CHAPTER VII
CHAPTER VII

THE AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

The autonomy movement was formally launched after the Six Point Formula was publicly announced and explained at a public meeting in Dacca on 20 March 1966.¹ The movement, in fact, was a continuation of what the BPAL had already initiated and intensified since its revival in 1964. And that had created extensive popular support all over the province for a final peaceful attempt to end the inter-wing disparities. The Formula, however, brought the demands to a definite focus and expedited mass mobilisation.

While the BPAL concentrated its energies to mobilise public opinion in favour of the Six-Point Programme², the Government too alarmed to ponder over the situation rationally, immediately resorted to a two-pronged attack on the BPAL. On the one hand, it branded the protagonists of the Six-Point Programme as "secessionists" and warned the East Pakistanis of the "consequences". On the other hand, it arrested the leaders and workers of BPAL to prevent further mobilisation.

¹ For details of the meeting see Ittefaq (Dacca) and Pakistan Observer (Dacca), 21 March 1966.
² For details of the BPAL leaders' extensive province-wide tours and public speeches see reports in Ittefaq, March-April 1966.
and imposed restrictions on the Press to prevent publication of reports about the popularity of the movement. The President who also headed the Convention Muslim League, in a series of speeches during his tour of East Pakistan tried to impress upon the East Pakistanis that the supporters of the Six Points were secessionists and that support to them would ultimately lead the East Pakistanis into an Indian trap. He threatened to use the "language of weapons", if necessary, to crush the six-pointers. 3 But the movement for autonomy launched by the EPAL spread far and wide. The nature of the movement showed a marked difference from all earlier anti-Centre movements. It was no longer limited to the middle classes. People from all segments of life like rickshaw pullers, mill workers, small shopkeepers, bus and taxi (three-wheeler scooter) drivers, daily wage earners, etc. took part in the agitations. Wider popular participation added an aggressive element in the autonomy movement in spite of EPAL's repeated calls for non-violence. Police stations, banks, government administrative buildings and pro-government newspaper offices were periodically attacked, but more as spontaneous reaction to ruthless repressive police measures by the Government than any organised violent movement. In some cases it was believed to have been engineered by the

3 For details see Pakistan Times (Lahore), Dawn (Karachi), and Ittefaq, March-April 1966.
Government itself to malign the EPAL.  

Unable to check popular participation, the Government in one sweep arrested most of the thirty-seven members of the EPAL Working Committee and other prominent EPAL, CL and trade union leaders under Clause 32 of the Defence of Pakistan Rules. East Pakistan observed a protest day on 13 May 1966 to express its resentment over the arrests. A public meeting held on the same day again endorsed the Six Point Programme. Those who spoke against the Governmental measures included Nurul Amin, Chairman of the NDF and the Basic Democrats of Dacca.

After a meeting of the Working Committee of the party held on 20 May 1966, the EPAL proceeded quite methodically. A province-wide hartal on 7 June 1966 was announced. The acting General Secretary, Mizanur Rahman Chaudhury, an MNA (and originally the Organising Secretary of EPAL) in a press statement appealed to make the hartal a success. He criticised confiscation of EPAL posters from a press by the

---


5 For details of the arrests see Ittefaq, 13 April-9 May 1966.

6 Ittefaq, 14 May 1966.

7 For details see Ittefaq, 6 June 1966, and Purbadesh (Dacca, Weekly), 7 May 1966.

police, removal of posters from walls by an organised group, arrests made while Awami League workers were putting up some posters and keeping them in unlawful detention for more than 24 hours. He concluded by saying: "I want to remind the Government that the people will not allow infractuation of the aims for which Pakistan was established". The East Pakistan Governor, Nonem Khan, made counter statements. But at a meeting at Narayanganj, which Nonem Khan addressed, the popular mood came very much to the surface. The crowd raised slogans in favour of the movement and left the meeting in protest against his attack on the autonomy movement. This meeting was also addressed by Shamsul Huda, President of Dacca City Muslim League (Convention). Both of them called for non-observance of the day. Thus the AL call for the hartal was practically a challenge against the established authority.

The students, the middle classes and the workers joined together for preparations to make the hartal a success through public meetings, street-side meetings, indoor meetings and processions in Dacca and other places.  

Nizamur Rahman Chaudhury in a further statement reiterated AL's resolve to carry on with the peaceful

9 Ittefaq, 1 June 1966.
10 Information collected from interviews in Bangladesh in 1976.
11 For some details see Ittefaq, 2 June 1966.
democratic movement in spite of arrests and other repressive measures. Sounding a note of caution he stated that people were very apprehensive about the ultimate consequences of thwarting all the constitutional and peaceful means of expressing public opinion. The concern for the repercussions of the repressive measures was also expressed in a joint statement of nine SPAL members of the Provincial Assembly. The overall reaction of the East Pakistani opposition was quite explicit when all the members of the Opposition and the Independent Group boycotted the Provincial Assembly on the first day of the Budget Session addressed by the Provincial Governor. Such a situation was reported to have been unprecedented in the parliamentary history of Pakistan. 12

On the eve of the planned hartal, Mizanur Rahman Choudhury, the Acting General Secretary, while calling for popular support for the movement, reminded the people that though the Six Point-based movement had been initiated by the Awami League, every patriotic and democratic national of the country had a special responsibility to take it forward because it concerned the common interest of all. He appealed to the youth, workers, peasants, shopkeepers, businessmen, industrialists, educationists, lawyers, etc. not to be a pawn in the hands of the power-drunk ruling coterie whose repressive powers were derived from the usurpation of the

12 Ittefaq, 5, 6 and 7 June 1966.
people's power. He concluded by saying:

... are the children of this country and therefore we have every right to realise our hopes and aspirations. If anybody denies us this right and blocks our way with means other than constitutional, we will neither fear nor forgive him. Whatever may happen we would not abandon the fight. 13

Syed Nazrul Islam, Acting President of the BIWL also sought co-operation from all democratic organisations towards the democratic movement for six points.

Tofazzal Hosain, editor, Ittefaq, described the popular response as a "sure sign of a forward step towards the objective" and added that without popular support no political party could fight for any issue. He described the popular discontent as a natural corollary of bypassing East Pakistan's popular verdict given in 1954 on regional autonomy and interregional economic disparity by a group with vested interests who would not accept even the 1956 constitution, honest modifications of which would have resolved political and economic maladies of Pakistan. The people this time, he pointed out, were determined to get their full rights, though the reactionaries were repeating the prohibitory measures adopted in the past and trying to thwart a legitimate democratic movement "without glancing at the old pages of history even once". 14

13 Ibid., 7 June 1966.
14 Mosafir, "Rajnaitik Ranna", Ittefaq, 7 June 1966.
Though newspapers were not allowed to publish anything about the hartal of 7 June 1966 except the official version, it is common knowledge that the hartal was a total success. But the Government engineered hooliganism and then opened fire at different places, killing a number of people—escalating the aggressive popular mood into resorting to some degree of violence like burning of police vehicles, throwing brickbats at police parties and government offices, etc. The long, official Press Note, however, blamed anti-social elements employed by the EAM for initiating the violent incidents in Dacca and Narayanganj and described the police firing at Narayanganj as an action in self-defence. The Government Press Note, however, did not seem to have cut much ice with the opposition which boycotted the National Assembly and the two Provincial Assemblies on 8 June 1966.

