

# Historic March

# GENOCIDE

## March 25, 1971

## Bangladesh Declares Freedom

Report in *The Statesman*, New Delhi, March 27, 1971



**Media Flashback**

### Dhaka Burns As Pakistan Army Unleashes Reign of Terror and Murder; Large Parts of City Put to the Torch; Slum-dwellers Murdered Indiscriminately; Students and Teachers Massacred; Police at Rajarbagh and Riflemen at Pilkhana Put up Heroic Resistance; Banganbandhu Arrested

### How Dacca Paid for a 'United Pakistan'

Reported by Simon Dring of *Daily Telegraph*, London  
Published in *Washington Post*, March 30, 1971

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, East Pakistan's popular political leader, was seen being taken away by the army, and nearly all the top members of his Awami League party have also been arrested.

Leading political activities have been arrested, others are dead, and the offices of two papers which supported Mujibur's movement have been destroyed.

But the first target as the tanks rolled into Dacca on the night of Thursday, March 25, seems to have been the students.

An estimated three battalions of troops were used in the attack on Dacca — one of armoured, one of artillery and one of infantry. They started leaving their barracks shortly before 10 pm. By 11, firing had broken out and the people who had started to erect makeshift barricades — overturned cars, three stumps, furniture, concrete piping — became early casualties.

Sheikh Mujibur was warned by telephone that something was happening, but he refused to leave his house. "If I go into hiding they will burn the whole of Dacca to find me," he told an aide who escaped arrest.

The students were also warned, but those who were still around later said that most of them thought they would only be arrested. Led by American-supplied M-24 World War II tanks, one column of troops sped to Dacca University shortly after midnight. Troops took over the British Council Library and used it as a fire base from which to shell nearby dormitory areas.

Caught completely by surprise, some 200 students were killed in Iqbal Hall, headquarters of the militant anti-government student's union. I was told. Two days later, bodies were still smouldering in burnt-out rooms, others were scattered outside, more floated in a nearby lake, an aft student lay sprawled across his easel.

The military removed many of the bodies, but the 30 bodies still there could never have accounted for all the blood in the corridors of Iqbal Hall.

At another hall, reportedly, soldiers buried the dead in a hastily dug mass grave which was then bulldozed over by tanks. People living near the university were caught in the fire too, and 200 yards of shanty houses running alongside a railway line were destroyed.

Army patrols also razed nearby market area. Two days later, when it was possible to get out and see all this, some of the market's stall-owners were still lying as though asleep, their blankets pulled up over their shoulders. In the same district, the Dacca Medical College received direct bazooka fire and a mosque was badly damaged.

As the university came under attack, other columns of

troops moved in on the Rajarbagh headquarters of the East Pakistan police, on the other side of the city. Tanks opened fire first, witness said; then the troops moved in and levelled the men's sleeping quarters, firing incendiary rounds into the buildings. People living opposite did not know how many died there, but out of the 1,100 police based there not many are believed to have escaped.

#### Mujib's arrest

As this was going on, other units had surrounded the Sheikh's house. When contacted shortly before 1 am he said that he was expected an attack any minute and had sent everyone except his servants and bodyguard away to safety.

A neighbour said that at 1-10 am, one tank, an armoured car, and trucks loaded with troops drove down the street firing over the house. "Sheikh you should come down", an officer called out in English as they stopped outside. Mujibur stepped out onto his balcony and said, "Yes, I am ready, but there is no need to fire. All you need to have done is call me on the telephone and I would have come."

The officer then walked into the yard and told Mujibur: "You are arrested."

He was taken away along with three servants, an aide and his bodyguard, who was badly beaten up when he started to insult the officer. One man was killed — a night watchman hiding behind the fence of the house next door.

As the Sheikh was driven off — presumably to army headquarters — the soldiers moved into the house, took away all documents, smashed everything in sight, locked the garden gate, shot down the green, red and yellow "Bangla Desh" flag and drove away.

#### By 2 O'Clock Friday

Fires were burning all over the city, and troops had occupied the university and surrounding areas. There was still heavy shelling in some areas, but the fighting was beginning to slacken noticeably. Opposite the Intercontinental Hotel a Paltoon of troops stored the empty office of "The People" newspaper, burning it down along with most houses in the area and killing the night watchman.

#### City lies silent

Shortly before dawn most firing had stopped, and as the sun came up an eerie silence settled over the city, deserted and completely dead except for noise of the crows and the occasional convoy of troops or two or three tanks rumbling by mopping up.

At noon, again without warning columns of troops poured into the old section of the city where more than 1 million people lived in a sprawling maze of narrow,



Murder in the night: Students massacred on Mar 25 by Pakistan army at Iqbal Hall.

winding streets.

For the next 11 hours, they devastated large areas of the "old town", as it is called, where Sheikh Mujibur had some of his strongest support in Dacca. English Road, French Road, Niar Bazaar, City Bazaar were burned to the ground.

They suddenly appeared at the end of the street, said one old man living in French Niar Bazaar area. Then they drove down it, firing into all the houses.

The lead unit was followed by soldiers carrying cans of gasoline. Those who tried to escape were shot. Those who stayed were burnt alive. About 700 men, women and children died there that day between noon and 2 pm I was told.

The pattern was repeated in at least three other areas of up to a half square mile or more. Police stations in the old town were also attacked.

#### Constables killed

"I am looking for my constables," a police inspector said on Saturday morning as he wandered through the ruins of one of the bazaars. "I have 240 in my district, and so far I have only found 30 of them — all dead."

In the Hindu area of the old town, the soldiers reportedly made the people come out of their houses and shot them in groups. This area, too, was eventually razed.

The troops stayed on in force in the old city until about 11 pm on the night of Friday, March 26, driving around with local Bengali informers. The soldiers would fire a flare and the informer would point out the houses of Awami League supporters. The house would then be destroyed — either with direct fire from tanks or recoilless rifles or with a can of gasoline, witness said.

Meanwhile, troops of the East Bengal Regiment in the suburbs started moving out towards the industrial areas about 10 miles from the Sheikh's centres of support.

Firing continued in these areas until early Sunday morning, but the main part of the operation in the city was completed by Friday night — almost exactly 24 hours after it began.

One of the last targets was the daily Bengali language paper "Ittefaq". More than 400 people reportedly had taken shelter in its offices when the fighting started. At 4 o'clock Friday afternoon, four tanks appeared in the road outside. By 4-30 the building was an inferno, witnesses said. By Saturday morning only the charred remains of a lot of corpses huddled in back rooms were left.

#### Curfew lifted

As quickly as they had appeared, the troops disappeared from the streets. On Saturday morning the radio announced the curfew would be lifted from 7 am until 4 pm. It then repeated the Martial Law Regulations banning all political activity, announced press censorship and ordering all government employees to report back to work. All privately owned weapons

### Unarmed Civilians Attacked by Army

Speech by Senator Gordon Allott to the U.S. Senate on July 14, 1971, Based on Eyewitness Accounts Given by American Citizens.

SADARGHAT is the dock area of old Dacca. On the morning of March 26th army troops attacked the terminal. No civilians were armed in that area. A machine gun was installed on the terminal roof and all men, women and children were fired upon. Inspection of the terminal on March 29th revealed pools of dried blood on the terminal floor. The wash-

rooms were completely soiled and soaked with blood. According to an eye-witness, a Bengali student, all civilians who were waiting for boats in the terminal were killed. After the massacre, bodies were dragged into buses and burned. Corpses were still floating in the Buriganga River adjacent to the terminal on March 29th.

Shandari Bazaar is a Hindu artisan center of old Dacca. house would be to raise the flag. At 4 o'clock Saturday afternoon, the streets emptied again. The troops reappeared and silence fell once more over Dacca. But firing broke out again almost immediately. "Anybody out after four will be shot", the radio had announced earlier in the day.

A small boy running across the street outside the Intercontinental Hotel two minutes after the curfew fell was stopped, slapped four times in the face by an officer and taken away in a jeep. The night watchman at the Dacca Club, a bar left over from the colonial days, was shot when he went to shut the gate of the club. A group of Hindi Pakistanis living around a temple in the middle of the Race Course were all killed apparently because they were out in the open.

Refugees who came back into the city, after finding that roads leading out of it were blocked by army, told how many had been killed as they tried to walk across country to avoid the troops. Beyond these roadblocks was more or less no-man's land, where the clearing operations were still going on. What is happening out there now is anybody's guess, except the army's.

Many people took to the river to escape the crowds on the roads, but they ran the risk of being stranded waiting for a boat when curfew fell. Where one such group was sitting on Saturday afternoon there were only bloodstains the next morning.

Hardly anywhere was there evidence of organized resistance. Even the west Pakistani officer scoffed at the idea of anybody putting a fight. "These bugger men", said one Punjabi lieutenant, "could not kill us if they tried."

"Things are much better now", said another officer. "Nobody can speak out or come out. If they do we will kill them — they have spoken enough — they are traitors, and we are not. We are fighting in the name of God and a united Pakistan."

(Despatch by Simon Dring of *Daily Telegraph*, London, in *Washington Post*, March 30, 1971)

Pakistan's Eastern Wing, rechristened the independent State of Bangla Desh by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a clandestine Radio Broadcast, was in the throes of a civil war on Friday with west wing troops resorting to force to regain control and the people, aided by the East Pakistan rifles and the police, resisting the attempt, reports UNI.

Heavy fighting was going on in Dacca, Chittagong, Sylhet, Comilla and other towns, according to reports from across the border gathered by UNI bureaus in Shillong and Calcutta and correspondents close to the border in the eastern sector. Casualties were believed to be heavy.

Mr Rahman and other Awami League leaders had gone underground, according to highly reliable reports received in Gauhati by PTI and UNI. A later report said Pakistan troops went hunting for them but could not find them.

Speaking over "Swadhin Bangla" (Free Bengal) Betar Kendra, Mr Rahman later proclaimed the birth of an independent Bangla Desh.

The declaration was made shortly before General Yahya Khan went on the air in the West wing to announce that the army had been instructed

to reassert the Government's authority in the East wing. He called Mr Rahman and his followers traitors.

Mr Rahman in his broadcast declared definitely: We shall not die like cats and dogs, but shall die as worthy children of Bangla Ma (Mother Bengal), adding, "The flag of Bangla Desh is flying in all villages of Bangla Desh".

The broadcast said personnel of the East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles and the entire police force had surrounded West Pakistani troops in Chittagong, Comilla, Sylhet, Jessore, Barisal and Khulna.

Heavy fighting was continuing, it said.

An announcer on the clandestine radio station evidently located in the northern region of East Bengal, said, "The Sheikh has declared the 75 million people of East Pakistan as citizens of the sovereign independent Bangla Desh".

The broadcast called upon the people of free Bangla Desh to continue the current movement till the last enemy soldier was vanquished. It said Mr Rahman was the only leader of the people of independent Bangla Desh and his commands should be obeyed by all sections of people to save the country from the ruthless

According to an American missionary who lives near the area, machine guns were placed at the ends of the street and soldiers attacked the entire bazaar area without warning on the morning of March 28th. On March 29th and 30th, not a sign of life remained in a once-busy Bazaar area. Corpses remained unburied on the street and inside gutted homes. Parts of three-story buildings had completely collapsed from the ferocity of the attack and shell holes marked heavy armament attacks.

Ramna Kalibari is an ancient small Hindu settlement situated in the middle of the Dacca Race Course. Even during the most violent Hindu-Muslim riots of partition, the village was able to avoid participation in communal strife. On the night of March 28th soldiers attacked the village killing all inhabitants estimated at 200 people. On March 29th, a pile of approximately 70 to 100 bodies charred and machine-gunned, was on visible display in Kalibari. The entire village was burned to the ground.

Other areas of Dacca, such as Nyar Bazaar, Ryar Bazaar and multiple "bustis" (shanty areas) were completely destroyed by fire because soldiers attacked during curfew under the cover of darkness. Details surrounding these attacks are not well known. However, many eyewitnesses described sudden attacks of sub-machine guns, grenades and burning to force the civilians out into at 7:00 a.m. on March 29th when near a hospital in Mohakhali, bustis were set a fire and fleeing inhabitants "gunned-down like dogs."

Iqbal Hall, student dormitory center of the Student Council, was attacked on the morning of March 26th by tanks and soldiers with sub-machine guns and grenades. Although the exact number of students killed is uncertain not one survivor was found.

Inspection of the Hall two days later revealed a building demolished by tank blasts and gutted by fire. Bodies were still visible — many of them having been taken to the roof to prevent body count. One man and

two children corpses were charred leaning against a window. The degree of armed resistance offered by the students is not clear. One American physician upon inspection of the Hall saw a pile of burned rifles. All of these rifles had false wooden barrels and may have reflected the degree of armed resistance which these students offered.

Jagannath Hall is the dormitory of the Hindu students at Dacca University. According to one student survivor who was treated at Dacca Medical College, all 103 students were killed. Soldiers attacked the dormitory on the morning of March 26th without warning. Approximately six students were spared and forced at gunpoint to dig a mass grave (in a field adjacent to the dormitory). They were then shot. This student was left for dead and was able to crawl away to the hospital under the cover of darkness.

Home of Professor G.C. Dev, Head and Professor Philosophy at Dacca University, was also attacked the same night. Professor Dev, a noted Bengali Hindu philosopher, has never been politically involved. He was an elderly bachelor who housed poor students, often leading discussions about philosophy and religion. His home was attacked and all students were killed. Professor Dev himself was marched to the adjacent field and killed.

Names and rank of faculty members at Dacca University who were killed or wounded.

1. G. C. Dev, Head and Professor of Philosophy, killed.
2. Moniruzzaman, Head and Professor of Statistics, killed.
3. Professor Ali, Head and Professor of History, killed.
4. Professor Guhathakurta, Head and Professor of English, killed.
5. Dr. Mupim, Instructor of English, killed.
6. Dr. Naqut, Instructor, department not known, killed.
7. Professor Huda, Head of Department of Economics, wounded.
8. Professor Innasali, Head of Department of Physics, wounded. Other faculty members were also killed during the attack on the university, but their deaths could not be

dictatorship of West Pakistan. Mr Rahman in his broadcast asked the people to resist the enemy forces at any cost in every corner of Bangla Desh.

May Allah bless you and help in your struggle for freedom from the enemy, he said.

#### Freedom at all costs

Mr Rahman said: "Pakistan armed forces suddenly attacked the East Pakistan Rifle base at Pilkhana and Rajarbagh police station in Dacca at zero hours on March 26, killing a number of unarmed people. Fierce fighting is going on with East Pakistan Rifles at Dacca.

"People are fighting gallantly with the enemy for the cause of freedom of Bangla Desh. Every section of the people of Bangla Desh are asked to resist the enemy forces at any cost in every corner of Bangla Desh. May Allah bless you and help in your struggle for freedom from the enemy. Jai Bangla."

The first victim of the military crackdown in the province was Dacca Betar Kendra, the world's only source of news from East Pakistan. Troops seized the radio station early on Friday and announced a 24-hour curfew in Dacca and its surrounding areas.

When the radio came back on the air it announced itself as "Radio Pakistan Dacca" and broadcast 16 martial law orders.

All flights between Karachi and Dacca have been suspended and teleprinter links between the two cities cut.

(The Statesman, Delhi, March 27, 1971.)



Slum-dwellings destroyed by army near Nilkhet.



Dead bodies of students left by Pakistanis as a warning to others.