



A mass grave on the side of the Road in between Rokeya Hall and Jagannath Hall of the Dhaka University

## Back to the Light from the Dark

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citizens, carried out as a sudden military operation. It must, therefore, have been done with full knowledge of the Pakistani high command including the commanding officer General Niazi. After this, can we forget 1971? Can we forgive the war criminals?

(Three)

The whole Bangalee nation irrespective of religion and sects intermingled in the victory festivals on 16 December 1971. The people came out of their homes to the streets like a dam-broken tide after hearing the news of the defeat of Pakistani Army.

On that day, the Pakistani Army Commander General Niazi surrendered unconditionally to the Joint Command of Bangladesh and India at the Race Course Maidan (now Suhrawardy Uddayan) in Dhaka. Thousands of people inflamed with victory-delight came to the surrender ceremony. They all carried the flag inscribed with the map of Bangladesh in their hands and with the slogan 'Joi Bangla in their tongue. The celebrated Time Magazine delineated the moment of victory festival like: 'Joi Bangla, Joi Bangla! From the bank of great Ganges and broad Brahmaputra, from emerald fields and mustard coloured hills of the countryside, from the countless squares of countless villages came the cry, Victory to Bengal, Victory to Bengal. They danced on the roofs of buses and marched

down city streets singing their anthem Golden Bengal. They brought the green and gold banner of Bengal out of secret hiding places, pictures of their imprisoned leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, sprang up over night on trucks, houses and signposts.

Independence of Bangladesh was not only the alienation from Pakistan. Rather this was the modern political aspiration against the religion based Pakistani statehood which meant to be freed from colonial rule and all kinds of repressions and being freed from illiteracy, bigotry and communalism. There was no democracy in communal Pakistan. Autocratic rule took place in Pakistan again and again by repealing democracy. Fundamental rights of the people was wallowed there on the ground. Language and culture were struck with blow. They rejected the right to Bangla language of the majority people. Though the Bangalee youths established their right to language by giving their fresh blood in 1952. The Bangalee nation has become victorious from the language movement to the movement for autonomy and struggle for independence. So Bangladesh is the name of those victories.

Placing high of all the superiority and sovereignty of people irrespective of religion and sects was the conviction of independent Bangladesh. The state will ensure the fundamental and human rights of all citizens. 'Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and

Christians of this country are Bangalees' was written in a poster during liberation war. This conviction was correctly reflected in the Preamble of the 1972 Constitution. "a fundamental aim of the state to realise the democratic process a socialist society, free from exploitation-a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens;" was written in the Preamble of our Constitution. It means the state will be directed by democratic norms and the people will be the master of the Republic.

(Five)

If we analyse the past political history of Bangladesh we will find the democracy was also killed here. The country was directed by martial law after repealing the Constitution. But the people of this country did not regard that situation, the political leadership did not compromise with the martial law rulers. The autocratic rule which came- after the change-over of 1975 was gone with the mass upsurge of 1990. A democratic process is still sustaining though there is a limit and weakness of the rulers after 1990 mass upsurge. Now the state power is being changed under the democratic process.

On the other hand, what do we see in Pakistan? Still there is the martial autocrat ruling in Pakistan. A military officer in Pakistan did not only capture the state power by removing the elected Prime Minister, but he also sent him exile with his whole family. This event is possible only in Pakistan.

(six)

In the recent time the demand for seeking forbearing of Pakistan for the event of 1971 has been strengthened. Leaders of different political parties, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, are now talking about trying those Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators who were responsible for genocide and mass rape in 1971 as war criminals. War criminals are being tried throughout the world. For that, international tribunals have also been constituted. If Nazis can be tried for committing crimes during the second world war, if the Serbian ruler can be taken into the dock for committing genocide there, then why the Pakistani war criminals should not be tried? At the same time their Bangladeshi collaborators must be tried on the same ground.

This trial is now at all necessary to ensure the victory of justice against injustice and the victory of truth against untruth.

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hotel official, "it is going to be bloody hospital." Simon Dring of Daily Telegraph, London gave a detail description of nightmare how unarmed residents and students in Dhaka University area were brutally murdered by Pakistani troops. The report, published in Washington Post on 30 March, 1971 says: 'As the university came under attack, other columns of troops moved in on the Rajarbag 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 leveled 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.'

Anthony Mascarenhas, former Assistant Editor of Morning News, Karachi came to the - then East Pakistan in May, 1971. This Goanese christian journalist, after seeing and hearing all the facts he left Pakistan in disgust for London. He filed a huge number of stories on the genocide in Sunday Times, London. He wrote: 'The pogrom's victims are not only the Hindus of East Bengal who constitute about 10 per cent of the 75 million population - but also many thousands of Bengali Muslims. These include university and college students, teachers, Awami League and Left - Wing political cadres and every one the army can catch of the 1,76,000 Bengali military men and police who mutinied on March 26 in a spectacular, though untimely and ill-starred bid, to create an independent Republic of Bangladesh.'

