

## Reflections on the Significance of the Historic Six-Point Movement and its Impact on Bangladesh's Struggle for Freedom and Independence

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### Abstract

*The historic Six-Point Demand or the Six-Point Formula has been widely credited as the 'charter of freedom' in the history of Bangladesh's struggle for self-determination from Pakistan's shameful colonial domination. Despite the fact that neither the separation of East Pakistan nor the independence of the eastern province of Pakistan was one of the professed objectives of the six-point freedom charter, the historic six-point movement in 1966 was the turning point in Bangladesh's quest for independence. The six-point plan had envisaged a full-blown and creative federal form of Government based on the 1940 Lahore Resolution, a parliamentary system of government to be directly elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise, two separate currencies or two reserve banks for the two wings of Pakistan, and a para-military force for East Pakistan. The spectacular success of the six-point movement in 1966 under the dynamic leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had prompted the ruling coterie of Pakistan to discredit the exponents and organizers of this movement. Although the self-declared diabolical military regime of Ayub Khan had used brutal and punitive measures against the proponents, organizers and supporters of the six-point formula, the six-point anchored mass upsurge in 1966 had seriously impacted and conditioned the subsequent political development in Pakistan. Doubtless, the six-point political movement had effectively transformed the cherished dream of greater autonomy into a sustainable freedom struggle for independent and sovereign Bangladesh. The main purpose of this paper is to assess the significance and relevance of the historic six-point movement and its impact on Bangladesh's struggle for freedom and independence. Once the main contents of six-point formula are summarized, the nature, magnitude, and impact of the six-point movement will be appraised.*

**Key Words:** Six-Point Demand, Six-Point Formula, Six-Point Movement, Freedom Charter, Charter of Independence, Independent Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangabandhu, Awami League

### Introduction

Although neither the separation of East Pakistan from Pakistan nor the independence of the eastern province of Pakistan was the professed objective of the six-point charter, the historic six-point movement in 1966 was the turning point in Bangladesh's quest for independence. Doubtless, the six-point political movement had effectively transformed the cherished dream of greater autonomy for the then East Pakistan into a sustainable freedom struggle for independent and sovereign Bangladesh. Notwithstanding the

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deliberate distortions of Bangladesh's political history over a period of more than fifty years, it is widely recognized that the six-point movement was a milestone in the history of Pakistan's Bengali-speaking peoples' relentless struggle for autonomy, freedom and independence (Ahmed, 1991; Ahmed, 2004; Jahan, 1994; Maniruzzaman, 1967, 1988; Rashiduzzaman, 1970; Dunbar, 1972).

The six-point plan had envisaged, among other things, a full-blown federal form of Government based on the 1940 Lahore Resolution, a genuine parliamentary system of government to be directly elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise, two separate currencies or two reserve banks for the two wings of Pakistan (Islam, 1977), and a para-military force for East Pakistan. The spectacular success of the six-point movement in 1966 had prompted the ruling coterie of Pakistan to discredit the organizers of this movement. Ayub Khan's diabolical regime had used various brutal and punitive measures against the proponents, organizers and supporters of the six-point formula, the six-point anchored mass upsurge in 1966 had seriously impacted and conditioned the subsequent political development in Pakistan. The main purpose of this paper is to assess the significance and relevance of the historic Six-Point movement and its impact on Bangladesh's struggle for freedom and independence. Once the main contents of six-point formula are summarized, the nature, magnitude, and impact of the six-point movement will be appraised.

### **The Main Elements of the Six-Point Formula**

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the then General Secretary of the East Pakistan Awami League (EPAL), had submitted the six-point program to the All-Party Meeting of the opposition political parties of Pakistan in Lahore on February 5, 1966. Based on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's "6-Point Formula: Our Right to Live" [March 23, 1966], the main demands of the revised version of the six-point plan (as of March 23, 1966) can be summarized as follows (based on Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur, Amader Banchar Dabi: Chhay Dofa Karmasuchi (Six Points: Our Demand For Survival):

**Point 1.** "The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense on the basis of [1940] Lahore Resolution, and Parliamentary form of Government with supremacy of legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise."

