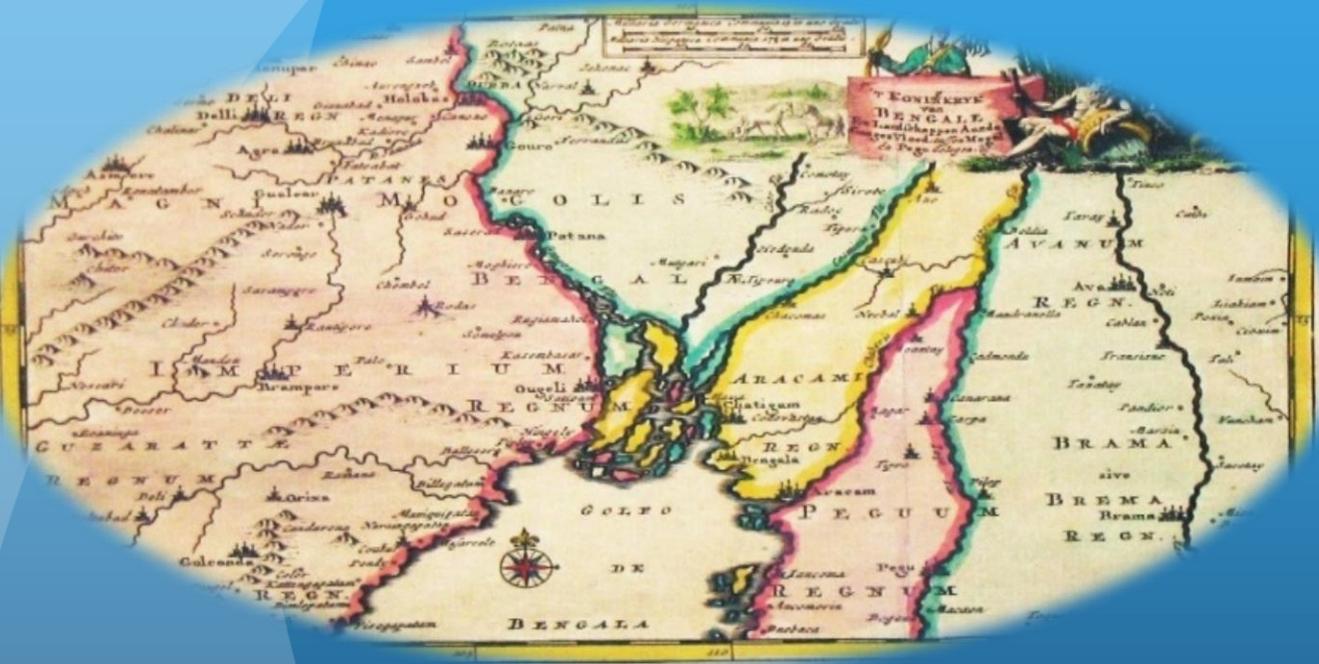
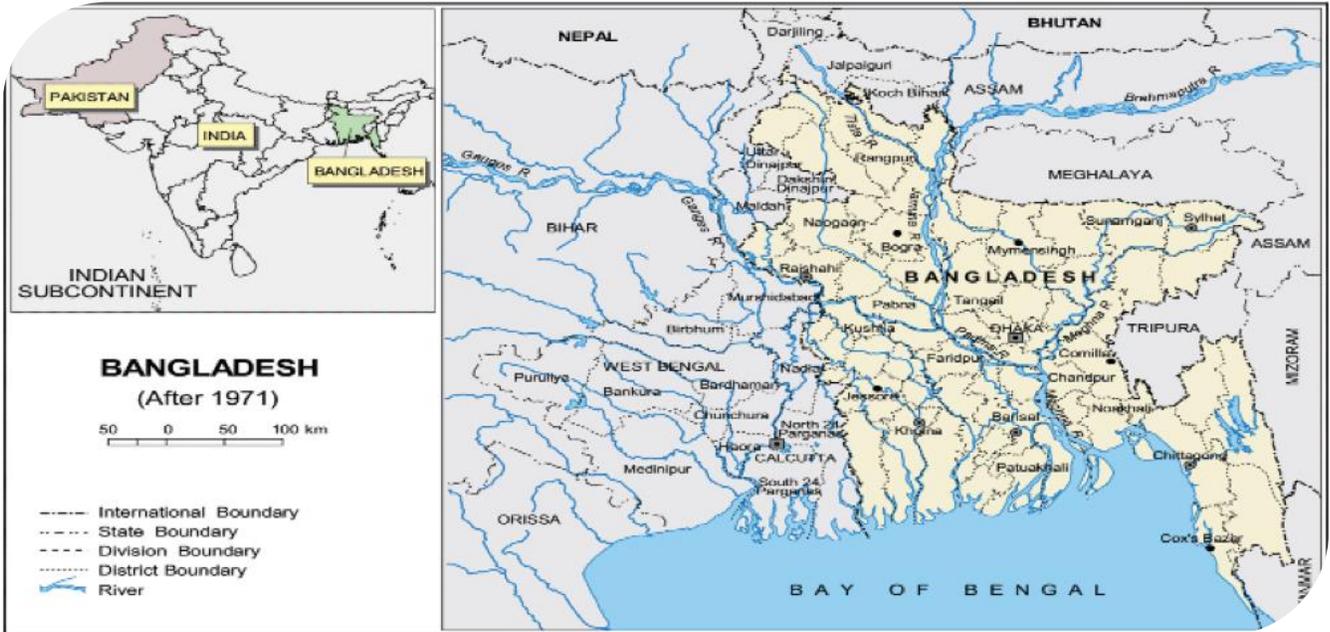