In the Daily Telegraph of March 30, 1971 issue Mascarenhas wrote that the systematic pattern of the murder throughout Bangladesh matches exactly the dictionary definition of genocide. His write ups on Bangladesh Genocide are widely acclaimed as he had an opportunity to closely monitor the real situation of Bangladesh in 1971. In Sunday Times, London of June 13, 1971 issue, he wrote: 'For six days as I traveled with the officers of the 9th Division headquarters at Comilla. I witnessed at close quarters the extent of the killing. I saw Hindus, hunted from village to village and door to door, shot off-hand after a cursory "short-arm inspection" showed they were uncircumcised. I have heard the screams of men bludgeoned to death in the compound of the Circuit House (civil administrative headquarters) in Comilla. I have seen truck loads of other human targets and those who had the humanity to try to help them hauled off "for disposal" under the cover of darkness and curfew. I have witnessed the brutality of "kill and burn missions" as the army units, after clearing out the rebels, pursued the pogrom in the towns and the villages.'

'Where are the Bengalis?' I had asked my escorts in the strangely empty streets of Dhaka a few days earlier.

## WORLD PRESS ON BANGLADESHI GENOCIDE

"They have gone to the villages," was the stock reply. Now, in the countryside, there were still no Bengalis. Comilla town, like Dhaka was heavily shuttered. And in ten miles on the road to Laksham, past silent villages, the peasants I saw could have been counted on the fingers of both hands.'

'There were, of course, soldiers-hundreds of unsmiling men in khaki, each with an automatic rifle. According to orders, the rifles never left their hands. The roads are constantly patrolled by tough, trigger-happy men. Wherever the army is, you won't find Bengalis.'

Before Mascarenhas left, another brave reporter, the first one from U. K. Colin Smith came to Bangladesh and reported events in the Observer, London on April 4, 1971 with a long account of anguish. He made a comment in his write up that the Bangalees will never forget the happenings of the past few weeks.

Sunday Times, London also published an account of genocide by Murray Sayle titled 'A Regime of Thugs and Bigots' on July 11, 1971. He came to Bangladesh when Pakistani military junta invited some foreign correspondents to the-then East Pakistan to see for themselves the prevailing 'normalcy' and military operation against 'rebels and miscreants'. Sayle had an opportunity to visit rural areas of Khulna and Jessore districts. He wrote: 'Here and there a few farmers were ploughing..... but there seemed very few people at work for such a crowded country. I have seen many East Bengal villages which have been burnt, or which seem to have strangely few people. This was the first I saw which was seemingly undamaged and completely deserted .... then more people came up, Muslim farmers from a village a few hundred yards away named Aramghata. The story they told was like many I have heard in the past week.'

'Some Muslims from their village had come up to see what was going on. The soldiers grabbed four of them and told them to recite something from the Holy Koran. They said the four Muslims were terrified but managed to begin "Bismillah Irahman Irahim....." (the opening words of the Koran). They said the soldiers shouted: "These are not Muslims! They have been taught to say this to trick us!" They then shot all four.'

The Guardian of London in an editorial titled 'A Massacre in Pakistan' on March 31 said: 'The fate of Dhaka is a crime against humanity and human aspirations'. On the same day New York Times in its editorial mentioning 'the brutality of the western troops toward their 'Moslem brothers' in the 'East' called upon President Yahya to stop bloodshed.

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Most of the reports, published in newspapers in 1971 on the genocide in the-then East Pakistan, had shocked the readers worldwide. The New Nation of Singapore in its April

6, 1971 issue published an editorial urging the world leaders to force Pakistan to end the holocaust. Expressen of Stockholm in its April 12, 1971 issue condemned the reckless rampages and genocide in Bengal. On April 16, 1971, New Statesman of London published an item, 'Blood in Bangladesh' on the front page in red type. It said, 'If blood is the price of a people's right to independence, Bangladesh has overpaid.'

Pakistan's military ruler General Yahya Khan, and his subordinates -General Tikka Khan, General Rao Forman Ali, General Niazi all were human monsters. These criminals were more notorious than Chengis Khan, Halaku Khan, Nero, Eichman and Hitler. The Hong Kong Standard on June 25, 1971 published an item captioned 'Another Chengis'. Governor of the-then East Pakistan General Tikka Khan was described in that article as the predecessor of Chengis Khan for his cruelty and brutality. It said: 'There is overwhelming evidence of murder, of senseless slaughter of children, of rape, of prostitution organised by and for senior army officers, of wholesale maddened, crazed, blood-thirsty determined massacre. Chengis Khan, for all his bloody faults, at least built up an empire in the course of his career. Tikka Khan and his gang of uniformed cut-throats will be remembered for trying to destroy the people of half a nation.'

