

# Listen Carefully to the BBC

by S Bari

ONE of my earliest memories as a toddler is of my father packing his suitcase to go to Washington, or Chicago, or New York. Of badges and posters and of my father proclaiming, "I will give up smoking when Bangladesh becomes independent." And he did.

Bengalis who lived abroad during the War spent time, effort and money organizing help and recognition for their country. Their tensions and panic were of a special kind: they did not know how their loved ones were, what was truly happening, they could not even be certain of the future of what they were fighting for. To find out about their meeting and demonstrations, their anguish and hopes, we spoke to Dr. Mohammad Yunus, now director of Grameen Bank, then a 31-year old teacher at Tennessee State University.

I used to read the Pakistan Observer. We followed the developments: the '69 movement, the closure of Parliament. After that, the paper stopped arriving. I came back from class on the 25th of March (it was still the 25th there due to the time difference) and turned on the radio. Military action in East Pakistan, it said. I immediately called one of the eight other Bengalis in Nashville. We all got together at Dr Ata's place.

Reports were conflicting: Mujib had been arrested, or killed, or taken to Islamabad, no one knew anything for sure. Local media were giving it intense coverage. Had independence been declared?

It still amazes me that I immediately decided citizenship was an issue. I said to my friends, "This is it, now Bangladesh has emerged, we must make up our minds whether we are Bangladeshi nationals or Pakistanis." This was quite a radical thought, and very sudden. Only one among us was hesitant, and felt that we were rushing things. But unless we know what we are, where we stand, we cannot act. There was not a second's hesitation in my mind, and now I wonder at my spontaneous decision.

Through a committee that we formed, the Bangladesh Citizens Committee, we contacted local media, TV and radio stations were very enthusi-

astic to give us air time: here was this hot news story from a country no one had heard of, and suddenly citizens of the country turn up in Nashville, Tennessee! That was my first public appeal to the US to stop aid to Pakistan.

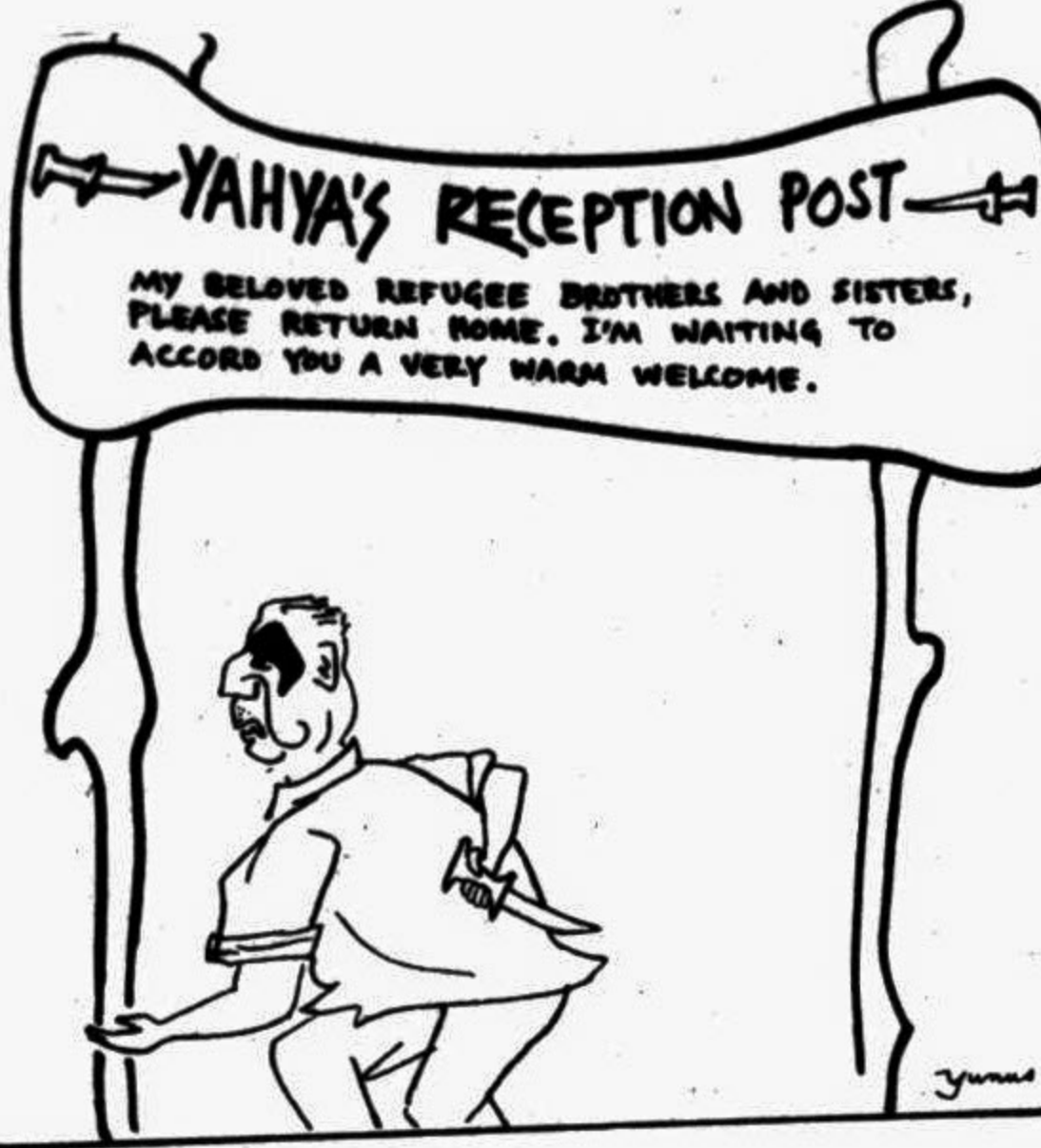
I went to Washington and landed on an embassy man Enayet Karim's doorstep. He had never seen me in his life, but he gave us all his hospitality. I spent the day of the 26th making posters: Stop Genocide, Recognize Bangladesh, Stop Military Aid.