Despite restrictive orders, references were made in some Dacca newspapers about 7 June 1966. Fofazzal Hosain immediately wrote: "In the tragic circumstances of the cruel measures adopted to thwart the six-point movement

15 Information gathered from conversation with a cross-section of Bangladeshis picked at random in Bangladesh in the first half of 1976.


17 Purbadesh, 12 June 1966.
the only consolation is that people in general have accepted the Six Points movement, that is regional autonomy movement, as their own." As bloodshed had once paved the way for the success of the language movement the success of the autonomy movement starting with bloodshed also, he thought was now assured. Tofazzal Hosain, who was also the Chairman of the Pakistan Branch of the International Press Institute, had to pay a price. He was arrested on 16 June 1966 under Section 32(1) of the Defence of Pakistan Rules, and the New Nation printing press from where the daily Ittefaq, the weekly Dacca Times, and Purbani used to be published was confiscated.

The hartal of 7 June 1966, The Times had rightly predicted "would bring the Government's dilemma to the crux to try to break the hartal, inevitably entailing violence and

---


the casualties that the movement could acclaim as its martyrs, or to acquiesce. The Government of Pakistan by its very nature could not have taken the EPAL move without challenge. But in spite of the repressive measures the EPAL moved on. An emergency working committee meeting lasting eleven hours spread over 10 and 11 June 1966 under the chairmanship of Syed Nazrul Islam, the Acting President, and attended by the Presidents and Secretaries of all district committees of the EPAL expressed satisfaction at the favourable response during the first phase of the movement and decided to launch the second phase of the movement from 16 August 1966 unless repressive measures like imposition of Section 144 and the state of emergency and curbs on civil liberties like free expression of opinion, use of microphone at meetings, movement from one place to another etc. were lifted and political prisoners detained without trial were freed by that date. Another important decision of the meeting was to observe Resistance to Repression days on 17, 18 and 19 June. Each unit of EPAL was instructed to organise hoisting of black flags from housetops, and wearing of black badges. They were also asked to organise meetings and peaceful demonstrations. The working committee also decided to start a province-wide signature campaign in favour of Six Points. The working committee thanked the people from various segments

20 "Drive for self-rule grows in East Pakistan; tactical dilemma for President Ayub", The Times (London), 17 May 1966.
of society whose spontaneous support had made the first phase of the movement successful and expressed condolence for those who had lost their lives while doing so. It was also decided to start a fund for helping the families of those who were killed. The formation of the Legal Aid Committee for helping those who had been involved in legal cases during the first phase was also appreciated by the working committee. The fifteen resolutions also included demands for a province-wide rationing system to ameliorate the acute food shortage, abolition of levy, lifting of all cases relating to the certificate system and adequate relief measures for the flood- and cyclone-affected areas of Sylhet and Rangpur districts. Other resolutions that were not published included some details of the programme for the second phase. These were general strikes, periodic cessation of work in mills and offices, hunger marches, public meetings, people’s deputations and stay-in strikes, etc.

The success of the hartal was a clear proof of the success of the EPAL strategy. But for the clear-cut focus of the Six-Point Formula, the EPAL would have found it very difficult to amass a huge following. This was similar


22 Interview with Amona Begam, Abdul Mannan, etc. The *Ittefaq* report cited above mentioned that only those items of the fifteen resolutions that could be publicised were being published indicating the significance of the unpublished ones. See *Ittefaq*, 12 June 1966.
to the All India Muslim League strategy in the early 1940s when the propagation of the Pakistan scheme brought all shades of Muslims in India under one banner.

Beginning on 17 June 1966 East Pakistan observed three consecutive protest-days in response to the EIPAL call. In the East Pakistan Assembly M.A. Zaheer, Parliamentary Secretary, defended the police firing on 7 June and condemned the strikers by calling them hooligans. He blamed the Opposition parties, particularly the BPL, for creating chaos and confusion in the country and held them responsible for lawlessness in Dacca and Narayanganj on 7 June 1966. 23

The Acting General Secretary of EIPAL who also happened to be an EMA was arrested. Mahmud Ali, an EIPAL member from East Pakistan, tried to raise this point in the National Assembly, but it was disallowed. Anti-Ayami League propaganda continued. 24

The decision of the June meeting of the EIPAL working Committee to start the second phase of the movement was ratified in the next meeting held on 23 and 24 July 1966. The working Committee was convinced that the Six Points had been accepted by the people as the only means (Vool Nantna) for fulfilment of democratic demands and eradicating economic disparities - keeping intact the unity and integrity of

---


Pakistan. The district EPAL branches were instructed to propagate the EPAL message so as to reach each and every village for creating public opinion for the realisation of the Six-Point Programme.25

After the sweeping arrests of EPAL leaders only some district-level office-bearers were available for carrying on with the organisational work at the provincial headquarters. Amena Begum, Secretary of the women section of the EPAL was made the Acting Secretary on a trial basis.26

Amena Begum had been in the EPAL since 1953 and had won in the 1954 elections as a UF candidate. She had joined politics mainly for doing social work.27 However, she was made the women's Branch Secretary of EPAL at the Council meeting of March 1966 - and as such an ex-officio member of the EPAL Working Committee. The purpose of having a women's Secretary obviously was to strengthen women's participation in the EPAL. Circumstances compelled her to take charge of the party at a very crucial moment. She was in fact to conduct the second phase of the autonomy movement. But despite her inexperience, in the second phase the essential part of the programme, i.e. mass mobilisation campaign, did not suffer. It continued unhampered preparing

27 Interview with Amena Begam in Dacca in 1976.
the East Pakistanis for further eventualities, namely, the Anti-Ayub agitation of 1968-69. Meanwhile during the second phase of the autonomy movement the PAL had to tackle another grave organisational problem almost threatening its status as the premier party of the province. Amena Begum handled the crisis situation also quite competently.

The public support, for the autonomy movement, however, needed to be channelised and expressed in terms of organised action. The absence of the senior leaders with better linkage with the organised sectors, the imprisonment of popular trade union leaders, student leaders etc. and the passivity of the other East Pakistani parties certainly slackened this part of the PAL programme.

The second phase of the autonomy movement was to be started with a public meeting at the Outer Stadium in Dacca. But the PAL was refused permission while the Convention Muslim League had been allowed to hold meeting there. Amena Begum, therefore, in a statement instructed all the district, subdivision, city, thana and union level PAL committees to carry on with the second phase through peaceful and constitutional means. A public meeting could however, be arranged at Chittagong on 17 August 1966 where she announced the formal beginning of the second phase. She

28 Azad, 10 August 1966.
29 Ibid., 17 August 1966.
demanded the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and all other party workers, described the Six Points as the basis of wider unity between the two wings of Pakistan, mentioned the greater contribution of the East Pakistanis for achieving Pakistan, condemned branding East Pakistanis as secessionists and reiterated ÉPAL's resolve to conduct the movement peacefully and through constitutional means and at the cost of any self-sacrifice to a successful end.30

Following the above meeting Uma Began, accompanied by other available party leaders including Syed Nazrul Islam, the Acting President on occasions, toured various districts. In their speeches they elaborated the rationale, validity and legitimacy (derived from wide popular support) of the Six Points; the ÉPAL's resolve to achieve success at any amount of sacrifice, the Government's irrationality in branding the autonomists as secessionists and in resorting to repressive measures. They also touched upon the immediate problems arising from food shortage, high prices, natural calamities and non-implementation of flood-control measures, etc. They called upon other political parties to participate in the movement, called on the Government to reinforce the country by accepting the Six Points - the Magna Carta of people's freedom. They asked the people not to be afraid of

the Government since the AL had the peoples support. They also asked for a referendum on the Six Points.31