ALL ROADS LEAD TO RAMNA



An exhibition to mark the 45th anniversary of
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's
historical speech on 7th March 1971



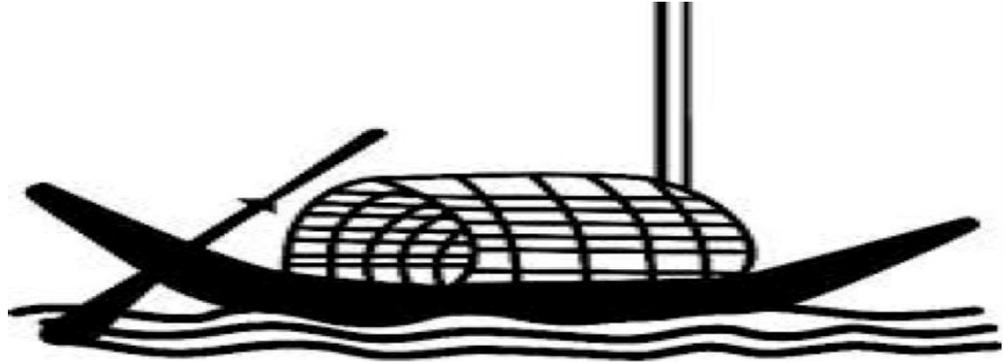
CONCEPTS

All Roads lead to Ramna is an exhibition that explores language, culture and oratory during the formative period of Bangladesh's history. Using multimedia, sound, photography, film, performance art and installation this exhibition will tell of an event in 1971 that led to the redrawing of the world map. This will be the first comprehensive exhibition of this kind in the UK relevant to London's Bengali community in Tower Hamlets and beyond. By creating an experiential space for awakening senses and emotions, *All Roads lead to Ramna* will also provide opportunities to involve and inspire the younger generation of Londoners.

The immediate focus of the exhibition, the historical speech of Bangabandhu on 7th March 1971, was a culmination of all the strands of our national movements for freedom; and the map of Bangladesh

symbolically reflects this, and will be a recurring image throughout the exhibition. The map of Bangladesh manifests our struggle for independence where all the mighty rivers of the Indian subcontinent flow into the Bay of Bengal. Each and every river represents a strand of our struggle for emancipation. Like the rivers, merging into the Bay of Bengal, the various strands of our struggles culminated into one final demand for independence on the seventh day of March 1971 at the Raman Racecourse. On that momentous day in our history the vast field of Ramna turned into a sea of people.

The currents on that day were so strong and the waves so fierce that the people of Bangladesh needed a skilled sailor to navigate the boat safely to the shore, which Bangabandhu provided masterfully.



Reflecting on the speech, one hears the thundering voice of Bangabandhu saying: *Bangladesher ethihash korun ethihash - bangler mumurjo manusher korun arthonader ethihash* (the history of Bangladesh is full of sorrows; the history of Bengal is the history of the oppressed and the voiceless). Here one can see that Bangabandhu not only highlighted the grievances of the people of Bangladesh but also gave them a voice that they lacked for thousands of years. Here we can recall the words of Rabindranath - *shob potho ashe mele gelo sheshe...*, *bhasha hare momo bijone rudhona chiro jiboner banior bedhona prokasher lagi koreche shadhona* (all roads meet at the end in our eyes, speechless and lost in the forest and crying to express life's entire pain).

