

# Undisputed Leader of the Bengalis

## Sheik Mujibur Rahman

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

Special to The New York Times

KARACHI, Pakistan, Dec. 8—As Sheik Mujibur Rahman's exuberant election-campaign procession wound through Dacca, East Pakistan, the other day, a young man ran from the crowd and jumped on the leader's truck.

Waving his arms, the youth hugged the Sheik, first on the left shoulder, then the right, then the left again and the right again, then on his chest. Between hugs, the young man mugged and the crowd roared approval as the Sheik, somewhat overwhelmed, tried to fend him off graciously, finally shoving him off.

It was the kind of display that is familiar to the 50-year-old Mujib, as he is called. He is the undisputed leader of East Pakistan's 75 million restive Bengalis, a distinction confirmed by his strong showing yesterday in the election for members of a national assembly to draft a constitution.

His party has carried all but two of the 130 seats decided in the East and it seemed probable that it would come close to 160. The East has 162 assembly seats.

It is virtually certain that Sheik Mujib, party leader of the Awami League, will have a key role in framing Pakistan's first democratically prepared constitution and in the 313-member assembly.

If he does not—if President Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan feels compelled to halt his steps to return the country to civilian, representative rule—Mujib is likely to lead an East Pakistani struggle to secede from the 23-year-old Moslem state.

### Rejects 'Surrender'

"I am not the man to surrender and no power of armed forces can suppress 70 million people," he declared in a pre-election interview.

Angry after a tour of the East Pakistani islands devastated by a cyclone last month, he warned that "if the polls are frustrated" the people of East Pakistan "will owe it to the million who have died to make the supreme sacrifice of another million lives, if need be, so that we can live as a free people" and be master of the province's destiny.

In three decades of political life, Sheik Mujib's face, thick black hair and mustache have appeared on many protest placards.

An admiring biographer has noted approvingly that Mujib has spent a total of 9 years and 8 months in jail for political offenses—"the longest period for any Pakistani politician."

Opposed to British rule before Pakistan was partitioned from India in 1947, the Sheik in the 1950's and 1960's was an outspoken advocate of East Pakistani autonomy in the face of domination by the Punjabis of West Pakistan, 1,000 miles away across India.

In 1965 he sponsored demands that the central Government, based in the West, surrender to the East and West wings all powers except defense and foreign affairs. His points are expected to become a major issue in drafting a constitution.

MMR JALAC(1)

## Jailed Several Times

Opposed to the former President, Mohammad Ayub Khan, the Sheikh was jailed several times before being tried in 1968 on conspiracy charges with 34 other defendants.

President Ayub had accused them of plotting with India to break East Pakistan from the West. Violent national protest against President Ayub and the trial led to the defendants' freedom and resignation of Field Marshal Ayub in March, 1969, after 11 years of dictatorship.

The affair carried the Sheikh to the heights of popularity in Bengal. The day after his release a million people turned out to hear him speak at a racecourse.

"Nobody ever got in the history of the world a public meeting of one million people," he said in his characteristic lilting high-pitched English. "I have got it."

No one has ever accused Sheikh Mujib of false modesty. "I don't depend on anybody except God and my people, and you know my people love me and nobody can suppress me and my people," he told a visiting correspondent.

One diplomat said, "Even when you are talking alone with him, he talks like he's addressing 60,000 people in Yankee Stadium."

His keenest supporters concede that Mujib is no intellectual. Kamal Hossain, a very close adviser, attributes his popularity to two decades of carefully developed organized support in his party.



Associated Press

**"Nobody can suppress me and my people."**

The Sheikh favors strict neutrality, including withdrawal from the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. He speaks admiringly of the struggle of "Vietnam's nationalists" against the United States. Still he is considered a moderate, even a rightist, compared with the Soviet and Maoist leanings of other aspiring Pakistani leaders.

Sheikh Mujib was born into a middle-class land owner's family in the east Bengal village of Tongipara on March 17, 1920. He lives in a large house in a fashionable quarter of Dacca with his wife, Fajilotdun, three sons and two daughters.

In his nonpolitical hours—few since the campaign began in January—he earns his living as an insurance salesman.

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