**Mr. Mohammed Israel**



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Age: 63

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Interviewed by: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Israel was the accountant of the Bangladesh Steering Committee. The steering committee was formed in Britain, in April, 1971 to coordinate the activities of all the subcommittees formed in favour of the independence of Bangladesh. From his financial record, the total amount raised for the Bangladesh cause was £406,856

My name is Mohammed Israel. My age is 63. My address is 24 Copeland Rd, Walthamstow E17 9DB. I come from Maulvibazar, Sylhet.

**Q: Do you feel that the independence war is part of your history?**
MMI: The independence of Bangladesh is the share achievement of movement of the ‘East Pakistan Liberation Front’ here in the UK. This can be interpreted if we analyse the incidents chronologically. East Pakistan Liberation Front was formed in August 1969, at 15 Vine Street in Aston, Birmingham with the target to make Bangladesh an independent state. The president was Abdus Sabur Choudhury, and the secretary was Late Azizul Huq Bhuyia. East Pakistan Liberation Front used to publish a Bangla newsletter, every fortnight as the voice of the organisation. It was published from 171, Wright Street, Smallheath, Birmingham. The name of the newsletter was ‘Bidrohi Bangla’. The long years of oppression of East Pakistan by West Pakistani administration was described in this newsletter chronologically.

A huge public meeting was organised by the East Pakistan Liberation Front at Digbeth Civic Hall in Birmingham, on 29 November 1970. Lots of Pakistani and Indian elites attended the meeting. Tariq Ali, one of the student leaders of Pakistan also attended the meeting. After discussing the oppression and the on going ill motivated administration policy of Pakistan, the meeting decided that there is no other way to solve the crisis but to make East Pakistan an independent state. The independence movement was strengthened from then. The situation in Bangladesh and reactions of the other countries were also considered with due respect.

In March 1971, it was decided to demonstrate and burn the Pakistani flag in front of the Pakistani High Commission in London.



On the morning of 5th March, we went to London from Birmingham by coach and surrounded Pakistan High Commission. We brought down the Pakistan flag from the High Commission office building and burned in front of BBC photographer, Mr. E. Himlton-West and other media men of different countries. We also burnt the photograph of Yayha Khan. We wrote ‘Joi Bangla’ ‘Swadhin Bangla’ and other slogans on the wall of the High Commission. We declared the independence of Bangladesh on that day. The memorandum of the independence of Bangladesh was handed over to Pakistan High Commissioner Suliman Ali by Azizul Haque Bhuyian, Secretary of East Pakistan Liberation Front. We shouted and chanted that from today we are citizens of an independent state of Bangladesh. We shouted that we have no connection with the state of Pakistan, withdraw the Pakistani troops from Bangladesh and recognise Bangladesh.

This incident was immediately broadcasted all over the world through radio, television and newspapers. We demonstrated and rallied for long days, and the news of the movement was disseminated throughout the world. The world became anxious to know the latest in East Pakistan. The television channels in UK showed us and described the then present situation in East Pakistan, and also highlighted the ill practice of oppression by the West Pakistan for long days. All the Bengalis in UK found courage after seeing the incident of burning the Pakistani flag in front of Pakistani High Commission on the 5th of March 1971 and an all-party meeting was called at Hyde Park, on 7th March 1971. People from all over the UK gathered at Hyde Park at about 10 am. The participants then marched towards the Pakistan High Commission after the end of the meeting. The High Commission office was surrounded and the people showed their disappointment and anger in the procession. The procession chanted the independence of Bangladesh. The number of participants was more than ten thousand. The Metropolitan Police estimated that was the biggest procession in the history of England.

