



December 16, 31 years after

JAMILUR RAHMAN

DEEP out of the shadows, out of an abyss of uncertainty, came December 16. It marked the end of the glorious War of Liberation, and with that the end of the Pakistani colonial rule. There had been deaths and destruction on an unprecedented scale. For obvious reasons, December 16 has gone down in history as a very special day to the people of this country.

The odds were heavy, but the once poetic Bengalees showed that they could be aroused to frenzied action if and when the situation so demanded.

A lot of things were happening when the nation finally found itself on the verge of victory. The creation

of new state certainly had implications that forced the then superpowers to play a role in the matter. And there were the Bhutto theatrics at the UN, but nothing could save the day for Pakistan.

The cause behind all diplomatic efforts of the Pakistan government failing to produce any results were far too obvious—their stand was not based on truth and justice. When the Liberation War had started, the military government of Yahya Khan was not ready to accept the plain truth that the Awami League had emerged as the single largest party on the basis of the 1970 polls, and had every right to form government. Their first mistake was to rely on their military might for resolving a crisis which was essentially political.

Though attempts to suppress a political uprising through applying force had failed many times in different countries, the Pakistani rulers were not willing to go by the lessons of history. Perhaps politics in Pakistan in the spring of 1971 could not be defined by general rules. The army was in charge of the statecraft, but there were people who became influential enough to change the usual course of politics. For instance, ZA Bhutto suddenly emerged as the most important figure in politics despite his being the leader of the province that did not represent the majority of Pakistanis. The military junta thought that it needed some one to take charge of the political front, and Bhutto did not miss the opportunity

though the principles of majority rule did not permit his becoming the arbiter of Pakistan's political destiny.

The crackdown on unarmed Bengalees on the night of March 25 was certainly the result of the miscalculation of the generals and their counsels that they could get away with any repressive measure. It was a brazen attempt to silence the voice of the majority. The 1970 polls had created a golden opportunity for the people of then East Pakistan to establish their rights. The negotiations that followed during the tumultuous days of March 1971 proved to be futile because the rulers were not prepared to accept the just demands of the people placed before them by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The genocide that began on March 25 completely changed the complexion of the political situation. It was no more dialogue; the nation was facing the hordes of Yahya Khan armed with sophisticated weapons. Apart from being a barbaric attack on innocent civilians, the crackdown also proved beyond any doubt that the military rulers cared very little about the majority of the people of the country that they were ruling.

The crackdown left the leaders of the beleaguered country with the arduous task of organizing a resistance movement. It was not easy, as the nation was not prepared for a prolonged armed struggle against the occupation forces. A big chunk of the population crossed over to India, a country that offered all kinds of support when the Mukti Bahini was organised. India had to shoulder the burden of nearly one crore refugees who did not know when they would be able to return to Bangladesh. It was a humanitarian crisis of great magnitude. But politi-

cal leaders like Tajuddin Ahmed faced the challenge with great composure and confidence. He had to negotiate with the Indians while organising the freedom fighters, who at the initial stage had nothing except courage and patriotism to fight against a regular army. But the political leadership did not fail. The Mukti Bahini began to hit targets within Bangladesh and was gaining more and more strength as the war escalated. Some of the operations carried out by the youths convinced the Pakistani military that the Mukti Bahini had become strong enough to strike at important strategic points.

The role played by the cultural activists and sportsmen was also quite significant. Cultural shows and charity football matches were arranged in different places in India, and there was a tremendous response from the Indian people. The whole world, except a few countries having a direct stake in the 'integrity of Pakistan,' started to rally behind our just struggle for independence. The ambassadors of the Bangladesh government in exile did a commendable job by pleading our case to the leaders and people of different countries across the world.

The occupation forces were demoralised by the fact that they were facing much tougher resistance from the freedom fighters. The Pakistani rulers found themselves in a very difficult position—there were no buyers of their conspiracy theory and their army in Bangladesh was cut off from the mainland. But they could not still realise that it was not possible to subjugate a nation on a permanent basis. Else they would have withdrawn on their own, avoiding the ignominy of the defeat on December 16.

From the beginning of December the pace of the war suddenly

accelerated when the allied forces and the Mukti Bahini decided to go for the final thrust. The occupation forces capitulated on December 16, leaving behind the memories of savage aggression against the people of this country. It was a great moment for Bengalees who could finally breathe free. It was like a voyage across a turbulent sea coming to an end.