On March 27th, Capital Hill was teeming with people from New York, Detroit, the Midwest, Boston, mainly workers and labourers. All these people had arrived spontaneously. There was total chaos, and it was obvious what we needed was a focal point: since no one had exactly arranged the demonstration, no one knew what to do next.

I saw my friend Shamsul Bari getting out of a car always one for sticking to the law. He had gone to get permission to demonstrate. I grabbed hold of him and shouted, "Our leader is here." Bari was a bit taken aback but I whispered to him, "Shut up and give orders." We followed him to the steps of the Capital, where our position was stated and we were interviewed by the media. Bari is now representative of the UN refugee agency, in Malaysia.

Journalist Simon Dring had just gotten out of Bangladesh, and through his reports we learned for the first time of the extent of the massacre. It was extremely emotional, we were all crying when we read the descriptions. I remember receiving a letter from my father soon afterwards, in which he said, "Everything is fine. Listen carefully to the BBC."

When we made the round of foreign missions to ask them to recognize Bangladesh, we were faced with an odd situation. "How can we recognize you," they would ask, "unless you have a government for us to recognize?" Not knowing what was going on in the sub-continent, we sent a man to Calcutta. He soon reported back that a government-in-exile had been formed already. He seemed surprised at the optimistic upbeat mood of the refugees. Which goes to show that we had no idea what the mood was like in Bangladesh.



Newsletter comment: One of Dr. Yunus's own creations

The Consul General in New York was a Bengali, and was recalled to Islamabad. The second man, Mr Mahmud Ali, declared from the first that he was a Bangladeshi. The Pakistanis gave him a hard time. He left the mission having filled his briefcase with all the official stationery and stamps, and he was invaluable in extending our passports and papers. He is now an Additional Secretary. In fact, many government servants wrote to us offering their support. One was Mr Kibria, who is now the head of ESCAP in Bangkok.

I used to live out of a suitcase. My Volkswagen was packed with paper and material for the Bangladesh Newsletter that Bari and I were producing. I went and stayed in Minneapolis, Chicago, all sorts of places. In Chicago Bari and Dr FR Khan had formed the Bangladesh Defence League. We lobbied for Congressional support, raised funds, met with India, brought out the newsletter, for the information as well as the publicity.

General Osmani kept sending messages asking for heavy equipment. We were rather distressed by this, since light equipment was better suited to guerrilla warfare. At this point, the Israelis approached us, offer-

ing help in guerilla training in exchange for Bangladesh's recognition of Israel. For some of us, this was a moral quandary; others contended that since the Arabs were not doing much to help us, there was no reason we should not accept Israeli assistance. Finally, however, their offer was not taken up.

American support is something that I like to think of those days. Most Americans didn't have clue where Bangladesh was or what was happening there. When they heard 'Civil War' they thought of their own history and would tell us civil wars were wrong. Once they understood that our war was more like their War of Independence, they became quite supportive.

One very emotional for me was when two ships arrived in Baltimore to transport arms to Pakistan. There we were sitting in our two little dinghys gheraoing these giant vessels. Finally there was a Congressional hearing, which Bari and I attended. Congress decided to suspend military aid to Pakistan. The President was not pleased, and Kissinger of course had written off our country as a basket case, but our job was accomplished: at least we had succeeded in stopping the flow of weapons.

6 AM: Woke up at my aunts house. Since the army raid in our house I was living like a fugitive, a night here, a week in a friends house, few nights somewhere else. Any way there was no bombing (air raids) this morning, only some cannons booming at a distance and the usual intermittent machinegun and rifle fire. Besides, today was the deadline given to Niazi by the Indian top army brass. Every one was dreading the refusal & the obvious reprisal & destruction of Dhaka.

My friend and comrade in arms Shahed Atiqur Rahman also spent the night with me at Road 31. He was with radio in hand probably trying to listen to BBC, VOA, Mujibnagar all at once. We all ate breakfast, myself and Atiq planned our days activities; collect more funds for the cause, who to visit, arrange more accommodations in different localities for freedom fighters that were coming into the city, visit different secret bases, prepare for interview with CBS, & ABC people scheduled for this evening.

8:30: Shahan Mobin Chowdhury came looking for us in a Red Cross Jeep. Good boy Shahan. We used to send him on small operations, distributing leaflets, throwing bombs in the campus, etc. He was frantic, Niazi has surrendered. We have won. The whole gov't of East Pakistan is Inter-Continental Hotel (which was taken over by Red Cross).

"Please come to Intercontinental they need Freedom Fighters to protect the hotel & the prisoners." "What? Are you sure?" "Yes, see they (Red Cross) have sent me to get you all with their car. Come on hurry."

9 AM: "We all got up on the jeep. I sat on the bonnet."

The elation at India's involvement was incredible. We started celebrating already. That was when the bitterest blow fell, the most saddening moment in all those nine months. I was at the house of a supportive Pakistani friend when I read the paper reporting the Intellectuals' Massacre. I broke down completely. I had tears streaming down my cheeks as I asked my friend, "We are independent, we have won! Why are you doing this now, what more do you want?" I wanted to put my hands around his neck and strangle him. Even though he had helped us all the way.

After independence, I drew our flag on the newsletter. That was one of the happiest moments of my life.

# Diary of a Freedom Fighter

By Wasif Islam

Some of our boys also crammed in. We were shouting Joy Bangla, long live Bangladesh. We are free, we are free." The jeep was moving slowly down Mirpur Road.

People were looking at us in utter bewilderment. Obviously the news of the surrender had not yet spread. There was disbelief in the faces of the people in the near desolate street.

I was holding a long stick in my hands. I asked for a flag. Some one supplied one to me. The red, green and yellow. I tied it to the stick and raised it aloft. I was feeling euphoric. This was the first flag of Bangladesh raised in Dhaka city after the crackdown in March, we crossed SK Mujib's house, I told some one to go and place a flag on top of his house also.

9:30 AM: "We reached Intercon Hotel. The Red Cross officials were more than happy to see us. They said "Look Niazi has surrendered. The war is over. Dr. Abdul Malek (Governor) and his high officials are all under the protection of Red Cross in this hotel. Please help us, take care of them. We are afraid that violent mobs may come and kill them."

We assured them we were soldiers without uniform, and we will see that the Geneva Convention is abided by. They signed us into a room in the hotel and said you 3 (Atiq, Shahan and myself), are the guests of Red Cross for 3 days at least. Mr Vaas Oederland of Bata who was working with the Red Cross handed over to us a list of all the gov't officials staying in the hotel. We promised to do our best.

10:30 AM: Atiq and Shahan went to get some of our selected boys from different bases to guard the hotel.

I stuck a revolver on my belt & strolled out of the hotel and posted some guards around the front of the hotel. By now there were some more traffic cars, few rickshaws, army jeeps, trucks rolling by carrying soldiers with defeat written over their faces. But people still had sceptical look. (The news sounded too good to be true). I was standing in front of Sakura. The GM of the hotel came and greeted "how's it going skipper?" A short man with a reddish face, probably German, or Swiss, or who knows from where. I just

looked him in the eyes, feeling tensed and was not in a mood for gossip. He grinned and quickly went back into the hotel.

A Pak Militia came and saluted & said there were 10 soldiers in the Radio Station next door. They wanted to surrender & give up their arms. I waved to 2 of our boys and told them to collect their arms. I noticed the Pakistani flag still fluttering over the Radio Station. I said for God's sake, take that down and put up ours right now.

11:00 AM: Atiq came back and handed me a Sten which I slung over my shoulder. People were starting to celebrate in the streets. Shouting, dancing singing. Joyously pumping our hands in gratitude, hugging us with love and admiration. They even carried us on their shoulders and gave us flowers some shoved roses in my pockets. We felt good.

11:30 AM: Atiq and myself drove towards old town and the Central jail. We had to take out Chullu Bhai and the others from jail. But it seemed the news had not spread there yet and we would have to fight our way in. We decided to wait a few more hours. On our way back we stopped at the High Court Mazar put our guns by the side of the tomb, prayed two Rakats of Shukrana (gratitude) and cried like babies. The nine months of pent-up emotions, fear, rage, anger, confusion, hurt, insecurity, all welled out in tears, helpless & happy we bawled to our hearts content. Then we went home and greeted mother and sister both of them were good MuktiJoddhas. My mother was with us from day one, consoling, feeding me and my other friends, collecting funds, arranging sewing kathas by the hundreds, for cold and shivering freedom fighters within and outside the city. Facing the Army when they raided our house in August etc. If I was giving awards I'd rate her for at least a Bir Protik any day. But then we were not in the race for all that.

1 PM: We went back to the hotel, had lunch. We sat close to Dr. A. Malek and his Austrian wife a converted Muslim. Then left for Dhaka Cantt. With foreign journalists to witness the surrender of the Pak Officers, led by Rao

Farman Ali (This was the real surrender). Before the ceremony we mingled. With the Pak Officers. One of them gave his car keys to us, saying: "I don't want any Malaoon using my car." Another Capt. said: "Good work. We'd do the same thing if we were in your shoes." A Major said: "Please help me get out of here." We said: "No way. You're only getting what you deserve." At the surrender, the Pak soldiers lined up with empty guns, Stens, revolvers, etc. Some Indian Army top brass gave orders in Hindi and some rules for POW was read out. Then they all lay down their arms.

We were the only Bengalis there besides the Foreign journalists. We saw tears in the faces of the Pak soldiers at the moment of their humiliation. The ABC journalists asked me on the way back: How do you feel? I said: "I don't, know, I'm getting mixed feelings." Inside, I was asking myself, how long will we be able to keep this Freedom. Could we win so quickly without Indian planes & tanks? I recollected a fragment from MAO or was it Lenin that a nation's character develops after protracted guerrilla or peoples' war. No, I'm no advocate of communism. Have we developed such a character devotion, honesty, sincerity. I was happy, but there was something gnawing at the back of my mind.

3 PM: We came home again, by now, Chullu Bhai was out and he had just arrived. We embraced and cried. On the streets, we shot bullets in the air. Rumi, Bodi, Azad, Ashfie, they were all dead. We vowed to make their dying worthwhile. Many friends, relatives and neighbours started to converge at our house. It was a great revolution.

6 PM: The whole city was now in a grip of joyous hysteria, shouting playing, singing flocking to and fro. We also saw the 16 December Brigade being born, faces we did not see in the last nine months. Now they were roaming around with guns, looking very heroic. Only they would look away shyly when they would come across us.

9 PM: We ate dinner at the hotel and had a party with the foreign journalists in their room and talked about the future of Bangladesh till late in the night.

11:30 PM: We slept in the hotel room. It had been a long day. The first night in nine months that we slept peacefully without the fear of getting picked up on getting a bullet in the head.

I looked at Atiq and Shahen, they were already sleeping like babies.