THE JOURNEY

This exhibition intends to narrate the incredible story of the people of a land divided by religion 23 years earlier. Within a relatively short space of time, the people of Bangladesh turned the tide to create a secular state in which they could be free economically, politically and culturally. The poster below shows the resolve of the people of Bangladesh, which is echoed in the writing of an Indian Bengali writer: “The other side of Bengal (*East Bengal*) is distinguishing itself from this side of Bengal (*West Bengal*) by undertaking an exemplary struggle and making sacrifices with their blood for self-determination and to establish themselves first and foremost as Bengalis and secondly as Muslims. These passages of history are undoubtedly our greatest experiences of this century (20th)”.

The exhibition aims to take the visitors through the long, hard journeys to freedom,

*“The struggle this time is the struggle for our emancipation.
The struggle this time is the struggle for independence”.*

commencing with the 1952 Language Movement, when the Pakistan government, despite the fact that Bengali was the language of the majority population of Pakistan, attempted to impose Urdu as the state language. In the resulting protests, several people died on the streets of Dhaka on 21 February 1952. This is the only known instance in history where people laid down their lives for the protection and preservation of the integrity of their mother tongue. And as a tribute to the martyrs of the Bangla Language Movement, the United Nations declared 21st February as International Mother Language Day in November 1999.



Hindus of Bengal, Christians of Bengal, Buddhists of Bengal, Muslims of Bengal
WE ARE ALL BENGALIS

In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced the Six Point Programme to achieve autonomy for the people of then East Pakistan. Many people died during the Autonomy Movement. Likewise in 1969 the people of East Pakistan took to the streets to overthrow the military regime of Field Marshal Ayub Khan. In March 1969 the people of East Pakistan in particular were successful in ending the ten year reign of Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Once again success came at the expense of the people of East Pakistan sacrificing their lives. The Field Marshal was replaced by a general by the name of Yahiya Khan on 25 March 1969. The general promised to hold a general election on the basis of universal adult franchise.

Between December 1970 and January 1971 the first ever free and fair election in the twenty-three-year history of Pakistan was held. The Awami League, under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a landslide victory. The Awami league won 167 out of 169 seats in the national assembly and 288 out of 300 seats in the provincial assembly in East Pakistan. This gave them an overwhelming majority both in the provincial as well as the national assembly. Thereupon everything began to take a downward slide. The military regime of General Yahiya failed to honour its promises of transferring power to the elected representatives of the people led by Bangabandhu.

The poster below shows the economic disparity between Bangladesh and West Pakistan

সোনার বাংলা খুশান কেন ?

বৈষম্য বিষয়	বাংলাদেশ	পশ্চিম পাকিস্তান
রাজস্ব খাতে ব্যয়	১৫০০ কোটি টাকা	৫০০০ কোটি টাকা
উন্নয়ন খাতে ব্যয়	৩০০০ কোটি টাকা	৬০০০ কোটি টাকা
বৈদেশিক সাহায্য	শতকরা ২০ ভাগ	শতকরা ৮০ ভাগ
বৈদেশিক দ্রব্য আমদানী	শতকরা ২৫ ভাগ	শতকরা ৭৫ ভাগ
কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের চাকরী	শতকরা ১৫ জন	শতকরা ৮৫ জন
সামরিক বিভাগে চাকরী	শতকরা ১০ জন	শতকরা ৯০ জন
চাউল মণ প্রতি	৫০ টাকা	২৫ টাকা
আটা মণ প্রতি	৩০ টাকা	১৫ টাকা
সরিষার তৈল সের প্রতি	৫ টাকা	২.৫০ পয়সা
স্বর্ণ প্রতি ভরি	১৭০ টাকা	১৩৫ টাকা

Why Golden Bengal is a ruin?

Inequalities	Bangladesh	West Pakistan
Revenue spending	1500 crores Taka	5000 crores Taka
Development spending	3000 crores Taka	6000 crores Taka
Foreign aid	20%	80%
Import of foreign goods	25%	75%
Central government employees	15 out of 100	85 out of 100
Defence/Military personnel	10 out 100	90 out of 100
Rice per maund (37.324kg)	50 Taka	25 Taka
Ata (wheat) per maund (37.3244kg)	30 Taka	15 Taka
Mustard oil per ser (933.10g)	5 Taka	2.50 paisa
Gold per gram	170 Taka	135 Taka

Pakistan's failure to honour these promises led to massive protests and a Non-cooperation Movement between January and March 1971 in East Pakistan. On 7th March 1971 Bangabandhu addressed a public meeting at Ramna Racecourse. This was the biggest public gathering Bangladesh had ever experienced. In front of over a million people, Bangabandhu stood high as a reassuring brother, spoke like a leader and prepared, instructed and inspired people like a commander-in-chief for the imminent war of independence. This speech has come to be known most popularly as "the Historical 7th March Speech".