Afterward we kept a close look on the events back in Bangladesh. On 25th March, we came to know about the genocide in Dhaka and Mukti Juddha (liberation war) started and we instantly gathered in Smallheath Park in Birmingham to protest the killing and highly supported the activities of the Mukti Juddha. In that meeting the greater interest of the independence of Bangladeshi movement East Pakistan Liberation Front was dissolved and a new committee was formed by the name of Bangladesh Action Committee. Mr. Jaglul Haque Pasha was the president and Mr. Azizul Haque Bhuyia was the secretary of the committee. After forming the committee on 27th March 1971, we requested all to form Bangladesh Action subcommittees all over UK and 85 committees were formed in the UK including (the) Middle-East.

We knew that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was missing. We tried in every way to find out the position and status of missing Bangabandhu, we sent a Barrister from London to Pakistan. We contributed £500 from our committee regarding this matter. The barrister found that Bangabandhu was alive and in Pakistani custody. We took steps to gather world support for the independence of Bangladesh. We started to find the countries those had arms deal with Pakistan. I was assigned to keep clear accounts of the money and expenses.

Bangladesh Action Committee Accounts

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I was the chairman of the Audit Committee, of the Bangladesh Action committee. I professionally kept a clear-cut account of the daily money collected and gave inspiration daily to donors and collectors.

Gathering and collecting information of the world sentiment about the problem of East Pakistan was my responsibility. I gathered information from five international newspapers namely The Times, The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Observer and The International Herald Tribune. We were figuring out which countries were favouring Pakistan and which weren’t, and we took necessary actions according to our findings. Initially India, USSR, Britain and British media were in favour of Bangladesh.

We used to find out the country that is supplying arms to Pakistan and helping Pakistan in other ways, we then demonstrated in front of the foreign offices of those countries in London. I have preserved those newspaper cuttings. On 30 June 1971, the ship, Padma, loaded with arms and ammunitions, was preparing to leave Montreal port of Canada to Pakistan, we came to know the information and we gathered in front of the Canadian High Commission in London, and we demanded the suspension of the supply. The shipment was stopped because of our demonstration. On the 22nd of July 1971, France Government decided to stop arms and ammunition to Pakistan. On 4th of August 1971, USA foreign Aid $220 million was suspended. The 7th naval fleet of America started moving towards the Bay of Bengal, to help Pakistan. We demonstrated against the move and later they suspended the advancement. We also succeeded to cancel the shipment of the £10-milllion worth of arms and ammunition according to the US arms deal, by our protest.

Her Majesty, The Queen Elizabeth sent especially personal message to Yahya Khan, the president of Pakistan to save the lives and look after the health of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that is why Pakistan Government did not have the courage to kill Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He remained safe and in good health. We got our independence easily with a very short period of time, due to the presence of our great internationally recognised leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The Bangladesh Steering Committee was formed on the 24th of April, 1971 in Coventry, to coordinate the activities of all the sub-committees formed in favour of the independence of Bangladesh. On 21st of June 1971 there was a meeting at Paris of 12 donor nations of the World Bank, to discuss grants to Pakistan. We, 120 members, mostly from Birmingham Action Committee went there and we had rallies, protest and demonstration and later we were able to cancel the grant to Pakistan. Almost all countries stopped giving aid to Pakistan and Pakistan became bankrupt and withdrew the membership from the Royal Commonwealth on 14 August 1971.

On 11th August 1971, a special military court was set up to convict Bangabandhu as a rastrodrohy (treason charge), and later to execute Bangabandhu, we protested against the plan and the court was postponed.

On 27th April 1971, the Pakistan cricket team came to UK; we gathered and demonstrated at all the places where they played in UK. From our demonstration we drew world attention with the picture of killings in Bangladesh and asked the world to help and recognise Bangladesh. We also had fights with Pakistanis with knives and some our Bengali demonstrators were injured.

The British parliament used to discuss the issue of the independence war of Bangladesh, nearly everyday; it was due to our relentless movement. On 3rd May 1971, 300 British MPs voted in favour of Bangladesh, in the parliament. British aid to Pakistan was stopped.

