The Trial-Repatriation Deadlock

Bhutto kept on insisting that Pakistan would only recognise Bangladesh after its prisoners were released. In November 1972, Bangladesh and India decided to repatriate some 6,000 family members of Pakistani POWs and, in response, Pakistan agreed to release some 10,000 Bangladeshi women and children held in Pakistan.[20] However, the fate of most Bangladeshis trapped in Pakistan remained uncertain.

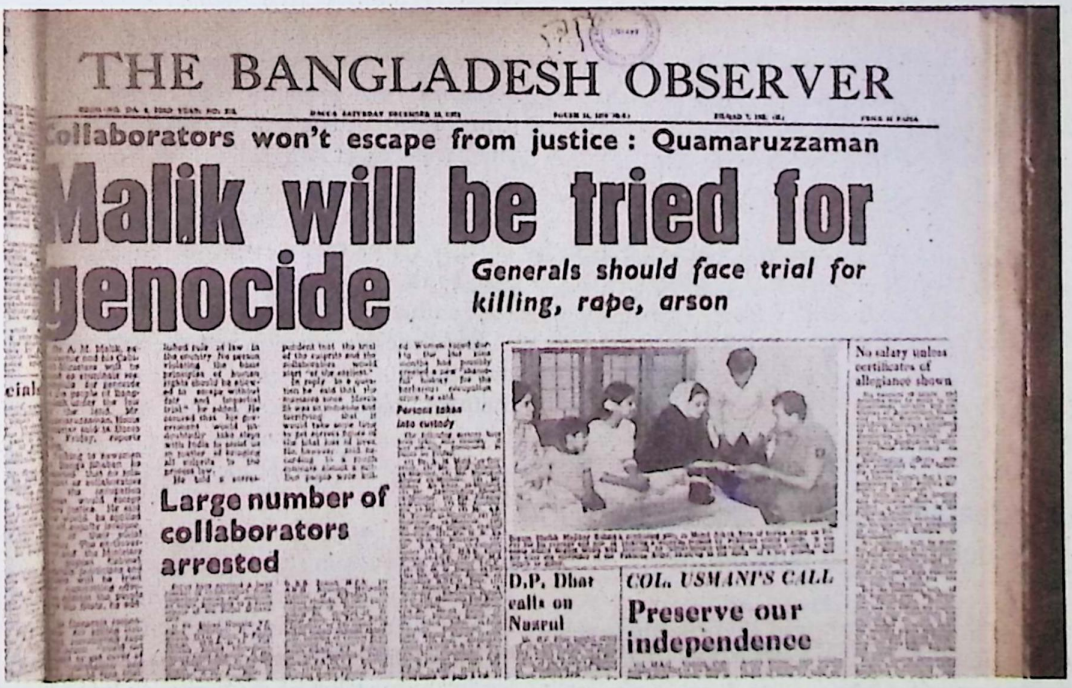
On April 17, 1973, after four days of bilateral talks Bangladesh and India announced a "simultaneous repatriation" initiative to end the prisoner-deadlock. Under this proposal, India would repatriate most of the 90,000 Pakistani POWs. In return, Pakistan would release the 175,000-200,000 stranded Bangladeshis and take back 260,000 non-Bangalis (Biharis) from Bangladesh.[21]

Bangladesh, however, made it clear that India would not release 195 of the initially accused Pakistani POWs and Bangladesh would try them, along with its local collaborators, for war crimes.

Pakistan accepted the proposal in principle, but agreed to take back only 50,000 Biharis. Bhutto however furiously refused Bangladesh's position to try the accused Pakistanis in Bangladesh. He threatened that if Bangladesh carried out the trial of the 195 Pakistanis, Pakistan would also hold similar tribunals against the Bangladeshis trapped in Pakistan. In an interview on May 27, 1973, Bhutto said:

"Public opinion will demand trials [of Bangladeshis] here ... We know that Bangalis passed on information during the war. There will be specific charges. How many will be tried, I cannot say."[22]

To prove that it was not just an empty threat, Pakistan government quickly seized 203 Bengalis as "virtual hostages" for the 195 soldiers.[23] Bhutto also argued that, if Bangladesh tried its POWs, Pakistanis who were already "terribly upset" would topple Pakistan's political leadership, and he claimed that his government had already arrested some top-ranking military officials for such conspiracy.[24]


THE BANGLADESH OBSERVER

collaborators won't escape from justice : Quamaruzzaman

Malik will be tried for genocide

Generals should face trial for killing, rape, arson

Large number of collaborators arrested

Persons taken into custody

No salary unless certificate of allegiance shown

D.P. Dhar calls on Nazrul

COL. USMANI'S CALL

Preserve our independence

Meanwhile, on August 28, 1973, India and Pakistan signed the Delhi Accord, which followed the Bangladesh-India "simultaneous repatriation" proposal. This allowed the release of most of the stranded Bangalis and Pakistanis held in Pakistan and India respectively for almost two years.

The tripartite repatriation began on September 18, 1973 and some 1,468 Bangalis and 1,308 Pakistanis were repatriated within the first week.[26] Pakistan and India agreed that the issue of 195 accused Pakistanis would be settled between Bangladesh and Pakistan.[27] Pakistan kept the 203 Bangladeshis out of this repatriation process.