However, for the poet Nirmolendu Goon, this was the moment when the people of Bangladesh took ownership of the word "Independence".

And for the poet Mohadav Shah, 7th March is the "Birthday of Independence". Whilst writer and columnist Abdul Gaffer Chowdhury believes that the historical 7th March speech is the "safety barrier" for the people of Bangladesh. Whenever the founding values of Bangladesh are challenged, people have taken inspiration from this speech and will continue to do so for generations to come. At the same time, the majority of people of Bangladesh fondly remember this day as the most glorious day in their lives and a symbol of oikkoh o brathitho-unity and brotherhood.

Then came the fateful night of 25th March, when General Tikka Khan let loose everything at his disposal to wipe out the people of Bangladesh.

The brutality was so ruthless that even overall commander General Niazi admitted that "The military action was a display of stark cruelty, more merciless than the massacres at Bukhara and Baghdad by Changez Khan and Halaku Khan, or at Jallianwala Bagh by the British General Dyer." However, the people of Bangladesh did not fail to follow the instructions of their leader and commander. They turned every house into a fortress and used whatever they had to resist the Pakistani army. Indeed they followed his instructions to the letter: "*Bear in mind that since we have given blood, we will give more. By the grace of Allah, we will surely liberate the people of this country*".

The people of Bangladesh made supreme sacrifices with lives and honours to liberate their country. After nine months of war, Bangladesh was freed on 16th December 1971. However, for the people of Bangladesh, as Tajuddin Ahmed said, "the full victory of the war of independence will be achieved upon the return of Bangabandhu". Indeed Bangabandhu returned to his beloved people and country on 10th January 1972. This day marked the end of colonial rule and the beginning of a new journey into the future for the people of Bangladesh. This exhibition will cover the period from 21 February 1952 to 10th January 1972.

EXPLORATION OF WORDS

All Roads Lead to Ramna aims to bring to life Bangabandhu's words across and around the exhibition space by breaking them down and displaying them on the walls and floors and suspending them from the ceilings in varying forms. The various mediums will manifest the unique artistry and the sequential nature of the speech. The exhibition will bring together the memories, experiences, stories and dreams of parents, grandparents and their contribution to the establishing of a nation in various ways however big or small. Feelings, words, emotions and thoughts will be pinned up on boards with bamboo cocktail sticks.

EXTRACTS FROM 7TH MARCH SPEECH



“Today I appear before you with a heavy heart. You know and understand everything. We tried with our lives. But the painful matter is that now the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur are stained with the bloods of my brothers”.

“Now the people of Bangla want freedom. The people of Bangla want to live. The people of Bangla want to have their rights”.

“The people of Bangladesh cast their vote overwhelmingly for me, for Awami League. Our National Assembly will sit. We will draw up the Constitution there. And we will build this country. The people of this country will have economic, political and cultural freedom”.

“They have called the Assembly. They have got to accept my demands:

- First, martial law must be withdrawn;*
- All army personnel must go back to the barracks;*
- There has to be an inquiry into the way the killings were carried out;*
- And the power has to be handed over to the people’s representatives”.*

“I am requesting you, you are my brothers. Do not make this country a hell and destroy it. We will not see each other’s face in the future. If we can solve things in a peaceful manner, we can at least live as brothers. That is why I am requesting you; do not try and run military rule in my country”.

“Hindus, Muslims, Bangalis and non-Bangalis, all those who live in this Bangla are our brothers. The responsibility of protecting them is upon you. Ensure that our reputation is not smeared in any way”.

“If one more shot is fired and if my people are killed again then my request to you is; build a fortress in each and every home. Face the enemy with whatever you have”.

“You can’t keep seven crores of people subjugated. Since we have learnt to die, no one can dominate us”.

“Bear in mind that since we have given blood, we will give more. By the grace of Allah, we will surely liberate the people of this country.

The struggle this time is the struggle for our emancipation.

The struggle this time is the struggle for independence”.