The victory was achieved by the nation which had made a supreme sacrifice for liberating itself from the clutches of the colonial rulers.

However, after 31 years of a quest for a just social order and a stable political system, it is perhaps time for a little soul-searching. One very striking aspect of the Liberation War was that the nation was united, except for those religious fanatics who had an entirely different interpretation of the struggle, against the enemy. The lesson to be learned from December 16 is, therefore, quite obvious—the element of divisiveness must be removed for national development. And the best way to pay tributes to those who sacrificed their lives for the noble cause is to work together for a better future.

It is crucially important to realise that people of this country wanted to establish their rights, but the Pakistani rulers tried to bludgeon them into submission. The struggle for freedom was based on certain principles. The rights of the common man, good governance, an exploitation-free society, and the rule of law were uppermost in the minds of the leaders of our movement for self-rule. However, it would be a great disservice to the nation if we do not make conscious efforts to attain those goals.

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Education for economic emancipation of Bangladesh

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global market. We will be a formidable player to achieve our goal if within the next 30 years we can turn our huge unskilled labour power into a highly skilled work force by imparting quality education that would be relevant to compete for the job market at the international level by producing high tech commodities at competitive prices that can match international standards. Accordingly, investment in the education sector as a whole will have to rise substantially during this period. However, it may be noted that increased investment in the education sector will have to be incurred in areas that conform with national priorities and activities that ensures the improvement in the skill level of the pupils that matches the requirements of the economy and

the society at large. Highly bureaucratized education administration has failed to be innovative and creative to change its content and orientation in line with the changing circumstances to meet the economic needs and demands of the society at large. All these responsibilities will have to be carried out in a participatory manner and the government will have to forge partnership with NGOs, local level communities, the academics experts in education planning and other relevant people from various sections of the community to address the problem of production and delivery services of education as well as that of financing it.

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Youths celebrating victory



Freedom fighters celebrating victory

17th December 1971: Announcement by Major ATM Hyder

HABIBUL ALAM, BIR PRATIK

IT was around 4-4:30 in the morning, there was no sign of the morning glow to be seen anywhere near the Lanes of Narinda. Narinda was off Tipu Sultan Road and adjacent to the only Christian graveyard. We had to be there because before the surrender of the Pakistan Army, a day earlier, and in the morning of 16 December the Pakistan Army gave some of the soldiers' arms and ammunitions and they were told to spread out within the communities where they felt Beharies were staying. Narinda was one such place. As we were informed by some of our freedom fighters that two or three soldiers have hidden themselves with some of the non-Bengali families and they have been snipe shooting at our boys. One of the boys of our group has also been hurt and was immediately taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

On hearing the news we told the group to cordon the area so that those Pakistani soldiers not get away, and we would be soon joining them to eliminate them or get hold of them red handed. Maya was already aware of the situation as his house was also in that locality. On arrival, I found Maya, Pulu, Biddu, Mujibur, Hanif, Anu and others including some of the locals were trying to trace and pinpoint the exact rooftops from where the snipe shots were being fired. Within half an hour or so we could nail one of them down. Still then the other two soldiers were not surrendering although their chief Lt. Gen. Niazi did surrender a couple of hours back in the afternoon at the Race Course Maidan.

I was on the verge of climbing one of the walls of the many attached houses when one of the freedom fighters came and informed me that Shoheed and Mokles had a very important message. I gave my gun to one of the boys and came to the main street. There they informed me that the Indian Army would be taking over the Radio on the morning of 17 December. And it was expected that the senior most officer of the Indian Army would make the first announcement of our country's liberation from our Radio Bangladesh Dhaka at around 8-8:30 am. On receiving the information I became very perturbed and felt what could be more humiliating for us the freedom fighters than to accept a foreigner to make the first announcement from the capital city of our liberated country. The message rushed into our mind like a wild fire: Are our leaders all dead that nobody was there on behalf of the exiled government or Sector-2 to make the announcement? We three sat near a closed tea-shop and started to think.

First thing first. We would not allow anyone else to announce first from our liberated country except the sector commander or representative of the Mujib Nagar Government. Therefore, at all cost we have to hold that place until we find the right person. We started to think fast. Who were available amongst us to represent the exiled government? Our thought process could not find any except our Acting Sector Commander Major ATM Hyder who was representing Sector-2 and the Bangladesh Forces in Dhaka from 16 December 1971 onwards. Although it came to my mind that Lt. Col. Shafulullah was somewhere either in Narayanganj or Dhaka but we did

not know his exact whereabouts. Secondly we were informed that our Commander-in-Chief did not attend the ceremony of surrender of the Pakistan Army. We also had information that Gr. Capt. Khondaker, the Deputy Chief, had left with the Joint Command for Calcutta. Therefore, in all fairness we had very little choice, either to get hold of Hyder Bhai to agree to announce or damage the station.