China was in favour of Pakistan and against Bangladesh. Edward Heath and the then president of World Bank, Mr. Robert McNamara, had a meeting in London and concluded the independence of Bangladesh. In this they put pressure on Pakistan to give independence to Bangladesh. There were over 10 million refugees in India. The Indian government considered the world opinion in favour of Bangladesh. Then the Indian army came forward to fight for the freedom of Bangladesh. On the other hand, the (Bengali) freedom fighters were armed with light arms, there would have been a great loss of life, and the war would have lasted for a long period like the Vietnam war.

We the Bengalis living in UK were so united and so strong that our movement was very successful to bring the World sentiment in favour of Bangladesh soon. That is a very important reason that we got our independence within 266 days of the beginning of the Mukti Juddha (liberation war). No other country of the world got it’s independence in such a short period of struggle. We created a new glorious record in the history of the world. I have given a very short description of our involvment for the independence movement in 1971. The full description of the whole picture of our overseas independent movement would require a big volume of history.

**Q: Can you remember how much money was raised from the UK?**
MMI: We raised £406,856 in total. The Steering Committee spent £33,212 from the collected money in the total course of the movement. We had 85 Action Committees, and we have the breakdowns of the donations we got from each of the Committee. Birmingham Action Committee donated £67,518. Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury took this amount to Bangladesh and handed over to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Birmingham Action Committee's financial account shows coach hire fare charges of £7,069 from their separate ‘coach hire collection fund’ regarding various days of demonstration in London including Paris.
I was a student of Chartered Accountancy and Cost & Works Accountancy at that time of liberation movement, and my education life was doomed because of my full time involvement in the movement. My syllabus was changed later.

The role of Bangabandhu was above everybody else, for the independence of Bangladesh, so it was impossible to achieve the freedom in his absence. In this point we sent a barrister to Pakistan to find the whereabouts of the missing Bangabandhu. Q C Tom Williams was the barrister sent to Pakistan to find out Bangabandhu on behalf of us. His travel fee was £500, he went to West Pakistan and we managed the whole event.

I was with this (the movement) from the very beginning and I was with this even after the freedom was achieved. I helped accountant general Kazi Mujibur Rahman, for the finalisation of the Steering Committee account of Bangladesh fund.

**Q: Your feeling when the country got its independence in 1971?**
MMI: I was elected as an AGS and later VP of Brindabon College, Habiganj. I organised to set up Student League in Sylhet District in 1961 with the help of Shah Moazzem Hussain, the President of East Pakistan Student League. I was the President of District Student League. I was also the convenor of Sylhet university movement and I was the Vice President of the Sylhet University movement committee in 1962. I have had practical experience in movements. We had bitter experience about Pakistan, because it was dominating us, they were suppressing us by using the army and economically they had all the businesses in their ownership. We were very angry with all this. I came to the UK in August 1969. Before I came to England I completed Chartered Accountancy Articles Clerkship with Mr. M. Saifur Rahman. I was involved against the corrupt politics of Pakistan policy. My name was black listed in the Pakistan Government.

In August 1969 East Pakistan Liberation Front was formed here in Birmingham with the view to free Bangladesh from Pakistani occupation. Then East Pakistan Liberation Front worked step by step for the independence of Bangladesh. After burning the Pakistani flag at the Pakistan High Commission office building in London on the 5th March 1971, we were well organised and prepared in our heart and soul to face any challenge for Bangladesh. We were ready to give our lives for the freedom movement. Our only motto was to liberate Bangladesh from the Pakistani occupation. On 25th March 1971, when the genocide took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the freedom fight started suddenly in a somewhat unprepared way. We dissolved the East Pakistan Liberation Front and formed the Bangladesh Action Committee in Birmingham and we also encouraged for the formation of action committees in different places of the UK. Mr Azizul Huq Bhuiya went to different places to form committees there. We formed 85 committees all over the UK and in the Middle East.