The resolutions passed in the public meetings they addressed included: Non-stop peaceful agitation for Six Points, demands for release of political prisoners, removal of restrictions on newspapers, repeal of emergency, pension for the families of those killed on 7 June 1966, release of the New Nation printing press, implementation of Drug Commission recommendations for flood control, full rationing and anti-price rise measures, 25-bigha ceiling on land holding, decrease in prices of yarn and colour used by weavers, rehabilitation of unemployed bidi workers, reduction in students' tuition fees, reopening of technical institutions and condemnation of American imperialism in North Vietnam.32

While the contents of these speeches remained more or less the same, the tenor, however, changed as time progressed. In the beginning more stress was laid on justifying the Six Points as a unifying factor for Pakistan and the EPAL resolve to carry on with the struggle without any ambition for grabbing or sharing power. Later Six Points were claimed as means for achieving a socialistic economic structure through which only Pakistan could prosper.33 The strengthening of EPAL resolve was clearly reflected when Amena

31 Compiled from reports in Azad (Dacca), August–December 1966.

32 Ibid.

33 See for example, Syed Nazrul Islam's speech in Chittagong, Azad, 26 November 1966.
Degan said:

To-day I will no longer demand for the release of our leader Sheikh Mujibur and the AL workers. To-day not only lakhs of AL workers are prepared to go to jails, the entire race (Jati) is prepared for maximum sacrifice for the realisation of the Six Points. I have personally verified public opinion by touring the whole length and the breadth of the land East Pakistan...the five and half crores of people will unitedly be with the Awami League till the Six Points are realised.

There was no doubt that in spite of the reduced strength at the level of top-ranking leadership, the AL had kept its flag flying and was gathering more and more mass support. But surprisingly, there was hardly any response from other political organisations some of which on principle had supported the demand for provincial autonomy. On the contrary, East Pakistani leaders like Nurul Amin, Ataur Rahman Khan, Abu Iosein Sarkar, etc. tried to isolate the EPAL by their emphasis on the formation of a united opposition to fight for the revival of democratic government in Pakistan without any pointed reference to provincial autonomy. And Maulana Bhagshani, the leading light of the left forces in East Pakistan, stayed away from the autonomy movement in spite of his commitment to the cause of autonomy since the very inception of the EPAL (of which he was the founder-President) on the plea that it was being engineered by external assistance. The General Secretary of his party, 

---

34 Aamea Degan, Acting Secretary EPAL at Roshanar Hat, Chittagong. See Azad, 24 November 1966.
M.H. Usmani, even thought that the administrative changes sought by the Six Points might "endanger the sovereignty of the country". Bhashani continued to mention autonomy but he was silent on Six Points. Similarly, a NAP public meeting in Dacca on 5 June 1966 remained silent about the hartal of 7 June, although protests were registered against Ayub Khan's threat to speak the language of weapons. This ambivalent attitude, however, was the inevitable outcome of the conflicting views within the party. The official position as stated by Bhashani was that NAP was not supporting the Six-Point Formula but would continue to fight for regional autonomy, linguistic provinces and abolition of one unit. He also warned the Government of the dangerous repercussions of its time-killing tactics. His emphasis on extra-regional issue was understandable. But his statement that the Government "to some extent have accepted our demands" and "as long as the Government follows a foreign policy which would promote friendship with the socialist countries, we would continue to express our


38 See Gyan Chakrabarti, "Satoi June-o-ragatishodder Bhumika", *Dainik Bangla*, 7 June 1972 for details of this conflict and also the underground EICP's circular to make the hartal a success.

40 *gratitude to the Government* did not improve his political image. Nor did such reaction help his political followers to decide upon any definite course of action vis-a-vis the Government. His stand regarding the AL and the Six Points were equally bewildering. While announcing that he did not accept the Six Points, he also expressed satisfaction over the fact that some persons who had once criticised him for saying "Assalam AlaiKum" themselves were leading a forceful movement for autonomy. 41 The NAP, however, continued with its own programmes concentrating on flood-relief, food shortage, high prices, etc. 42 However, some NAP leaders continued to express support for the Six Points. Haji Mohammed Danesh, Vice-President of NAP and a popular peasant leader even called it the *Praner dahi* (hearts desire) of East Pakistan. 43

The autonomists led by the NAP stood firm but could not make any visible dent in the existing undemocratic system. Under a similar situation in 1942, the Quit India Movement had suffered a similar fate. This ineffectiveness of the autonomists, however, was shortlived. As the Agartala Conspiracy Case implicated Sheikh Mujib

42 For some details of NAP's *Eight and Fourteen Point Programmes* see *Azad*, July-August 1966.
and thereby the EPAL and the anti-Ayub movement in East Pakistan got under way in East Pakistan, the autonomists started a two-tier movement: one consisting of the demand for a change in the system symbolised by the Ayub regime, and the other, consisting of the demand for regional autonomy. But meanwhile, the EPAL and the APAL also underwent a split on the issue of autonomy. One AL faction joined the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), abandoning the Six Points. And during this period the entire opposition in East Pakistan was divided into three camps.

1. The staunch autonomists consisted of the bulk of the EPAL and a section of the National Awami Party led by Prof. Muzzaffar Ahmed. For them, the question of full-fledged autonomy for the region as contained in the Six Points Programme was as important as the establishment of parliamentary democracy in the country as a whole.

2. The moderates consisted of the IwF, Council Muslim League, Jamaat-e-Islami, Mizam-e-Islam and a faction of the APAL, including a few EPAL stalwarts. They formed the Pakistan Democratic Movement under the leadership of Kurul Amin. These parties attached more importance to the establishment of a parliamentary system, which they believed would have taken care of the issues behind the demand for autonomy.

3. The various leftist groups under the umbrella of Maulana Bhashani seemed to believe in total societal restructuring which could not be achieved either through
implementation of the Six-Point Formula or the realisation of the FDM objective. They also suspected that the autonomists were stooges of imperialist forces and represented merely the emerging East Bengali bourgeoisie.\(^44\)

Factional frictions within the NAP that started basically with its stand on the autonomy movement vis-a-vis the Government led to further differences. Speculations about a joint NAP-\textsc{al} front\(^45\) strengthened further when a NAP meeting addressed by some leading members of the NAP opined that sacrifices and struggle needed for fulfilment of socialistic goals, regional autonomy and anti-imperialist stand could be taken up only by the NAP and the \textsc{pal} because these were the only two political parties that had "spontaneous" popular support behind them.\(^46\)

In October 1967, eight NAP leaders of \textsc{al} were expelled from the party as a result of what was described by some as an intra-party confrontation between the "internationalists" and the "nationalists".\(^47\) The formal split took place in December 1967. Meanwhile, M.H. Usmani, General Secretary of AP\textsc{pal}, at a press conference, said

\(^{44}\) For an account of the leftists' stand and dilemma, see Talukdar Maniruzzaman, \textit{Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh} (Dacca, 1975), pp. 10-29.


\(^{46}\) Azad, 13 May 1967.