**Point 2.** The Federal Government of Pakistan "shall deal with only two subjects, viz.: defense and Foreign Affairs, and all other residuary subjects shall vest in the federating states."

**Point 3.** "Two separate but freely convertible currencies for two wings [of Pakistan] should be introduced;" or if this is not feasible, there should be one currency for the whole country, but effective constitutional provisions should be introduced to stop the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Furthermore, a separate Banking Reserve should be established and separate fiscal and monetary policy to be adopted for East Pakistan.

**Point 4.** The power of taxation and revenue collection shall be vested in the “federating units and the Federal Centre will have no such power.” However, the Federation will be entitled to have a share in the state taxes to meet its expenditures. “The Consolidated Federal Fund shall come out of a levy of certain percentage of all state taxes.”

**Point 5.** There should be two separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings with clear assurance that “earnings of East Pakistan shall be under the control of East Pakistan Government and that of West Pakistan under the control of West Pakistan Government.” And the “foreign exchange requirements of the Federal Government [of Pakistan] should be met by the two wings equally or in a ratio to be fixed. The indigenous products should move free of duty between the two wings.” The Constitution should “empower the units [provinces] to establish trade and commercial relations with, set up trade missions in and enter into agreements with foreign countries.”

**Point 6.** East Pakistan should have a separate “militia” or “Para-military” force.

### **Hostile Reaction of the Political Stalwarts of Pakistan to the Proposed Six-point Formula and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Bold Response**

The mainstream political leaders of the opposition parties in Pakistan were not even willing to discuss the merits or demerits of the of the proposed six-point formula for ensuring greater provincial autonomy for the eastern province of Pakistan. In fact, no West Pakistani political leaders (not even Nawabzada Nasarullah Khan, the President of the then All-Pakistan Awami League) were willing to lend any support to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's clarion call for maximum provincial autonomy based on the proposed six-point formula (Gull, 2014: 73). It is really appalling to recapitulate even after the lapse more than five decades that the non-Awami League delegates from the then East Pakistan to that historic conference in early February 1966 did not endorse the six-point demand. Like their West-Pakistani counterparts, Bengali-speaking political stalwarts had also sniffed an element of “secession” or “disintegration” of Pakistan in the six-point formula. In fact, the six-point formula could not be pried out of the “subject-matter committee” of that so-called all-party conference Harun-or-Rashid, 2019; Gull, 2014; Ahmed, 1991).

Instead of endorsing or facilitating a fair discussion on the six-point formula for ensuring maximum provincial autonomy, the self-declared champions of restoration of democracy in the then Pakistan had deliberately launched a vile propaganda campaign against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the chief sponsor and proponent of the six-point plan. Doubtless, those motivated anti-Bengali postures and biased propaganda were essentially characterized by blatant lies, falsehoods, conjectures, distortions, and innuendoes. In fact, the six-point proposal had received frontal attack even from the veteran Pakistani political stalwarts and doyens of most of the political parties at a time when they were clamoring for establishing pure democracy in Pakistan! (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019; Ahmed, 1991; Gull, 2014).

In her celebrated work titled Pakistan: Failure in National Integration, Rounaq Jahan (1994) succinctly summarized the hostile reactions of other political parties to the six-point formula: “The Six-Point demand not only split the [Awami] League but made it

difficult for the East Pakistan wing to form an alliance with any other West Pakistan-based party. The CML [Council Muslim League] decried the Six Points as a demand for confederation, not federation; the Jama'at-i-Islami branded it [Six-point formula] as a separatist design; the Nizam-i-Islam rejected it [Six-point formula] as a unilateral, dictatorial move on Mujib's part; and the NAP (National Awami Party) dismissed it [Six-point formula] on the grounds that it was parochial and did not include any measures to free East Pakistan from imperialists agents" (Jahan, 1994: 139-140),

