid part of my wages also, and I still have the receipt.
So everybody … started with one week wages, like £10.00 or £20.00; anybody all around the country (UK), no one was left untouched. I [don't] believe anybody left without paying money.

**Mohammed Ibrahim Baksh**
We had a steering committee. Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury was the Chief Justice then. He was … in the UK … I was the auditor of the [Luton branch] Committee. Every weekend we used to have meetings and we used to collect donations. Every two weeks we used to have an internal audit and we used to inform people about the collection in the last two weeks of the month. I can't remember the exact figure now. … We went house to house for fundraising. I participated in the fundraising when I got some time. We … gave the donors the acknowledgement of their contribution. I don't have any copy of those receipts - it is 35 years now - and I have lost all of them. … We told [the people] about the situation and tried to convince them [to participate]. We had transferred money to [Abu Sayeed Choudhury] occasionally. We sent him £2,000 to £3,000 at a time … He spent the money [on] the different activities needed for the movement. He also sent the money and some other necessary things to the freedom fighters. He was secretive [about] the sent items and used to say: "Don't ask me, it will not be good if these [things] are discussed in this country".

We sometimes gave all the wages we got in [one] week. We had two types of participation - one was on [a] regular basis and one was special. We used to give two to three pounds regularly. … I can't remember how much I gave to the fund personally but I gave my wages on many weeks. I used to get £18 to £20 a week. … The Pakistani people also raised fund for the war in favour of Pakistan.

**Anwora Jahan**
[I was invited] to attend a programme. I was a civil servant and I had difficulty getting [there]. … So when I went to the meeting, it was already over, so I missed the meeting on the first day. Then Bangladesh Wome's Association in Great Britain was formed, that was participated by Lulu Bilkis Banu, Jebunnessa Bakh, Ferdus Rahman, Munni Rahman, Shafali Haq, Khaleda Uddin and some of the younger women. We decided that we will have a demonstration. … It was attended by 300 women. I was never certain that I can do my due in these programmes, because I had three children and I was a full-time worker. … Later I got very much involved in these [activities]. … Sofia Rahman was the secretary of the organisation and she [could not] … continue because of some reason, maybe education or maybe family problems. Then I was made the secretary. Jebunnessa Bakh was the chair. We were doing all the activities, as we knew we can't physically participate in the war, or we were not in a position to get name and fame by doing something. But we were participating in the movement for our mental satisfaction. …


March for Bangladesh, Charing Cross - Embankment, 3 April 1971.

We were writing letters to the leaders of the nations of the world and to their wives as well. We also personally handed over letters to the leaders of the UK, some accepted us and some not. We used to keep [contact] with the general organisation formed for all men and women. I was a bit [of an] outgoing type and so I used to go to those meetings. … Sometimes we used to collect money and arranging different types of programmes. We had arranged a huge mela at that time, and we raised £700 in a day. Today £700 is nothing but in those days it was a huge collection. For example, you can't get on a bus without 70 pennies now, but it would take four pennies then. … [The] doctors' association used to contribute £50 every week but we were not that rich and knowledgeable. We were travelling all [around] London with our own expenses. It [was] a kind of contribution as well. We had 300 members [and] we used to write letters to them every month. It used to cost us £4. … In the later stage we were getting some grants and funds but we were not spending them for these kinds of purposes. I [did] not give any money directly but I was bearing the everyday expenses.

We were thinking [that] … the war would last for ever but it [did] not. We used to go to the House of Commons and used to see the MPs and were asking them to support Bangladesh. We used to tell them the stories [about] the war and atrocities that was going on. … We asked them to recognise Bangladesh and we went to the annual conference of those parties like the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. Most of them listened to us with interest and helped us a lot. I worked with Michael Barnes, John Stonehouse and [others]. Before the end of the war, we used [to] have meetings every week and we used to attend the meetings after the jobs.

I had no reason to take part in these activities, because I was not expecting anything from all these and we were not getting directly affected by the war. But we were anxious of our friends and family and our homeland, so we took part in all this.

**5. Non-Bengali Contribution**

**Michael Barnes**

My name is Michael Barnes. I was a Labour MP (1966-1974) for Brentford and Chiswick in West London. I went to Bangladesh on three occasions in 1971, 1972 and 1973. 1971 of course was during the Pakistani crackdown. My involvement in this, the way that it started was that I have of course a number of Bengali friends and constituents in my constituency but the thing that I thought was really most inappropriate was after the crackdown by the end of March 1971 and all the reports coming through with killings, rape and all the rest of it. The Pakistani cricket team was due to come to England for a tour and I thought this most inappropriate. They should not come at this time. So I tabled a motion in the House of Commons saying words to the effect that the Pakistani Team should not come. I remember being summoned by the Pakistani High Commissioner that he was very concerned.

Various Members of Parliaments went to West Bengal during April. The first to go was Bruce Douglas-Mann, if I remember right. I can't remember when John Stonehouse went, he may have gone later. Bruce Douglas-Mann certainly went in April 1971. Now I was connected with War on Want, the overseas aid charity. I knew the chairman, Donald Chesworth, very well and he decided to organise a trip by 'War on Want'. Now 'War on Want' is a charity so it had to be careful that it did not get involved in politics. So although in one sense the purpose of our visit was humanitarian and we also visited some of the areas that have been affected by the cyclone in previous autumn with view to aid. We went to places like Swandip in Chittagong. This visit took place in May 1971, four of us went on it, Donald Chesworth, Chairman of 'War on Want', later he was the Warden of Toynbee Hall, Bruce Kent, chairman of CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), and although at that time he was a Roman Catholic priest, John Horgan, an Irish Senator who was also a journalist and worked for the Irish Times.

First of all we went to India. We went to Bombay and then we went to Delhi. In Delhi we had various briefings because the Indian government at that time was extremely concerned of what was happening because literally millions of refugees were trying to cross the border into West Bengal and I think Tripura as well. So we had a meeting with the Indian Foreign Minister, Mr. Sarwan Singh at that time in Delhi. Then we went on to Calcutta and then again a briefing from the British Deputy High Commissioner, Mr.Stephen Miles, who was very helpful and as a diplomat he was very supportive of the Bangladesh movement. We also met members of the Bangladesh Government in exile - Mr.Tajuddin Ahmed and others - and we met them in the Sunderbans. I think we met them in East Bengal or Bangladesh territory, just over the border. We also met at that time Barrister Amirul Islam. He went to become the Junior Minister in Mujib's government. He was very active in Calcutta at that time. A lot was going on at that time. The *Mukhti Bahinis* were trained; arrangements were being made to provide them with weapons. Various people were organising this in Calcutta and West Bengal. We visited a very big refugee camp by the Dum Dum airport in Calcutta .We then went to Northern West Bengal upto Raiganj because a huge number of refugee were coming through that area. From Raiganj we went to Agartala. We met Cononel *Osmani* with his Mukhti Bahini in Agartala. We also met M.R. Siddique, who later went to become Commerce Minister in Mujib's Government. He was a big businessman.

When the delegation came back to the UK, what we were going to do was to draw the attention of the British people and particularly the government and parliament. There are various debates which took place in parliament. One of the debates was on 14$^{th}$ of May 1971 it is in the (session 1970-71, volume 817 p 753). There was another debate on the 9$^{th}$ of June 1971 (session 1970-710, Volume 818 column no 1066). I gave a clear picture of what was going on. In the parliament this is what I quoted "In New Delhi on the 21$^{st}$ of May, 1971 the Indian government had a clear picture of the situation, 3.3 million refugees from East Pakistan. … [The] vast majority were in West Bengal, [but others were] … in Tripura, … Assam and Meghalaya and a few hundred thousands in Bihar". By the end of the war I guess there were nearly 10 million refugees in India.

There are few Bengalis who ought to be remembered by the young Bangladeshis. One is M.M. Talukder, he used to publish a English and a Bengali paper. The Bengali paper was named 'Jagaran'. He did a great deal at that time. The other person is Tassaduq Ahmed, the owner of Ganges Restaurant in Soho. Before we went on this 'War on Want' visit in 1971, we had a meeting in his restaurant with Tassaduq. John Pilger, the journalist, was also there.