\(^{47}\) \textit{Purbadesh}, 15 October 1967.
that the infighting in the NAP had nothing to do with any ideological issue. The crux of the matter was what would be the policy of the NAP towards the Government. He also said that NAP did not represent any particular "class" and believed that through parliamentary democracy alone could resist and eradicate the evils of imperialism, feudalism and capitalism. 48

The beginnings of the PDM were made during an animated discussion at a seminar organised by the Pakistan Study Circle soon after the expiry of the 1950 rules. Under the Chairmanship of Nurul Amin the meeting discussed the problems of unity in the opposition camp. The main concern of the speakers appear to have been restoration of parliamentary democracy through a concerted effort by all opposition parties. Significantly, the question of provincial autonomy was not raised at all. However, Shah Azizur Rahman of the LFPAL viewed that the question of such unity could not be effectively discussed unless Sheikh Mujib and other imprisoned leaders were released. Besides, Abdul Haq (known as one of the principal theoretician of the pro-Peking LFCFML) of the NAP said that the proposed minimum programme should also indicate the Opposition’s role as anti-imperialists and include demands of the peasants and the workers. 49

48 Azad, 16 October 1967.

49 Other speakers at the meeting included Ataur Rahman Khan, Farid Ahmad (Mel), Golam Azam (Jil) and Fahmud Ali (JDF). For details of the speeches see Purbadash (Weekly), 15 January 1967.
The PDM programme did include demands for some amount of decentralisation but the PDM leaders' speeches and statements, as reported in the Press, invariably sounded hollow and vague. They appeared to be too eager to capture power through a middle-of-the-road programme likely to be acceptable both to the establishment and their future constituency. At this stage, if they had succeeded in their efforts to persuade the AL leadership to give up or tone down its programme and join the moderates, their tasks would have been made easier. At the same time, it would have robbed the AL of the pivotal role it held in the politics of Pakistan, particularly that of East Pakistan. Hence efforts were made to lure the Awami Leaguers away from the autonomy movement.

Isolation of the staunch autonomists by splitting the AL was attempted both by the moderates and the establishment obviously to better the chances of self-preservation. And since the existing system did not provide for a direct communication channel between the base and the apex of the structure the establishment was misled into believing that the comparatively less experienced leadership of the AL would give in to vague promises and change their loyalties and that would finish off the autonomy movement. Evidently, they had miscalculated. For example, when Aftab Ahmed, a retired west Pakistani civilian known to have been close to Bhawravdy, came to Dacca, stayed in

49a Golam Azam, ed., PDM Pakistan Canatantrik Andolan, 8 Dafa Karmasuchir Vittita Utkyabaddha Gana Andolan (n.d.)
the Shahbag Hotel and approached some up-and-coming district level leaders of the Awami like Mannan from Tangail and Momen from Khulna, they could not be won over. His promises like "everything would be straightened out within six months" if they gave up the Six Points carried no conviction with them. He failed to convince them of the objective and modalities of the "straightening" out process. The outcome of such dialogues was no secret. As reported:

The special emissaries from Pindi who came recently for this purpose have not been able to do much in this regard. For the Awami Leaguers have told them that they are willing to co-operate with any group for the fulfilment of people's demands, but added that on the party basis the Six Point movement will continue. 51

But the official decision of the AL was still awaited. In the last week of April 1967 the Provincial (East Pakistan) and Central Working Committee of the Awami League met at Dacca where the former agreed to let the latter carry on with discussions about a united Opposition Front although a large section of the Awami Leaguers openly opposed the idea of Awami League's participation in it. 52 The question of principle apart, for those Awami Leaguers this was a question of strategy. Sheikh Mujib's aversion to such

50 Stated by Abdul Mannan during my conversation with him in Dacca in summer 1976.
51 Durhadesh, 19 February 1967.
52 Ibid., 30 April 1967.
coalitions had always been very strong and considering the advance made with the Six Points Programme, he was reported to have already made it known that it would not be profitable for the APAL to start afresh with a new and toned down programme.53

The majority of JI Awami League's unshakable faith in its Six-Point Programme was unmistakably demonstrated in May 1967 when the Pakistan Democratic Movement was formed. Barring a few defectors, the IPAL stayed away from it. This eventually caused a split in both wings of the APAL, demonstrating not only the intra-party conflicts of IPAL and APAL, but also that of the WPAL. The polarisation within the WPAL significantly indicated regional groupings.

That everything was not well within the WPAL could be guessed when some time after Mizanur Rahman Chaudhury's visit to West Pakistan to participate in WPAL discussions about the Six Points,54 Sheikh Manzurul Haq, President of the Karachi Awami League, denied a report by a section of the Press about a split in the Karachi AL.55 In the context of the earlier expressed support of Manzurul and Tirmizi in contrast to the unfavourable response of Lundhore, the President of WPAL, this indicated the Karachi AL's stand

53 Purba deesh, 23 April 1967.
54 See Ittefaq, 10 June 1966.
55 Ibid., 20 July 1966.
as opposed to the WPAL spokesmen like Lundkhore and Nasrullah. Difference of opinion within the WPAL and consequently within the WPAL about the Six Points and the autonomy movement was therefore quite clear.

A section of the WP AL alumni Leaguers were also prepared to join the PDM in preference to the continuance of the autonomy movement. But as later events proved, they were in a small minority. However, the issue was decided after long deliberations by party functionaries.

The WPAL Working Committee held a meeting starting on 19 May 1967 in which the Presidents and General Secretaries of the district and subdivision units also participated. On the first day, Abdus Salam Khan, on behalf of the sub-committee nominated for participating in the discussions about PDM, submitted a report. On 20 May 1967, the second day of the meeting, representatives of the district and subdivisional units presented their opinions about the report. The majority of them opined against the Eight-Point Programme of the PDM. Some of them were reported to have said that even if the WPAL decided to participate in the PDM they would, on their own, carry on with the Six Point movement. However, as no decision could be taken, it was decided to refer the matter to the WPAL Council to meet on a future date. Nevertheless the WP meeting expressed full confidence in the Six Points and decided to carry on with the movement till the realisation of the programme’s
objectives. It was made clear that till a final decision was taken at the proposed Council meeting, the EPAL would cooperate with any PDM call for realisation of democratic demands. This meeting also decided to observe 7 June 1967 in commemoration of the day in 1966 by holding public meetings, distributing pamphlets, taking out processions and condolence meetings for those who had sacrificed their lives during the Six-Point movement. It also demanded release of all political prisoners, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. 56

During this critical juncture when the EPAL was fighting the Government on the one hand and the moderates in the party on the other over the Six Point formula and the autonomy movement, it was the students particularly the Chhatra Leaguers who to a large extent kept the spirit of the movement alive. Responding to the EPAL call they observed with meetings and processions and raised slogans in favour of Six Points and the autonomy movement. 57

While a decision already existed about referring the PDM issue to the EPAL Council, thirteen members of the GC requested the Acting General Secretary of EPAL, Amena Begam, to convene a Working Committee meeting to nominate

