The sequence of events clearly demonstrates that both the government and the army were aware of the fatal attacks by 9.30 AM. Eye witness testimony said the DG Major General Shakil spoke to the Prime Minister by phone immediately after the first shots were fired outside the Darbar hall. The officers who fled the Darbar hall also contacted their superiors.

"I called my cousin Lt Col. Elahi Manzoor Chowdhury at 10.15 AM," said Abdul Mugni Chowdhury who works at a university. "In a whisper, he said he was holed up in a bathroom with other officers. He said he had called the cantonment for help."

By the time the order came to move troops, the rebels had dug in. By 11.30 they had taken women and children as hostage. The soldiers who had rushed out to surround the Pilkhana were told to await further orders. Government ministers and MPs arrived to begin negotiations, and helicopters dropped leaflets asking the rebels to surrender.

Eyewitnesses said the mutineers created smoke by setting fires. They also shot at anyone who tried to see into the Pilkhana. "I had no idea at the time that such a massacre was going on in such a beautiful place. We couldn't even hear the cries of the victims because of the continuous firing," said Dr. Shamsun Nahar, an authoress who lives in a flat overlooking the Pilkhana.

The mutineers' attempts at concealment have left many observers perplexed. The rebels knew that the authorities had an accurate tally of how many officers were in the Pilkhana. They also knew that the officers who survived the first wave of shootings must have contacted their superiors by cell phone. So why did they try to hide what happened? The mass graves in themselves pose a vexing question. The rebels knew the murders would soon be discovered. Then why did they go to all the trouble of hiding the bodies?

The answer may lie in the killers' exit strategy. The rebels initially took control of the Rifles Square shopping mall, although they left in the evening. Why capture the shopping centre? Could it be because it had a birds' eye view of the Pilkhana? For two days the rebels claimed on TV that the DG and other officers were "in custody". But they must have known both the government and the army were in possession of the real facts. So who were they trying to deceive? Could it have been the general public?

Nasir, a shopkeeper in the Azimpur area, said he had seen BDR jawans escaping. "Many locals actually helped them," he said. "If we knew then what we know now, we would have caught them and handed them over to the authorities."

The Pilkhana is surrounded by densely populated

Thirty-six Hours in Hell

Lt Col. Elahi Manzoor Chowdhury, Assistant Adjutant General at BDR Headquarters, is among the slain soldiers whose remains have not been identified. His wife Tanni Yafta Chowdhury has been combing the pilkhana and the hospitals for her husband's body. She spoke to her husband at 10.30 AM on the morning of the mutiny. Shortly afterwards, she herself was taken hostage. Tanni Chowdhury spoke to Syed Zain Al-Mahmood about her horrific nightmare.

When did you first become aware of the mutiny? Can you describe that morning?

At around 9.15 AM I got a call on my cell phone. It was my husband. "There has been trouble, he said. The jawans are shooting. Close all doors and windows. Don't come out." I was very frightened. By then I could hear gunfire. He called again a few minutes later. "A lot of officers have been killed. I am taking cover in the bathroom." I started to call my relatives and my husband's colleagues. Help is coming, I was told. Every second seemed like an eternity.

Did you hear from him again?

Yes, he called at around 10.30 AM. He said, "They're coming. Amar jonno dua koro. Ar dekha hobe na." Then the connection was lost. My husband was Asst. adjutant general -- he had nothing to do with the jawans. I hoped against hope that they would spare him. But that's was not to be.

Did you try to save him by calling for help?

I tried calling everyone I could think of. I was told that help was on its way. I kept praying for the sound of the army rolling in. But nothing happened. I don't understand why it would take so long for troops to get to the pilkhana from the cantonment? Does it take hours? You tell me?

What happened next?

Around 11.30 there was loud knocking on the door. I didn't want to open up, but they said they would shoot. I opened the door and four jawans came in with rifles at the ready. They pointed their weapons and asked for my husband. I said he was at the office. They took me and my children to the Quarter Guard where we were held with a number of other families.

Please describe how you were treated?

There were clearly two groups. One group had their faces uncovered, and treated us well. They gave us water when we asked for it. The other group came now and then. They covered their faces with red cloth and seemed very violent. They said things like, You've lived in air conditioning all your life. How does this feel?