Shahadat informed me earlier that Major Hyder would be staying for one night in Dr. Zafrullah's residence, which was also in Hatkhola and close to Fateh's house. I informed Biddu to inform Maya that I was leaving and someone should take over my place and also to send some boys to Radio Bangladesh. Shoheed informed that he knew the house where Major Hyder was staying for the night. While we walked out of Narinda Lane and were looking for a transport a young person from the local community pointed his fingers towards a Toyota Sedan 1967 model cream coloured car parked in front of the house on the main street. Immediately our brains started functioning. We needed to move fast and to do so we required a vehicle. It seemed to me that it was a God sent that the car only seemed ready for proper utilization. I peeped in through the window glasses and found that there were some files of the Parliament of the East Pakistan Government tied together and left on the back seat. I opened the locked door with two thick wires and then from the front dashboard switch panel pulled the

informed Shoheed that without Shahadat, Major Hyder may not agree to speak over Radio. Hence after he picks up Major Hyder, he has to pick up Shahadat and bring both of them together to Radio Bangladesh by 7:30 am. We must remember and should not forget that before 8:30 am we have to make the arrangement for announcement. I also informed him to convey to both Major Hyder and Shahadat that we would somehow ensure that the Radio was switched on and kept ready for the announcement. With that I left Shoheed near Hatkhola and proceeded towards Radio.

I arrived at the Radio Station earlier and found that there was only one guard at the gate. On asking him he informed that there was an old peon inside the tea stall and he would be able to help us. I got my car inside and while I parked the car I saw Fateh Ali Chowdhury stepped out from another car and walked inside. It was a big relief for me to see him. We both walked towards the tea stall that was at the back of the building opposite to the garages. It was from the old man that we came to know that the best way to get the Radio Station operational was to get hold of a gentleman by the name of Mr. Shamsul Huda Chowdhury who was the ex-Regional Director and knew the ins and outs of that Radio Station. Moreover, the old man said that Mr. Shamsul Huda Chowdhury lives very close in Eskaton Garden. The house that Mr. Huda stayed once belonged to one Mr. Khoda Bux and I happened to know that building. We thanked the old peon and told

minute or two. In came Mrs. Laila Arzuman Banu the famous singer and said that "my sons -- what do you want?" We informed her that we needed to urgently talk to Mr. Huda. She understood and turned and went to the adjacent room and within a minute or so a pretty bulky person came in and sat down in the front sofa. We kept sitting and he looked at us and seemed to wait to hear from us.

I brought out my Chinese pistol and kept it on the table kept my finger in the trigger batch and rotated the pistol on the glass covered table for couple of seconds and then looked at him. Fateh also brought out his "Astra pistol". It was then I told him, we knew he had worked with the Radio. Moreover, we have been also informed that he knew the engineers those who could make the radio station operational. So, to ensure that everything goes according to our plan, to be more polite and make him feel at ease we spoke to him in English. We introduced ourselves stating that we were from Sector-2, gave our family background so that he felt comfortable. My father an engineer and we lived in Dilu Road, Fateh's father a retired district judge and they lived in Hatkhola. And then the tough words came out of my mouth. "We have come to ensure that the Radio station is operational within 8 o'clock this morning. We are aware that you are the one who can help us to do it. If you don't agree we will be left with no choice but to eliminate you." Moreover, we also said that to get the Radio Station operational any kind of help he needs including protection of his and his families' "we stand guarantee".

We indeed informed him of the urgency because the government in exile would have to make some important announcements by 0800 hours and if it failed then there would be lots of complications. And we both would have no choice but to take appropriate actions against all of them involved with the Radio. A threat that we gave earlier and now seemed to work. In the mean time we were served with sweets and Mr. Huda picked one up from the plate and requested us to also try the sweets. Mr. Huda looked cool like a cucumber. While he ate he also got the time to think for few minutes and then he told us to have patient for few minutes more and went to the corner of the room to make some telephone calls. He spoke to two of the engineers on the phone and told them what we have told him couple of minutes back.