But Pakistan did not seek any apology to the people of Bangladesh for the massacre and crime committed by its forces and military leaders 30 years ago. It was observed that Pakistan's perception and attitude towards the War of Liberation of Bangladesh and the emergence of this land as a sovereign state has not changed much over this long period. Moreover, the governments came to power in that country during these years directly or indirectly made adverse remarks hurting the sentiment of Bangalees.

The recent derogatory remarks by Pakistani Deputy High Commissioner to Bangladesh Irfan Raja about the War of Liberation and the background of Genocide erupted nationwide protests in Bangladesh. The people of all walks of life demanded unconditional apology from Pakistan and immediate withdrawal of the diplomat. But the Government of Pakistan did not express any regret for the diplomat's objectionable remarks. Rather, Islamabad announced its decision to call back the envoy in the face of diplomatic pressure saying 'We regret the controversy surrounding the reported remarks of the Pakistani Deputy High Commissioner'. The grounds cited in this statement were not only unsatisfactory, rather quite annoying. No steps were taken against the diplomat for trying to belittle the image of Bangladesh by his audacious remarks. Though a Pakistani daily 'The Frontier Post' in an editorial on 2 December



The Arts Building of Dhaka University damaged by Pak army shelling.

criticized the Islamabad's move. Other Pakistani dailies- The Nation, The News, The Nawa-i-waqt also condemned Pakistani rulers and the diplomat, Dr. Tariq Rahman, a Pakistani university professor, resigned from the Pakistan Army in protest of 1971 genocide in Bangladesh wrote an article, published in The News on December 7, 2000. He said that there is no reason why the ordinary Pakistanis should bear burden of guilt of this genocide. The people of Pakistan did not do anything, the-then military government did not inform them what was really happening in Bangladesh. Dr. Rahman suggested the present government of Pakistan to beg apology to Bangladesh. But, Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf could not accept the reality. Rather, talking to a group of Bangladeshi journalists in Islamabad in July this year he provoked them in fury through his rude assertion that Pakistan owed Bangladesh nothing. He said that in 1971, both Bangalee and Pakistani had committed mistakes. General Musharraf wanted Bangladesh to forget the past.

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But it is not possible for the people of Bangladesh to forget the past. Even non-Bengalis could not forget the crimes committed by Pakistani Muslim forces. We conclude this article with excerpts of a letter written by such a person named Salaluddin Sermon from Jeddah, to the Editor of Arab News. It would reveal a clear picture to be conscious readers particularly the new generation, who are duped by Pakistan's remarks and propaganda. The letter was published in the Arab News on 11 October 2000: 'Urdu-speaking Muslims were living

in East Pakistan, among Bengalis, since 1947. None of them was harmed. Again, after the creation of Bangladesh, they have been living in many camps in Bangladesh. There have been no violence against them. So why would, suddenly in March 1971, Bengalis loot their property and rape their women? Who would believe that? The fact is that the Urdu speaking people were misguided and encouraged by the Pakistani Army to carry out operations against Bengalis who reacted when attacked.'

..... Mukti Bahinis (Freedom fighters of Bangladesh) were not miscreants as stated in the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report. They were fighters against barbarism to protect their mothers and motherland.'

..... It is a very painful chapter in Muslim history that millions of Bengali Muslims cried to be saved from Pakistan's slaughter, but no Muslim country ever came to their rescue. No one bothered even to listen them. "The Bengali Muslims got help for self defense only from the enemies of Islam like Hindus of India, Communists of Russia, Yugoslavia etc."

..... I do urge the OIC, the biggest organization of Muslim countries, to make amends for the crime of its silence while three million Muslims were killed and a hundred thousand Muslim women raped, to set up an independent commission to find out the truth about the crimes committed by the Pak Army and Jamaat-e-Islami activists in the then East Pakistan, and adopt a resolution to prevent such crimes in future.

Ref:1. Bangladesh Documents, vol-1, UPL, Dhaka,1999.