There was a group of us in the parliament who during the crackdown could see that there was no diplomatic solution to this. The only possible solution, the lasting solution was, for there to be an independent Bangladesh. The question was how do you get that? I think the Indian government at that time, Mrs Ghandi, had a very clear idea and the only way to solve this problem was to kick the Pakistani Army out. But India could not invade in May '71, June '71 or July '71. The Indian government knew and those of us in the British Parliament knew that India had to prepare public opinion or world opinion because there would have been a great hoo haa - like Blair and Iraq. So there was a need to prepare world opinion. So those of us who were involved in this issue, in the House of Commons, we tried to do that. We would keep asking questions and I remember tabling a question myself to the Foreign Secretary and I said "Would the Foreign Secretary not agree, the only possible solution is for India to invade". Now the Foreign Secretary couldn't say "yes" but he didn't say "no". Reginald Prentice, who was a Labour Minister and knew a lot about the Indian sub-continent, said the same thing and gradually the Indian opinion and the world opinion got ground. The Indian government handled this really skilfully because they waited and when they were confident that world opinion would accept this and than their army launched the invasion. We of the Labour Party did not only held this view, it was a cross party thing and there were certainly some from the Conservatives who were very supportive of the Bangladeshi issue.

**Excerpts from parliamentary debate**
"Despite our efforts and those of other powers, as India and Pakistan have been driven to the calamity of war; our immediate concern must now be to try to stop the fighting, and to contribute to a sane and civilized solution, and take account of the wishes of people affected. When we heard the first reports of attacks and fighting on the border of India and West Pakistan on third December, it started on 3rd December 1971, my right honourable friend and prime minister appealed to President Yahya Khan and Mrs Gandhi to do all within their part to prevent the spread of the conflict. We are also in touch with other governments".

The British government didn't want a war between India and Pakistan, and then when the war starts, they were talking about ceasing hostility and so on. In fact, privately I think, they had come to terms, the British Government, probably by October or so, although they couldn't say so. … They were very careful not to criticise India. When it happened they just talked to Pakistan [about] ceasing hostility and getting the best solution for the people concerned and so on. This was because there were atrocities been carried out by the Pakistan army.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, when he was released, by the Pakistanis, came to London on his way to Bangladesh - wrong direction, never mind - but he came to London first of all and stayed in Claridge's Hotel. Sheikh Mujibur then went back to Bangladesh, became Prime Minister; David Frost interviewed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dhaka, in an open vehicle, it may be a bicycle rickshaw, they were travelling around Dhaka and talking to each other.

Mr Barnes (far right) meets Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, February 1972.

I met [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] in February 1972. I went with another member of the parliament. My companion was a senior Conservative MP named H. Fraser. Two of us went on a sort of courtesy visit. My colleague was the chairman of the British-Bangladesh Parliamentary Group; I was the Vice-Chairman. So we went to Bangladesh and we met Sheikh Mujibur then. And at that time it was very difficult to travel around Bangladesh, so many bridges were down, and travel was very difficult. So we just made one visit out of Dhaka. We flew to Dinajpur; and were able to see something of what was happening of there in Dinajpur. We saw some of the destruction.

It was my first visit to Bangladesh proper after independence, although I think that we had been over the border in May '71, in the Sunderbans and in Agartala where General Osmani was operating. So we met Sheikh Mujib at that time, and Gen. Osmani and the president Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, who was here during the crackdown.

[Mujib] had a very great charisma, a very impressive gentleman. He spoke quite slowly and quite softly, and he would speak about his love for the people of Bangladesh, and also their love for him. He was a very great man, but I think part of the problem in the early days of Bangladesh was that he was not a very great administrator. He had people like *Nurul Islam*, he had good people in his government, and people like *Kamal Hossain*.
But I mean the task, the problems I think, possibly I am just repeating what was said about Sheikh Mujib, and he was only there for three years. But I think he found it very difficult to [run the government]. If people wanted to see him, he would see them and if you are the prime minister or the president you have to draw the line somewhere. But I think in those days - at first to begin with - that literally there was queue of people, who wanted to see him with their problems, so it is very difficult.

**Nora Shariff**

I first came to know of anything about Bangladesh in about 1966. Probably in 1967 when I got to know Sultan Sharif, he was very much involved in politics and the six point formula has been issued at that time. He and his friends were very busy with the demand and making copies and distributing it. When I read that, I realised that there was a big problem and they were quite right about the independence movement and Sultan Shariff told me the history of the partition and what has happened since then—the language movement. I could see and realized that East Pakistan was moving in a bad way. 55 per cent of the population was in East Pakistan but yet they were dominated by West Pakistan which over was 1,000 miles away from India. The Bengalis were left at the rural communities just fishing and doing there land and were not given any good jobs in the civil service and in fact they were not allowed a good education, you know what I mean. I was also a bit of a humanitarian and wanted to see people with a better life and then I had a strong person like Sultan, I was very keen in doing something. He at that time was thinking of an independent East Pakistan.


When the six-point formula came out first of all we found someone who would do copies quite cheaply, we had meetings and distributed leaflets. We had meetings all over the place. We had meetings in our first floor. I remember I went to different places, Manchester and Birmingham. We use to have big meetings, there were loads of people wanted to know what was going on in Bangladesh. They wanted to know what the next step was and what could they do. Very quickly after that Sheikh Mujib was arrested. He was arrested for conspiring against Pakistan and the movement then intensified like anything.

We organised rallies, meetings. I remember we organised a big long procession, where women with their prams and we decided to get torches to make out of the procession. So we found a place where we bought sticks and wrapped just a bit of cloth on the top. Lots of boys came around our flat and made huge big placards with "Free Bangladesh and we want democracy. Down with Ayub Khan regime". That was [a] really, really big march. We went to Hyde Park Corner with hundreds and hundreds of people with big placards. The torches were lit and we all went down to the Pakistani High Commission and everyone shouting. It was invigorating. Then the case started against Mujibur Rahman. We were pushing things to happen. There were discussions about lawyers in Bangladesh having a chance to get him out and winning the case.

So Sultan and some of his friends wanted someone to go from London to East Pakistan. I remember we were discussing about the fares and the expenses needed to send the person to East Pakistan. It was difficult because we were all students at the time. Anyway, we got Thomas William, a famous lawyer here in the UK. I remember I went to the meeting and discussed what was going on in East Pakistan. We raised the money for his fare and the people in East Pakistan would take care of his hotel expenses. We sent him over to East Pakistan. He stayed there for a week. He was really, really clever. He examined the situation very carefully and put forward his case. He questioned the validity of the court that was trying Mujibur Rahman. Because there was a martial law going on, the armies could not try him as a civilian. Martial law was only for army personnel and he got Mujib released.

After he got released … news was coming of what was going on in East Pakistan. We had meetings and in those days meeting were for three to four hours long. Every one discussed about the future of East Pakistan. Earlier on Meeting were held on Trafalgar Square and later on we had meetings in Toynbee Hall, International Students Hostel and Pakistan Youth Federation Hall. Frequently we also had meeting outside the Pakistan High Commission.

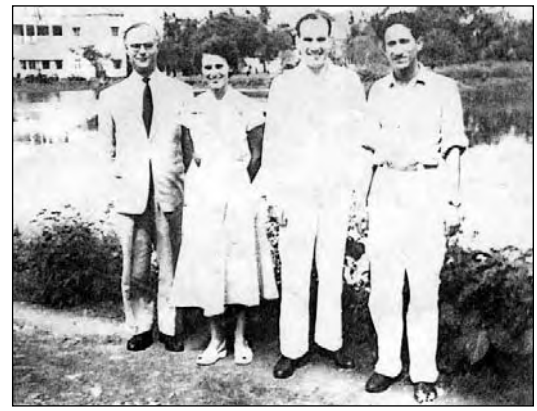
Then Sheikh Mujib was making a movement for an election and we got that news. We were lobbying MPs and that things are happening in Bangladesh and we wanted MPs support. Several MPS came to our support Peter Shore and another man. … I cannot remember his name. He is dead now. They were very supportive. They came to our house and discussed what was going on. They wanted to know the aspirations and what was going on. We then again started campaigns for election and started collecting money and sending it back to East Pakistan. There was also a very big cyclone in East Pakistan and we raised money and arranged to send it. Again there were more demonstrations and more rallies.