Despite pungent comments and frontal attacks on the six-point formula, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman refused to be blackmailed or intimidated by the criticisms of his six-point plan. His response to the critics of his autonomy plan was quick and creative. In an impromptu press conference in Lahore on February 10, 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had forcefully argued, as noted by Talukder Maniruzzaman, "The question of (provincial) autonomy appears to be more important after the War (between India and Pakistan in September, 1965). Time has come for making East Pakistan self-sufficient in all respects. He then enunciated a 'six-point charter of survival' program for East Pakistan" (Maniruzzaman, 1967: 876-885). In that historic press conference, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had also clearly articulated that since the proposed six-point demand was not at all designed to harm the common people of West Pakistan, the question of demanding a genuine "provincial autonomy" for East Pakistan based on the six-point formula "should not be misconstrued or dismissed as provincialism". He had pointed out that the 17-day war between Pakistan and India in September 1965 made it crystal clear to the "East Pakistanis" that the defense of East Pakistan couldn't be contingent upon the mercy or courtesy of West Pakistan. He reminded the audience that instead of relying on West Pakistan for its protection from external attack, East Pakistan --- a distant land located one thousand miles away, should be made self-sufficient for defending itself from hostile external aggression. He also made it abundantly clear that his six-point plan for "maximum" provincial autonomy reflected the long-standing demands of the people of East Pakistan. He also pointed out the uselessness and irrelevance of the "All-Party Conference" (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019; Ahmed, 1991; Gull, 2014).

On his return from Lahore to Dhaka on February 11, 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had provided further clarification on his six-point formula in a press conference. He explained why he had disassociated himself from the All-Party conference in Lahore. He had clearly stated that the delegates from East Pakistan Awami League (EPAL) had rejected not only the proposals passed by the All-Party Conference but also severed all ties with the disgruntled leaders of the so-called conference of the opposition parties. He said that it was impossible for him or his party to betray the genuine interests and long-standing demands of the aggrieved and deprived people of East Pakistan. He emphasized that the immediate adoption and effective implementation of his six-point formula "will be quite conducive to foster durable relationship between two provinces of Pakistan" (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019; Ahmed, 1991). In a follow-up press conference on February 14, 1966, he reiterated what he had uttered in his Lahore press conference that the "the question of full-autonomy appears to be more relevant for East Pakistan after the 17-day war between

Pakistan and India. The time is ripe for making East Pakistan self-sufficient in all respects” (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019).

### **Reaction of Ayub Khan’s Dictatorial Regime to the Six-Point Plan**

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s demand for “maximum provincial autonomy” based on the six-point formula seems to have shaken the foundation of Pakistan because this plan had exposed the fact that the real intention of Pakistan’s ruling elite was to “strengthen” the Central Government but not “Pakistan.” He repeatedly said in several public meetings that the people of Pakistan had always desired to have a “strong Pakistan,” not a “strong Central Government.” However, the anti-Bengali ruling coterie was not at all interested in dealing or negotiating with the Awami League on the issue of provincial autonomy even though Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the proponent of maximum provincial autonomy, had publicly stated that he was willing to negotiate his six-point plan with anyone in good faith provided a meaningful autonomy was ensured for East Pakistan. Yet, the autocratic regime started using repressive tactics to suppress the six-point movement (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019; Ahmed, 1991; Gull, 2014). As noted by Dr. Md. Abdul Wadud Bhuyain, “the Ayub regime’s policy towards the six-point demand of the AL (Awami League) was one of total suppression. It showed once again that the (Ayub) regime failed to respond to the political demand” (Bhuyain, 1982: 104).

Immediately after the provincial autonomy plan based on the six-point formula was unveiled by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Lahore conference of opposition political parties in early February, 1966, Ayub Khan was quick to denounce it as a “separatist or secessionist move” . Aimed at browbeating the dedicated champions of greater provincial autonomy the self-declared guardian of the nation had started discrediting both the message and the messenger of the six-point program. Appearing in the final session of the meeting of the Pakistan (Convention) Muslim League in Dhaka on March 21, 1966, being fully attired in the Army General’s khaki uniform with full display of all of his regalia and medallions, the self declared President of Pakistan had condemned the six-point based plan for maximum provincial autonomy in the harshest possible terms (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019; Ahmed, 1991; Gull, 2014).

