

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's London Visit January 8, 1972

The vanquished Pakistani junta ceded under pressure of the global community to release Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. On 8 January 1972, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman flew to London by a chartered flight from Rawalpindi airport. He reached London on 09 January 1972. He briefly stayed at Claridge's Hotel and in the afternoon met the global press at its ballroom. Thousands of expatriate Bangalis poured down in front of the hotel to have a glimpse of their leader. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman conveyed his gratitude to the international community through the press for its strong support to the cause of Independence of Bangladesh. Later, he shared his experience of incarceration with the press. Bangabandhu urged the States of the world as well as the United Nations to recognize Bangladesh. In the evening, he was received by the then British Prime Minister Edward Heath at the 10 Downing Street. The Prime Minister Edward Heath was in vacation. At the news of Bangabandhu's arrival in London, he rushed to meet him, cancelling his vacation. They talked for an hour in that evening. Bangabandhu thanked British government and its people for their valuable support during the liberation war of Bangladesh and Mr. Heath promised that Britain would do all to help in the economic recovery.

News Conference

At the news conference he said that he had been under sentence of death and was held in a condemned cell. The intense heat was terrible, he said, and he was in a solitary confinement which was hard to bear.

"Gentlemen of the press," he began, "today I am free to share the unbounded joy of freedom with my fellow countrymen. "We have earned our freedom in an epic liberation struggle. The ultimate achievement of the struggle is the creation of the independent, sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh, of which my people have declared me President while I was a prisoner in a condemned cell awaiting the execution of the sentence of hanging."

According to the New York Times then he left no doubt of his own determination to keep what was once Pakistan's eastern wing independent. He said that Mr. Bhutto had appealed to him to find "some possible link" with Pakistan but that he could say nothing about that until he was home. He spoke bitterly of what, the Yahya Khan regime had done in East Bengal. "They tortured boys and girls," he said, "mercilessly" killed people, and burned "hundreds of thousands of buildings."

"I think if Hitler had been alive today," he said, "even he would be ashamed."

The way the West Pakistanis had behaved made it impossible "to live together," he said. But he added that he hoped the present Pakistani Government would hold war crimes trials and that he thought Mr. Bhutto would do so.

In his opening statement, he praised those countries that had helped the Bangalis, mentioning India, the Soviet Union, Poland and other East European countries, Britain and France. He added thanks to people elsewhere, including "the people of the United States." Asked later about the pro-West Pakistani position of the Nixon Administration, he said he was sure that the American people favoured Bengali independence but did not know about the Administration.

Asked whether he would accept foreign aid from the United States, he said he would welcome aid from anyone but would not let any country “impose something on us.” In the same evening, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman left London for Bangladesh by a chartered Comet Jet of British Royal Air Force.

Reference:

1. Source: Waiting for the Centenary: Triumphant Homecoming of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib
2. <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/01/09/archives/sheik-mujib-free-arrives-in-britain-yahya-is-arrested-bengali-chief.html>