

THE LIBERATION WAR

A triumph of the people

ZAHID HOSSAIN

THE nine-month long bloody Liberation War which we fought in 1971 against the Pakistani intruders and the occupation forces ended in our glorious victory on December 16. It was basically a people's war and the freedom loving people of

Bangladesh celebrate their victory on this day every year with due solemnity, fervour and enthusiasm.

This great saga of victory is written in blood and tears, every drop of which tells of the saddest memory of pride as well as pain. Three million people were brutally murdered, thou-

sands of women molested, lakhs of children orphaned and women widowed, innumerable homes and market places burnt down, countless bridges and culverts demolished, a scorched earth policy rigorously carried through, leaving a trail of destruction.

These were some of the atrocities that the Pakistani marauders mercilessly committed before they were forced to lay down their arms and surrender unconditionally. But no amount of suffering and sacrifices, however, terrifying and unbearable, could deter the people from carrying on the fight for freedom and reaching the destination of victory on December 16. There is no finer day than December 16 in our glorious history and in our humble lives because on this day after centuries of bondage we emerged as a free nation. On this hallowed day we exult as proud victors. The long search for our identity came to an end on this day and its our glory in identifying ourselves as free citizens of a free country.

The Mujibnagar government which led the war from the very beginning of its formation had kept the interest of the common people in the upperhand in all their actions and policy planning. The emphasis of the exiled government was to involve the masses in their war efforts against the Pakistani forces. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry of the government, in spite of its resource constraints and other difficulties undertook lot of programmes for motivating and inspiring the common people against the atrocities and heinous crimes of the Pakistani forces and their local comrades. The Sadhin Bangla Betar Kendra played a very important and inspiring role in keeping the people informed of the government

efforts in the war fronts as well as in the diplomatic fronts for mobilizing world opinion in favour of our fight for freedom.

A Psychological Warfare unit was set up at the Ministry of Defence and those of us who had the opportunity to work there always fondly remember those days. This unit undertook several long term and short term programmes for undertaking a campaign to inspire the common people and to keep their morale high to face the enemy and fight against them boldly and squarely.

We had very limited resources at our disposal for carrying out our assigned job. Even we did not have a separate table, not to speak of a separate room for those of us who were involved in the task. For that matter, even the Defence Secretary of the Mujibnagar government late Mr. A. Samad did not have a separate table of his own. Myself as the Chief of the Psychological Warfare Unit used to share the table of the War time Deputy Chief of Staff then Group Captain (First Bangladesh Air Force Chief and Air Vice Marshal) A. K. Khandaker along with Defence Secretary Late Mr. A. Samad and the only Deputy secretary of the Ministry Mr. Akbar Ali Khan (former Adviser and Cabinet secretary). Most of the time Group Captain Khandaker used to visit the war fronts and used to remain out of the headquarters. In fact only two small rooms were given to the Defence Ministry for accommodating all the officers and staff members of the ministry.

Defence Secretary Late Samad was a very pleasant personality and his every word and advice were inspiring and motivating. Group Captain Khandaker on his return from his visits to sector commanders' offices and war fronts used to

supply us lot of inside information which were mostly inspiring. Dr. Belayet Hossain of Dhaka University Physics Department, Late Mr. Ali Imam, an official of the Forest Department, poet Al-Mahmud and Al Mubajhid were also associated with us in our efforts to conduct the Psychological Warfare against the enemy.

In our day to day work, we had a very good working relationship with the External Publicity wing of the Foreign Ministry and the Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra and we used to implement many of our psychological warfare programmes jointly.

The exiled Mujibnagar government had only a few Ministries and no complaint was ever heard about lack of co-ordination amongst the Ministries or officials. Possibly because the target of all was the same and all were really dedicated to the cause and it was simply to wage an all-out war against the enemy involving all the people without making any differences of caste or religion or position. The Cabinet Secretary of the Mujibnagar government Mr. H.T. Imam still feels proud of his heroic role played during the period of the exiled government in Mujibnagar. "Actually it was a people's war and the Mujibnagar government was fully successful in organizing and motivating the entire people of the then East Pakistan in its efforts to make it a total war, excepting a few collaborators, Razakers, Al Badrs and Al Shams", Mr. Imam said.