The election was held and then they refused to hand power to Mujib. I remember we did vigil for days during the day and during the night outside the Pakistan High Commission asking for transfer of power. I also spent quite a lot of time as well outside the High Commission. People were listing to news from East Pakistan on portable radios as well. Communication was difficult at that time from East Pakistan and people had to rely on news on portable radios. On 7th of March 1971, Sheikh Mujib made his big speech about the big struggle and in the meantime before the war Pakistani armies were filtering in East Pakistan and were committing atrocities. We were getting photographs what was going on in East Pakistan. We were bringing these photographs to the MPs and holding rallies. They were trying to rally support in the House of Commons. Everything was going on at that time. We had meetings and invited the MPs to tea and inviting them to dinners. There was really a big support from the British elite for the people of East Pakistan and what was going on.

Then came the news that the war has started and Mujib was arrested. We had a massive rally in Trafalgar Square, which I will never forget. Because the war has begun and Sultan made a fiery speech there on that day. He was saying that he was going and who else wanted to go to Bangladesh. As many as possible should go and help people get freedom in Bangladesh.

**F. Stephen Miles**

I served in the diplomatic service from 1948 to 1980 and in the service we were allowed to choose, where we wanted to serve. … After having served in Ghana, I decided to serve in [other] New Commonwealth countries. I was interested primarily in what happened [when Britain's] colonies became independent [and how the] relationship developed between Britain and the countries of the Commonwealth. … Was it a success or wasn't it? Well, it was a mixed picture, but on the whole I think it was a success. …



F. Stephen Miles (centre) with the British Deputy High Commissioner, Peter Hampshire (left) in Dhaka 1954.

I served in East Pakistan in 1954-55. Bengalis were always giving us trouble. They did in British days and this was no exception, because the Bengalis strongly resisted the [imposition] of Urdu on East Pakistan by the Pakistan government. The Muslim League was in charge in Dhaka [after 1946 but] was then overthrown in the first election and a Left-wing group took over - the Awami League. One of the leaders of this group was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was again known to me very well, because I had a principle of getting [to know] those people, who had the probability [of coming] to power …

I was the Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta in 1970 and the High Commissioner in Dhaka [in] … 1978. … We knew Major General Chowdhury - him and his family - very well and our children knew their children. And often we went to [his house in the military headquarters at] Fort William in Calcutta. Now the war had just broken out – [it was] the end of December 1971. General Chowdhury didn't take a major part in the war himself, because he was in charge of Fort William and the troops there. [However] … he did have a small area in the south [of Bangladesh], which was his responsibility. … One night he decided to rest from the war and invited us to dinner. While we were there, a call came through for me. It was a message that the British Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka had sent to me, which was that the Indian air force was firing rockets at the State House or the Government House in Dhaka, which was very close to the British High Commission in Dhaka. He asked us how this could be stopped, because it was liable to hit the British High Commission. And General Chowdhury then said: "I must stop them bombing" and he got on the phone to the Indian military headquarters in Delhi and asked them to stop firing rockets at the State House. The firing then stopped. …

My last post in Bangladesh in 1978-79 was [as] High Commissioner. In 1971 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman … became the first President of Bangladesh. I went to see him when I was still in Calcutta, I went over to Dhaka [when he was] just taking over government. He was a delightful chap … but he was really a chaotic administrator. Everything went downhill and he got assassinated sadly.

When I went back there in 1978 as the High Commissioner, there was General *Ziaur Rahman* in charge. We had our second biggest aid programme in the world there. We were making some progress. A difficult problem was immigration to the UK. We had a large team of immigration officers who tried to decide whether families and children to Bangladeshis; who emigrated to England some years back, probably should join their [fathers]. … It was terribly difficult to decide who are not bogus. My officers thought that about 40 per cent of the applications were bogus.

## 6. Pakistanis

**Kulsum Ullah**
We couldn't tolerate the Pakistanis at that time. I was a regular customer of a Pakistani shop and on the other side of the road there was a Bengali shop. At that time there were only three to four shops there. One day I went there and stood on the road and demanded the people not to buy anything from the Pakistani shop. Everyone laughed at me. I can remember this very clearly. I told [them] that the Pakistanis are killing all the people in our country. After that, some of the admirers [of Pakistan] asked what I have done. If they [stopped me on the street], I told them that they can't do anything here [in the UK like] they are doing in Bangladesh.

**Tahir Ali**
They had violated us very much. They dealt us badly even here in UK. They used to say: "*Bengal ka baccha, koi nehi accha*" and we replied: *"Pakistan ka baccha, koi nehi accha."* We faced them boldly. Not all the Pakistanis were [the] same. Some of them were good, some were not. We had Pakistani friends also. But when the war started the relationship was on fire. Now also we have friends from Pakistan. Some of them are very reasonable, and we also love them.

**Anwora Jahan**
I had a very bad relationship with [the Pakistanis]. … We had a conference in West Pakistan before the war, when I was working ... [and] I was called to speak. … As soon as I started to speak – I was speaking in English – some of the people asked me to speak in Urdu, but I got angry with them and started to speak in Bengali. …

Another thing was, when I was heading to the UK, they didn't allow me to carry more than five pounds. I boarded on the PIA, [the Pakistani Airline], with my [three] children. They served food for only one child. When I asked them to serve all [of them], they told me what they are doing is right. They were treating us like this from the very beginning.

Another example of the oppression [is that] gold was 120 Taka per bhari (weight unit) in East Pakistan and 90 taka in West Pakistan. Paper was also highly priced in East Pakistan and the price was less in West Pakistan. Thus we understood the process of [exploiting us] economically. The shop owners in Mirpur were unwilling to answer us when we were talking in Bangla.

**Tunu Miah**
They did treat us as second-class citizens of the country, the then Pakistan. They even believed that we are not true Muslims, [that] we were second-class Muslims. It was long before the independence movement began and the war started. This was the main reason behind the independence war. The general people were not conscious about the Six Point demand but they were aware of the discrimination.

Especially in this country, the UK, the Pakistanis behaved [towards] us very badly. They played like kings and thought that we were slaves. They are good, they are learned, they are good Muslims also, and the Bengalis are a nation of slaves, they are not good Muslims also. And the Bengalis, who originated from the Hindus, are not good Muslims at all. They talked with us without any respect, even when we were talking to them with due respect.

Nowadays, we are good friends of the Pakistanis. And now if we meet together, we sometimes remember the history, and these [are] jokes nowadays. But these were serious matters in the wartime.

**Sazzad Khan**
I was working in a factory … we were only three Bengalis there and at least 2,000 Pakistanis were working there. They had a rule that if two of the employees were involved in a fight, both of them will be dismissed. So we had to be restricted [to] hot conversations at most.

At that time, Ayub Khan was due to visit Britain on a state visit. He was coming to Manchester, also. The date was fixed, there was a programme arranged for the Pakistanis in Manchester and the entry fee was £1.00. They asked me if I was planning to attend the meeting. I asked what the old fox would sing and dance. The factory had the role of dismissing both parties of any fight, so we had oral fighting sometimes but no physical clashes were usual. I showed [some Pakistani workers] the ticket and [asked them]: "Why should I go to the programme of Ayub Khan by buying [a] ticket? What is the enjoyment I will get there?" … Two of them advanced towards me and demanded [that I] withdraw my comment. I was adamant too and refused to withdraw, [so] fighting was inevitable.

One of our colleagues from Kashmir, who used to support me on many occasions, came to the scene and asked us what was the problem. They … told him about my comment. He agreed with me and [and said]: "Have you ever heard of buying a ticket to participate [in] a meeting of a president or a prime minister?" They retreated then.

I was still working in that factory when Bangladesh was independent from Pakistan. The English saw … the quarrel …, so after independence, [they] used to joke with [the Pakistanis], saying to them: "Hands up, Khan is coming!", when they saw me coming from a distance.