Characterizing the six-point formula as a demand for “greater sovereign Bengal,” Ayub Khan had claimed that such a “dubious plan” would put the “Bengali Muslims” under the domination of “caste Hindus” of West Bengal. He had compared the “prevailing situation” in Pakistan [as of March, 1966] with the volatile political situation that had prevailed in the USA before and during the outbreak of a prolonged Civil War in early 1860s. He even arrogated himself by saying that the nation might have to face a “civil war” if such emotive and volatile situations were forced upon “him” by the “enemies of Pakistan” < “secessionists” and “destructionists.” He had threatened the alleged “autonomists” and “secessionists” with “dire consequences” if they failed to shun the idea of six-point based movement for maximum provincial autonomy. Ayub Khan had also the audacity to underscore that the “language of weapons” would be ruthlessly

employed for the sole purpose of exterminating the “secessionist elements from Pakistan” (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019; Ahmed, 1991; Gull, 2014).

Abdul Monem Khan, the then infamous Governor of the then East Pakistan, had publicly stated that “as long as I remain the Governor of this province, I would see to it that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman remains shackled in jail”. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then flamboyant Foreign Minister of Pakistan, had openly challenged Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to a public debate on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed six-point formula at a public meeting to be held in Paltan Maidan in Dhaka. To the chagrin of the Ayub regime, Tajuddin Ahmed, the number 2 leader in the then Awami League, took up the challenge on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Unfortunately, it was Z.A. Bhutto who did not show up for a debate! (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019: 126-128).

In response to a variety of false accusations and vile threats, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was quick to respond. In a mammoth public gathering at Paltan Maidan, he thundered: "No amount of naked threats can distract the deprived and exploited Bangalees from their demand for provincial autonomy based on their six-point plan". Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the greatest champion of Bangalees' rights for self-determination, along with top leaders of the Awami League, kept on addressing numerous public meetings in the nooks and corners of the then East Pakistan (Harun-or-Rashid, 2019). Without wasting a moment, the entire Awami League and the East Pakistan Students' League (EPSL), its student front, were geared toward mobilizing and motivating the general masses in favor of demanding self-government and autonomy based on the six-point program (Maniruzzaman, 1988: 25).

### **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Launches the Six-Point Movement**

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had presented not only the bold and creative six-point formula proposal for accruing and securing “maximum autonomy” but he also launched a viable and sustainable mass movement (which he himself led till he was put in jail on May 9, 1966) for popularizing, enlisting, and mobilizing mass support in favor of the six-point program. After proposing his historic six-point program, he had actually invested all of his energies and resources in disseminating the fundamental message of “maximum autonomy” for East Pakistan. He started articulating both the rationale and justification for proposing “maximum provincial autonomy” based on his six-point plan. However, before embarking a mass movement, he had initiated some strategic intra-party and organizational measures. For example, the working Committee of the Awami League party was restructured and revamped in the historic Council Session of the East Pakistan Awami League (EPAL) that met on March 18-20, 1966. While Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Tajuddin Ahmed were unanimously elected the President and General Secretary respectively of the newly revamped Awami League, the proposed six-point program was also fully and formally endorsed by the Council Session (Rashiduzzaman, 1970, Maniruzzaman, 1988; Ahmed, 1991; Harun-or-Rashid, 2019).

To the chagrin of Pakistan's ruling coterie, the six-point formula had generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the people of East Pakistan. Indeed, the six-point movement had instantly garnered spontaneous mass support throughout East Pakistan, and the entire province was galvanized throughout February-March-April-May-June, 1966 (Ahmed, 1991; Rashiduzzaman 1970, Maniruzzaman, 1988; Jahan, 1994, Bhuyain, 1982; Gull, 2014). Harun-or-Rashid, 2019).

