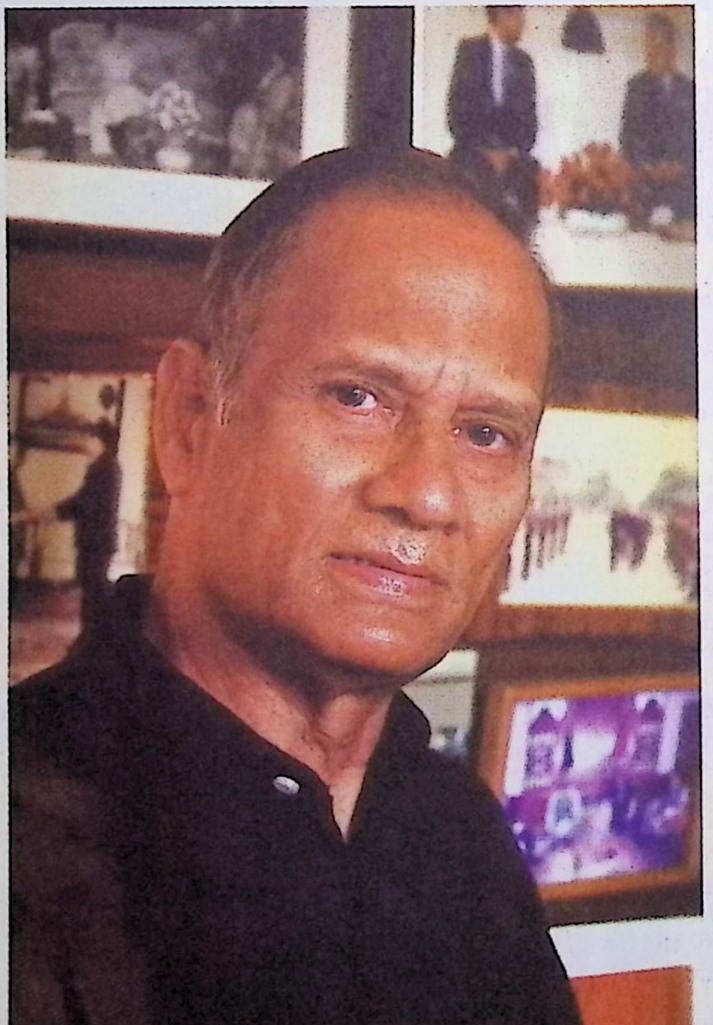
The Unrising of March 19

ERSHAD KAMOL

March 19, 1971. A mob created a barricade on the road near Joydebpur intersection so that a contingent of the Pakistani Army, led by Brigadier Jahenzeb Arbab, cannot reach the East Bengal Regiment at Joydebpur Palace. A rumour spread that the contingent had gone to disarm the Second East Bengal Regiment at Joydebpur, the battalion was manned predominantly by Bangali officers and soldiers. Brigadier Arbab, a Pathan, ordered the battalion to clear the road and if need be shoot at the mob. A Bangali Major of the battalion did not carry out the order of the Brigadier, rather tried to make the agitated mob understand the situation. However, the Brigadier became very angry when someone from the mob fired on the army and ordered to retaliate. A non-Bangali soldier carried out the order and fired on the mob killing two people on the spot and wounding many. Later another wounded person also died. Ultimately a curfew was declared in the area. The reluctance of the Bangali officer to carry out the order of the Brigadier was considered an act of 'mutiny' by the Pakistani Army.



Major General (retd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury Bir Bikram

Brigadier A.R. Siddiqui, the then Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) chief who was also the Press Adviser to President Yahya Khan, in his book titled "East Pakistan the Endgame", published from Oxford University Press, writes, "On the same day (March 19), a larger and much more serious incident also took place. A brigade commander (Brigadier Arbab Jahenzeb of 57 Brigade), who was returning from Joydebpur after inspecting one of his battalions, the Second East Bengal Regiment, was mobbed by angry Bangalis near a level crossing. He asked the mob to disperse and clear and way for him. The mob refused, and someone in the crowd opened fire. The brigadier ordered his men to retaliate but the Bangali troops refused. This marked the beginning of mutiny."

The Bangali Major, who refused to follow the order to fire on his countrymen, was none other than Major General (retd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury Bir Bikram, a former Adviser to the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh.

According to General Chowdhury like many other incidents during the Liberation War, the incident on March 19, 1971 has been wrongly presented. Which is why there is so much confusion amongst the younger generation even after 38 years of our Liberation.

Explaining the incident General Chowdhury says, "In fact, Brigadier Jahenzeb Arbab, who led 'Operation Search Light' on the first hour of March 26 on the Bangalis, and 70 other Pakistani Army carrying heavy weapons of 57 brigade from Dhaka Cantonment went to ascertain the loyalty of the Bangali-led Second East Bengal Regiment at Joydebpur. But being guided by a