I protested [against] the visit of *Sayedee*, when he visited Manchester to deliver a lecture about Islam to the people. I was against the visit as he was with *Al-Badr*. When I was not in the committee of the *Shahjalal Mosque*, he was allowed to speak. … I never allowed him. Even when he was due to speak to a gathering in the public library, we protested and cancelled the meeting. We protested when he spoke here in another place in Manchester. I can't tolerate [these collaborators] till now. Maybe I am not doing right, but I can't help this.

When [the] Awami League [won] the election, I was in Birmingham. ... After the election *Ashraf Gazi* went to see me and … we had our supper together. And he told me all of a sudden: "Sajjad, let us both go to Bangladesh, the parliament is sitting on the 3rd March. It was in 1971. All the leaders of Pakistan are coming, let us go and see them." I asked him about the tickets in such a short period of time. He assured me that he would be able to manage that. We were ready to go, one of our friends, Sayeed Mahbubul Haq, gave us the tickets. He was living in Birmingham and we called him at about 1:00 at night, he came and managed tickets for us. We arrived in Bangladesh on 22 February. We were planning to stay at home for one week and then we were due to go to Dhaka. But the parliament session was cancelled within that week, and Bangabandhu called for the non-cooperation movement. We were participating and arranging the demonstrations.

In the meantime, another incident took place. One of our cousins, who was an *Ansar* Commander, was training us in our village field. He trained us how to fight [and] how to hide. … We cancelled our plan to go to Dhaka. On 7th March, Bangabandhu gave his speech, the Pakistanis cut it up, and people were denied to hear the speech. But the next morning at eight, they relayed it. … He called all Bengalis to be prepared. ... It increased the frequency of taking arms training. I was not planning to go to India till then but I was participating in the trainings.

In May, some four miles east of my village, some of the people were arrested from Omorpur village. Two of the rich people were arrested and killed in *Sherpur*. One of them used to live in Britain and one was a brother of a restaurant owner in Britain. The next day, the Pakistani army came to a village approximately four miles south of my village. They killed people at the market and destroyed everything in the market. They also attacked Ranigonj, a village near my one.

After seeing all these [things], I was convinced that they will come to our village some day, and so I decided to collect some arms and fight them. Then I went to India in the middle of May [and] one of my cousins accompanied me. We went to Karimgonj, India. We found some of our leaders, including Ashraf Gazi … Our MP, Advocate Roisuddin, was also there. They told us that we would have to prepare to fight the battle for five years. "So [those of] you who have come to India [are] not sufficient. We need at least ten million of Bengalis to come to India. We have to be prepared for at least five years. So we will have to train … You [will have to] bring more people." They issued border security passes for identity cards and [enrolled] us as members of the Mukti Bahini. We came to Bangladesh to collect more people for the fight. We came once more, but the second time we were arrested near Batura by the Pakistani army. They took us to the Chatok cement factory.

They came to take our statement. Suddenly one Siddiqur Rahman, who was a second officer of our *Thana*, came to me and saw me. He … told me: "I am very sorry, but please tell the truth." The sentries were torturing us - they were using the rifles to beat us. One, maybe a captain of the army, was sitting and … asked me: "Were you involved when the Pakistani army was ousted from Sylhet?" I was not involved but I told him I was involved. I don't know why.

Somehow the information passed to the [factory] manager that they were going to kill us the next day. A Major was there and the manager … requested him not to kill us. That night suddenly the army came and asked us to get up. They [took us across] the river and handed us to the Thana. It was two days after our arrest. We had no food for the two days. The police brought us some food; the food was so low in quality. The OC [Officer Commanding] was behaving well towards us. Maybe he was also in hiding. …

He consoled us and gave us hope of life. The next day they took us to Sylhet. It was a residential building of the then Sylhet Model School. The room was large enough; we were 18 prisoners there in a room. We were waiting for the last moment of our life. The sentries were not behaving with us badly, rather suddenly they came and ordered us to get up and took us to some place - they were in need of blood for their wounded soldiers, they were planning to draw blood from us.

It was June, if I am correct. We saw a lot of Pakistani soldiers wounded [and] that gave us a slim hope of victory. We have not been able to kill any of them, but a lot of the wounded soldiers are here from only one sector, so it was clear, that the Pakistani army was being defeated everywhere. One night … *Major Salim* came to me and asked me to get up [together with] one more man who was a Hindu. … He took us and kept me locked in a toilet. After some time the Major came and offered me [a] cigarette.

I was not afraid of death, I don't know why. All the 18 of us who were kept in the same room, we discussed the situation and decided that if they kill us together, we will chant "*Joi Bangla*" as the last word of our life. After some time, I have smoked a ciggeratte, and the major came again. He opened the door and took me to his room. He asked me to sit down. He had soft drinks on his table. He offered me to drink and I accepted. During the recording of the statement I told them I was from Britain, and then he asked me to sleep. After a brief interval he asked me a question, and assured me if I was fit for a bullet, he will not kill me anyway. But he asked me to tell the truth. He asked me: "Have you helped Awami League from Britain?" I answered: "No, I only helped Asad, who was injured and later died during the anti-Ayub movement. I helped him in his treatment."

He then asked me to tell the list of the active Awami League workers of my area. I named Mr. Haque, and Mr. Roisuddin. He refused and asked me to tell [him about] the next line of workers. He said: "They are prominent leaders, tell me someone who is next to them." I answered: "As I have come to Bangladesh only [a] few days before, I have not seen anybody who is not in favour of Awami League and 'Joi Bangla', I have not seen one. Maybe there are some people but I haven't seen one. So I don't know whom to name or mention."

He agreed with me and asked me: "As Bangabandhu has demanded for Six Points, he has not declared Bangladesh. Why [are] you people going to India? Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is in our custody, [so] why you are going to India?" I answered: "You are killing us in our homes; we are unable to protest, so we are going to India, so that we will be able to protest to some extent." He then asked: "What is the proof that we are killing you at your homes." I mentioned the incidents in Omorpur, Ranigonj and Facir Bazaar. And he located those [places] on the map. He again locked me in that toilet. They kept me in the toilet for three days and three nights.

They had killed the Hindu gentleman, but kept me alive. Other people, who were with me assumed, that we both have been killed. But I was still alive and [the major] was giving me hope of releasing me and [the] others. I was just sitting in that room for three long days. It was a small room and there was no accommodation for anything else. After three days they set me free from that room and took me back to the previous room, where we 18 people were held.

When they were taking me to [the] previous room [where the others were kept], Salim informed me [about the] process of freeing us all. He had talked to his Brigadier and he wanted to visit us and give his decision. "[You believe] that whenever we arrest someone, we kill him, but we want to prove you wrong. You have some students with you, we want them to [return] to the college when we release them. You have to assure that." I promised them: "Yes, they will [go back to] the colleges." He proposed that he would send army personnel to our homes.

I told him: "This plan will not work. If there are Muktis [around], they will shoot or all the men and women will run away from the village. No-one will come to receive us when the army … brings [us]. Because wherever the army is going, they are killing all the villagers, so no-one will … talk to them. The people will not realise the fact that the army is there to help someone."

He then asked me to show him a possible … solution of the problem. He asked me to give the address and name of someone who lives in the town as a close relative to me so that he can send some Bengali police along with him to our village to bring our guardians. Some of the 18 people held there were my relatives. … So I was thinking of the fate of all of us, and later told the officer the name and address of one of my brothers-in-law, [who] was working in the District Commissioner's office. They brought him there immediately, but nobody let him know the reason, why he was being brought. So everybody was worried about him. They believed I was already dead, and now he is going to die also. But they brought him to our room and let him see us. After a few moments they took him away and sent him back to his workplace again. On the way they asked him to go to our homes and bring our guardians so that they can take us with them.

After one day the Brigadier also came. He visited us and [told] the students: "We will free you on the condition that you will take admission in the colleges again." They all replied positively. Then they asked me what I would do if they freed me and I answered: "I have come to Bangladesh just a few days ago." He misunderstood me and said: "So you want to see the end of the battle, so you have to live in the jail."