As noted by Talukder Maniruzzaman: "To say that this [six-point] programme evoked tremendous enthusiasm among the people of East Bengal would be an understatement. Encouraged by overwhelming popular support, Sheikh Mujib convened a meeting of the (EPAL) Council (March 18-20, 1966) at which his (Six-Point) programme was unanimously approved and he was elected President of the (East Pakistan Awami League) party. With a phalanx of organizers from the Student's League, Sheikh Mujib then launched a vigorous campaign. For about three months (from mid-February to mid-May), the urban centers of East Bengal seemed to be in the grip of a 'mass revolution,' prompting the Central Government to arrest Sheikh Mujib and his chief lieutenants (Tajuddin Ahmed, Khandokar Mustaq Ahmed, Mansoor Ali, Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury, and others) under the [infamous] Defense of Pakistan Rules and put down a complete general strike in Dacca (June 7, 1966) by killing 13 participating strikers" (Maniruzzaman, 1988: 25).

Instead of fairly dealing with the legitimate grievances of the neglected eastern province of Pakistan, the power elite of Pakistan took a deliberate decision to suppress Bangalees' quest for maximum provincial autonomy through the use of colonial types of repressive methods and procedures. Obviously, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had become the main target of various virulent forms of harassment, intimidation and fraudulent cases even though some critics of the six-point plan thought that those repressive and punitive measures were not adequate to suppress the separatist movement (Choudhary, 1974). However, the on-ground reality was that the Government had intensified its policy of retaliation, repression and persecution against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his followers. For example, while Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was touring various districts in April 1966, he was repeatedly arrested in almost all important places on flimsy and fraudulent charges (Ahmed, 1991; Gull, 2014; Harun-or-Rashid, 2019).

Anisuzzaman, a distinguished literary figure of Bangladesh, has summarized the nature of the repressive measures which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had to confront and endure for starting and sustaining the historic six-point movement at a critical juncture of our history: "During that period (from the middle of February through May 9, 1966), there was hardly any place where Sheikh Mujib was not arrested [on false charges] for addressing public meetings to enlist mass support in favor of six-point program. Today in Jessore, tomorrow in Khulna, day after tomorrow in Rajshahi, and on the following days in Sylhet, Mymensingh, and Chittagong. Once he was released on bail in one place, he rushed to another place. He had no time to waste. The only time wasted was in the process of posting bail for his release. Arrested again, and being released on bail once

again, and then immediately move to another place (to address the public meetings)” (Anisuzzaman, 1995: 11-12).

It was on June 7, 1966 when a full-blown *hartal* was observed in support of the six-point program throughout the urban centers of the then East Pakistan in defiance of various oppressive and repressive measures of the autocratic Government of Pakistan. People from walks of life had lent their whole-hearted support to this *hartal*. Obviously, it was a mass response to governmental repressive measures since the middle of February 1966 when Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had launched the historic six-point movement. Sheikh Mujib, the most articulate champion of “maximum autonomy” for the then East Pakistan, was already put in jail on May 9, 1966. Several dozen men were shot dead during *hartal* on June 7, 1966. Hundreds of participants were injured. Thousands of Awami League leaders and student workers were put behind bars without any trials. *Hulias* (warrants of arrest) were issued on hundreds of Awami League workers and student leaders. *The Daily Ittefaq*, the most popular Bangla newspaper of the then eastern province of Pakistan, was shut down, its press was confiscated, and its editor, Tofazzal Hossain (Manik Mia), was put in jail. Yet, the repressive police forces could not halt the march of the six-point anchored movement for achieving maximum autonomy (Rashiduzzaman, 1970; Ahmed, 1991; Maniruzzaman, 1988),

In his seminal assessment of the role of the Awami League in the political development of Pakistan, M. Rashiduzzaman had succinctly summarized the significance of the six-point program: “The culmination of the Awami League demand for regional autonomy came in March 1966 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman put forward his Six-Point Program. .... The impact of the six-point demand of the Awami League was felt far and wide. The central government [of Pakistan] dubbed it as a demand for the separation of the Eastern Wing from the rest of the country, and launched a propaganda campaign, which called for a strong central government and decried the autonomists. On June 7, 1966, there was a province-wide hartal (strike) in East Pakistan sponsored by the Awami League to press the demands embodied in the six-point program. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with several lieutenants, was again put into the prison. (Sheikh Mujib was put in jail in early May, 1966). The government also blamed ‘foreign interests’ in the agitation led by the six-pointers ----- After about a year, several East Pakistani civil servants and military officers were arrested on the charge that they had conspired to separate the East Wing by violent means in collusion with India. Eventually, the so-called ‘Agartala Conspiracy case’ was initiated against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and 31 others for alleged high treason” (Rashiduzzaman, 1970: 574-587).