**Q: Were you involved in campaign for the freedom of Bangladesh?**
MMI: Yes, I was deeply involved in the campaign all through the movement. We went to Paris where the World Bank meeting was held, to grant aid to Pakistan. We demonstrated there. We also protested against grants given to Pakistan by different countries in front of their high commissions office and embassies office in London. Almost all the countries stopped their grants given to Pakistan and it was bankrupt and short of stock of arms and ammunitions. There was no strength for Pakistan to go to war against India. Pakistan told to the world it was their internal affair. We told the world it was an external affair and to help us to save our people and recognise Bangladesh.

John Stonehouse was the founder of ‘Bangladesh Trust’, his secretary was Sheila Buckley.

At the end of April 1971 Pakistan Government declared general pardon to all participants who took part in the (Bengali) liberation movement. At that time some men from the Police force joined in their duties. Pakistan Government showed this picture abroad on TV. On seeing this picture some people abroad were very disappointed about the independence of Bangladesh and assumed that it would be a war like that of Vietnam. At that time I, considering our effective activities in the movement abroad, and the initial world opinion about it, forecasted and told my committee members that Bangladesh will be independent within December 1971.

**Q: What do you feel about Bangladesh now?**
MMI: Bangladesh will be a very good prosperous country. Now it is not doing well, but I forecasted in April 1971 that Bangladesh will be independent within December 1971, and after 20 years of independence of the country it will have its first tooth. Really I was right, Ershad’s government was ousted and democracy started in Bangladesh after 20 years. If one has enough knowledge about the people of Bangladesh and search the world opinion, he will develop an idea as to what will happen in the future. After 40 years Bangladesh will have the taste of independence and corruption will be diminishing and people will enjoy different facilities from the country. As Bangladesh is running by our own people in army, businesses, banks, High Commission offices abroad we are very happy and proud of it. Prosperity of the country is in our own hand and needs good wishes from all of us.

**Q: How did you get the news of friends and families, at the time of war?**
MMI: I did receive news from friends and relatives from Bangladesh. I was in close contact with Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury. So I had updated news from Bangladesh, as Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury was directly connected with the then Bangladesh government in exile and he was also the President of Bangladesh Steering Committee in England.

I received daily information from international newspaper like the Daily Telegraph, The Daily Times, The Daily Guardian, The Observer, The International Herald Tribunal etc. and also from radio and television.

**Q: Do you commemorate national events of Bangladesh?**
MMI: Yes, I participate when I get any opportunity and information.

**Q: We see the Bangladesh High Commission has honoured you because of your participation in the movement of the independence of Bangladesh, did any other organisations offer you their gratitude?**
MMI: Bangladesh Steering Committee of UK and Ex-President of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury gave me certificate of my participation, as the Chairman of the Audit Committee. Mukti Juddha Sangsad has honoured me with certificate. The first secretary of Bangladesh High Commission and Steering Committee of the Action Committee for Liberation of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh in the UK in 1971, Bangladesh Social History and Research Centre, Birmingham also gave me certificates etc.

**Q: Do you plan to settle in Bangladesh in later part of your life?**
MMI: I had a dream of settling in Bangladesh. I studied in Bangladesh; the educational institutes were I had my education by the hard earned money of the poor people of the country. I could have some peace of mind if I could have done some work for the general people of the country. This is an obligation of my mind. I tried to settle in Dhaka just after Independence of the country. I also applied for a plot of land at Rupnagar in Dhaka under the Housing and Settlement Department. I was present when the lottery was being held and they nominated me to draw the lottery tickets. I picked tickets one by one finishing the lottery, my application was not successful. When they saw I was unsuccessful they proposed to give a special plot to me but I refused to take a plot from their special consideration.

DIT was allotting 10 kata of plots in Gulshan, Banani and in Baridhara. I went to DIT and took an application form and applied for one plot on the condition that I’ll pay the full cost of the plot by foreign currency. I sent £1,005 with the application form. This was in 1983. More than a thousand people from the UK applied for the plot only two plots were allotted to UK residents, of this two plots, one was in my name. In the plot allotment I topped the highest point because I applied paying the full price of the plot by foreign exchange. I had a good service record all through my life and the remuneration I was drawing then was within the highest salary bracket in the UK.