It was long after [our] arrest … and there were so many predictions and some were saying that we have been killed. One day one of my nephews informed my mother of 18 dead bodies near our area. We 18 were caught, so some of them thought those were [us]. … They then later took us to the Circuit House - it was maybe August - and we were in prison for two and half or three months. They took us to the Circuit House and we met Sayeed Ali there - he was the chairman of the Peace Committee. Brig. Iftakher Ahmed asked Sayeed Ali what his opinion about releasing us was. He asked him to [give his opinion about] the benefits of our release. He pointed [out] that we were all from Jogonnathpur and the whole Thana [was] in Indian control. Even the Thana headquarters [was] hoisting the Indian flag. So they decided against our release.

[Six or seven soldiers] might have been planning to kill us that night but all of a sudden Major Salim entered the room and ordered them to halt. He then ordered them to get out of the room and ordered the sentry not to allow anybody [to enter] without his permission. He then took me again and told me that he is trying for the last time [to free] us.

I have seen by my own eyes how they tortured the common people. The Razakars used to tell the Pakistani army who were the Awami League and the Muktis. But in most cases the victims [were ordinary] people. The army used to tie them upside down, then start beating them with iron rods, starting from the head, down to the feet. I sometimes used to be present, and they sometimes begged me to save them. They were mostly common day labourers. They were people who came to sell their agricultural products and most ordinary people.

[The Major then] appealed to his commanding authority to let him … send us to the central jail, which was run by the Bengali people. He succeeded [in doing] so and we were transferred to the central jail [in] Sylhet [Town]. At the jail I was surprised and sad to see the conditions. Soon a leader of the prisoners there [told] one of my cousins to carry water. … I was informed by one of the group about this. I went to [my cousin] and called him back. As he was coming back with me the criminal leader stopped us. I advanced [towards] him aggressively and threatened [to kill] him. So he left us alone. The Jail Superintendent came and said: "This is not a place of luxury. Here you will have to [do] what we order you. Ok, for today it's all right but in future you will have to join [the] others." I was quiet. The next day maybe my elder brother came and gave him some bribe. The same Jail Superintendent, who was an elderly guy, called me and told [me]: "Is everything Ok for you? No problem for you? Please tell me if you need anything." See what a nation we are? His name was Abdus Sobhan.

Within the jail we got one person who was soft to us and in favour of the liberation. He was very fond of us, he even gave us his radio to listen the Swadhin Bangla Beter [pirate radio] at night. One day we were eating and one of my cousins had left his meal [which came from outside the jail] aside. One sentry came and asked him what was wrong. He replied that he will eat later, but the sentry [refused] and my cousin was angry and threw his meal [down] the drain. The sentry attacked him. As soon he attacked him … I called all my group members to catch him and the others. We caught them and I started beating him.

The Assistant Jail Superintendent, who was Shahidullah and commonly known as the '*shida jailer*' … [in other words] known for his honesty, came and stopped us ... In the jail I used to say all the time that Bangladesh will be free soon. I had the confidence as I have seen many of the Pakistani army wounded … that Bangladesh is getting freedom soon.

Then they transferred us to a new location, which was the jail school. There Mr. *Abdur Rob* gave us his radio to listen the *Swadhin Bangla Beter* every night. We were better there and all the criminals had the feeling that they will not be able to do anything with us. The jailer [put me in] charge of food distribution according to the scale. The doctor of the jail was also a corrupt man. He denied giving [me] good medicine when I had conjunctivitis. When Yahya Khan declared the General Amnesty in September, we were set free from the jail.

Sazzad Khan at his residence, Manchester 2006.

**Badrun Nesa Pasha**
I must say, the Pakistani people living here in UK were not liking the torture, killing and mass killing going on in the East Pakistan. They were feeling sorry for those who were being affected. On the other hand they were ashamed for whatever President Yahya and Bhutto [were] doing. Everybody was very much supportive and a lot of Pakistanis were supportive as well, I think.

**Ajmat Ullah**
We had good relations with the Pakistanis at the beginning. But as the war started, we had a very [bad] relationship with one another. We were annoyed and angry with them. They used to attack us on the streets just after the beginning of the war but later we protested and used to fight them. We used to move in groups and we were prepared to fight them anywhere we face them.

**7. National Pride and Anniversaries**

**C.A.S. Kabir**
During my teenage I used to write, and I was fond of my language, and I was also a cultural activist; so I used to love my language, I used to love my culture. I fully identify myself as a Bengali, I think that's culturally I am a Bengali, [my] language [is] Bengali, so I am 100 per cent proud of being a Bengali.

**Aziz Choudhury**
Now we have our own identity, our own flag. It is something you should be proud of … the freedom. I used to work in an accounting firm where we had people from different countries. There was this Bangladeshi boy from Dhaka who did not care what was going on Bangladesh. An Asian-born African told this boy that when he went to India, people in India said he was from overseas and not a part of India. In Africa he was not welcomed. In Britain he was British but not white. He told the Bangladeshi boy that he should be proud of being a Bangladeshi.

**Abdur Rashid**
I should say I am proud, with mixed feelings, now. I shouldn't say much, but we are probably by nature, a greedy nation, and we have not been able to overcome the greed. We as a people probably were not fit enough to get fully independent, because our greed took precedence to our nationalist feeling. For example, as I said when I was in Chittagong for a week, it was not anything for my personal gain. I sold all my products in the right way I could ... When I came back to Britain, I could see [a] good life and a good future. I was not a newcomer. I had already spent five-six years in the UK. So I don't have anything to get out of … Bangladesh. I was really dreaming of a nation which is equally prosperous and people devote themselves and they get good positions, good education and everything.

We got the country but … maybe I was too optimistic but I find … that people were not ready for independence, because they were more greedy for personal gain than for the nation. But the decades have gone by and the country faces problems and people bomb all over the country - they are trying to make an Islamic state or something. I am a Muslim but [an] Islamic state, … the way as they define it, I don't fully agree with it. I don't agree to cut somebody's hand and things like that, you know. People by nature are greedy. It depends how much he is involved. A beggar will steal a piece of bread, [another] man will steal a £5, but when it comes to £500, £5,000 or £5,000,000 [the] human race is generally greedy. How many people can control themselves, when you put [a] million pounds here and you find it unguarded? If a hundred people go by, how many of them will go without picking it up? Well, in that respect, if you start cutting hands off all the thieves, all the people will be hand-less.

So it is a severe matter when people [start] to make it … purely … [an] … Islamic state and bomb all over the country, and people support it, some people oppose it. I understand Palestine … is an independent movement. … I will die for my country, because I see the result - my children or children's children will live better. But I don't see these things happening in my country when illiterate people - boys, girls -were convinced that they will go to heaven, when they die for … putting bombs. … I know from my age and experience, when a movement of this nature starts, they are very hard to stop. It grows stronger and stronger, unless the root cause is eradicated. And I doubt if they can do it.

[For the] first few years I was so happy [celebrating Independence Day]. I would not miss [it]. I [would] start planning with the children and myself long before the day. But after four, five years … the generals started taking advantage of the freedom - you see, you can't avoid commenting on [the] political side as well. When we put our energies and time, it's no joke to leave your job and go to the street again. It's not a small matter not knowing what you will do tomorrow along with your children and wife. So it is a courage you take because you dream [of] something better. But the dream evaporated in [a] very short time, within five years, when the killing … and the generals took over. There were [a] few army people, but those who were left … started becoming aggressive and started fighting [among] themselves [about] who should go to the power.

**Tunu Miah**
I am very much proud of my homeland, Bangladesh. I can't explain exactly, how much pride I took when we got the victory! I can't define my emotion in words. I participate in all the programmes. Sometimes I arrange programmes of my own as far as I can.

**Tahir Ali**
We were very much proud of the victory, but we regretted the loss of the lives. The country was in the process of building, but suddenly they killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, they didn't spare his children also. Some of us here in the UK refused to have food for [a] few days. They were all shedding tears; what a tragedy that was. … Afterwards Zia took control and Osmani resigned from his post. [A] few years [later] Zia was also assassinated and Gen. Ershad took over. The history of Bangladesh is unique. There is no law, no morals, and people are suffering.

