

Masud Hasan Khan

IN the month of December, when Bangladesh was preparing to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its Victory Day, a quite unusual incident took place in Pakistan.

A Bangladeshi teacher and writer who was attending an international conference in Islamabad demanded that the Pakistani authorities should formally apologise to the people of Bangladesh for the wartime atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army in 1971.

Perhaps, it is the first instance in the history of Bangladesh that anyone made such a demand standing on the soil of Pakistan.

The lady who had the courage to speak up was Dr. Sultana Sarwatara Zaman, a psychology professor at the Dhaka University.

Dr Zaman told the delegates at the International Conference of Writers and Intellectuals that, to establish an enduring friendly relationship with Bangladesh, Pakistani people should be made aware of what had happened in the then East Pakistan when the army was let loose on the innocent civilians.

"We believe this was done without the knowledge of the people of West Pakistan," she added.

Her demand at such a function caused a considerable stir among the participants and Prof Khawaja Masud, who was moderating the proceeding stopped her from deliberating.

He said that the focus of the whole conference was forward-looking rather than looking at the past.

However, when the other Pakistani delegates protested Masud's interruption, he had to give away.

Later, Tahira Mazhar Ali, mother of celebrated journalist Tariq Ali, went to the podium and said that the delegation

from Bangladesh was being very gracious by saying that the people of West Pakistan did not know what was happening in the East Pakistan in 1971.

"The truth is quite different," she said. "The people knew and kept quiet."

Mrs. Ali, then, offered apology on behalf of all Pakistani women saying "We are ashamed. Please forgive us."

The statement by Tahira Ali, however, did not please many Pakistani writers and intellectuals who resented the comment privately.

However, the demand of apology by the Bangladeshi delegation sparked off a new kind of curiosity among the Pakistani people and media who showed keen interest on details of what happened during Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971.

On positive response from the participants of the conference, a number of Bangladeshi participants drafted a letter to the Fakhar Zaman, Chairman of the Pakistan Academy of Letters, and other Pakistani dele-

gates.

The letter was signed by a number of delegates from Bangladesh. Those who signed the letter included Prof Kabir Chowdhury of the Dhaka University, Prof M Shamsur Ali, Vice Chancellor of the Open University, Enaytullah Khan, Editor of the Holiday, Mohiuddin Ahmed of the University Press Limited, Dilara Chowdhury, Chairperson of the Department of Government and Politics, Jahangirnagar University and journalist Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury.

Talking to *The Daily Star*, some of the Bangladeshi participants said the demand for an apology was justified because similar apologies have been made by Japan to Korea.

The *Daily Star* talked with Dr Sultana Zaman, and a number of other delegation members who described what happened when the demand of apology was made and what was the reaction from the Pakistani as well as the international delegates. Below is a rundown of the account:

The International Conference of Writers and Intellectuals took place between November 30 and December 3.

The Bangladeshi participants were approached a month before the conference by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

Meanwhile, officials at the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka contacted another group of people and told them to be ready for the conference.

They were told that there were three groups of people being invited for the conference.

One group was invited by the High Commission for Pakistan in Dhaka, a second group was invited by the Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad while the third group was selected from the Bangladesh government.

The group invited by the Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad included: Chowdhury Mohammad Faruque, Editor and Publisher of the *Daily Meilat*, Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury, special correspondent of

BSS news agency, Hassan Shahriar, special correspondent of the *Itefaq*, Prof M Ershadul Bari of the Dhaka University, Munirul Huq, Publisher, *Economic Times*, and Prof Kabir Chowdhury.

The group invited by the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka were: Mujibur Rahman, a senior advocate of the Supreme Court, Dr Sadrudin Ahmed of the Rajshahi University, M Tajammul Hussain of the Islamic Institute of Technology, Prof GW Chowdhury (who could not make it), Dr Dilara Chowdhury of the Jahangirnagar University, retired judge Abdul Bari Sarkar and Justice Mostafa Kamal.

The official Bangladeshi delegation was composed of: Muklesur Rahman, Secretary of Cultural Affairs, ABM Abu Musa, Director General of the Bangla Academy, poet Nurul Huda of the Bangla Academy, Dr Sultana Zaman, Dr Shamsur Ali of the Open University and Mohiuddin Ahmed of the UPL.

When contacted by The

Daily Star, a spokesman for the Pakistan High Commission, however, said that they did not invite any guest on their own.

Rather, the High Commission only extended the invitations on behalf of Fakhar Zaman, Chairman of the Pakistan Academy of Letters, said MH Malik, Minister, Information of the High Commission.

He said that the Academy had the list of the invitees and airfare and other costs were also provided by the Academy.

When asked, Malik said he did not know Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad got involved in it.

But he said that the Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad do have contacts with the Pakistan Academy of Letters from where the invitations could have been issued.

A number of Bangladeshi participants who were in the official delegation said that the Pakistani authorities were interested more about inviting their selected people.

They said they would not have made it to Islamabad un-

less the Bangladeshi High Commission there intervened.

They did not receive any programme of the conference and caught the plane at the last moment, the participants said.

Bangladeshi delegates prepared 10 papers for the conference. However, the final programme allowed only two papers out of the 10 for presentation. Out of the two, only one was read out.

Controversy over a Bangladeshi paper

One of the papers, titled "Culture and development of Pakistan facing the 21st century" by M Tajammul Hussain, a Bangladeshi participant at the conference, contained some comments that were highly objectionable according to other participants.

The writer, who is a teacher of the Islamic Institute of Technology, in the paper said "slogan of regionalism has made independent Bangladesh in 1971... the reality of Bangladesh is that her inde-

The Issue of Apology

On the 25th anniversary of our independence we raise the demand for an apology from the people and the government of Pakistan for the atrocities committed against our people 25 years ago. It was as a direct result of the repression, atrocities and genocide carried out against our people that millions of our unarmed civilians had to die and many millions more had to become refugees in India. More than a hundred thousand women were rescued from the various Pakistani military camps who were used to satisfy the animal lust of soldiers engaged in destroying us. For the victims of our genocide and for those women who suffered as captives in the hands of Pakistani soldiers and for all the atrocities committed against our people, we demand that an official apology be extended to the people of Bangladesh.

This we do, not out of any bitterness or animosity against the people of Pakistan, but from a sense of deep respect for those but for whose sacrifice we would not have achieved our independence. As one self-respecting nation to another we expect that citizens of today's Pakistan will recognise the great wrong that was done to us by their soldiers and leaders, and taking full cognizance of the atrocities committed against our people 25 years ago, will do what any honourable nation does when confronted by its past wrong deeds.

We believe such an apology will greatly improve the growing relations between our two countries, and help us to normalise our relations even further.

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The paper referred to Farakka Barrage, the Talpatti issue, the Chakma issue as examples of "subjugation" by India, and said Bangladesh "was established as a result of regional slogan and linguistic frenzy."

Members of the Bangladesh delegation, both official and private, informed that the paper was one of two allowed to be read out at the conference.

When the writer was invited to present the paper at the conference, he did not read it out. He was found outside the venue.

However, the paper was distributed among the participants as well as to the media.

The *Daily Star* tried to contact the author of the controversial paper, but could not find any address from the other members of the delegations.

Officials at the Cultural Affairs Ministry said the author was not a member of Bangladesh's official delegation. He was invited by the Pakistan High Commission.

Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka said that Tajammul Hussain was a member of the Bangladeshi delegation, and could not provide his address readily.

An official of the High Commission said the author of the paper was known to a good number of the Bangladeshi delegation members.

Interestingly, most of the delegation members claimed that they did not know the person.

A Bangladeshi participant, who happened to have shared room with the controversial author during the conference, said he did not know him or have his contact address.

Another conference participant informed that the author left the conference soon after his paper was distributed and stayed back after the end of the conference.