...
ten representatives for the PDM.\textsuperscript{58} The Acting Secretary rejected the plea on technical grounds, the substantive one being that since the issue of \textsuperscript{58} in the PDM itself was yet to be decided in the Council meeting, the purpose of the proposed WC meeting did not exist.\textsuperscript{59} The above thirteen, however, at a meeting described by them as a requisitioned WC meeting, empowered Masrullah to nominate ten members to the PDM and called a Council meeting on 30 September 1967. The Acting President of the \textsuperscript{58} considered this illegal. He also mentioned that he had already convened a Council meeting on 19 August 1967 according to clause 15 of the \textsuperscript{58} constitution. The Acting Secretary also in a statement made it clear that in view of the decisions taken in the May meeting, the pro-PDM members had no right to convene any WC meeting.\textsuperscript{60} Havabzada Masrullah Khan, President, \textsuperscript{58} and one of the prime movers for the PDM, in an interview commented that the PDM Council decision (to be taken at the meeting on 19 August) would not be binding on the pro-PDM members since the proposed meeting had been already called illegal. The pro-PDM members were reported to have been certain about their being in the majority in the WC, and allegedly

\textsuperscript{58} See bulletin signed by Burul Islam Chaudhury, Treasurer, \textsuperscript{58} in Azad, 18 July 1967.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 25 July 1967.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 16 and 17 August 1967.
that was what motivated the Six Pointers to convene a Council meeting. But, they stated, the Presidents of all district ALs excepting those of Dacca, Mymensingh and Chittagong were in favour of joining the PDM and, therefore, in the Council also they would be in a majority. The requisitionists' number, however, did not represent a numerical majority of the Working Committee unless some of them were sitting on the fence and did not sign the requisition notice. Also, since the opinions of the district and subdivisional units were also to be taken into account, it is quite conceivable that neither group (pro-PDM and pro-Six Points) had a clear majority in that meeting. The decision for referring the issue to the Council was an open admission of the fact and a very democratic way of functioning also.

On the eve of the APAL (official) Council meeting Navabzada Nasrullah, the APAL President, stated that he was interested in keeping the party unity but had not been able to evolve any modality for it. He also felt that only the PDM could change the political situation of the country and believed that since in the APAL the number supporting the Six Points were very few, their decision needed no special attention. Navabzada's assertion, however, proved false when the Council meeting attended by 836 Councillors out of a total of 950 unanimously resolved that APAL would not

61 Ibid., 18 August 1967.
join the PDM. This resolution, introduced by A.H.M. Kamruzzaman, M.N.A., reiterated the Council's faith in the Six Points and described the Eight Points of the PDM as opposed to the Six Points; the motion was passed within two hours of the commencement of the meeting at the grounds of the Eden Hotel in Dacca on 19 August 1967. The more debated issue, however, was the expulsion of the requisitionists. The Councillors expressed their dismay by chanting slogans like "expel the betrayers", "Navabzada leave Bengal", etc, when M.A. Aziz, Secretary Chittagong District AL, introduced a resolution for expulsion of those members. However, a Subjects Committee with the District Presidents and Secretaries was formed which proposed that if any member maintained any contact with the PDM after the resolution about the PDM was passed (i.e. the main resolution of the meeting) then they would be considered as expelled from the party with effect from 10 October 1967. But the majority of the Councillors still demanded immediate expulsion. Ultimately, after a five hour-long discussion, a via media was found by appointing a subcommittee consisting of Amena Begam and M.A. Aziz which was required to send a show-cause notice to the offenders asking them to reply within fifteen days why, according to the constitution of the party, they should not be expelled for breaking party discipline and indulging in anti-party activities. The members were: Abdus Salam Khan, Zahiruddin, Nurul Islam Chaudhury, Abdur Rashid Sarkabagish, Mujibur Rahman (Rajshahi), Abdur Rahman Khan, M.A. Rashid,
It should be mentioned here that out of these thirteen all were members of the SC except Abdus Salam Khan and out of the twelve, all except Nurul Islam Chaudhury belonged to the twenty-five members nominated by the CPAL President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The above Council meeting was also addressed by representatives of the Karachi AL who supported the Six Points and opposed joining the PDM. In a statement also they said the Karachi AL supported the Six Points and was trying for greater public support.

In his inaugural address at the Council meeting Syed Nazrul Islam, the Acting President, while describing the situation and the background of the intra-party conflict revealed the significant fact that the APAL had as yet no constitution. In her report the Acting Secretary blamed the Government for food shortage and rise in the prices of essentials. She pointed out the anti-people policies of the Government and said that salt tax and land tax were being increased, heaping further burdens on the common man but the pay of the MPAs had been increased from Rs.400 to Rs.800 during the absence of the Opposition members. About any united

62 Ibid., 19 and 20 August 1967.


64 _Azad_, 20 and 22 August 1967.
Opposition movement she said that the E-PAL policy was very clear. The earlier bitter experiences proved that such fronts were short-lived and unable to achieve any objective and therefore "we are not prepared to carry on any movement based on anything; other than the Six Points". Both Nazrul and Amena blamed the few pro-PDM Awami Leaguers for the rift in the party. 65

The pro-PDM Awami Leaguers also criticised the Six Points. The E-PAL leader, Lundishor claimed that Amena Begam was not the mouthpiece of the party; her group was the "silent group". And after a seventeen-day stay in East Pakistan, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan told newsmen that the E-PAL decision would not affect the working of the PDM; that the Council meeting of 19 August 1967 was illegal and the participants were not real AL workers; and that they were only helping the Government. However, a meeting of the APAL Central Working Committee led by Nasrullah in Dacca on 23 August 1967 announced dissolution of the E-PAL WC with effect from the same day and created a 24-member ad hoc committee to be valid till 30 September 1967 in its place. It also decided to serve a show-cause notice to the Acting President and the Acting General Secretary of the E-PAL, asking them why they should not be expelled from the primary membership of the party. But by then the

65 Ibid., 22 August 1967.
decision of the EPAL (pro-Six Points) Council meeting had already been implemented and thirteen EPAL members had been individually served the show-cause notice, and a joint statement of the Acting President and the Acting General Secretary categorically pointed out that "paragraph 2 of the EPAL constitution clearly delineated the relationship between the provincial and the Central Awami League and according to that the Central AL JC has no right whatsoever to dissolve the EPAL JC". Following this, at a pre-posted emergency meeting of the EPAL (pro Six-Points) working committee a unanimous decision was taken to form a forty-eight member (24 from each wing of Pakistan) organising committee of the All Pakistan Awami League. This committee was entrusted with the task of formulating a constitution and manifesto for the APAL incorporating the Six Points and it was also empowered to convene council meetings of the APAL. A.H.A. Kamruzzaman (MLA and ex-officio member of APAL WC) was given the entire responsibility of communicating with all units of EPAL and holding of the first meeting of the organising committee. It was disclosed at the meeting that in 1964 an ad hoc organising committee of the APAL was formed under the chairmanship of Nawabzada Hasrullah Khan but that the said ad hoc committee had failed to hold organisational elections and preparation of a constitution and a manifesto. A resolution also said that the APAL had no power to dissolve the EPAL JC and that this decision was motivated and illegal.

66 For details see ibid., 25-23 August 1967.
Following the EPAL 'C' decision Karrazaman left for West Pakistan. He made it known before his departure to Karachi that within the second week of September the details of 48 members of the new organising committee of EPAL would be announced from Karachi and its meeting would be held in Dacca during the last week of September 1967. While in Karachi he told newsmen that discussions with Karachi and Sind leadership of the AL had been very fruitful regarding certain important issues and that soon the EPAL would be reorganised with a programme based on the Six Points. Party election would follow this. He was reported to have mentioned that in Hyderabad, Karachi, etc., people had no faith in the PDM. They had unstinted support for the Six Points because they believed real democracy could be achieved through this only. And Nasrullah had lost his credibility by his breach of trust with the party by not holding party elections. Later he also announced that Nasrullah was no longer the President of the EPAL.