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the cause of the motherland. A clear verdict was given in the 1970 general elections for self-determination of the Bengalees. But when the Pakistani occupation forces resorted to genocide after ignoring that verdict, the Bengalees also took up arms very swiftly. The people responded in millions to the call for combating the enemy with whatever they had. Students, teachers, labourers, farmers, industrialists, businessmen, political leaders and workers and the women community--everybody joined the war. The Pakistani invading force could be defeated in only 9 months because of this unity. Our leaders who directed the war effort showed amazing efficiency in obtaining support and cooperation of our allies in the international arena. Within a very short time, they could make arrangements for military training both on the home-soil as well as some places of our neighbours India. It was the freedom fighters who made the hilly areas and the jungles fit for living. All pains and sufferings had faded before the noble aspiration of the people for liberating the motherland. I can mention about my own experience here. Around 1700 of us were simultaneously imparted training at Palatona of Tripura. We slept on thin polythene sheets spread on

the ground. Our barrack-like house was also covered with polythene. There were only four tube-wells for our use. Groups of five or six took rice, bread, vegetable and pulse from a single plate at noon and night. After training, we were sent to the Melaghar camp. Life was equally hard there. But when the Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam and the Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed visited those camps, the plea that the thousands of freedom fighters made was not for good food and lodging, but for arming them swiftly so that they could be sent to confront the enemy.

After victory was achieved in the liberation war, the freedom fighters went back to their former professions and workplaces to lead a normal life. The country was liberated and their aspiration was fulfilled. In return, they sought a developed and prosperous country where all citizens would be provided with education and employment. The freedom fighters did not think of their own comfort in the battlefields of 1971. Innumerable fighters embraced martyrdom during the war and thousands were injured. The families of the wounded freedom fighters were subjected to brutalities of the Pakistani occupying force. Thousands of dwelling houses of the freedom fighters were burnt to ashes and looting and plundering of their property were resorted to. Even after returning from the battlefield, many freedom fighters had to

## the Freedom Fighters

spend their days in misery. The Bangabandhu government established the 'Freedom Fighters' Welfare Trust' for the freedom fighters in the war-ravaged independent Bangladesh. A number of mills, factories and business

enterprises were handed over to this Trust. One-time assistance was also provided to the families of the martyred freedom fighters. But very soon, the situation became hostile for the freedom fighters. The Father of the

Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated on 15 August 1975. On the midnight of 2 November, the four national leaders who led the liberation war were brutally killed at Dhaka central jail. Those who

took over state power started subverting the achievements of the liberation war one after another. Let alone preserving the interests of the freedom fighters by the state, the very identity of a freedom fighter invited hazards and repression. The offspring of the freedom fighters could not utter proudly that their parents had staked their lives while fighting for liberating the motherland. The spirit of independence and liberation war was repeatedly trampled underneath the arrogance and bragging of the killers of seventy-one.

This situation was not desirable in a country that earned independence in exchange for an ocean of blood. The people could not accept this state of affair. So they took a stand to resist this reversal of the wheels of history. After many struggles and bloodletting, they elected a pro-liberation government to power. Now the freedom fighters can once again disclose their identity proudly. The co-fighters can again show due honour to those valiant sons of the soil who had embraced martyrdom during the war. Now the freedom fighters are buried with state honour after their death. They deserve this honour and the government is proud to do this for them. After independence, a quota



Pakistani Army committed ugliest genocide in Bangladesh in 1971.

was kept reserved for appointment of freedom fighters to government jobs. But this was ignored since 1975. The scope for their seeking government jobs decreased gradually as their age increased. Besides, many did not possess the requisite qualification. In such a situation, a fresh decision was required. Now, provision has been made for keeping a quota for the offspring of freedom fighters in government service and the seats of higher education. It is not a favour for the children of the freedom fighters of seventy-one, it is in fact their right. The present government has also introduced allowances for the distressed freedom fighters and budgetary provisions have been made for the purpose. It was not desirable that the greatest sons of the soil would remain impoverished after three decades of independence. The autocratic rulers were responsible for such a situation.

After 1975, no steps were taken at state level to preserve the memory of the liberation war and the freedom fighters. Instead, attempts were made to erase these from the minds of the countrymen. Many memories were lost with the passing of time. But we now see a different picture. Liberation war museums are being set up now in different parts of the country. The sites of valour, heroism and courage of 1971 are being preserved. The 'Bijay Ketan' established at Dhaka Cantonment shows

us the preparatory stages of independence war and the memorable moments of the heroic armed struggle. The new generation would derive inspiration from these in their march forward.

No nation can advance by merely reminiscing about the achievements of the past. We also do not want that. The generation of 1971-liberation war is now working to add newer feathers of gold to the crown of the nation's heritage. We emerged victorious against a formidable enemy in 1971. We would be successful again in holding aloft our flag of red and green in the world of 21st century.

Lakhs of freedom fighters had participated with arms in the war of liberation. The Bangalee nation was united in standing beside those freedom fighters. That war was everybody's war, a war of the masses in the real sense. All the towns, ports and villages were transformed into bases of the liberation war. In a country like that, doing something for the freedom fighters means doing it for everybody. An affluent life for all and an environment conducive to the growth of everybody need to be ensured. This should be kept in mind if anybody wants the welfare of the freedom fighters in the real sense.

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed