The Jinjira Massacre

An eyewitness account of the Jinjira massacre of April 3, 1971, that killed 3,000 people and left a devastating impact on the lives of thousands.

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I had just returned to my job in the Information Ministry in Islamabad after nine months of training on communication research in West Germany. There was a happy reunion with my family-- my wife and two children. It was January 1971; in a 300-member National Assembly election held in December 1970 Awami League had won a landslide victory as a single majority party capturing 167 seats. There were great expectations that at last power was within the grasp of the East Pakistanis; Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would soon form a cabinet as prime minister and long overdue economic disparities and deprivation of Bangalis would be removed.

On March 3, the hopes and aspirations of the Bangalis were dashed to pieces when President General Yahya Khan cancelled the scheduled meeting of the National Assembly in deference to the wish of ZA Bhutto, the leader of Pakistan's Peoples Party. Predictably, there was a firestorm of protest and widespread condemnation in East Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib declared a non-violent non-cooperation movement against Pakistani authorities, which imposed martial law. In defiance, there were daily angry demonstrations and rallies. Things deteriorated fast. There were sporadic clashes with the army with huge casualties on the Bengali side. The Governor General Admiral Ahsan and Lt. General Shahibzada Yakub Khan, zonal martial law administrator, apparently in sympathy with Bengali's legitimate cause, resigned. They were replaced by Lt. General Tikka Khan and Lt. General Niazi, who were considered hawks. The Chief Justice BA Siddiqui refused to administer oath to Tikka Khan as Governor. On March 7, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at a mammoth public meeting in Dhaka, in a clarion call to the nation, declared that this time the struggle was for emancipation, the struggle was for independence. There were clashes in Chittagong port when the Pakistan army was stopped from unloading arms and ammunition from the ship 'Swat'. There were reports of troops movement to East Pakistan.

These were writings in the wall and straws in the wind of a gathering storm. The defining moment was round the corner. I told my wife it was time to escape to freedom. Her face looked pale. With great difficulty I managed ten days casual leave on grounds of my father's ill health. On March 20 when I boarded the plane, I was frightened. Except for five families, all others were tall, stout and rough faced male passengers.

There was no mistaking they were soldiers in civilian dress. On arrival in Dhaka, I told my father about the troops movement. In the evening he went to Road 32 to tell Bangabandhu who said that he knew about it. In the aftermath of the brutal attack of the Pakistani Army on March 25, everybody was fleeing the city in panic. When our close neighbours in Elephant Road left one by one, we were at our wits end. We heard that 22 persons in a minibus were waylaid in Mirpur by non-Bengalis and slaughtered. Information about midnight knocks by the army everyday to pick up youths were around, and rumour was afloat of an imminent house to house attack and search operation in Elephant Road jointly by the army and their collaborators. We were demoralised and our resolve to stay put collapsed. My father, who had served as a Superintendent of Police in Faridpur back in 1949, said that in Bhanga, Faridpur he had a well-to-do friend who would readily offer us shelter. On March 31, the whole family including my parents, my elder brother, Professor Momen of Social Welfare Institute and his family, my younger brother Hasnat Abdul Hye who had recently returned from Karachi and was transferred to Patuakhali, my youngest brother, Architect Rashid and three sisters left for Faridpur.

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