**Kulsum Ullah**
I was very much proud of my Bangladesh. I called more than a hundred people that day when victory was achieved. I called all my friends, relatives, members of the Women's Association and many other people. I can remember clearly that I called some hundred and [a] few more ... and told them all that Bangladesh is independent now. Nowadays I can't do a lot for my country but I still feel very much for my homeland. I was a member of the Girl Guides in my student life, when Fatima Jinnah [sister of Mr. MA Jinnah] came to Sylhet. I was the first girl [to receive] her, shaking her hand, from the aircraft. She landed near Akhalia, Sylhet. All the girls ran to the plane and were getting on board. A man helped them holding their hands, but I protested and said: "I will not get … help [from a] man." All my teachers praised me afterwards, and told the other girls what I have done was right, and advised them to follow this.

## 8. Returning to Bangladesh

**Abdur Rashid**
Everybody who was born in Bangladesh wants to die in Bangladesh. Whether I am able or not, I don't know, but I am still thinking to live there [a] few years before I die, because that gives a pleasure, which is not available anywhere else. It is only mental. [We all] have a connection with … the place where [we] are born. And where you then go, the relationship is not the same. I am here for 42 or 43 years, [but] still I could not forget my land. So that is … only because of the mental satisfaction - it's not out of any hate [for] this country. … It is because … I will feel better in my birthplace.

**Aziz Choudhury**
I said I lived in Bangladesh. Now, the Bengalis, we are living here. The global world, or the village has become smaller and smaller. … We won't forget. We can't live without Bangladesh. So what we have to do [is] to share our expertise, we have to bring Bangladesh up. That's the thing I am saying. We have to strengthen Bangladesh, we have to modernise Bangladesh. It does not matter whether we live here or there. A lot of people [who are] living in Britain … leave the country and go to Bangladesh. When the summer comes they come back, because they got enough money. A few people can do that.

My father was well established in Shillong India. When the riots came [around 1946], he lost everything and came to Bangladesh. So if he had a big investment in Bangladesh, he would be all right, maybe. But he suffered at the beginning. The same thing may happen with us. That is one side, and the other [side] is [that] we are international people now. We got people in America, we got people in Europe, and we got people all over the world. And we should move around where we [want]. … Like my son, he is very good at literature but I was indirectly influencing him to be a doctor. I thought [that] if he is a doctor, he can go to Bangladesh, he can go to Canada, he can go anywhere, and still his trade is first class. … The other one is a lawyer, a solicitor. If they want they can easily go and stay [in Bangladesh]. That's [the] sort of way we should equip our children. If they are engineers and electronic engineers, computer scientists, economists etc. they can work in Bangladesh. And you don't have to work [your] whole life in Britain. A lot of companies, a lot of businesses have international postings. They got a branch in London, a branch in Dhaka, … a branch in Singapore [and a] branch in New York. People like us, those who are in London, we [can] set up something in Dhaka. [That] is not a big thing.

Now what's going on in Sylhet? There is an international airport there. If we develop that, from here we can go straight to Sylhet. It's a brilliant city, it is natural and everything is there. And if we can develop that place, and it's with the gas and the energy we have, we can do wonderfully good.

If we are strong, we can have an influence in Bangladesh. People from here can be in the [British] parliament. … Say for example, if we have a good system, if we have the facilities, we can take all our old people - irrespective of Bengalis or non-Bengalis, all old people - we can have a home. Take them to Bangladesh when it is very cold here. We should have [a] nice hotel and all the facilities. Let them stay there. And everybody will be benefited. In future, it may happen, because of … globalisation. And if the plane fare is controlled, we can have our own airline. Then all people can be shifted [there during] the winter. Let them stay there, because they are not doing anything here. When the summer comes let them [return] here. So both the countries will be benefited. All of our vegetables, food and everything comes from Bangladesh. A lot of other industries we can build in Bangladesh. Cheap labour, they can get jobs, bring them all here, we can have a company here.

So now … we have to think economically. And if we … do these [things], we can help ourselves, we can help the British economy and also we can help the Bangladesh economy. We can play this role. We can be experts here. It's not just [that] you know Bengali and you know a little bit [about the UK], you have to [be] an international expert. If we can do that, there is a bright future awaiting us. An Englishman can't do what we can do, because he can only do [things] here. He doesn't know anything [about] Bangladesh. … What we are talking [about] now … may not be implemented in our lifetime, but people may pick up the thing and they can expand and change a little bit. … But if we just isolate [ourselves], after two three generations it will be lost. But if we build a bridge [now] … it will strengthen both countries.

**Nora Shariff**
I spent over three years [in Bangladesh] and was very happy. I had a job [at] the University of Dhaka as a lecturer in the law department. I was leading [a] reasonably normal life. My youngest daughter, Fauzia, was born there. Now things have changed. There is a lot of killing and mugging. … Now you are not safe. You cannot travel safely. They hijack your cars. It is difficult to live a free life over there. It is difficult for women to travel freely in Bangladesh now. It wasn't like that before. … I don't think I will settle down in Bangladesh.

**Tunu Miah**
It is my dream to go to Bangladesh and settle there, but it depends on the financial status of someone, and maybe I am not a capable person in [that] sense. I love my country Bangladesh but I am living in the UK, which is my home also. We, the Bengalis in UK, in the true sense are not finally settled anywhere, not in Bangladesh, not in UK.

**Mohammed Israel**
I had [a] dream to settle [in] Bangladesh. I studied in Bangladesh. The educational institutes where I had my education [depend on] the hard-earned money of the poor people of the country. I could have some peace of mind if I could have done some work for the general people of the country. … I tried to settle in Dhaka … just after the liberation of the country. … I applied for a plot in Dhaka. I was present when the Lottery was [being held]. I applied for the Rupnogor project. I was present and they appointed me to conduct lottery. In the lottery my name was unsuccessful. They proposed a special one for me but I refused, and they again insisted and told me that those were five *kata* plots.

[The] *DIT [Dhaka Improvement Trust]* was allotting 10 kata plots in *Gulshan*, *Bonan*i and in *Baridhara*, and they will be very good for me. I went to [the] DIT and applied for one plot. I sent £1,005 pounds with the application - it was [in] 1983. They sent me [an] allotment letter for one plot. I was happy that I will have a good place to live back in Bangladesh. They asked for all the papers and the certificate of my *matriculation examination*. I topped the point list.

Later the former President *Ershad* came to power and he saw the plot and he was greedy for the plot. He formed a four-member committee to fulfil his desire. The committee reconsidered my papers and rejected my freedom fighter certificate. I applied as a non-residential Bangladesh citizen but they said that I don't have a freedom fighter certificate. I then called the Minister, *MA Munim*, who was the head of the committee. I then went to the country and applied for the return of the plot.

Mohammed Israel with a Crest (2005) from the UK Bangladesh High Commission as a recognition for his role in 1971.

I took a certificate from the *Muktijudda Shangshod*. They asked me to show a certificate from the Defence Ministry. I applied to the Defence Ministry … The plot most probably went to Ershad's pocket at last.

I am not so unhappy, because we wanted a free Bangladesh. Now when we visit Bangladesh, we are happy to see the Bengalis are running the businesses. [All] the High Commission's … staff [is] Bengali. We are happy with that. In [the] course of time the corruption will be reduced and the country will prosper soon.

## 9. Bangladesh Now

**Gulam Mustafa Choudhury**

When I came back to the UK in 1980, I was earning and losing a lot through my business in Bangladesh. I am satisfied that during that time I had sent two and half thousand people to different countries abroad from Bangladesh. We used to take 8,000 Taka from them and the plane fare was 2,000 Taka, and I had to give the officials of Bangladesh 3,000 Taka as bribe, and I used to profit 3,000 Taka. No one known to me has [been prevented] from going to some place abroad. [When someone comes] to me [saying] that he is going to sell his house to go to the Middle East, I send him without any charge. In 1990, when I went to visit the *Kaaba*, a lot of people came to take me to their homes.