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WAF Apologises to Women of Bangladesh

In a statement issued on Monday, the date which marks the start of the army action in the former East Pakistan, the Womens Action Forum (WAF) in a statement have apologised to the women of Bangladesh for the violence used against them during the events of 1971. The statement reads:

"As 25 years of independence, the state and the people of Pakistan must reflect on the role played by the state and the Pakistani military in the unprecedented and exceptionally violent suppression of the political aspirations of the people of Bangladesh in 1971. Continued silence on our part makes a mockery not only of the principles of democracy human rights, and self determination which we lay claim to, but also makes a mockery of our own history.

"The comity of nations has now not only recognised that even in cases of war, and other forms of conflict, there are certain parameters beyond which violence cannot and must not be condoned, and further that those perpetrating and responsible for such violence should be held responsible. In view of this, and in the larger interests of our own humanity as a nation, we must condemn the repression by the state of its own citizens in 1971. As Pakistanis who stood silently by, we must also judge ourselves as history has already judged us.

"WAF would like to use this opportunity to build public awareness on the issue of state violence and the role of the military in 1971. At the same time there is a need to focus on the systematic violence against women, particularly the mass rapes. While we try to focus the nations attention towards a period in our history for which we stand ashamed, Women's Action Forum, on its own behalf, would like to apologise to the women of Bangladesh that they became the symbols and the targets in the process of dishonouring and humiliating people.

"The statement has also been endorsed by a number of other organisations including ASR, SAFIE, Shirkatgah, Institute of Women's Studies, Lahore, Smorgh Collective and Pattan - PR

25 Years of Silence 1971-1996

AS Pakistan approaches its 50th year, we must reflect on these five decades not only in celebration and nostalgia but with a consciousness of the darker side of our history... a history that is systematically denied to its own citizens. It is ironic that Pakistanis, particularly younger generations, consider Pakistan's history as continuous when in fact the first half of the 50 years were internally challenged. Indeed, this challenge then led to a truncated Pakistan in 1971. This was a critical point for Pakistan since it threw up a crisis in terms of our own identity, our sense of self and most of all, our humanity. While we have still not emerged from this crisis, we make it worse by continuing to be silent. Representing our history under a false patriotism and denying the experiences of the oppressed is not the grounds on which we can build a future we may be proud of.

In reviewing our history, both the State and the people of Pakistan need to confront their denial of democratic and human rights and the indifferent attitude towards women. In particular this silence and eclipsing of the voice of the people and the tremendous violence directed against the women of Bangladesh is a shameful testimony. The mass rapes and violence was specifically motivated to seize power from those who had democratically earned it. 1971 was a brutal year rationalised under the guise of war, revenge, honor and betrayal through misrepresentations by the powerful classes who determine how history is constructed and obscured.

"Progressive movements must no longer allow themselves to fall into the trap of being duped by historical distortions. To some extent, the women's movement in Pak-

They Remained Silent

Mustafizur Rahman

THE people of West Pakistan are silent spectators to the genocide... so said Tajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Provisional Bangladesh Government on 17 April, 1971. Indeed when hundreds of thousands of their unarmed civilian compatriots were being butchered by the Pakistan army, the people of West Pakistan did nothing to restrain them. Rather their elected leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto declared "By the grace of God Pakistan has at last been saved." This he said after witnessing personally the burning and ravaging of Dhaka on the night of 25th March 1971, when over 50,000 unsuspecting men and women and children were massacred in the city. Bengali lives were of no consequence to Mr Bhutto as long as the facade of national integrity was maintained. Little did he realise that the genocidal massacre unleashed by the Pakistan army snapped the link between two wings of Pakistan for ever.

Why did the people of West Pakistan remain silent when there was a military crackdown on East Pakistan? There was blood both in East Pakistan and Yahya's army took pride in doing a clean job. "My army is a professional army and it does a clean job," boasted Yahya Khan. Indeed it was a cleansing operation in which not even the children and women were spared. "We are determined to clean East Pakistan once and for all of the threat of secession, even if it means killing off two million people and ruling the province as a colony for 30 years," said a General to a journalist in the 16th Division Headquarters at Comilla in April 1971. They, however, ended up killing three million and not two.