DIT advertised the successful allotment list in the newspapers and when they were fully satisfied they sent allotment letters. They sent me allotment letter for one plot referring to the number 155-P and asked me to submit all the necessary papers. I sent all the necessary required papers immediately. I sent all the necessary required papers immediately. I took leave from my very busy, high pressured job responsibility again and again. I went to the Bangladesh High Commission office and attested all the required documents as asked by the DIT. I was happy that I would have a good place to live back in Bangladesh. A few months later they again asked me to submit my matriculation certificate, which I sent. All the necessary required documents in connection with the final plot allotment were collected from me by the DIT. No other documents were left in respect of the plot allotment. If a Mukti Juddha certificate was required, DIT would have written to me at the beginning of their first letter or subsequent letters. This cannot be omitted at all because this is a valuable document to be required.

Later on President Ershad came to power by vote rigging. He was greedy to acquire some plots. He formed a four member committee headed by his Finance Minister, Mr. M.A. Munim to full fill his desire to cancel some plots. All of a sudden nine months later I received a letter from DIT stating that my plot was cancelled by the decision of the Government of Bangladesh (Ershad’s Government) as I had not furnished the Freedom Fighters certificate from the competent authority. The government did not issue the Freedom Fighters certificate to any overseas people who took a leading part in the Liberation Movement in 1971. If it were to be issued I would have received the Freedom Fighters certificate.

I received the plot cancellation letter the day when we had my company’s AGM and this affected my sentiment very badly because DIT took all the necessary care for the allotment of the plot and advertised my name in the newspaper. People saw my name in the newspaper and subsequently my allotted plot was cancelled by the corrupt Ershad government. It was nothing but a serious insult to me. In this connection, I was deeply shocked and lost concentration in my very responsible job. In addition to my normal job, I was given special additional responsibility of investing large sums of money in the market regularly at my own initiative. This was done with high efficiency and accuracy and not a mistake occurred during my long busy service life. Everybody was highly satisfied with my service. Owing to this shock I was sometimes absent minded, sad and this affected my concentration at my job. It repeatedly appeared in my mind one after another, what I did before and during the liberation movement, taking risks of my own life and damaged my prospective career. I could not control myself at all. It was noticed by my Managing Director and he observed me very closely and noted my problems in my personal file. At the time of a big merger of the company, this note adversely affected my service and I was made redundant. I lost my highly paid job as well as a substantial amount of pension fund. The benefit I got from my chairman is that he gave me a personal and private award of £10,000 as an appreciation of my efficient service.

I then went to Bangladesh and contacted the Finance Minister, Mr. M.A. Munim who was the Chairman of the Plot Reject Committee as well as one of the top position holders in the government official. His view was that the decision of his Plot Reject Committee’s cancellation of my plot was not right at all. He felt sorry about it and strongly recommended on my application to RAJUK and the Land Minister to return my plot.

The recommendations were given from Foreign Minister, Mr. Humayun Rashid Choudhury and Vice President of Bangladesh, Mr. Shah Moazzem Hussain and a certificate from the Ex-President of Bangladesh, Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury. In connection with the Liberation Movement 1971 there were only two competent right people as an authority to give Mukti Juddha certificates. Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury was one of them. Despite these request to RAJUK, they did not return my plot. They asked me to show a Mukti Juddha certificate. I applied to the Mukti Juddha Sangsad for a certificate after fulfilling all the long formalities and procedures. Sometime later I received the Mukti Juddha certificate from the Mukti Juddha Sangsad and submitted it to RAJUK. They did not consider this certificate and asked me to show Mukti Juddha certificate from the Ministry of Defence and that my name should be written in the Bangladesh gazette. I applied to the Defence Ministry with all of my documents. It was President Hussain Muhammed Ershad who was the main authority to sign the Mukti Juddha certificate and that is why I did not get the Mukti Juddha certificate.

I am surprised to know how Hussain Muhammed Ershad got a plot in Baridhara in the DIT plot allotment advertised in the newspaper dated 21st December 1985. His name was not there. Who got my allotted 155-P plot and how and in what respect?