When [General] Osmani came to the UK he used to stay in my home, when he was going to the north [of England]. One day there was a meeting in my home. I called ten of my close friends and asked them to save £10 each … Osmani came to my home again in 1984. He saw us meeting together [and] … asked [about] all the details. … He then offered to build a hotel in Dhaka [for us]. ... We all agreed. Then he bought the land in the *Wari* area of Dhaka. The head office of the *Janata Party* was adjacent to our hotel. He again came to the UK in '85. He handed over the documents and then he become ill and passed away in February. He died here in London and his dead body was sent to Bangladesh.

I went to Bangladesh in January 26th 1986. … The chairman of the Jalalabad Association, A. E. Choudhury, and all the members of the association helped me a lot. ... Then in the evening we took control and [unfurled] the banner of [the] Hotel Osmani. In 1986 the construction of the hotel started and it was opened on 25th March 1990. [President] Ershad was due to inaugurate the hotel but he was busy. … We ten people, [who were] saving money, are now the owners of the hotel.

In 1985, I had an operation on my abdomen. When I was awaking from the operation, I was thinking about my children – they had nearly been orphans. So I decided to build an orphanage on my great-grandfather's land. His name was Dainuddin. So I built an orphanage after his name. All my family members … helped me [to build it]. The orphanage was opened in 1988. We have around 40 students on an average. We permit a student to stay there for not more than 12 years, and [during] this time he must become a *Hafiz*. ... We are planning to teach them a practical trade. Also we are planning to offer them weaving.

In 1988, when there was a flood in Bangladesh, we provided shelter for 1,128 people in our Osmani Hotel. We gave them shelter and the people of the area fed them for [a] time. … The interesting thing was babies were born and people died and even marriages took place in my hotel during that time. It was raining for 35 days.

**Ajmat Ullah**

We were hopeful of a peaceful and prosperous Bangladesh, but we are disheartened now. All the people who came back from Bangladesh are unhappy about the situation in our country.

In '71 more then 90 per cent of the people were illiterate and they used to work in factories. Nowadays there are many educated people and they have businesses like restaurants. … We [are afraid] to go to Bangladesh now. The terrorist activity is more now than [at] any time in the past. [Whichever] party [comes] to power the situation is the same and even worse than the past. At the present time the Awami League people are … hiding. When the Awami League [gets] power, the *BNP* will be hiding. This is the situation of the country for ten years. Even the opposition party people, when guilty, will not be arrested by the police, if they have money and good connections. …

I have very little time. Maybe I will not see the change. How can we improve the situation, where eight out of ten are dishonest? The contractors work on the road and it again breaks [up] after just three to four months. They are looting *crores* of Taka. The responsibility not lies only with one party - both the parties are involved in the looting. They used to make partners among them and share the looting. Only if Allah helps us and if some kind of natural disaster kills a huge part of the whole population - only then the situation can change. Ten out of a thousand people are living a luxurious life and the rest of the people are just begging [from] door to door.

**Mohammed Israel**
Bangladesh will be a very good country. Now it is not doing well, but I forecasted in 1971 that Bangladesh will be independent within December 1971 and after 20 years the independence of the country will have its first tooth - the Ershad government was removed at that time. If one has enough knowledge about the people of Bangladesh and search world opinion, he will develop an idea [about] what will happen in the future. After 40 years Bangladesh will have the taste of independence.

**Nikhilesh Chakraborty**
I feel very sad, very disappointed. The way it's slipping into a kind of continuous civil war, the killings in the name establishing the kingdom of God or the rule of God - a democratically elected government actually having partnership with that kind of thinking. And it's become a place where problems have [gone] from bad to worse. Lack of accountability is the word. I came to this country at the age of 23 and there were no elections in my homeland in my lifetime. The only election held in 1952 is long before. … No election, no choice. So I wasn't even accustomed to be able to voice my own views and showing my own preference in terms of my own voting rights. My first ballot … was in Islington where I lived.

Bangladesh still is holding the legacy of Pakistan. Pakistan never had democracy in my lifetime. … Military rule has been the order of the day. In 1958, Ayub came into power and he was replaced by Yahya Khan. After Yahya Khan [a lot of] generals came, one after another, and ruling Pakistan. In the same way, 1975 was the severest blow to the Bangladeshi democratic movement. If 1975 didn't happen, we could have moved a little bit further. But 1975 brought us back to military dictatorship as we can say. The parties that came to power [were] the parties of the chief military commanders … formed in the cantonments. The only future of Bangladesh should be decided by the Bangladeshis in their own free will. Democracy is an institution and that institution has to be built on success.

What did we want to achieve? And my answer is: "We wanted to achieve an independent, forward-looking, democratic government in my motherland." That can only happen through the democratic process, building up institutions, building up judiciaries, building up the rights of ordinary human beings, bringing in economic development and growth, and sharing in a fair distribution to the whole of the nation. This can be done only through an accountable system of democracy.

**C.A.S. Kabir**
We had a dream about Bangladesh. We had a sweet dream but [it has] not been realised. It was not realised because, [when] … the country was independent, and Pakistanis left the country and [we] were free, we thought: "That's the end of it." We did not take any care of our enemy. … In every revolution, there is counter-revolution. We were not prepared. Not our bureaucrats, not our parliamentarians, not our police force - they were not aware of it. There were people working from behind, from overseas, and they had friends like Pakistan, friends like China. So that's the way they were able to overthrow the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. They killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the four founding pillars of Bangladesh were killed - Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam, Kamruzzaman and Monsur Ali.
Bangladesh was leaderless. Somehow … Ziaur Rahman came into power. Actually from that time, Ziaur Rahman gave arms [and] invited the *Jamaatis* in his government. He gave them the permission [to become] a political party. From then the conspiracy started. It was developing and our enemies, particularly the Pakistanis, were helping them. Nobody could stop it. That's going on since the advent of Ziaur Rahman in power. Until 1990, it was all martial law - there [was] no civilian rule. … Nobody could stop the Jamaatis. Those people do not believe in the independence of Bangladesh. They are working behind with the collaboration of the present BNP and now the power is in their grip.

So … our dream was, that Bangladesh will be democratic, secular, truly secular. … When we were freed from the Punjabi rule, when we were independent, the Western people used to call us [a victorious] nation. Now we are the most corrupt nation in the world. It was never in our expectation. So our enemies were active to achieve their goal. We were sleeping and still people in favour of [the] independence of Bangladesh are not united. ... They are looking to power only. … How to keep the sovereignty and freedom - they were not keeping it in their mind. On the other hand, the Jamaatis and other Islamists [are] against democracy and they are united and they are more powerful now.

So [our] dream [has] not been realised. … Bangladeshis … are very, very hard-working people; they are trying to stand on their own feet. Another thing I realised - there are some academic people and some intellectuals, they are working from behind. There is a cultural movement already started in Bangladesh. We can't see it just in the ordinary [way] - we [have] to go to the inside and see it [through] the way articles are written in newspapers, and there are [a] couple of channels like Channel I and *ATN Bangla*. Some intellectuals are actually working behind and trying to give the idea to the people that we are Bengali, Bangladesh is our country. This should [be a] sovereign country. We got our own culture, we got our own literature, and we are to save our country from the occupation of the other people, and we are to stand with the other countries of the world alike as a democratic secular country. This is the message coming through the media. But you must be sharp to realise all these things. …

The ordinary working class people, they got the guts to protest, which is a good thing. If the oppressor oppresses us and we take it without any protest, then they will oppress us more. But that's not the case of Bangladesh. The working class people, they know how to protest. And people are doing it in various ways, particularly *Dr. Younus*, *Fazle Hasan Abed* and *Dr. Qazi Faruk Ahmed* and these sorts of people. They are enlightening the people and not only that. In the same time, they are trying to improve the financial condition of the people, which is a good example for Bangladesh. In that field Bangladesh has made a lot of progress. Particularly … in family planning and health keeping, Bangladesh is tremendously doing well.

