

GENOCIDE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Others, speaking privately, were more blunt in seeking justification.

"The Hindus had completely undermined the Muslim masses with their money," Col. Naim, of 9th Division headquarters, told me in the officers' mess at Comilla. They bled the province white. Money, food and produce flowed across the borders to India. In some cases they made up more than half the teaching staff in the colleges and schools, and sent their own children to be educated in Calcutta. It had reached the point where Bengali culture was in fact Hindu culture, and East Pakistan was virtually under the control of the Marwari businessmen in Calcutta. We have to sort them out to restore the land to the people, and the people to their Faith."

Or take Major Bashir. He came up from the ranks. He is SSO of the 9th Division at Comilla and he boasts of a personal body count of 28. He had his own reasons for what has happened.

"This is a war between the pure and the impure," he informed me over a cup of green tea. "The people here may have Muslim names and call themselves Muslims. But they are Hindus at heart. You won't believe that the maulvi (mulla) of the Cantonment mosque here issued a fathwa (edict) during Friday prayers that the people would attain janat (paradise) if they killed West Pakistanis. We sorted the bastard out and we are now sorting out the others. Those who are left will be real Muslims. We will even teach them Urdu."

Everywhere I found officers and men fashioning imaginative garments of justification from the fabric of their own prejudices. Scapegoats had to be found to legitimise, even for their own consciences, the dreadful "solution" to what in essence was a political problem: the Bengalis won the election and wanted to rule.

The Punjabis, whose ambitions and interests have dominated government policies since the founding of Pakistan in 1947, would brook no erosion of their power. The army backed them up.

Officials privately justify what has been done as retaliation for the massacre of the non-Bengalis before the army moved in. But events suggest that the pogrom was not the result of a spontaneous or undisciplined reaction. It was planned.

General Tikka Khan takes over

It seems clear that the "sorting-out" began to be planned about the time that Lt-Gen. Tikka Khan took over the governorship of East Bengal, from the gentle, self-effacing Admiral Ahsan, and the military command there, from the scholarly Lt-Gen. Sahibzada Khan.

That was at the beginning of March, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's civil disobedience movement was gathering momentum after the postponement of the assembly meeting from which the Bengalis hoped for so much. President Yahya Khan, it is said, acquiesced in the tide of resentment caused in the top echelons of the military establishment by the increasing humiliation of the West Pakistani troops stationed in East Bengal.

The Punjabi Eastern Command at Dacca continues to dominate the policies of the Central Government. [It is perhaps worth pointing out that the Khans are not related: Khan is a common surname in Pakistan.]

When the army units fanned out in Dacca on the evening of March 25, in pre-emptive strikes against the mutiny planned for the small hours of the next morning, many of them carried lists of people to be liquidated.

These included the Hindus and large numbers of Muslims; students, Awami Leaguers, professors, journalists and those who had been prominent in Sheikh Mujib's movement. The charge, now publicly made, that the army was subjected to mortar attack from the Jaganath Hall, where the Hindu university students lived, hardly justifies the obliteration of two Hindu colonies, built around the temples on Ramna race course, and a third in Shakrepati, in the heart of the old city.

Nor does it explain why the sizeable Hindu populations of Dacca and the neighbouring industrial town of Narayanganj should have vanished so completely during the round-the-clock curfew on March 26 and 27. There is similarly no trace of scores of Muslims who were rounded up during the curfew hours. These people were eliminated in a planned operation; and improvised response to Hindu aggression would have had as, as, as different results.

Touring Dacca on April 15 I found the heads of four students lying rotting on the roof of the Iqbal Hall hostel. The caretaker said they had been killed on the night of March 25. I also found heavy traces of blood on the two staircases and in four of the rooms. Behind Iqbal Hall a large residential

building seemed to have been singled out for special attention by the army.

The walls were pitted with bullet holes and a foul smell still lingered on the staircase, although it had been heavily powdered with DDT. Neighbours said the bodies of 23 women and children had been carted away only hours before. They had been decomposing on the roof since March 25. It was only after much questioning that I was able to ascertain that the victims belonged to the nearby Hindu shanties. They had sought shelter in the building as the army closed in.

THIS IS GENOCIDE conducted with amazing casualness. Sitting in the office of Major Agha, Martial Law Administrator of Comilla city, on the morning of April 19, I saw the off-hand manner in which sentences were meted out. A Bihari sub-inspector of police had walked in with a list of prisoners being held' in the police lock-up. Agha looked it over. Then, with a flick of his pencil, he casually ticked off four names on the list.

"Bring these four to me this evening for disposal," he said. He looked at the list again. The pencil flicked once more. "... and bring this thief along with, them."

Death sentence over Cold Drink

The death sentence had been pronounced over a glass of coconut milk. I was informed that two of the prisoners were

THIS IS GENOCIDE conducted with amazing casualness. Sitting in the office of Major Agha, Martial Law Administrator of Comilla city, on the morning of April 19, I saw the off-hand manner in which sentences were meted out. A Bihari sub-inspector of police had walked in with a list of prisoners being held' in the police lock-up. Agha looked it over. Then, with a flick of his pencil, he casually ticked off four names on the list.