### **The Impact of the Six-point Movement**

The six-point movement had also far reaching effects on the subsequent political development in the then Pakistan. As noted by M. Rashiduzzaman, “The Awami League leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, gave a new turn to Pakistan politics when he put forward a six-point program which would allocate maximum power to the province, and at the same time reduce the strength of the Central Government (of Pakistan). The entire



weight of the party (the Awami League) was thrown in favor of the anti-Ayub movement which spread throughout the country in the early months of 1969, and it is likely that the Awami League will play an even more active role in the future” (Rashiduzzaman, 1970: 574-587).

The imprisonment of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other top Awami Leaguers in 1966 could not diminish the mass support for the six-point demand even though the intensity of the movement could be suppressed. The policy of suppression of all forms of political freedoms and dissenting voices had miserably failed to halt the march of the long-term effects and future implications of the six-point movement. In fact, the many forms of governmental repression and the use of police violence against the organizers and participants of the six-point movement had prompted and motivated the general population of the then East Pakistan to render their full support for the six-point formula. The six-point movement had also far reaching effects on the subsequent political development in the then Pakistan

The origins of both the Agartala Conspiracy Case and the 1969 student-mass movement can be traced back to the six-point movement. The Punjabi-Muhajir dominated Central Government of Pakistan had implicated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the fraudulent Agartala Conspiracy Case. It is now apparent that such a vile conspiracy was hatched out against the most articulate champion of greater provincial autonomy to destroy Bangladesh’s quest for autonomy and self-determination once and for all. Given the fact that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the chief force behind launching a credible mass movement in 1966 for realizing maximum provincial autonomy through the implementation of the six-point formula, Pakistan’s ruling elite wanted to hang this great leader as a “traitor.” In other words, the Government of Pakistan wanted to eliminate him from East Pakistan’s political scene for the purpose of maintaining a status quo in the form of colonial rule in East Pakistan. The success of the six-point movement had prompted the arrogant, debased, and dictatorial regime of Ayub Khan to falsely implicate him in the Agartala Conspiracy Case. However, an anti-Ayub mass movement in late 1968 and early 1969 led to the withdrawal of the so-called Agartala Conspiracy case and unconditional release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from imprisonment (Rashiduzzaman 1970; Maniruzzaman, 1988; Jahan, 1994; Bhuyain, 1982; Harun-or-Rashid, 2019).

About the profound impact of the six-point program on the professed 11-point charter of the 1969 student-mass movement, M. Rashiduzzaman observed: “For all practical purposes, the eleven-point student program was an expanded version of the Awami League’s six- point demand for autonomy” (Rashiduzzaman, 1970: 574-587). The saliency of the six-point movement in the then Pakistan politics is more evident in the following concluding remarks of M. Rashiduzzaman: “The real strength of the Awami League is not its organizational skill but the growing popularity of its (Six-Point) program for regional autonomy with the 70 million Bengalis in East Pakistan. We have already noted that a popular movement started in East Pakistan following the announcement of Awami League’s six-point program and the changing pattern of Pakistan politics has eventually led to what is undeniably a separatist movement. Even

the stringent repressive measures and centralized administration can't halt the process (of separatism). As the champion of the cause of regional autonomy, the future of the Awami League lies in its capacity to sustain and strengthen the movement" (Rashiduzzaman, 1970: 574-587).

Talukder Maniruzzaman has noted the immediate impact of the governmental repressive measures during the six-point movement on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's popularity in the following words: "As one might have expected, Sheikh Mujib's arrest in 1966 only served to enhance his popularity to the point where he became the veritable symbol of Bengali nationalism" (Maniruzzaman, 1988: 23).