The main concern of the Mujibnagar government was the common people and their welfare. As such a planning cell was in operation from the beginning to work out detailed programmes. The planning cell was upgraded to planning commission in the month of August with Professor

Muzzafar Ahmed Choudhury of Dhaka University political science department as its chairman. The main purpose was to work out in detail the modalities of involving common people in the efforts of the Mujibnagar government in the war front as well as in the rehabilitation and settlement of the affected people.

In the same direction to involve the people including the leaders of different political parties in the war efforts, Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed made a Consultative Committee sometime in September. The committee consisted of representatives of the Awami League, NAP (Bhasani), NAP (Muzzafar), the Communist Party etc and the government of Bangladesh to ensure a sense of participation in the war of independence among all sections of the people.

The maximum salary of the Mujibnagar government was Rs five hundred per month and one can easily understand and realize the actual position and how far the propagandas of the anti liberation forces are true.

The members of the Mujibnagar government and its other leaders used to lead a very simple life. The acting president and all other ministers initially stayed in the same building at 8 Theatre Road. Afterwards, when the families of the acting president and other ministers joined them, they shifted to a small house at CIT Road except Tajuddin Ahmed who continued to stay at 8 Theatre Road separately from his family. Mr. Tajuddin vowed not to live with his family till Bangladesh was fully liberated.

We should take a firm pledge on this Victory Day for restoration of democratic order and rule of law in every sector of our national life.

Zahid Hossain is a freedom fighter and now associated with AJA BD Registrars as its CEO.



“Free the mundane present from the glorious past”

ASRAR CHOWDHURY

I 971. Three million lives. 266 days. 7.83 lives per minute. This is just the human price Bangladesh paid for her freedom. Fate had it I missed the 1971 'Train to Bangladesh'. History wasn't on my side. I belong to the post-1971 generation. As a Nation we're lucky though. The 'living' of 1971 have preserved the stories of the 'dead' of 1971. Through these stories, the fire and the spirit of 1971 have been preserved for us. If another train does blow her whistle in my lifetime, I surely won't miss it.

Any student of the Muktiyuddha has heard the name of Fateh Ali Chowdhury. A Freedom Fighter of Sector 2, he was a part of a few critical operations of our Muktiyuddha. The irony is, not too many have heard him speak about his experiences and thoughts on the Muktiyuddha. He likes to stay away from the limelight. But then, the post-1971 generation can't always accept silence as a virtue. I couldn't resist myself when I heard he agreed to talk about his experiences and thoughts on 1971. I certainly didn't want to miss this 'Train'.

When the Muktiyuddha started, Fateh Ali Chowdhury was a student of the final year in English at Dhaka University.

Bright careers chased University students in those days. But that wasn't to be. Life seldom goes as planned. His was a generation that was at the crossroads of history. Many like him soon found themselves pursuing a much brighter career. Defending the honour of the Motherland to establish the foundations of a Free Bangladesh.

"We didn't decide to go to war. It just happened. After the crackdown on 26 March, when we saw our own people being slaughtered like game, we found ourselves in a position where joining the war was the only option. And like many others, we went out to defend the honour of the Motherland". Fateh Bhai puffed his cigarette and carried on. "This is probably the same story of all of us who fought in 1971."

Fateh Ali Chowdhury was a member of the Crack Platoon of Sector 2. The Dhaka Operation of Crack Platoon 2 in late August 1971 is a turning point in our Muktiyuddha. There may be romanticism in fighting a war, but the scars can stay for as long as one lives. On 29 August, nine Freedom Fighters of Crack Platoon 2 were caught. Rumi, Altaf Mahmud, Chullu, Badi, Jewel and Bakr were among them. Fateh Bhai became emotional. "It was then we realised there

was no turning back."