Hindus, the third a "student," and the fourth an Awami League organiser. The "thief," it transpired, was a lad named Sebastian who had been caught moving the household effects of a Hindu friend to his own house.

Later that evening I saw these men, their hands and legs tied loosely with, a single rope, being led down the road to the Circuit House compound. A little after curfew, which was at 6 o'clock, a flock of squawking mynah birds were disturbed in their play by the thwacking sound of wooden clubs meeting bone and flesh.

Captain Azmat of the Baluch Regiment had two claims to fame according to the mess banter. One was his job as ADC to Maj-Gen. Shaikat Raza. Commanding officer of the 9th Division. The other was thrust on him by his colleagues' ragging.

Azmat, it transpired, was the only officer in the group who had not made a "kill" Major Bashir needed him mercilessly.

"Come on Azmat," Bashir told him one night, "we are going to make a man of you. Tomorrow we will see how you can make them run. It's so easy."

To underscore the point Bashir went into one of his long spiels. Apart from his duties as SSO, Bashir was also "education officer" at Headquarters. He was the only Punjabi officer I found who could speak Bengali fluently. By general agreement Bashir was also a self-taught bore who gloried in the sound of his own voice.

A dhari walla (bearded man) we were told, had come to see Bashir that morning to inquire about his brother, a prominent Awami League organiser of Commilla who had been netted by the army some days earlier. Dhor gaya, Bashir said he told him: "He has run away. The old man could not comprehend how his brother could have escaped on a broken leg. Neither could I. So Major Bashir, with a broad wink, enlightened me. The record would show dhor gaya: "shot while escaping."

I never did find out whether Captain Azmat got his kill.

The rebel Bengali forces who had dug in at Feni, seventy miles north of Chittagong on the highway to Comilla, had tied down the 9th Division by destroying all the bridges and culverts in the area. General Raza was getting hell from the Eastern Command at Dacca which was anxious to have the south-eastern border sealed against escaping rebels. It was also desperately urgent to open this only land route to the north to much-needed supplies that had been piling up in the port at Chittagong.

So General Raza was understandably waspish. He flew over

the area almost daily. He also spent hours haranguing the brigade that, was bogged down at Feni. Captain Azmat, as usual, was the General's shadow. I did not see him again. But if experience is any pointer, Azmat probably had to sweat out his "kill" and the ragging for another three weeks.

It was only on May 8 that the 9th Division was able to clear Feni and the surrounding area. By then the Bengali rebels, forced out by relentless bombing and artillery barrages, had escaped with their weapons across the neighbouring border into India.

The escape of such large numbers of armed, hard-core regulars among the Bengali rebels was a matter of grave concern to Lt-Col. Aslam Baig, G-1 at 9th Division headquarters.

"The Indians," he explained, will "obviously not allow them to settle there. It would be too dangerous. So they will be allowed in on sufferance as long as they keep making sorties across the border. Unless we can kill them off, we are going to have serious trouble for a long time."

Lt. Col. Baig was a popular artillery officer who had done a stint in China after the India-Pakistan war when units of the Pakistan Army were converting to Chinese equipment. He was said to be a proud family man. He also loved Cowers. He told me with unconcealed pride that during a previous posting at Comilla he had brought from China the giant scarlet waterlilies that adorn the pond opposite the headquarters. Major Bashir adored him. Extolling one officer's decisiveness Bashir told me that once they had caught a rebel officer there was a big fuss about what should be done with him.

"While the others were telephoning all over for instructions," he said, "he solved the problem. Dhor gaya. Only the man's foot was left sticking out of the ditch."

It is hard to imagine so much brutality in the midst of so much beauty Comilla was blooming when I went there towards the end of April. The rich green, carpet of rice paddies spreading to the horizon on both sides of the road was broken here and there by bright splashes of red. That was the Gol Mohor, aptly dubbed the "Flame of the Forest," coming to full bloom. Mango and coconut trees in the villages dotting the countryside were heavy with fruit. Even the terrier-sized goats skipping across the road gave evidence of the abundance of nature in Bengal. "The only way you can tell the male from the female," they told me, "is that all the she-goats are pregnant."

Fire and Murder their vengeance

In one of the most crowded areas of the entire world, Comilla district has a population density of 1,900 to the square mile—only man was nowhere to be seen.

"Where are the Bengalis?" I had asked my escorts in the strangely empty streets of Dacca a few days earlier. "They have gone to the villages, — was the stock reply.

Now, in the countryside, there were still no Bengalis. Comilla town like Dacca was heavily shuttered. And in ten miles on the road to Laksham, past silent villages, the peasants I saw could have been counted on the fingers of both hands.

There were, of course, soldiers—hundreds of unsmiling men in khaki, each with an automatic rifle. According to orders, the rifles never left their hands. The roads are constantly patrolled by tough, trigger-happy men. Wherever the army is, you won't find Bengalis.