Rounaq Jahan underscored the following impacts of the six-point movement: "In the spring of 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman launched his now famous Six-Point Movement. The Six-Point demand—especially attractive to the Bengali nationalist bourgeoisie—was to date most radical demand for East Pakistani autonomy. The Six-Point Movement evoked widespread enthusiasm in East Pakistan. Mass Meetings and rallies held throughout the province by the East Pakistan Awami League helped to rejuvenate the moribund party organization and Awami-affiliated student party, the East Pakistan Students League [EPSL]. Predictably, the Six-point Movement broadened the Awami League's base of support in East Pakistan at the cost of West Pakistani support" (Jahan, 1994: 139).

M.B. Nair concludes his authoritative book titled Politics in Bangladesh: A Study of Awami League:1949-58, (New Delhi, Northern Book Center, 1990, p. 257) with the following observations about the far reaching effects of the six-point movement: "However, in 1964 when political activities on party basis were permitted, the Awami League [AL] emerged from its seclusion and reorganized itself, so that in 1966 it [AL] was able to give a concrete shape to its long-standing demand for regional autonomy in the form of 'Six-Point Programme' which subsequently was the harbinger of the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign state in 1971" (Nair, 1990: 257).

The significance, relevance, and poignancy of the six-point movement can also be gleaned from some of the comprehensive and documented writings of several reputed and fair-minded Pakistani scholars and political observers (Gull, 2014, 2015; Alqama, 1997; Husain, 2010; Mehmood, 1989; Waseem, 1989; Zaheer, 1994); and The Report of the Hamood-ur-Rahman Commission of Inquiry into the 1971 War (2001). For example, in his extraordinary book titled 'What Was Once East Pakistan', Syed Shahid Husain has expressed the opinion that there was nothing wrong with the six-point "demand, because independent economists acknowledge that there had been a massive transfer of resources from East Pakistan to West Pakistan which was one of the causes of ill will between the two wings". Syed Shahid Husain further observes that "asking for a separate currency did not mean to a call for secessionist movement. It was only intended to get guarantee that the non-transfer of resources from an under-developed region to one that was developed. All the people of the East Pakistan had a full legal right on their own

resources. They were also entitled to get subsidies on the basis of being more economically violated and exploited than the West Pakistan” ((Husain, 2010: 24-25; cited by Gull, 2014: 66).

The significance and poignancy of the Six-point plan for the emergence of independent Bangladesh are well reflected in Ayyaz Gull’s thought-provoking article (Gull, 2014: 59-74) titled “Charter of Independence: A Critical Study of Mujib’s Six Point Programme”. It seems most gratifying to note that a scholar of Ayyaz Gull’s stature and ethnic background has preferred to conclude his critical appraisal of the significance of the Six-point freedom charter with the following credible lines: “The critics of the Six Point Programme, (were) more concerned with its political than its economic implications. Mujib’s proposal for substantial control of the economy by the provinces gave birth to an irrational fear in West Pakistanis that the six-point plan would lead to the dismemberment of Pakistan by encouraging dissident tribal and linguistic groups in the west. In reality, Six Point Programme reflected some genuine East Bengali grievances and which were long standing demands of the East Pakistanis who were waiting for these fulfillments for decades. Mujib’s (six-point) movement proved to be a radical departure from the simple autonomy demand of the past. The Six Point Programme aimed towards a confederation, instead of a federation. The demand of full control on rising taxes and expenditure along with the freely convertible currencies and the power to enter into foreign trade relationships, keeping foreign exchange earning separate, was too much for the central government to accommodate. Neither any political party nor the central government of Pakistan gave any detailed explanation why they were opposed to the Six Points Programme” (Gull, 2014: 74).

