

Bangladesh High Commission London  
Press Release

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**Bangabandhu's historic 8 January 1972 UK visit celebrated by London High Commission**



Bangladesh High Commission, London yesterday organised a high-profile celebratory event commemorating the historic maiden visit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the United Kingdom on 8 January 1972 en route his heroic homecoming to independent Bangladesh following his release from 9-month long imprisonment in Pakistan. British Ministers, Leader of the Opposition, eminent parliamentarians, senior members of the House of Lords, ambassadors, renowned British journalists and senior UK Foreign Office officials addressed the event titled **“Bangabandhu & Britain: And the Historic 8 January”**, paying their profound homage to Bangabandhu and recalling his special relationship with British Government, its Conservative and Labour Prime Ministers in early 70s and with the British-Bangladeshi expatriates.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. AK Abdul Momen, MP, graced the event as the Chief Guest, chaired by High Commissioner of Bangladesh to the UK and Ireland Saida Muna Tasneem, while British Foreign and Development Office (FCDO) Minister for South Asia and Commonwealth Lord Tariq Ahmad attended as Guest of Honour and First Minister of Wales Rt Hon Mark Drakeford AM as special guest. UK's Leader of the Opposition and the Labour Party Leader Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP, Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party Ms. Nickie Aiken MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Ms Lisa Nandy MP, UKFCO Parliamentary Secretary Joy Morrissey MP, Vice Chair of the APPG on Bangladesh Lord Bilimoria, Chair, Standing Committee on Justice, House of Lords Lord Howell, Lord Rami Ranger, Chair of Conservative Friends of India, Seema

Malhotra, MP, Indian High Commissioner to the UK Ms. Gaitri Issar Kumar, Human Rights Lawyer Mrs Cherie Blair CBE QC, Former Assistant Private Secretary to Her Majesty The Queen and Chief Executive, Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC) Ms. Samantha Cohen CVO, former Bangladesh Ambassador Mohiuddin Ahmed, former BBC Journalist William Crawley, organiser of Bangladesh liberation war overseas freedom movement in the UK Sultan Mahmud Sharif and Conservative member of the London Assembly and candidate for London Mayor Shaun Baily participated in the discussions. Hundreds of expatriate Bangladeshis from the UK and Ireland joined the commemorative event paying their tribute to the Father of the Nation.

**Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen** in his speech said Bangabandhu's stopover in London on 8 January 1972 before he reached independent Bangladesh and subsequent meetings with the then British Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath and opposition and Labour Leader Sir William Harold demonstrated an unqualified friendship from both the ruling conservative government as well as the opposition labour party and unconditional love from his Bangladeshi-British brethren. Dr Momen said, "Bangabandhu's 8 January official meeting with Sir Edward Heath not only set in stone a strong Bangladesh-UK friendship to grow in leaps and bounds over the next 50 years, but also paved the way for Bangladesh's official recognition by Britain on 4 February 1972."

**Lord Tariq Ahmad** said, "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is an inspiration not just to the Bengali community across the world but to many who fight for liberty and democracy. He laid the foundation of a strong partnership and deep friendship that Bangladesh-UK has been enjoying in the past five decades since his maiden visit to the UK on 08 January 1972." He said that Bangabandhu's founding vision of a democratic, secular and inclusive Bangladesh was an inspiring one; and the UK would remain a critical partner of Bangladesh seeking to support peace and prosperity for all its people led by the able leader of Bangabandhu, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

High Commissioner **Saida Muna Tasneem** in her opening remarks paying homage to the Father of the Nation said, "Bangabandhu's 08 January visit to the UK and his official meeting at No 10 Downing Street where he was recognised by Prime Minister Edward Heath as the President of independent Bangladesh, was in fact de facto diplomatic recognition by the then Conservative Government of a just liberated Bangladesh, and a testimony to the special status that a Statesman like Bangabandhu enjoyed with Britain". The High Commissioner paid a special tribute to the Bangladesh-British community who had never failed to demonstrate their love and support to the Bangabandhu during his 1969 Agartala Conspiracy case by sending British QC Thomas Williams as his defence counsel and organising the most powerful 'Release Bangabandhu' political rallies at the Trafalgar Square during Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971." She also quoted from Prime Minister Boris Johnson's recent letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the occasion of the Bangabandhu Birth Centenary, in which Johnson wished that Bangabandhu's inspiring founding vision of a democratic, free, secular and inclusive Bangladesh would continue to guide Bangladesh during the 50th anniversary celebrations in 2021 and beyond.

He hoped that the UK government, its people and British-Bangladeshi expatriate would extend their continued appreciation, understanding, cooperation and support in our pursuit of a democratic, secular, self-reliant, inclusive middle-income Bangladesh by 2021 and developed economy by 2041 under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Leader of the Opposition and the **Labour Party Leader Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP** paid his deep tribute to Bangabandhu and said, "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a great statement who spent 14 years imprisonment for fighting to establish civil, political and cultural rights of his people and leading his country towards independence." Sir

Keir recalled the meeting between Bangabandhu and former British Labour Prime Minister Sir Harold Wilson and said that he was incredibly proud that the two great leaders shared a rare friendship based on their belief on equality and justice; and that bond provided a strong platform for the friendship and relationship between the British people and people of Bangladesh”.

Representing Conservative Party Chair Amanda Milling, Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party Ms. **Nickie Aiken MP** said the bond Bangabandhu had established with the UK since his stopover in London on 08 January 1972 would continue to guide the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and the UK in the post-Brexit and post-Covid era. She said, “I understand that Prime Minister Boris Jonson will be working more closely with Bangladesh’s Father of the Nation’s daughter Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to optimise bilateral trade and investment and facing risks from climate change.

Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs **Lisa Nandy** said she is immensely proud of her Bengali-British heritage as her father was a Bengali and reframed her Labour Party’s commitment to work closely with Bangladesh High Commission as well as with the British-Bangladeshi community to celebrate Bangabandhu’s birth centenary and the 50th year of Bangladesh independence and Bangladesh-UK diplomatic relationship.

Following the discussion, Dr Momen and Lord Ahmed jointly inaugurated the ‘Bangabandhu Library’ established at the Bangladesh High Commission London, marking the historic day of Bangabandhu’s maiden visit to the UK and the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation. High Commissioner Tasneem on inauguration of the Bangabandhu Library said, “We are proud to name this High Commission’s conference room as the Bangabandhu Library to honour the Father of the Nation and Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who procured this High Commission building in 1973 as the first Bangladesh diplomatic asset overseas. The Library will remain open for all British people who would like to do research on the Bangabandhu”.

A documentary on the Father of the Nation was screened at the beginning of the event titled, “Bangabandhu and Britain: A special relationship” that followed a cultural presentation of sarod recital and dance titled “Bangabandhu the Brave heart: A Veer Rasa”, by renowned classical musician Rajrupa Chowdhury and prominent perfuming artist from Bangladesh Sadia Islam Mou and her troupe.

Ashequn Nabi Chowdhury  
Minister (Press)