

¹[FIFTH SCHEDULE

[Article 150(2)]

HISTORIC SPEECH OF THE FATHER OF THE NATION, BANGABANDHU
SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN ON THE 7TH MARCH, 1971 [Translated]

My brothers,

I have come before you today with a heart laden with sadness. You are aware of everything and know all. We have tried with our lives. And yet the sadness remains that today, in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur the streets are soaked in the blood of my brothers. Today the people of Bengal desire emancipation, the people of Bengal wish to live, the people of Bengal demand that their rights be acknowledged. What wrong have we committed? Following the elections, the people of Bangladesh entrusted me and the Awami League with the totality of their electoral support. It was our expectation that the Parliament would meet, there we would frame our Constitution, that we would develop this land, that the people of this country would achieve their economic, political and cultural freedom. But it is a matter of grief that today we are constrained to say in all sadness that the history of the past twenty three years has been the history of a persecution of the people of Bengal, a history of the blood of the people of Bengal. This history of the past twenty three years has been one of the agonising cries of men and women. The history of Bengal has been a history where the people of this land have made crimson the streets and highways of this land with their blood.

We gave blood in 1952; In 1954, we won the elections and yet were not permitted to exercise power. In 1958, Ayub Khan imposed Martial Law and kept the nation in a state of slavery for ten long years. On 1 June 1966, as they rose in support of the Six-Point movement, the sons of my land were mown down in gunfire. When Yahya Khan took over once Ayub Khan fell in the fury of the movement of 1969, he promised that he would give us a Constitution, give us democracy. We put our faith on him. And then history moved a long way, the elections took place. I have met President Yahya Khan.

I appealed to him, not just as the majority leader in Bengal but also as the majority leader in Pakistan, to convene the National Assembly on 15 February. He did not pay heed to my appeal. He paid heed to Mr. Bhutto. And he said that the assembly would be convened in the first week of March. I went along with him and said we would sit in the parliament. I said that we would discuss matters in the Assembly. I even went to the extent of suggesting that despite our being in a majority, if anyone proposes anything that is legitimate and right, we would accept his proposal.

¹ Schedules Fifth, Sixth and Seventh were added by the Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act, 2011 (Act XIV of 2011), section 50.

Mr. Bhutto came here. He held negotiations with us, and when he left, he said that the door to talk had not closed, that more discussions would take place. After that, I spoke to other political leaders. I told them to join me in deliberations so that we could give shape to a Constitution for the country. But Mr. Bhutto said that if members elected from West Pakistan came here, the Assembly would turn into a slaughter house, an abattoir. He warned that anyone who went to the Assembly would end up losing his life. He issued dire warnings of closing down all the shops from Peshawar to Karachi if the Assembly Session went ahead. I said that the Assembly Session would go ahead. And then, suddenly, on the first of March the Assembly Session was put off.

Mr. Yahya Khan, in exercise of his powers as President, had called the National Assembly into Session ; and I had said that I would go to the Assembly. Mr. Bhutto said he would not go. Thirty five members came here from West Pakistan. And suddenly the Assembly was put off. The blame was placed squarely on the people of Bengal, the blame was put at my door. Once the Assembly meeting was postponed, the people of this land decided to put up resistance to the act.

I enjoined upon them to observe a peaceful general strike. I instructed them to close down all factories and industrial installations. The people responded positively to my directives. Through sheer spontaneity they emerged on to the streets. They were determined to pursue their struggle through peaceful means. What have we attained ? The weapons we have bought with our money to defend the country against foreign aggression are being used against the poor and down-trodden of my country today. It is their hearts the bullets pierce today. We are the majority in Pakistan. Whenever we Bangalees have attempted to ascend to the heights of power, they have swooped upon us.

I have spoken to him over telephone. I told him, "Mr. Yahya Khan, you are the President of Pakistan. Come, be witness to the inhuman manner in which the people of my Bengal are being murdered, to the way in which the mothers of my land are being deprived of their sons." I told him, "come, see and dispense justice." But he construously said that I had agreed to participate in a Round Table Conference to be held on 10 March.

I have already said a long time ago, what RTC ? With whom do I sit down to talk ? Do I fraternise with those who have taken the blood of my people ? All of a sudden, without discussing matters with me and after a secret meeting lasting five hours, he has delivered a speech in which he has placed all responsibility for the impasse on me, on the people of Bengal.

My brothers,

They have called the Assembly for the twenty-fifth. The marks of blood have not yet dried up. I said on the tenth that Mujibur Rahman would not walk across that blood to take part in a Round Table Conference. You have called the Assembly. But my demands must be met first. Martial Law must be withdrawn. All military personnel must be taken back to the barracks. An inquiry must be conducted into the manner in which the killings have been caused. And power must be transferred to the elected representatives of the people. And only then shall we consider the question of whether or not to sit in the National Assembly. Prior to the fulfilment of our demands, we cannot take part in the Assembly.

I do not desire the office of Prime Minister. I wish to see the rights of the people of this country established. Let me make it clear, without ambiguity, that beginning today, in Bangladesh, all courts, magistracies, government offices and educational institutions will remain closed for an indefinite period. In order that the poor do not suffer, in order that my people do not go through pain, all other activities will continue, will not come within the ambit of the general strike from tomorrow. Rickshaws, horse carriages, trains and river vessels will ply. The Supreme Court, High Court, Judge's Court, semi-government offices, WAPDA, nothing will work. Employees will collect their salaries on the twenty-eighth. But if the salaries are not paid, if another bullet is fired, if any more of the people are murdered, it is my directive to all of you : turn every house into a fortress, resist the enemy with everything you have. And for the sake of life, even if I am not around to guide you, direct you, close off all roads and pathways. We will strive them into submission. We will submerge them in water. You are our brothers. Return to your barracks and no harm will come to you. But do not try to pour bullets into my heart again. You cannot keep seventy five million people in bondage. Now that we have learnt to die, no power on earth can keep us in subjugation.

For those who have embraced martyrdom, and for those who have sustained injuries we in the Awami League will do all we can to relieve their tragedy. Those among you who can please lend a helping hand through contributing to our relief committee. The owners of industries will make certain that the wages of workers who have taken part in the strike for the past week are duly paid to them. I shall tell employees of the government, my word must be heard, and my instructions followed. Until freedom comes to my land, all taxes will be held back from payment. No one will pay them. Bear in mind that the enemy has infiltrated our ranks to cause confusion and sow discord among us. In our Bengal, everyone, be he Hindu or Muslim, Bangalee or non-Bangalee, is our brother. It is our responsibility to ensure their security. Our good name must not be sullied.

And remember, employees at radio and television, if radio does not get our message across, no Bangalee will go to the radio station. If television does not put forth our point of view, no Bangalee will go to television, Banks will remain open for two hours to enable people to engage in transactions. But there will be no transfer of even a single penny from East Bengal to West Pakistan. Telephone and telegram services will continue in East Bengal and news can be despatched overseas.

But if moves are made to exterminate the people of this country, Bangalees must act with caution. In every village, every neighbourhood, set up Sangram Parishad under the leadership of the Awami League. And be prepared with whatever you have. Remember : Having mastered the lesson of sacrifice, we shall give more blood. God willing, we shall free the people of this land. The struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation. The struggle this time is a struggle for independence. Joi Bangla !