EXPLORATION OF SOUNDS

We will enter a room where we will hear the voice of a woman crying; she is the voice of her nation. She is holding and tapping a bamboo stick as she sings a song of lament, a plea for her nation to be free. Thousands of women have gathered with bamboo sticks, arrows and bows in their hands as though the war is eminent. The village woman Monwara Bibi sing her self-composed song while tapping on the bamboo stick: *mori haay ree haay dhokhe poran jaayah, shunar Bangla shoshan hoilo poran kaindha jaayah* (Oh my heart is broken with sorrows, the golden Bengal has become a ruin, my heart cries)



Slogans

- **Joi Bangla Joi Bangabandhu**
 - **Tumar desh, amar desh:**
Bangladesh Bangladesh
(Your country, my country:
Bangladesh Bangladesh)
 - **Amar desh, tumar desh:**
Bangladesh Bangladesh
(My country- your country -
Bangladesh Bangladesh)
- Tumar, amar tikhana: *Padma, Meghna, Jomuna***
(Your and my destination
[identity] Padma, Meghna, Jomuna)
- **Tumar netha, amar netha: *Sheikh Mujib Sheikh Mujib***
(Your leader my leader - Sheikh
Mujib Sheikh Mujib)
 - **Tumar bhai, Amar bhai: *Mujib bhai Mujib bhai***
(Your brother, my brother - Mujib
bother Mujib brother)
 - **Mujib bhaiyer poth dhoro:**
Bangladesh shadhin koro
(Follow the path of bother Mujib
and liberate Bangladesh)
 - **Bir Bangalee ashro dhoro:**
Bangladesh shadhin koro
(Brave Bengalis take the arms and
free Bangladesh)

- **Ghore ghore dhurgho ghoro: *Bangladesh shadhin koro***

(Turn every home into a fortress of resistance and liberate Bangladesh)

- **Aposh na shangram: *Shangram Shangram***

(Compromise or struggle - Struggle Struggle)

- **Porishod na rajpoth: *Rajpoth rajpoth***

(Assembly / parliament or streets - streets streets)

Songs

- **Amar bhai er rokthe ranganu ekushe**
February ami ki bulithe pari (how can I forget the 21st February that has been soaked by the bloods of my brothers)
- **Amar sonar Bangla ami tumay bhalo bhashi** (my Bengal of gold I love you)
- **Nirjathither desher maaje jonogoner nao Mujib biya jaore** (in the land of oppressed Mujib row the boat of the people)
- **Shuno ekti Mujiburer konto theke** (listen from the voice of one Mujib)
- **Amra shobai Bangalee** (we are all Bengalis)
- **Shabpotho eshe mele gelo sheshe** (all roads meet at the end)

EXPLORATION OF IMAGES

While the exhibition documents the political story, the landslide election victory of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the betrayals by collaborators, the massacre of intellectuals two days before the surrender of the Pakistani forces - it also aims to display other stories that have been difficult to assimilate. Accompanying the exhibition will be a season of short films by local artists and filmmakers exploring the subject using digital media, these films will do some of the work in helping to reach out to those who have not been exposed to this history before. The archival images in the exhibition will have text and explanation accompanying the photographs to bring the importance of this struggle home to Londoners and to bring immediacy to it's historical, cultural, political and poetic significance.



WHY

The project aims to project a unifying view of the country's ethnic, linguistic, and political history by using imagery, sound and multimedia. *All Roads Lead to Ramna* will draw on the people of Bangladesh as its most valued asset: it will allow diversity of local stories and the plurality of voices to be heard.

WHERE

Old Truman Brewery, Ely's Yard, 15 Hanbury Street, London E1 6QR

Or

Whitechapel Gallery, 77-82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

WHEN

The exhibition will open on 7th March 2016 in London. The main exhibition will be held in London between 7th and 21st March 2016. Thereafter the exhibition will leave London for tour of England, Scotland and Wales followed by the World tour between 2016 and 2017 subject to further research and development. However, we plan to run various workshops and film show throughout the month of March 2016 particularly in London.

THE GOALS

- To present Bangabandhu's speech of 7th march 1971 as one of the most inspiring speeches in the world;
- To present Bangabandhu's speech of 7th march 1971 as an only living historical speech;
- To demonstrate its relevance and applicability for present and future struggling masses across the globe;
- To highlight Bangabandhu's commitment for the people of developing worlds in general and people of Palestine in particular.

“As a man, what concerns mankind concerns me. As a Bangalee, I am deeply involved in all that concerns Bangalees. This abiding involvement is born out of and nourished by love, enduring love, which gives meaning to my politics and to my very being”.

THE TEAM

Nooruddin Ahmed
Agroni Research
020 8981 1020
07764198815
nooruddin.ahmed@agrone.co.uk
www.agrone.co.uk

Ansar Ahmed Ullah
Agroni Research
020 8981 1020
07956 890689
researcher@agrone.co.uk
www.agrone.co.uk

Sunara Begum
Creative Producer
Visual Artist / Photographer
07929 874 327
info@sunarabegum.com
www.sunarabegum.com

END