That Nasrullah had failed to perform his duties was repeatedly emphasised obviously to justify the break more on technical grounds than on the rift due to divergence of opinion regarding the Six Points. After all, the pro-Six Pointers would gain nothing by publicising the fact

67 Ibid., 6 September 1967.
68 Ibid., 14 and 16 September 1967.
that Six Points was less than universally accepted. Hence Kamruzzaman's statement: "We are determined to correct the mistakes committed by our leader in the past in not conducting the party affairs in the proper manner."69

At a press conference held in the EPAL office in Dacca on 18 September 1967 Kamruzzaman announced the formation of a 48-member Central Organizing Committee of the APAL and announced that its first meeting was to take place in Dacca on 24 September 1967. He also stated that Karachi, Sind and Baluchistan AL had supported the formation of the new Organising Committee and they along with AL did not accept the existence of any All Awami League under the leadership of Nasrullah Khan. In Punjab there was fairly large support for the new Organising Committee but the Punjab Awami League had so far not given intimation of any official opinion. He disclosed that in UP particularly in Punjab Nasrullah and Chulam Jilani were carrying on anti-Six Points publicity. The 24 West Pakistanis in the Organising Committee included Malik Hamid Sarfraz, Chaudhry Naziruddin, Syed Abu Asim, Syed Khalid Ahmed Tirmizi, Syed Shah Bokhari, Mohammad Murtaza, etc.70

Kamruzzaman's assessment about feelings in certain areas of UP were based on fact. The Sind AL at its JC meeting at Jacobabad on 6 September 1967 had unanimously

69 Ibid., 17 September 1967.
70 Ibid., 19 September 1967.
resolved that the APAL (existing) Organising Committee could not remain valid after it had lost the confidence of the majority section of the party. It also demanded immediate party reorganisation on the basis of the Six-Point Programme. It was also said that by joining the PDM the (existing) APAL had overridden the Sind AL manifesto.\(^71\)

The WC of the newly formed APAL had its first meeting in Dacca on 24 September 1967 which decided to continue with the existing structure of the WC and Kauruza-man was elected as the permanent convenor of the Committee. A ten-member subcommittee was formed to prepare the constitution and manifesto of the reorganised APAL and was instructed to formulate these on the basis of the Six Points, the abolition of One Unit in West Pakistan and socialist economy. Earlier a resolution had been unanimously passed in favour of reversal of separate provinces to their autonomous status as existed before the One Unit came into being. Significantly, at the meeting, while seventeen from EP participated - of the rest five were in jail and two were indisposed - only seven West Pakistanis were present. Eight more members from each wing were co-opted in the new WC raising the total to 56.\(^72\)

At the pro-PDM AL ad hoc committee meeting on the same day Nasrullah criticised the formation of the new

\(^71\) Ibid., 7 September 1967.

\(^72\) Ibid., 25 September 1967.
organising committee but resolutions were passed demanding release of all political prisoners including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, repeal of the state of emergency, lifting of prohibitory order from the New Nation Printing Press, etc. 73

Its next meeting held on 28 September again referred to the above demands and also to rise in prices, rationing in rural areas and repressive laws, etc. 74 These obviously underlined a certain unity in the perception of the basic problems that the people were facing. At the Council meeting of the pro-PDM AL held in Dacca on 16 October 1967 it was made known that if by next February the PDM failed to start any concrete movement then the pro-PDM EPAL would adopt its own programme. Besides, this meeting was also reported to have expressed its confidence about the Six Points while rendering full support to the Eight Points of the PDM. This meeting was in favour of leaving the question of dissolution of One Unit to the concerned provinces and entrusted the ad hoc committee to take expulsion measures against Syed Nazrul Islam, Amina Begam, Kamruzzaman, Abdul Malek Ukil, Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Rafiquddin Bhuian, Professor Yusuf Ali, Abdul Aziz of Chittagong and two others. 75

The EP speakers at the abovementioned meeting sounded rather on the defensive. They explained, as if

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 30 September 1967.
75 Ibid., 16 October 1967.
to justify their deviation, that the idea of the PDM was mooted only after the Awami League's inability to lead in nationwide movement became obvious, and the move for PDM was formalised only after the West Pakistani leaders had accepted the essence of the Six Points. It was claimed that proper implementation of the eight point programme of the PDM would take care of the EP demands. Obviously, the EPAL defectors could not afford to disown the Six Points, and therefore claimed that the eight points in effect signified a moral victory of the EPAL. It was mentioned that no constituent of the PDM had abandoned its individual party programme for good. Hence, by joining PDM they had not sold out the AL. 76

In the context of the politics of Pakistan the formation of the PDM was not exceptional, particularly in view of the fact that the efficacy of the Six Points Formula had been doubted even by some EPAL leaders like Abdus Salam and Tarkabagish at its inception. Abdus Salam in fact, in his inaugural address at the 1966 Council session had said, "in [national] politics Six Points are not the last words" and "if any group comes forward to eradicate the mountainous disparity between the East and the West the [EP] AL would welcome it". 77 During his negotiations

76 See report of speeches made by Abdus Salam, Maulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, Nasiur Rahman (Jessore) etc. in ibid., 17 September 1967.

77 Ittefaq, 19 March 1966.
with the West Pakistani leaders he might have been convinced that the eight points did offer a viable alternative for the Six Points. And the fact was that the eight points were certainly an improvement over the 1956 constitution and did include demands that would, if fulfilled, have taken care of the pressing demands of EP. But what was the guarantee that in the absence of clear-cut predetermined constitutional arrangements for EP's right to manage its own economy, these demands were going to be fulfilled? The pro-FDM & PAL leaders were probably repeating the mistake Suhrawardy had once committed by compromising on certain basics. The Six-Point Formula was the end-product of the proven failure of a particular strategy. And these politicians were now advocating the same. The Eight Points as they were could have been enough for East Pakistan if normal democratic traditions had been well entrenched in Pakistan. During its formative years Pakistan failed to develop the democratic norms. During the intervening period pressure groups opposed to democratic functioning certainly did not weaken. Rather new dimensions had been added to further their entrenchment into the Pakistani society. And, therefore, remedies which had not cured the disease at the earlier stage could not have been effective when it had further aggravated.

In East Pakistan the popular support to the Six Points and indifference to the Eight Points might not have
been due to any in-depth understanding of the risks involved in accepting the PDM programme. But the anti-PDM EJPAL leadership had certainly realised it and had tried to forestall the possibility by appealing to the primordial sentiments of a large section of the East Pakistani population with the clear-cut focus of the Six Points, which the PDM programme could not overshadow. If the PDM could mobilise any significant sector of the politically conscious in East Pakistan it could have succeeded. After all it had considerable support from a section of East Pakistani politicians. But because of its weak support base confined mainly to personal followers of the de-EBUed politicians it failed to wean away popular attention in East Pakistan from the Six Point Programme. This was in spite of their extensive tours, criticism of the Six-Pointers and slogans like Anchalik Swavatta Shasan dite hobe (Must give regional autonomy), Anchalik boishamva dur karo (remove inter-regional disparities), etc.