Martial law orders, constantly repeated on the radio and in the Press, proclaim the death penalty for any one caught in the act of sabotage. If a road is obstructed or a bridge damaged or destroyed, all houses within 10 yards of the spot are liable to be demolished and their inhabitants rounded up.

The practice is even more terrible than anything the words could suggest. "Punitive action" is something that the Bengalis have come to dread.

We saw what this meant when we were approaching Hajiganj, which straddles the road to Chandpur, on the morning of April 17. A few miles before Hajiganj, a 15-foot bridge had been damaged the previous night by rebels who



were still active in the area. According to Major Rathore (G-Ops.) an army unit had immediately been sent out to take punitive action. Long spirals of smoke could be seen on all sides up to a distance of a quarter of a mile from the damaged bridge. And as we carefully drove over a bed of wooden boards, with which it had been hastily repaired, we could see houses in the village on the right beginning to catch fire.

At the back of the village some jawans were spreading the flames with dried coconut fronds. They make excellent kindling and are normally used for cooking.

We could also see a body sprawled between the coconut trees at the entrance to the village. On other side of the road another village in the rice paddies showed evidence of the fire that had gutted more than a dozen bamboo and mat huts. Hundreds of villagers had escaped before the army came. Others, like the man among the coconut trees, were slow to get away.

As we drove on, Major Rathore said, "They brought it on themselves." I said it was surely too terrible a vengeance on innocent people for the acts of a handful of rebels. He did not answer.

A few hours later when we were again passing through Hajiganj on the way back from Chandpur, I had my first exposure to the savagery of a "kill and burn mission".

We were still caught up in the aftermath of a tropical storm which had hit the area that afternoon. A heavy overcast made ghostly shadows on the mosque towering above the town.

Light drizzle was beginning to wet the uniforms of Captain Azhar and the four jawans riding in the exposed escort jeep behind us.

We turned a corner and found a convoy of trucks parked outside the mosque. I counted seven, all filled with jawans in battle dress. At the head of the column was a jeep. Across the road two men, supervised by a third, were trying to batter down the door of one of more than a hundred shuttered shops lining the road. The studded teak wood door was beginning to give under the combined assault of two axes as Major Rathore brought the Toyota to a halt.

"What the hell are you doing?"

The tallest of the trio, who was supervising the break-in, turned and peered at us. "Mota," (Fatty) he shouted, "what the hell do you think we are doing?"

Recognising the voice, Rathore drew a water-melon smile. It was, he informed me, his old friend "Ify"—Major Iftikhar of the 12th Frontier Force Rifles.

Rathore: "I thought someone was looting."

Ifikhar: "Looting? No. We are on kill and burn." Waving his hand to take in the shops, he said he was going to destroy the

Rathore: "How many did you get?"

Ifikhar smiled bashfully.

Rathore: "Come on. How many did you get?"

Ifikhar: "Only twelve. And by God we were lucky to get them. We would have lost those, too, if I hadn't sent my men

QUOTABLE Quote

"Many politicians are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition that no people ought to be free till they are fit to use their freedom. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story who resolved not to go into the water till he had learned to swim."

Thomas B. Macaulay



North South University

MPharm Admission Spring 2014

- MPharm in Pharmacology & Clinical Pharmacy
- MPharm in Pharmaceutical Technology & Biopharmaceutics

Admission Test: Friday, 03 January 2014 at 10:00 AM
Application Submission Deadline: Thursday, 02 January 2014

Admission Requirements:

- BPharm degree
- At least 2nd Class (45% or above) in all exams or a minimum CGPA of 2.5 on a 4-point scale
- Qualifying in NSU admission test or minimum score of CBT 213 in both TOEFL & GRE
- Written test is waived for candidates with undergraduate CGPA of 3.5 or above from NSU

Special Features:

- Faculty members with PhD from reputed Universities, with strong research background
- Modern laboratory facilities for research (HPLC, GC-MS, LC-MS, FT-IR, Mini R&D set-up, Thermal cycler (PCR), Fluorescence microscope, Gel-doc system, Cell culture lab, ELISA reader, Langendorff system for isolated perfused heart & pancreas, Animal house etc)
- Pharmacy Practice Lab (First in the country)
- Tuition waiver, financial aid and graduate assistantship for deserving students
- Fully automated and digitized central library; seminar library with rich collection
- Courses designed as per North American Standard
- NSU degree is globally accepted for higher studies & job placement
- Credit transfer facility & collaboration with reputed universities (USA, Canada, UK, Japan)

Application Forms are available for Tk. 1000 at the UCBL Bank, Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229

For information please contact:

Program Office, Department of Pharmacy
North South University
Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229
Phones: 880-2-885-2000 ext: 1966/1967/1954
Email: shilu@northsouth.edu
Website: www.northsouth.edu

Invest for Success!

The Laureate is built to help you succeed. Whatever your business may be, make this commercial landmark your business address.



The Laureate
Your Business Address

at
Banani
11

Please call

01755 66 24 24

https://www.facebook.com/btibd ■ www.btibd.com



REHAB MEMBERSHIP #001
ISO 9001:2008 CERTIFIED



building
technology
& ideas Ltd.

in pursuit of excellence...