# Tale of an Unlikely Hero

From Page 8 member how you crossed that see of blood! You never even as a matter of form or courtesy took the name of either the Soviet Union or India. This is a bad sign. Believe me we are already in for very bad days. For the rest of his stay in Dhaka he couldn't recover from his worries that very visibly weighed him down and down. Dipen's second trip to his dreamland was in fact a kind of mission. He has been receiving disquieting news about the movements of Zahir Raihan — who had developed an obsession for digging up Jamaat's underground organisation and their conspiracy for undoing the victory of December 16. Dipen took Alamgir Kabir and myself to Zahir's place and we had a long long talk on the prevailing situation and our own do's and don't's of the moment. Dipen's stature in the literary world, his standing as

a wonderful prop for the liberation efforts, his personal association with and love for Zahir, the writer and freedom fighter, and last of all, his power of analysis and persuasion made Zahir relent in his persistence for the Jamaat-hunt as well as the hunt for his brother Shahidullah Kaiser who had been missing since December 14 and everyone, except Zahir, was convinced that he had been killed by the Al-Badr on the day of his missing. It was decided on the spot that next day, January 29 all four of us would have our dinner at Bernu and Shaheen's — the great singing duo, that is. The appointed hour passed. And the clock-hands crept on to strike eleven. We had all the time been in touch with Zahir's place on telephone. The last message received was Zahir had gone to Mirpur — the Behari killers' colony — in

search of his brother on an information from somewhere and has not returned so far. We then went on separate ways to our houses and the saddest man among us was the most knowing man also. He knew what had happened. His mission had come to a sad and tragic failure.

In the closing months of the war Dipen put pressure on Zahir Raihan to raise some purely East Bengal — Bangladeshi in present parlance — platform that could take over the musical squad from them and make it into a hundred per cent Bangladesh affair. So was formed the Liberation Council of Bangladesh.

All these efforts and undertakings were coming to a close as the Indo-Pak open war crescendoed to a fast and triumphant finish for the allies. Very naturally, Attendance at the rehearsals was thinning fast. But December 16 was different. Very different indeed. Squad members — singers and instrumentalists, scriptwriters and reciters, all boys and girls drawn from perhaps all areas covering Thakurgaon to Teknaf, as the saying goes, started crowding 144 Lenin Sarani from early morning. And there was no sign of Dipen — the ring master. When at long last he showed up, — he wore a most crestfallen look. He must just be coming out from the gates of a mental hell. What was omis on such an auspicious day?

Some of us addressed the crowd. Talking of sacrifices made and of eternal gratitude, of our hopes for the future and our resolutions to materialise them. But, in fact, we were all the time waiting for what Dipen would come up with.

Our hero — a braver fighter I have yet to see — fell to complications arising out of all his vital organs being crammed into such a small cage as his midgety chest — on January 19, 1978. I feel honoured to have been able to be at his bedside for the whole of his dying month. All of Calcutta's writers and artists went to his funeral at Keoratala — and as his body went into the incinerator to the ringing chorus of the Internationale, even such sworn enemies as Santosh Kumar Ghose and Mahashweta Devi went clasping each other close. I, from Bangladesh, felt that a part of our Liberation War has just now been extinguished.

## Shawkat Ali

(continued from page 10)

the country, the entire leadership of the Sangsad was remoulded, reflecting the change in the national political leadership. And the one-way propaganda and campaign of lies against Bangabandhu started.

We decided an alternative organisation was necessary because of all the lies and propaganda that was being spread in the name of the Sangsad; the way the history of the liberation struggle was being distorted in the name of freedom-fighters; the way the then government of Ziaur Rahman was working against the ideals of the liberation war and cooperating with anti-liberation forces by rehabilitating Razakars; for all those reasons.

DS: So how do you see the history of the liberation struggle?

SA: There are those who are currently trying to please everybody by saying different things and giving different interpretations at different times and to different people.

By comparison, I'd say that we are completely clean. In a clear and unequivocal way, without any ambiguity, we say that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the founder of Bengali nationalism, the country was freed under his leadership, he is the founder of Bangladesh, father of the nation. Bangladesh became independent through his long political struggle and far-sighted leadership.

The armed struggle, the war of liberation of 1971 was the result, the climax of a long political struggle. History will remain incomplete and incorrect if we see the war of liberation of '71 as something separate from the preceding years of political struggle. It would be a distortion of history.

Those people who say this or that thing to please some people, can't give the correct version of history, because history is not about pleasing people. Whatever we say, we say it because we believe it, and because we understand it. Now, some people might be pleased with that, while others might not be pleased. But we are sorry, can't do anything about it.

On the occasion of the People's Republic of Bangladesh VICTORY DAY we extend our heartiest felicitations



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