**Shahid Ali**
Bangladesh has developed a lot in these 35 years. Bangladesh is heading towards the right way after the liberation war. I hope the condition will be better day-by-day. We at that time feared that Bangladesh might not survive for long; some other country may swallow up the country. But Bangladesh has done reasonably good in the early days as a new country new nation. I hope the future is very bright for Bangladesh.

**Michael Barnes**
Bangladesh has a great future, I am sure. It has gas reserves, which have to be exploited. I don't know to what extent they have the gas reserves and the possible oil reserves, but they certainly have gas. It's an incredibly fertile country. But the big threat to its future, if scientists are right, is global warming because if the sea level rises what will happen?

On the political front, one wishes that there were a genuinely democratic government. I met [Sheikh] Hasina in 1998 - she invited me for an audience in her residence. The British High Commissioner also came and the head of the British Council was also invited. We sat for a bit and talked for about 20 minutes. We talked about her father and my meetings with him and so on and so on.

I think the really important thing politically is that there should be free and fair elections, without intimidation, fraud and so on. Because when you get the things like bombings … the real true democracy can't flourish. I must confess that I am not terribly well informed up to the minute, because unfortunately [Bangladesh is not covered a lot] in the British press. I mean only if something very significant occurs, like that one in August 2004, when Sheikh Hasina herself was injured and a lot of her comrades were killed in the bomb attack on the meeting. Her hearing was badly affected. When something like that happens, it tends to get into the headlines.

## 10. Telling the Younger Generation about the Past

**Aziz Choudhury**
You love your father, nobody will tell you how to express that. When the time comes, the tears come from your eyes; you smile for his happiness, and all these things. There is no rule, isn't it? And it will come, so it all depends on how you feel.

I will give you an example. … My two sons go to a private school, they give them so much homework and they are busy. So I could not do so much to tell them about Bangladesh. But I used to make sure that on every 21st February I tell them the whole story about Bangladesh. I took them to the Surma Centre where I worked at that time. I lived in south London and every *Ekushe* February I used to take them to the Surma Centre.
From home when we started driving, I used to start the story from the language movement. I had a long story to tell them, because our home was in India. We came to Bangladesh [during] the riots [around 1946]. And then the language movement [started] and then the independence war - that was a long story. … Once a year they had to listen to the whole story, because they had no choice sitting in the car and listening to me. So going and coming, it used to be only about the Bangladesh things.

A long time later my eldest son … was in St. George's medical school, and he was a secretary there and he was the president of the students' union. And he was the most [successful] student there and … he was very popular. One day he phoned me in the office [and] said: "Thank you, *Baba*." I said: "What? What has happened?" He said: "No, in all these years you were talking and I never knew that I have absorbed so much." I said: "What is all this talking?" Then he explained. Four or five students were standing and talking. Somebody was asking: "Who is coming from where?" One [came] from India, one from [somewhere else]. And then … he said: "I am from Bangladesh." There was a Pakistani girl there. She said: "Oh, we gave you the freedom." The minute she said this, my son said: "Don't say that. You didn't give us the freedom. You did this, this, this." And so on in one breath without stopping. He talked for ten minutes; he told all the history. And after that the girl was saying: "I am sorry, I am sorry." He said: "Don't joke with these things. So many women were raped, so many people were killed, and don't joke with these things."

And after that the girl was apologising and everybody was requesting him to cool down and then he came back and called me. He said: "I … know so much, I could tell so much and when she said they gave us freedom, suddenly that hit me. She ... had just completely destroyed the whole history and giving a new story there. And I was so pleased that I could say so much about that. I talked about ten minutes, Baba, about Bangladesh and they thought I was going mad."

… So it's all that - how you feel and how [the] next generation … see these things. I think a lot of [them] feel that way, that's why there is a Banglatown and all these newspapers, televisions, not just one person's expression, it's an accumulated thing. Now it's like a 'third Bangla'. First one is Bangladesh, second is Calcutta, and this is the third Bangla. This one is leading the whole [of] Europe, even America. It's like it has become the capital of Bengali people here.

**C.A.S. Kabir**
It is great for the younger generation of Bangladesh. We have got more enlightened people now. And again we have got professionally educated people, more experienced people and more trained people. We did not get that chance in the Pakistani rule. Now, in every field, everywhere, we got our experts. When I used to go to the Pakistani High Commission before [the] independence to get a passport, it was very difficult to go inside the office. But nowadays when I go, I see from the front [that] the security man to the High Commissioner is a Bengali. [During] Pakistani rule we did not get the opportunity to get the highest … [positions]. All those things used to go to the Punjabis. Now it's our people, our Bengali officers, they are getting all the opportunities to get the [best positions]. We got our generals, we got our ambassadors, we got our president, we got our prime minister, and so there are more opportunities. These are the positions created by us, we have created it, and we have created the nation.

You are the younger generation [who] fulfil those positions and do your duty. So your job … [is to] build up Bangladesh [and] bring it to its old reputation. Bangladesh was once … one of the richest countries in the world. … Lord Clive [has written] in his book about Bengal, about the part we live in Bangladesh, about *Murshidabad*, its wealth, the Bengali heritage, its art [and] its architecture. … I have my full confidence over the Bengalis. They are the [cleverest people in] the world. Why [should] they be lagging behind? They should go forward. And I got my full confidence that if they make the contribution we will go forward and again in the world community we will be a nation. We will be proud of our own identity, our own nationality, our own country, our own sovereignty.

**Mathin Miah**
It is good to give the young generation ideas about Bangladesh. I also advise them about Bangladesh. But when they go to the country and see the behaviour of the people in the airport, they can realise the truth. They are qualified and knowledgeable; they are not illiterate like our generation. When they go to the country and observe the activities of the people in the country, [since] most of the Bangladeshis try to exploit them … they lose … heart. If the people of our country were cordial and helpful like the people of Britain, our new generation in the UK would be interested to go and invest in our country.

The present generation here in Britain is in a good position and earning considerably. … In all the fields our children are doing well, but they don't like to visit Bangladesh because of the behaviour of the people in Bangladesh. Those who come back from Bangladesh, when I ask them [about] their experience, they are not satisfied about the condition of the country. They appreciate the natural beauty of Bangladesh, but they are not happy with other things. Just at the entry to the country, in the airport, they start harassing [them]. Someone will try to take the luggage away, and the officials will not cooperate, and they will ask for a bribe. The workers and the officers in the airport don't behave with them well. If they were satisfied with the people in the country, they would have gone more frequently, and they would have business in the country. The country would have … benefited. But those who go to Bangladesh never like to visit Bangladesh again.

**Badrun Nesa Pasha**

[I am telling the younger Bengali generations]: "Whatever your root is, don't forget your root. If you need to go back, go back ten generations and find out that your forefathers belonged to Bangladesh … then [to] Bengal, … East Pakistan and [now to] Bangladesh. … It is a beautiful … and very nice country. People are very affectionate. … They have love and warmth. Visit Bangladesh regularly!"

I tell my children to visit Bangladesh regularly. … Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, but if you go to Bangladesh you don't see that the country [is] poor. It's progressing but not everybody, unfortunately. But still they are making good progress. Don't forget your roots. Learn Bengali, learn as many languages as possible. Bengali is quite a rich language in the Indian sub-continent. So don't forget, we do have a history of Nawab Shirajuddula. We do have a history of Tipu Sultan [and] we do have a history of Sheikh Mujib now.

I think my children are proud of our contribution in 1971. Most importantly, my children are very proud of Bangladesh. We all tried our best to teach them Bengali, so we started Bengali classes in 1978 organised by the Bangladesh Women's Association. Mr. Roger was the role model for those who wanted to learn Bengali. If he could learn Bangla, you can learn Bangla. And if he can [learn] Bengali culture, you can learn Bengali culture as well.

I am really proud of my children, both of them can speak fluent Bengali. They can read well [but] … can't write that fluently. … I think they are contributing to Bangladesh because we have set up Sarkar Pasha Welfare Trust in Bangladesh in October 2002 with [the] intention that we will have health service for the poor and the disadvantaged people and we will open an English medium technical school and college for them. We have got in mind … an orphanage for the orphans as well. Both my children have become very much involved with it. My daughter is a doctor. She contributed half of the year organising this.