Two names, Fateh Ali Chowdhury and Habibul Alam will go down in history in the first two days of the existence of Bangladesh as an independent nation. The waiting was worth its weight in gold that day. To be able to hear the story from Fateh Bhai himself!

"Crack Platoon entered Dhaka on 16 December 1971" started Fateh Bhai. "Bangladesh was now a free country. I went inside Dhaka Cantonment with the Four Guards Regiment of the Indian Army in search of any Freedom Fighters who could have been held as prisoners. But I could not trace anybody in the total chaotic situation. I learned from a source that some of our Freedom Fighters from the Crack Platoon Operation of 29 August could be alive and were held in Dhaka Central Jail."

"In the mean time, Habibul Alam and I decided it would be appropriate to open the Radio and BTV. The next morning, 17 December, we went to the Radio Office. Earlier, we contacted Shamsul Huda Chowdhury, Former Regional Director of Radio. He advised us on how to open the Radio. This would be the first broadcast in the air media of Independent Bangladesh. I clearly remember what I said", Fateh Bhai said with emotional eyes.

"I am Fateh Ali Chowdhury, a

Freedom Fighter of Sector 2. On behalf of the Fourth Bengal Regiment, Major Haider of Sector 2, Officer Commanding of Dhaka Operation will now speak". There was a pause. Fateh Bhai took a deep breath. "Sir (Major Haider) spoke."

"We then rushed off to Dhaka Central Jail. There wasn't a moment to lose."

"Habibul Alam and I reached Dhaka Central Jail before noon. We asked the Jail Officer if there were any Freedom Fighters among the prisoners. And then we asked how many of the prisoners could be freed according to Law."

"We learned that four Freedom Fighters were in the Jail. They were Masud Sadeque Chullu, Abdus Samad, Kazi Iqbal and Ahsanullah. The Jail Officer made a list of the Freedom Fighters, Political Prisoners, and those charged with Petty Crimes who could be freed according to Law. He handed the list to Habibul Alam. Habib signed on behalf of the Fourth Bengal Regiment. I countersigned. Dhaka Jail was opened. We then went to open BTV."

"Shamsul Huda Chowdhury advised us to contact Ejaz Ahmed to open BTV. We did so. This time I was more tensed than the entire nine months of our freedom struggle. Shimul Billah sang the National Anthem. We made the same statement as we did on

Radio. And that was it. Our Radio, Dhaka Jail and BTV were opened."

"I was just the rubber-stamp of history. If I weren't there that day, somebody else would have done what I did. In the words of my friend, the noted singer Azam Khan, I want to say 'Today Bangladesh is free. And this is my achievement.'"

"Very few Nations have the privilege of fighting a War of Independence. It's true that I was one of the Freedom Fighters who fought with arms. But then, a true victory would never have been possible if the Nation didn't participate. Those who didn't fight with arms are also Freedom Fighters. The death toll itself speaks. We fought the Muktiyuddha as One Nation. I'm honoured to have been a part of this history. That's all."

I had to ask Fateh Bhai the question many would like to ask. "Why don't you normally talk about 1971?" Fateh Bhai looked at me. His eyes gave the indication I was about to witness history in the making.

"History cannot be contemporaneous. What I am saying now and you are writing is documentation only. History can only be written by posterity."

I now understood Fateh Bhai's 'sounds of silence'. But then, the post-1971 generation expects more than just mere documentation. Fateh Bhai looked at me again. This time



Fateh Ali Chowdhury

his eyes had a childlike look. He wanted to say something to us.

"The spirit and the fire of 1971 now rest in the hands of the young of today's Bangladesh. It's your responsibility to play your part in taking Bangladesh forward. It's your responsibility to do something positive for your posterity. This is all our generation expects. Nothing more. Nothing less!"

Fateh Ali Chowdhury's famous last words were "Free the mundane present from the glorious past!"

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Mirza M Eyahia and Rezaul Amin, Freedom Fighters of Sector 2 for arranging the interview.

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