

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Six-Point Programme, and the Impact of Cyclone Bhola

Background: Rise of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

After independence, East Pakistan remained politically marginalized despite its larger population.

In this context, **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** emerged as the **most influential Bengali leader** advocating for political and economic justice for East Pakistan.

- Mujib was an active member of the **All India Muslim Students Federation**, later joining the **Awami League**.
- He rose through politics as a **vocal critic of centralization** and West Pakistan's dominance.
- His vision was based on **provincial autonomy, economic equality, and democracy**.
- Mujibur Rahman became the **symbol of Bengali nationalism**, representing the grievances of millions in East Pakistan.
- He emphasized that Pakistan could only survive through **federalism and respect for majority rule**.

By the early 1960s, Mujib had united the people of East Pakistan under his leadership and began to formally outline their political demands.

The Political Context Leading to the Six Points

During the 1950s and 1960s, central governments based in West Pakistan increasingly used **martial law** and **bureaucratic control** to suppress democratic voices.

- East Pakistan's economy was exploited, and political representation was deliberately weakened.
- The **Constitution of 1962**, imposed by General Ayub Khan, strengthened presidential authority and ignored provincial rights.
- Mujibur Rahman and the **Awami League** argued that Pakistan's unity required **a fair distribution of power and resources**.
- Tensions intensified when West Pakistan continued to dominate trade, defense, and administration.
- The people of East Pakistan started demanding **full provincial autonomy** instead of token participation.

Out of these frustrations, Mujib presented his famous **Six-Point Programme** in **February 1966**, which became the **charter of Bengali rights**.

The Six-Point Programme (1966)

The **Six-Point Programme** outlined Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's vision for a **federal and democratic Pakistan** where East Pakistan could govern its own affairs.

The six points were:

1. **Constitutional Structure:** Pakistan should be a **federation** with parliamentary government elected by universal adult franchise.
2. **Federal Powers:** The **central government** should control only **defense and foreign affairs**.
3. **Currency System:** Each wing should have **separate fiscal and monetary policies**, or effective safeguards for separate currencies.
4. **Taxation and Revenue:** The **federal government** should not have taxation powers; revenues should belong to provinces.
5. **Foreign Exchange and Trade:** Each wing should manage its own **foreign trade and earnings**.
6. **Control over Resources:** East Pakistan should have control over its **resources and industries**, particularly jute exports.

These points aimed to ensure that **East Pakistan could manage its economy** while remaining part of a united Pakistan.

It was a **peaceful proposal for autonomy**, not secession.

Reasons for Rejection of the Six-Point Program

The **West Pakistani leadership** — both civil and military — **rejected the Six Points**, calling them a threat to national unity.

- They argued it would **weaken the central government** and make Pakistan a loose confederation.
- The military elite feared losing control over **foreign policy, defense, and trade revenues**.
- Industrialists from West Pakistan opposed it because it would **end economic privileges** gained from East Pakistan's exports.
- Politicians like **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto** accused Mujib of **conspiracy and separatism**.

- Mujibur Rahman was **arrested in 1968** and tried in the **Agartala Conspiracy Case**, accused of planning to separate East Pakistan with India's help.

The rejection of these points deepened **East Pakistan's distrust**, convincing many Bengalis that **true equality within Pakistan was impossible**.

The Cyclone Bhola (1970): The Humanitarian Disaster

In **November 1970**, the **Bhola Cyclone** — one of the **deadliest natural disasters in history** — struck East Pakistan.

- Wind speeds exceeded **200 km/h**, destroying villages and crops across the coastal belt.
- Over **500,000 people** were killed, and millions were displaced.
- The **central government's response was slow and inadequate**, failing to provide immediate relief.
- Relief operations were delayed for **weeks**, increasing suffering and anger among survivors.
- Foreign journalists highlighted the **government's negligence**, which further damaged its image.

The cyclone exposed **administrative failure and indifference** from West Pakistan, strengthening anti-government sentiments in East Pakistan.

Political Impact of the Bhola Cyclone

The aftermath of the Bhola Cyclone had a **direct political impact** on Pakistan's future.

- The **Awami League** organized large-scale relief campaigns, gaining immense public support.
- The government's apathy made the **East Pakistanis feel abandoned** by the central authorities.
- During the **1970 general elections**, emotions from the cyclone tragedy translated into a **landslide victory** for the Awami League.
- Mujibur Rahman's party won **167 out of 169 East Pakistani seats** and achieved a **national majority**.
- However, West Pakistani leaders **refused to hand over power**, citing fear of national disintegration.

This refusal destroyed the last hope of reconciliation and led directly to **the political confrontation and civil war of 1971**.

Significance of Mujibur Rahman and His Legacy

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is remembered as the **Father of the Nation** in Bangladesh, but his political legacy holds lessons for Pakistan as well.

- His movement was not initially about separation but about **justice and federal equality**.
- The **failure of the central government** to recognize regional rights turned his movement into a **struggle for independence**.
- Mujib's insistence on **democracy, representation, and autonomy** exposed the weaknesses of Pakistan's centralized system.
- The **Six-Point Programme** remains a historic document symbolizing **the demand for fairness and decentralization**.
- His leadership, though controversial in Pakistan, represents a call for **equitable governance and mutual respect** among provinces.

Conclusion

The story of **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**, the **Six-Point Programme**, and the **Cyclone Bhola** illustrates how **political injustice and administrative neglect** can destroy national unity. Had the central government addressed economic grievances and shown empathy after the cyclone, Pakistan's history might have been different.

The tragedy of 1971 teaches that **nations survive through inclusion, justice, and respect for diversity — not through domination or suppression**.