He returned back and was little more comfortable now and stated that there would be no problem to get the Radio started provided if no other outsiders come inside the station and create disturbance. It was then we opened up with him of our urgency and informed him what was exactly in our mind. That cool person thought for a few seconds and gave a million dollar smile and said, "if you come across the friendly forces you may tell them that the crystals are available in the Mirpur transmission centre and to get that we would need the concerned person". We profusely thanked him and told him that we would both be seeing him inside the Radio Station within 7:00 am without fail.

Major Hyder and Shahadat both came on schedule as requested. We held journalists Mr. Kader Mahmood and Mr. Ekas Ahmed in the first floor of the building, both knew Shahadat. Fateh immediately took both Major Hyder and

Shahadat to a corner room of the first floor and Mr. Kader Mahmood and Mr. Kader Mahmood wrote the speech for Major Hyder. Once Major Hyder was inside the building we introduced Mr. Shamsul Huda Chowdhury to him. It was by then we found that five to six freedom fighters have already arrived. We gave absolute instructions to them. The main gate to be kept closed for

It was around 8:10 that the Bangladesh Radio went on air. Fateh was told to announce in Bengali before Major Hyder gave his speech. It was from the outside of the glass window we could see Fateh sat quietly in front of the microphone. He looked very nervous. The technical persons from outside made movements of their hands and showed the red light, which indicated he was on air and he announced. At 8:15 am Major

receive the freedom fighters. Fateh handed over his Chinese SMG to her and she waited in the jeep. The jailer came and got all of us inside. Introduced myself and requested him to locate the freedom fighters. Slowly our eyes went towards the second grided gate. And it was there we could see the same very fair looking person Chullu Bhai trying to come forward from behind the other prisoners. We shouted with joy and tears

4-4:30 Hours: In the afternoon on the earlier advice of Mr. Shamsul Huda Chowdhury FF Fateh Ali Chowdhury telephoned Mr. Ejaz Ahmed who was the Director of Dhaka Television. He spoke to Mr. Ejaz in English and introduced himself as the staff officer of Major Hyder. Fateh also very clearly informed him about our intention. He further informed Mr. Ejaz that required he should contact Mr. Shamsul Huda Chowdhury who would be able to provide him with the present information. Thus Fateh, FF Afiqur Rahman (Tipu) and others arrived in Television Station at around 4-4:30 pm. Major Hyder, Shahadat and myself arrived in the open jeep few minutes after the arrival of Fateh and others.

On arrival at the Television premises we meet Khaleda Fahim, Sakina Akhtar, Artist Keramat, MA Wahid and Abdullah Al Mamun. Shahadat knew most of them. It was for the first time in my life that I was inside the studio. The studio was on the ground floor of the DIT building. Once inside the Dhaka Television it was totally different world of its own. For the first time we saw that how the new National Flag of Bangladesh was shown for the first time on the TV screen on 17 December 1971. A table fan was placed behind the small wooden pole and the fan rotated in full speed. It blew enough air to keep the flag flying straight. The big studio camera took the shots and then simultaneously displayed on the black and white big and small monitors kept on the table and racks.

Shahadat finalised the programme with Khaleda Fahim and others. Fateh and myself both had to sign on behalf of the government in exile and Mr. Ejaz signed on behalf of the establishment.

It was agreed that Fateh Ali Chowdhury would announce in Bengali and then Major Hyder would give the same declaration over the National Television as he had done in the morning over the Radio. He would also provide some more instructions to the Freedom Fighters and guerillas of the country. It was the handsome young freedom fighter by the name of Alqur Rahman (Tipu of Gopibagh) to read the English script. Fateh's announcement, Hyder Bhai's speech, Tipu's English announcements went on smoothly according to the schedule.

We profusely thanked the producers, engineers and the work force of the Dhaka Television Studio. While we walked out of the TV Studio and came near the last stairs of the DIT building we saw an open jeep rolled in and stopped in front of us. It was Baachu with his boys. We embraced each other and I felt relieved that he was alive and so was Major Hyder. We did not get any information of him and his group for last few days. We left the control of the TV Studio under his boys and left with Hyder Bhai and Shah Chow to meet Mrs. Jahannara Imam at her residence at Elephant Road. There we introduced Major Hyder to Mrs. Jahannara Imam and her son Jami. We then left for our house in Dilu Road where Hyder Bhai decided to stay the first two nights.

Finally the announcement of the liberated country of Bangladesh was made on 17 December 1971 from Dhaka the capital city of Bangladesh by a great freedom fighter and son of the soil Major Abu Ishaq Mohammad Hyder.