Whenever, I went to Bangladesh and attended RAJUK, the secretary of Estate, Mr. Abdur Rahman Bhuiyan to pleased me takes my file from the store room and looks at the file again and again. He told me that my case would be considered in due course of time but the Secretary of the Estate Mr. Abdur Rahman Bhuiyan did not submit my file to the board meeting of RAJUK. For his assurance I waited to hearing from RAJUK a decision but it was nothing but simply waste my time. I wasted more than nine weeks and lost my job. I repeatedly requested him and the chairman to submit my file to the RAJUK board meeting. He told me that he would do this but eventually he did not take any action. He intentionally held my file with some evil purpose otherwise he would have submitted my file to the board meeting of RAJUK. If he had submitted my file to the RAJUK board meeting I would have easily got my plot back because Mr. M.A. Munim the Chairman of the Plot Reject Committee recommended it. On the other hand he was also one of the top government authorities in relation to the Ershad Government in plot cancellation decision making body. It carried full value to get my plot back. In addition the certificate from Mr. Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury carried higher value because he was one of the main competent authorities for freedom fighter certificates as he led the Liberation Movement abroad in 1971. There were also various certificates from other authorities remained in my file.

My plot application deposit money is still lying with RAJUK.

Later on when Mrs. Khaleda Zia was in power, I wrote to the Finance Minister Mr. M. Saifur Rahman, about the Mukti Juddha certificate. He wrote to me acknowledging the receipt of my letter and sent my paper to the Prime Minister’s office and also to the Ministry of Defence. The Defence Ministry officially took all the necessary information from the Bangladesh High Commission office in London. They were pleased and verbally told me that they will issue a certificate with Prothik Padak (Freedom Fighter Medal). Later on they felt sorry that they were unable to issue a certificate as there was no official authority appointed by the government to sign the Mukti Juddha certificate.

On 20th October 1991, the Prime Minister Mrs. Khaleda Zia was on a short visit to London. She arranged a meeting at the Hilton Hotel. I attended that meeting and told her about my allotted plot that was cancelled by the Ershad Government. She told me that, she knew about the cancellation of plots by Ershad Government. She told me that she would personally look into my matter. I immediately provided her all the necessary documents attached with two applications, one was a short summary of the facts, and the other was long describing details in connection with the plot. She returned to Bangladesh and sued President Ershad and recovered 22 plots from his possession. What did she do with those 22 plots?

I constantly applied to her but I had no response. I went to Bangladesh, submitted some applications and reminders to her office and tried to make an appointment with her but failed.

When Sheikh Hasina was Prime Minister I wrote a few letters and reminders to her about my plot but did not respond to any of my letters. I wrote letters and gave reminders to her finance minister Mr. S.M. Kibria and her Foreign Minister Mr. Abdus Samad Azad but no response was received from them. It seems to me, I wrote to the graveyard man, not to the government authority responsible for people. They are only power hungry people knowing the art of fighting, taking position in the chair. They don’t know the responsibility and accountability to the public from the position of their chair. How we expect dream of progress and prosperity of the country from those types of irresponsible and ignorant people.

From my overall experience, Bangladesh is running mostly by the incompetent corrupt politicians including some officials. They have no sympathy for the general people. They do not know the courtesy to respond to public letters. They are ignorant and that is why Bangladesh is not rapidly progressing. Otherwise Bangladesh would have been one of the progressive model countries in Asia. We achieved independence within counted 266 days of Liberation War which broke the world history record.

What I benefited from the Bangladesh government, I lost my prospective career in the full time engagement in the Bangladesh Movement and on the other hand I got a plot of land duly allotted by DIT. At last this plot of land was cancelled by the corrupt Ershad Government. I was involved in RAJUK plot fighting against corruption. No doubt I’ll get justice regarding this matter as I never got involved in corruption. Certainly I’ll get the right price of my honesty against corruption.