Our Cruel Birth

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In the cold winter morning of December 16, Dhaka cantonment was hot with rumours. The depressed and desperate Pakistani army officers were confused about their fate. *Will the yellows from the north (Chinese army) and the whites (American 7th fleet) from the south arrive to rescue them?*

However, a note from Indian Major General Nagra, to Pakistan Army General Amir Abullah Khan Niazi made the situation clear at 10 am. It said, "Dear Abdullah, I am at Mirpur Bridge. Send your representative." The call had made the confused Pakistan Army top brass, huddled in Dhaka cantonment, to know that their game in Bangladesh was over. It was neither Chinese nor the American Army, but the Indian troops, aided by Mukti Bahini, who were awaiting them just on the outskirts of the city. After several hours of discussion, General Niazi signed the instrument of surrender at the then Dhaka Race Course--now Suhrawardi Uddyan--through a formal military ceremony.



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Surrendering the arms: Pakistani troops made their final march on Bangladeshi soil.

But the war was far from over. Pakistani soldiers in different parts of the country were desperately fighting against the allied forces. As their communication with the HQ in Dhaka was shattered by the guerrilla attack of Mukti Bahini, they did not know about the fateful surrender. Even in some districts, Pakistani soldiers were defending with some formidable confidence. During this period, some atrocities were committed by the retreating Pakistan Army. With the help of the Biharis and local militias, the Pakistan Army started to adopt a 'scorched earth' policy destroying food, medical and supply storages in most of the districts. In some areas like Syedpur and Ishwardi, the fighting was so grisly that Pakistani soldiers gave up fighting as late as December 19, three days after the formal surrender. But by this time, a massive destruction of food and logistic supply along with the supply route, meant Bangladesh with her seven crore population was pushed to another disaster-- a fatal famine.

Pakistani soldiers surrendered and got the protection of the Indian Army according to the Geneva Convention. But their local accomplices did not. Retaliation began just after the war. Mukti Bahini started to hunt down members of the Bengali Razakar forces for their participation in the atrocities committed by Pakistani army. Many Razakars, along with their top leaders, fled to Pakistan and other countries. But Biharis did not lose their ground so easily. Biharis are the Muslims of North Eastern India evicted by the Indians during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. They were pushed into the then East Pakistan and the then government allowed them to settle in this land. Culturally and linguistically different from Bengalis and more related to the West Pakistanis, these people collaborated with the Pakistan Army and many of them fought alongside the Pak forces.

After December 16, many of these Bihari settlements were still holding out against the Mukti Bahini. Most of these settlements such as Jalladkhana of Mirpur and Mohammadpur were the centres of torture and mass killing. After the liberation, the newly formed Bangladesh armed forces launched their first operation to liberate these settlements on January 25, 1972. During these operations Bangladeshis witnessed the sign of brutality committed by these Bihari settlers. Thousands of people including many intellectuals were killed in Jalladkhana settlement which was the last to be discovered. Currently these Bihari people, now regarded as stranded Pakistanis, were dumped into makeshift refugee camps where they are leading a miserable life till date.