### **The Six-point Movement in the Making of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Sole Spokesman of Bengali-speaking People of the then East Pakistan**

Although Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was regarded as the top leader of the Awami League when he had launched the six-point movement in early 1966, he was not yet regarded as the “undisputed leader” of all Bangalees of the then East Pakistan. Nor was he called ‘Bangabandhu’ in 1966. He was not the only political leader of the eastern province of Pakistan who had championed the cause of full provincial autonomy. There were other top political leaders even within his party with impressive credentials who were committed to the pursuit of full autonomy. There were also more senior political leaders in other political parties, including Maulana Bhasani, the original founder of the Awami League, who vocally demanded full provincial autonomy. Being essentially disgusted with West Pakistan’s colonial domination and exploitation of the then East Pakistan, Maulana Bhasani had uttered more than once “goodbye” to West Pakistan --- at least a decade earlier than the historic six-point movement. Maulana Bhasani was never willing to compromise on the issue of full provincial autonomy for the then East Pakistan. However, it was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s fearlessness and relentlessness that gave more concrete shape and direction to the autonomy movement. Only a courageous leader of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s stature and caliber could come up with the bold and

creative six-point plan for accruing full autonomy for East Pakistan at a time when Ayub Khan's brute regime was at its pinnacle after consolidating its grip over the entire power structure of the country.

The historic six-point movement had direct bearing and profound impact on the following momentous events: the making of the infamous Agartala conspiracy case against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the 11-point anchored volatile student-mass movement of 1969, the withdrawal of the concocted Agartala conspiracy case and the unconditional release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from solitary confinement on February 22, 1969, the shameful removal of the infamous provincial governor Abdul Monem Khan, the sudden collapse of Ayub Khan's dictatorship and the rise of Yahya Khan's diabolical regime, the general elections in 1970 on the basis of adult franchise, the landslide victory of the Awami League in the general elections in 1970, the spectacular rise of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the sole spokesperson of the Bengali speaking people of the then Pakistan, the nine-month long liberation war in 1971, and finally the spectacular emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation-state on December 16, 1971. Doubtless, those tumultuous events were milestones in the history of Bangladesh's struggle for freedom and independence. There is no doubt that the name of the common thread that had firmly connected those memorable milestones was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The six-point movement was designed to realize full provincial autonomy for East Pakistan, and there is no doubt that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's relentlessness in conceptualizing, starting, and sustaining a pragmatic Bengali nationalistic movement that was deliberately geared toward achieving maximum autonomy had clearly distinguished him from other contemporary autonomists of the then East Pakistan. His fearlessness also made him the most volatile champion of "full provincial autonomy". Despite the most brutal measures that were employed against the chief proponents, organizers and supporters of the six-point movement by the then Central Government of Pakistan and their cohorts and collaborators, the six-point movement had genuinely affected the subsequent political development in Pakistan.

There is no doubt that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would have remained a top Awami League leader even in the absence of a bold and creative provincial autonomy plan in the form of the six-point formula. Had there been no six-point movement in 1966, there is every doubt if Agartala Conspiracy Case would have been hatched out against Sheikh Mujib at that particular time. Had there been no Agartala Conspiracy Case, the student-mass movement of 1969 would not have gained that much intensity on the issue of unconditional release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from imprisonment. Thus the six-point movement, Agartala conspiracy case and the 1969 student-mass movement had provided the much-needed ground and context for the emergence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as *Bangabandhu* (Friend of Bengal).

Subsequently, the people of the then eastern province of Pakistan had vested their full trust in their *Bangabandhu* in the general elections of 1970 that made this extraordinary man their legitimate sole spokesperson and undisputed leader. Indeed, it was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of his people, who had spearheaded Bangladesh's struggle for full-blown independence. Given the fact that the six-point demand had also reflected the legitimate grievances of the people of the then East Pakistan, the six-point movement had garnered spontaneous mass support throughout the province. The timing, first for framing and articulating the six-point formula, and then launching and sustaining a nationalistic movement for realizing the goals of six-point formula was crucially important. The economic and political demands, as stipulated and enumerated in the historic six-point formula, were the frontal assault on the foundation of Pakistan's colonial administrative structure and the authoritarian modes of governance. Doubtless, the historic Six-Point Demand or the Six-Point Formula has been widely credited as the "Freedom Charter" or "Charter of Independence" in the glorious history of Bangladesh's relentless struggle for self-determination from Pakistan's colonial domination and ignominious subjugation.

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