In West Pakistan also a counterforce was taking shape. Just at the time when the original APAL was breaking up after the formation of the PDM and there was evidently some support in some parts of West Pakistan for its reorganisation on the line of the APAL with emphasis on the Six Points and socialistic economy and dissolution of the One Unit, a new party was being formed by the ex-Foreign Minister, Z.A. Bhutto.78 Whether the timing of the founding of the

78 Founding of the PPP was reported in Azad, 17 September 1967.
PPP was accidental or was a deliberate move to forestall the emergence of a reorganised AL with a stronger base in West Pakistan, particularly in Sind and Baluchistan, is difficult to assess. It might also be possible that the PPP was a natural development in West Pakistan like the autonomists were in East Pakistan. The JMM on the other hand, appear to have been designed to protect Pakistan from both a radicalised AL and a progressive PPP. If so, it failed miserably.

The EPAL turned more and more aggressive vocally in putting forward its views. Syed Nazrul Islam, Acting President of the EPAL, said:

Through the Six points we want that East Pakistan's money remains in East Pakistan and West Pakistan's money remains in West Pakistan - what is so anti-national in that? If in a referendum even thirty per cent vote against the Six Points we will give it up....
(Tell us) why have you kept hundreds of leaders and workers in the dark cells of prisons without any trial,....Accept the popular demand, there will be no need for any movement. We do not want power. Awami League's economic programme is socialistic. We want to establish an exploitationless society through a socialistic economy. Independence was not achieved to pave the way for two hundred families of a particular area to suck the blood of millions and thus grab the entire (national) wealth. 79

The EPAL fervour for a socialistic economy seemed to have caught the imagination of at least a section of the

APAL. Kamruzzaman, while informing newsmen at Karachi of the details about the APAL reorganisation that was taking place announced that the APAL wanted a "classless society" and "parliamentary democracy" in Pakistan. It was, however, not clear whether both the demands came from the same group or from different groups.

In East Pakistan the impact of the pro-autonomy Awami Leaguers could have been minimised by the National Awami Party led by the father figure of Maulana Bhashani. He could have mobilised the peasants and the leftist urbanites much easily because he was a popular peasant leader of long-standing, his party had been the asylum of the banned Communists and he had by the mid-sixties a pronounced pro-China stand when a pro-China faction of leftists were emerging in East Pakistan. But because of Maulana Bhashani's inability to put forward a plausible line of action the very factors that could have strengthened his position to provide a possible alternative to the Awami League's dominance weakened his position beyond repair and split his party first down the middle, followed by further splits of the faction that remained with him initially. However, a NAP-AL entente was still thought possible because Bhashani had said that after the AL had changed its stand

80 Ibid., 13 December 1967.
on One Unit, foreign policy and economic policy, its differences with the NAP had been in a great measure removed. Applying hindsight it appears that with the advent of the PPP it was quite natural for the NAP, particularly the PPP, to look for an ally to maintain, if not widen, its support base there. A reorganised AL, which had some support in some areas of WP, might have appeared to be a possible rescuer.

Some LPPAP leaders (called pro-Moscow) explained the rift within the LPPAP as the result of difference of opinion about the party's policy towards the Government, a united Opposition front, autonomy and nature of the movement. A faction of the NAP (described as pro-Peking) was said to be against the prevalent anti-government movement and were not prepared for an entirely anti-Government united Opposition movement on those four issues. Professor Mazaffar Ahmad also said in a press statement that the (so-called) nationalist faction of the NAP could no longer work with the (so-called) internationalist faction for the above reasons.82

The rift not only split the NAP, it damaged Bhashani's image considerably. At the NAP requisitionists meeting in Dacca on 16 December 1967 the slogan was: Bhashani Ayub Khaner dalal (Bhashani is a stooge of Ayub Khan). Mohiuddin in his written speech said that the other faction was trailing behind the Ayub Government on the plea that the

82 Purbadesh, 23 and 26 November 1967.
Government was anti-imperialist and imperialism was the main enemy of the country; they were neither spelling out in public that the Government had an anti-imperialist role nor were they supporting the Government directly, but were following the principle of not disturbing the Government.

Mohiuddin also called the other faction of the "traitors" for not having participated in the post-7 June movement.

Mahmudul Haq Usmani said that they too were anti-imperialist but did not want to attach less importance to the grave national problems by giving top priority to it. He further pointed out that talking of people's democracy was futile when there was no parliamentary democracy, no press freedom and no fundamental rights in the country. He also pointed out that people's democracy could not be achieved without people's power, but it was quite possible to achieve socialist society even through parliamentary democracy. Though his arguments followed a particular line of approach he opposed branding various NAP factions as pro-Moscow or pro-Peking.

Since the strife related to internal problems of the country, he said, this really amounted to hiding the real problem.

So it was clear that though the rift in the N-P widened apparently on the ideological issue of ways and means for the attainment of socialism in the country, the practical implication was that the so-called Peking faction believed to be led by Bhashani, was ambiguous about its policy towards the Government while the so-called Moscow faction decidedly

opposed the Government.

But in spite of alleged passive support to the Government by one section of the NAP, it obviously was not spared from governmental criticism. And Ayub Khan's slanderous remarks about East Pakistanis still enraged Bhashani. His indignation was apparent when he said: "The President would do well if he remembers that 56% of Pakistanis live in East Pakistan."\(^{34}\)

Though absence of support of the top leaders of other Opposition parties, including the NAP, somewhat reduced the impact of the movement, the focus remained and its spirit was deeply ingrained in East Pakistan. It is remarkable that even during the period of confusion and strife the comparatively junior leaders of the ...PAL who had remained outside prison walls stood firmly by the party programme in spite of the best efforts by the rest of the Opposition and some party members to persuade them to tone down their demands and join hands with the compromise-minded leadership. Even the alleged organisational weakness\(^{35}\) of the Awami League could not corrode the conviction of the Awami Leaguers in charge of the party (in East Pakistan) at the time. This showed that they understood the situation in its proper perspective. Their line of argument was that

\(^{34}\) See Bhashani's Press statement, ibid., 18 December 1967.

once the popular movement was given up and bargaining started there would be no option left if such negotiations failed. This certainly showed a great degree of political maturity and made it clear that East Pakistani Awami Leaguers held on to the party programme not so much because of the charisma of any individual or because of a negative attitude of anti-centrism but because they believed in the positive objective of the Six-Point Programme. And it was this belief that kept them and the movement on the right-track. The other opposition parties' failure to offer any viable alternative to the EPAL affected the interests of the Government also as the neutralisation of the AL was essential for the interest of the ruling coterie. The only alternative open to the Government was to attack the party's legitimacy built up through its long association with various regional movements and with the demand for regional autonomy. This was done. Jsheikh Mujib, President of the AL and the chief protagonist of the Six-Point programme, who was already in prison since mid 1966, was implicated in a conspiracy case against the state of Pakistan. The idea behind this

86 Interview with Abdul Mannan who along with others had argued with Abdus Salam Khan while discussions about joining the PDM were on.