Habibul Alam, Bir Pratik is a freedom fighter. Sector-2



Freedom fighters entering Dhaka on 16 December 1971.

all purposes till 8:30 am, nobody was to be allowed to enter the premises without our clearance. If by any chance the friendly forces come they should hold them there as long as possible in the gate and inform us. Under no circumstances anybody would be allowed to enter the premises.

While we were busy with the preparation all of a sudden one of the freedom fighters rushed and informed that one Indian Army officer with three to four soldiers wanted to get in. Fateh rushed to Mr. Shamsul Huda Chowdhury and informed him. Mr. Huda sat in the Regional Director's room and received the Indian officer, talked to him for couple of minutes and then the officer was happy and left. Mr. Huda spoke to us immediately after the departure of the officer that he informed the officer who was of the rank of Lt. Colonel that there would be a huge delay to fix the radio station and he was in search of the crystals, which was in Mirpur, and at the same time he was also in search of the concerned person.

Again while the preparation for the announcement of the Liberation of the country was going on in a full swing, two freedom fighters of Khoka's group brought in along with them two political personalities of Awami League. We could only recognize Mr. Shamsulzoha MP from Narayanganj and not the other gentleman who looked very senior to Mr. Zoha. Mr. Zoha introduced Mr. Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury to us. We immediately took them to a different room and very politely asked them of their intention for the visit. The veteran politician Mr. Zahur Ahmed persistently wanted to see Major Hyder. We very tactfully kept their movement confined within the room. To keep them busy Fateh very tactfully requested them to write whatever they had to say.

ATM Hyder went on air through the Radio and made the announcement: "The country has been liberated and the Bengalis were now free citizens of the country. He further provided couple of instructions to all freedom fighters and to the people of the country for their safety and security". Once the announcement of Major Hyder was over, we left the place and handed over the responsibility of the premises to Khoka and his group.

1100 hours: While Fateh and myself were returning to our place in Dilu Road we took the Eskaton Garden Road and passed through the Ladies Club. Looked very carefully and saw a blue jeep. I left the car at the Ladies Club and took the jeep. The jeep was open all around and had no hood. Once we were in Dilu Road my youngest sister Shahnaz reminded us of the raid made by Pakistan Army on 29 August 1971 and wanted to know whether there were any freedom fighters alive. Information provided by Dinu, Linu, Khonu the Billah brothers and some other that at least Chullu Bhai and Samad Bhai were alive and according to their knowledge would most probably be in the Central Jail of Dhaka.

Again Fateh, Shahnaz my youngest sister and myself rushed towards the central jail. And so were the Billah brothers who came along in another car. We bought garlands from the street and gave it to Shahnaz to receive Chullu Bhai and others. We arrived in front of the jail gate and asked the sentry to open the gate. The sentry was puzzled for few minutes and said that he needs to get the clearance from the jailer. We told him to do so immediately.

We could see from outside that huge number of prisoners gathered in front of the inner grided gate. We told Shahnaz to wait outside the main gate with the garlands to

ran down our cheeks. Chullu Bhai told us that Samad Bhai was there too and we also got him out. We asked the jailer to release both of them. The jailer looked at Fateh and me and then said that he needed permission from the competent authority. While talking with the jailer the rest of the prisoners started chanting slogans to release them too. I nearly lost my temper so did Fateh and told him that we would be signing the papers. The jailer took Fateh and me to his office and talked over phone with DIG prison and then looked at us for few seconds and brought out the thick bounded book and placed it on his table. He flipped through some pages and stopped at an empty page. And then brought the book in front of me. He also provided a ball-point pen to write.

In English I wrote, "In behalf of the Government in exile and Sector-2 hereby authorize you to release the freedom fighters and prisoners of war". Wrote my name in full and put my signature with date. The chanting of slogans still went on and we waved at them and said that they would be released within couple of minutes. That was our first glimpse how a jail looked like. We got two survivors Mr. Masud, Saïque and Mr. Samad of the 29 August raid alive and got them out. We also got Ahsanuddin a freedom fighter who was caught on 14 December from Narayanganj while he was moving with explosives to destroy a bridge and was sent to central jail. While we took Chullu Bhai and Samad Bhai in our vehicle we found that a large number of young and old prisoners came out of the jail gate. The local people surrounded our car. Shahnaz got them and there she took the Chinese SMG in her hand and aimed the gun towards the sky and fired some shots of joy. The crowd started to shout slogan 'Joy Bangla'.