The intellectuals, the politicians and the common people in West Pakistan did not condemn this brutality. Rather the armed forces were congratulated for their patriotism. Probably Dr. Johnson meant these people when he said "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." The people of West Pakistan showed utter disregard for the sufferings of the people of East Pakistan. Yet their fellow citizens in East Bengal were their own countrymen and co-religionists but for whose active participation in the Pakistan movement in the forties there would be no Pakistan.

Did the people in West know what was happening in the Eastern wing? It has been said that strict censorship coupled with vigorous propaganda by the Pak Information Ministry kept them in the dark and gave them a distorted picture. The army junta clamped down a tight censorship on 25 March and it was not lifted till the end of July 1971. The official propaganda machine only emphasised quick return of normalcy in the eastern wing after the civil disobedience movement and made out that the army was engaged in a patriotic action sorting out the Indian agents and the miscreants.

There have been some attempts to defend the West Pakistanis on the ground that they did not know the gravity of the situation. They had no idea that the Pakistan Air Force was bombing the outlying cities to flush out the resistance fighters. They did not know that there was a civil war going on in East Pakistan between the Pakistan army and the freedom fighters. They were only told about the Bengali "atrocities" but they had no information about the atrocities being committed by the Pakistan army in its deliberate campaign of genocide.

These arguments can not be accepted as justification for condonation of the genocide by the people of West Pakistan. While the government machinery may have been successful in misleading the uneducated rural population the higher strata of the society particularly the educated class consisting of students, intellectuals, politician and bureaucrats surely had some idea about the actual situation. They should have had no illusion about the credibility of the government publicity machine. They had access to the inter-

national electronic media particularly Voice of America, BBC, Radio Australia, Radio Japan and other foreign radios. For inexplicable reasons even the educated Pakistanis dismissed the foreign broadcasts as deliberate mis-information inspired by India. They never asked themselves why would they all simultaneously gang up to vilify Pakistan. They believed what they wanted to believe. They shut their eyes and ears to outside influence and made themselves susceptible to the government's innovative propaganda campaign spreading venom against the East Pakistanis.

The role played by the West Pakistani journalists who knew what was actually happening in East Pakistan is a black chapter in the history of journalism in Pakistan. In mid April 1971 a group of West Pakistani journalists were given a tour of East Pakistan to write about the restoration of normalcy. What they actually saw in their own eyes - the devastation, the destruction and mayhem - shuddered them. They have massacred the Hindus and wiped out the Bengali intelligentsia - one would tell another in a hushed voice. Yet their despatches to their respective newspapers in West Pakistan gave a totally inaccurate picture and complimented the armed forces for successful restoration of law and order. The television cameramen in this group of journalists manipulated their cameras with amazing dexterity to mislead their countrymen. Only one of them, Anthony Mascarenhas, had the courage to come out with the truth. His article "Genocide" which was carried by the Sunday Times of London on 13th June, 1971, splashed the true story of the genocide. Mascarenhas, however, had to flee to London with his family to escape the wrath of the military rulers.

The Pakistani diplomats abroad did a great disservice to their nation by keeping their government uninformed about the outrage that the military action in Pakistan evoked world wide. Some over enthusiastic diplomats, on the other hand, informed their foreign office as to how successfully they explained the "actual" situation to their host governments and elicited their sup-

port and understanding. While many of them personally did not approve of the military action they lacked the moral courage to express their true feelings. Only one Pakistani diplomat, Iqbal Athar, who was Pakistan's Ambassador to Italy, resigned in protest.

A conference of the Pakistani envoys was held in Geneva on 24-25 August 1971. Foreign Secretary SM Sultan presided. ZM Faruqi, on behalf of Ambassador Aga Hilaly, described how sympathetic the Nixon administration was to Pakistan. He made no mention of the condemnation of the American public and the press of the military rulers. Jamshed Marker, Ambassador to the USSR, assured that the USSR will not sever diplomatic relations with Pakistan and that the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty was basically aimed against China not Pakistan. Salman Ali, High Commissioner to the UK, said that the British Press was antagonistic to Pakistan because it was controlled by Jews. He advised strong publicity in England to highlight the 'atrocities committed on non-Bengalis in East Pakistan'. KM Kaiser, Ambassador to China, said that China would support Pakistan but he could not give specific nature of the support. Iqbal Akhund, Ambassador to Yugoslavia, said that Yugoslavia was sympathetic to Pakistan. None of them spoke about the revolution and disgust that the military crackdown aroused all over the world. Only one of the envoys Aga Shah's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, called upon his government to establish a civil government in East Pakistan, withhold trial of Sk. Mujib, arrange return of the refugees from India and solve the food problem in order to get international support (Weekly Frontier, Calcutta, 30th October 1971).

The educated Pakistanis who have lived through the crisis created by the genocide in East Pakistan in 1971 will have to bear the load of guilt on their conscious till their dying day for not raising their voice in protest when their countrymen were being killed indiscriminately.

The writer is the Ambassador of Bangladesh in China.

Women of Pakistan apologise for war crimes in 1971

Ain O Salish Kendra

When the confrontation between people's power in Bangladesh and Pakistan's military power climaxed in a war of liberation in 1971, and Yahya Khan's troops launched a genocide in Bangladesh, the vast majority of people in Pakistan remained silent. Only a few brave voices were heard in protest.

In August or September 1971 for the first time a public statement was issued condemning the genocide and recommending negotiations with the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh. This statement was signed amongst others by the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, journalist Mazhar Ali Khan, trade unionist Tahera Mazhar. These signatories were at the time accused by Pakistan's establishment as anti-national and subversive and they had to pay a price for their courageous defiance.

Today, 25 years later, women's groups have become the vanguard of Pakistan's conscience. They have resisted military rule in the eighties in their own countries. On 1 March 1996 they spoke out in public to apologise for the military atrocities in 1971. In particular they condemned the acts of rape committed by their military in Bangladesh. Even in 1996 their statement is an act of courage, and we welcome their attempt to accept responsibility and to hold out their hands in solidarity with us.

Earlier in November/December 1995, at an international conference for Writers and Intellectuals organized by the Pakistan Academy of Letters in Islamabad, Dr Sultanzaman of the University of Dhaka asked why Pakistanis did not protest the military atrocities committed in Bangladesh. In response Tahera Mazhar spoke out: "We are ashamed for our silence. People of Pakistan knew but they remained silent. And silence became consent. On behalf of the women of Pakistan I offer my apologies to the people of Bangladesh."

We print below two public statements issued by the Women's Action Forum - a broad based coalition of women's groups in Pakistan, and ASR, a resource centre. Both were in the forefront of resistance to Ziaul Haq's military rule and his attempts to condemn women to subordination in Pakistan. These statements issued on 1 March to coincide with the day Yahya Khan postponed the Constituent Assembly speak for themselves. We print them because we want to recognize the people's initiatives to ascribe responsibility for the genocide.

We expect that our sisters in Pakistan will work towards stronger national condemnation of those who were guilty of war crimes in Bangladesh, because we feel that this will strengthen their own struggle for democracy. We also see their apology as a marker towards an affirmation of peace, democracy and non-violence in South Asia.

DAWN SATURDAY, December 23, 1995

An apology to Bangladesh

REFERENCE to Mr. Askari's article in DAWN (Dec 12) there is no denial that Pakistan's Government, its people, generals, soldiers and bureaucrats owe an unconditional apology to the brother Muslims of Bangladesh for the rapes and excesses that occurred during the East Pakistan crisis. This issue was raised during Intellectuals' Writers Conference at Islamabad recently by the Bangladeshi delegate, Ms Sultana Zaman and was supported in letter and in spirit by Tahira Mazhar Ali Khan from Lahore.

It is noteworthy that recently the Japanese tendered an apology without any reservations for their war crimes. Therefore, our Generals specially who had been responsible - directly or indirectly - for established crimes during the East Pakistan crisis must come forward and tender an apology on behalf of the people of Pakistan. Incidentally the same very people owe apology to their own nationals of Karachi, Hyderabad etc. for similar crimes of siege, harassment which continues since 1992.

S M Hussain Karachi