87 On 6 January 1968 the Central Home Ministry, through a Press Note announced that twenty eight persons including two East Bengali members of the CPI had been arrested in December 1967 for their involvement in a conspiracy for the cessation of East Pakistan aided by some officials at the Indian Deputy High Commission in Ja.ca and some Indian Army Officers posted at Agartala, a border town in India. It was claimed that most of the arrested persons had admitted their guilt. In a subsequent Press Note released on 18 January 1968 Sheikh Mujib was mentioned as the chief architect of the 'conspiracy'. For details see Dainik Pakistan, 7 and 19 January 1968.
move was to present Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as an apostate and thus consolidate public opinion in East Pakistan against the Awami League and bring the people round to the Government in the name of Muslim fraternalism against the "Hindu" India. It was hoped that once Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was branded as an Indian agent and defamed the Awami League would lose its legitimacy in the eyes of the people of East Pakistan. Those who formulated this strategy were possibly encouraged by utterings like the one by Nurul Amin in 1966, that anyone guilty of even in the thought of secession should be tried in open court and punished properly. But before proceeding with the plan of the conspiracy case, the ruling coterie obviously failed to assess the public response to such statements. The regime's efforts proved counter-productive. The reaction (though delayed) of the people of East Pakistan showed that they did not believe in the myth that the Awami League was committing treason. In fact the case, officially called the Agartala Conspiracy Case, added to the personal popularity and credibility of Sheikh Mujib, gave a new lease of life to the AL and enhanced its legitimacy in the eyes of East Pakistanis.

Initially the announcement of the 'conspiracy' and Sheikh Mujib's involvement in it had stunned EP politicians including the Awami Leaguers. Most of the top AL leaders were behind bars, some had defected to join the AL, many important workers were in hiding and sympathisers were

---

scared. The Acting General Secretary Amana Begam like many others, was certain that the Government would spare no means to strike a final blow to Sheikh Mujib and the 1941 AL. But she still believed that in the event of a country-wide popular movement the situation might change. Anyway, her first reaction was to issue a statement on behalf of the AL-UW demanding trial in public of all the accused in the case, and fair trial according to existing laws. The Government, probably hoping to prove its righteousness decided on public hearing of the case.

In April 1968 by an ordinance the President constituted a Special Tribunal consisting of ex-Chief Justice K.A. Rahman, Justice Mujibur Rahman Khan and Justice Maksumul Hakim to conduct the case of the state vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others. The trial started on

89 Stated to me by Amana Begam in Dacca in 1976.

90 Dainik Pakistan, 22 January 1968. As stated by Amana Begam this statement was drafted by Abdul Gaffar Chaudhury, a journalist. Chaudhury himself mentions this in "Iriteeya Mat" (a regular column written by him) in Purbadesh, 6 February 1970.

91 Eleven of the total of thirty five persons accused had already been pardoned after they had become witness for the State. Twenty-eight out of these thirty-five belonged to the Armed Forces - mostly the Navy and the Air Force, the senior-most officer involved was Lt. Col. Noor Aziz (killed by the Pakistani Army in 1971), the rest belonging to rather lower ranks in the armed forces hierarchy. Six of the thirty five were AL members - one of them being its President and the others, local leaders from various districts. Three of the total were Bengali members of the CSP, eligible for the rank of Secretary - and all the three had earlier been rumoured to have been associated with the drafting of the Six-Point Formula.
19 June 1968 at the Kurmitola Cantonment in Dacca where all the accused persons were imprisoned under the Army, Navy and Air Force Act since 18 January 1968.

The EP Awami Leaguers were unnerved. They realised that conviction of Sheikh Mujib would not only remove him from the political scene, it would lead to the virtual demise of the party as well eroding all the groundwork already laid for the achievement of its objective, East Pakistan's autonomy. For the time being, therefore, a very limited objective was decided upon and that was to secure the release of Sheikh Mujib by any means.92 To take care of the legal process the Awami Leaguers arranged for counsel for Mujib and raised funds for the expenses.93 Secondly, while ostensibly continuing with its mass mobilisation programme as part of the autonomy movement through public meetings, the EPAL leaders explained the predicament to the local units and prepared them psychologically for agitations demanding release of Sheikh Mujib. The third, but the most difficult manoeuvre that they contemplated, was to negotiate with the West Pakistani leaders to make them support East Pakistan's demand for Sheikh Mujib's release.94

92 Stated by Abdul Mannan, Amina Begam and some others.

93 Besides eminent local lawyers, with the help of Awami League sympathisers based in London, an eminent British lawyer, J.T. Williams was engaged.

94 Stated by Abdul Mannan, Amina Begam and some others.
While preparations for the trial were going on, political activities on the whole were conducted on a low key. A commentator observed that because of the case "like guilty minds leaders of the opposition have shrunk inside their shells", as if they wanted to "keep quiet till there was all clear signal". But still the Awami League meetings used to be well attended as compared to those by either faction of the NAP.

By the time the trial started the EPAL had evolved its strategy of "one step forward, two steps backward", for securing wider support for the demand for Sheikh Mujib's release and accordingly, in a resolution passed at the WC meeting held on 4 July 1968 called on the people for a united movement.

The EPAL move, however, was interpreted by many as a move to build a counterforce to the conservative FDM. The consequent speculations included the possibility of an alliance of AL, NAP(B) and PPP. Abandonment of the non-negotiability of the Six Points in favour of wider (and

95 "Lull on Political Front is Bitting", The wave (weekly), 18 June 1968.

96 Report in Purbadesh, 16 May 1968.

97 See report of the Working Committee meeting Bangaldesh, 5 July 1968. The strategy was spelt out by Abdul Mannan and Amona Begam in my conversation with them in Bangladesh in 1976. See also, Mustafa Sarwar, "Panchish bachharer sangrame Awami League o Bangabandhu", Bangladesh Awami League Council Adhibeshan '74, Jamaranka, (Dacca, 1974).
necessarily progressive) ideals seemed to be an obvious necessity for any such united movement. The success of any move towards this, it was thought, depended on how well the EPAL leaders like Kamruzzaman (operating at the Centre) Syed Nazrul Islam and Ameena Begam (operating in the province) could "prepare" themselves by weeding out the influence of "some old woods" from the EPAL. 98

The EPAL leaders were certainly preparing themselves, but for an entirely different objective and that was to keep the Six Points as non-negotiable as before but at the same time to secure help for an immediate cause, and that was to secure release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through popular movements backed also by West Pakistani politicians. Accordingly, the EPAL Council meeting in Dacca in October 1968 called on the people to start a united movement immediately to realise certain urgent demands. A four prong operation was announced (1) meetings and processions, (2) strikes, (3) non-cooperation, and (4) civil disobedience, if necessary. At the following public meeting a resolution was passed expressing complete confidence in the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Other resolutions included demanded for the release of all political prisoners and call

---

98 See Wave (weekly), 15 June 1968, 14 July 1969, for an exposition of this view which, according to information gathered in 1976 in Bangladesh, did attract some attention.
to mobilise the masses for the realisation of the Six Points. 99

Although no immediate response to the EPAL's call for a united movement was visible, there was a perceptible change in the political trends in East Pakistan. Maulana Bhashani withdrew his (passive) support to the Government. He demanded that Ayub Khan should step down immediately since his Government had failed to improve the conditions of the poor. He also admitted that the demands for East Pakistan's autonomy were "unanimous demands of the province". 100 His acknowledgment of the autonomy movement also marked the beginning of his association with the anti-Ayub movement which in East Pakistan also included a strong demand for the release of Sheikh Mujib and which ultimately was greatly responsible for the downfall of the President. And these developments undoubtedly indicated the EPAL's dominant position in the province by launching the autonomy movement and carrying it against many odds.

99 Sangbad (Dacca), October 1968.

100 See report of Bhashani's public speech, Sangbad, 4 November 1968.