

# A Walk in the

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BDR Pilkhana used to be one of my favourite destinations in Dhaka. With its arching trees, boulevards forming a canopy of green, and the long road that winds its way through the enclave the sight itself was a treat. In no part of the city one would find in one place - gardens of rose and orchid, fields bordered with coconut trees, ponds with crystalline images, and an open sky that embraces the distant horizon on edges of the landscape. During my visits to Pilkhana to meet the late Director General (DG) of BDR, Major General Shakil Ahmed, in addition to the enlightening company of this fine gentleman, another lucrative treat was the scenic beauty of Pilkhana. These encounters led to many other friends in Pilkhana -- from Colonel Emdad to Captain Mazhar - all of whom are no more.

In my wildest nightmare did I ever imagine that this beloved place of fond memories would become the most dreaded place of horrific scenes? Could nature be so treacherous as to unleash savagery in the realm of such serenity? In celebration of nature, did I miss the shadows of death that were to unravel in the ominous future that was to come? So many "whys" in my mind as I slowly put my shaky steps into this forbidden land of death and cruelty, barbarism and insanity.

In the gate of Pilkhana, there is a crowd of loved ones waiting anxiously with the fleeting hope of knowing what probably is already known. Army jawans stand in vigil and at the entrance are two armoured personnel carriers which give you the first impression of something terrible must have gone wrong inside. As I walk down the roads, it is a barren and deserted land with only personnel from army, police, and fire service roaming around.

I go to Darbar Hall a place known because of social occasions, particularly wedding ceremonies. There is an eerie silence that pierces through the heart as I gaze at the stage where the DG and senior officers were seated. Crests and trophies, meant for the braves, proudly hold their names that still shine inspite of the gloom that looms large. Walls around bear marks of fatal bullets that put an end to so many illustrious lives who were confined within the walls of fatality. It is the same in the bathrooms bullet marks sprayed in glass and walls. Pieces of false ceilings had been removed by those who were trying to save their lives by climbing upwards and sheltering from the carnage below. Bullets were fired in false ceilings as well and there was no place to hide, nowhere to run.

A gentle breeze from nearby fields blows the curtains to break the suspense as I try to imagine the marching orders that officers had to take led by the DG. I don't want to imagine what followed next as described by the survivor Lieutenant Colonel Kamaruzzzman during his TV interview. Shakil Bhai was too dear a person, a friend, and a well-wisher for me to have the strength to think of anything else other than the smiling and charming army officer who would instantly befriend anybody. It is impossible to imagine the picture as he took those fatal steps from the stage trusting the mutineers who assured that "Nothing would happen Sir." the trusted officers were literally invited into the orgy of killing that was unleashed. The stain of blood in the floor, partly jelled and partly blurred, make horrifying images. The red carpet meshes with the other red and assumes a darker shade, a shade not darker than the brutal acts themselves. I take one final look at the hall which held so many memorable events of friends and family, take a deep breath, and say to myself, "It will never be the same."

I take a stroll through roads and see lids of manholes opened. There are coloured banners and festoons stating, "Welcome to Rifles Week 2009" what a welcome indeed and what a week to remember! I reach almost the end of Pilkhana and the killing field where officers were either shot or shot and put into mass graves. There are tents spread around edges of the field where the mutineers camped