

The Guerrillas of Dhaka in 1971

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My father went back to his recliner and just nodded his head. He had a habit of shaking his legs whenever he was excited. He was glad that it was all over, but felt nervous about the rifle I was carrying. He kept looking at it and told me to keep it safe and out of reach of my younger brothers. He told me to make sure it was not loaded. I left the weapon beside him and went into take a nice warm bath.

I was extremely tired and all the exhaustion seeped into my bones. I literally melted away at having the luxury of taking a hot bath. After having a delicious and hearty meal, I simply wanted to go to bed. As my head hit the pillow, I fell fast asleep. When I woke up in the morning, the sun was already quite high in the sky. It must have been nearly ten in the morning. I jumped out of bed and freshened up. My mother was always bustling about in the kitchen and she eagerly served me breakfast. It was my favorite meal: *paratha*, beef curry, and fried eggs. She had also made some semolina *halwa* (sweet dessert), which I loved to eat hot. Not having eaten properly for months, I devoured my breakfast. After a cup of hot tea, I went out of the house to look around. The boys on the street were jubilantly firing the guns in the air and were shouting "Joy Bangla!" I went back in and looked at my G3 rifle and reflected on the fact that a real Muktijoddha would never boast in public. "It does not matter, let them enjoy," my father said. He asked me to sit beside him and tell him how I had been since the last time he saw me. We talked for an hour about the different missions that we carried out while in Savar. I could see my father's proud eyes as he gazed at me unblinkingly, listening to my narration of the war and the different missions which I had taken part in. Beneath the pride, I saw the stark relief he felt at having me sit by him safe and healthy.

Manik Bhai did not return home, neither did Tito and Zakir Bhai. So many wonderful and courageous men had given their lives so that we could live as a free nation. Their dreams must live on. They were not able to see Bangladesh as a free country. It was now our duty to build the country of their dreams so that their sacrifices would not go in vain.

I could not stay long at home as we had been told to report at Purana Paltan. We were to return to the camp and bring back all the weapons and ammunition to the new camp in Dhaka. A house had already been selected at Purana Paltan where we were to set up our new camp. The building belonged to Jahanul Islam (Founder Chairperson of Eastern Housing Ltd.) at 21 Purana Paltan Lane. There were four apartments in the building. We selected the apartment on the outer corner. On the left side of the building was a small alley. The location of the apartment was good. We would be able to set up sentry posts around it without trouble. After making all the arrangements for our new camp in Dhaka, we went back to our camp at Jirabo. Zahidul and Arif joined us from Dhaka on December 17. Bachchu Bhai quickly arranged for transportation to be used by us as our convoy. Within a few



Late Areful Maula (left) and Towficur Rahman in Jirabo Camp, 1971.

Bhai stood up waving to the people as we entered Dhaka. I stood at the back with Jami and Ifu Bhai, while Asad sat just behind Bachchu Bhai. Our convoy of 15 trucks moved slowly towards Dhaka on the Aricha Highway. We, 450 Muktijoddhas in the convoy, were jubilant at the thrill of entering Dhaka. With smiles on our faces and proud hearts, we moved towards the capital of our new nation. Triumphant we entered Dhaka, freed of all our enemies.

Our convoy moved slowly up through Amin Bazaar towards Dhanmondi. As we came near Dhanmondi Road 1, just before Elephant Road, someone shot at us from the window of one of the houses. It was a well-developed residential area and there were many two- or three-storied houses all around, making it extremely difficult to see where the gun was being fired from. We quickly took up position and fired back in the direction of the gun fire. After a couple of shots, the sniper stopped firing at us. We waited for a while to check whether it was safe before our commander sent some fighters to look for the sniper who had fired the shot. They searched each and every house on the street, but the sniper could not be found. He must have disappeared from the area through the back door of one of the houses he had been hiding in. After an hour of searching, Bachchu Bhai told us to start moving the convoy again. We took our convoy down Elephant Road past Hotel Shahbag and then, after passing the Race Course, we turned left at the intersection where currently Matsha Bhaban is located. Then we turned right towards Kakrail, at the corner of Ramna Park. Finally, we plied down to Purana Paltan - our new camp. As we passed through the roads of Dhaka, we were cheered at and greeted by excited crowds calling out slogans of "Joy Bangla". We were greeted in a city of celebration and festivity, not the somber city we had left behind a few months ago. Men, women, children, and people from all walks of life were unanimously celebrating the historic independence. It was not an easy feat for us to reclaim our land. We had lost several courageous friends in the process and had suffered great loss and pain. But then, life is a moving feast, life is a celebration of joy, and the whole city was jubilant as patriotic songs played loudly on speakers mounted on the streets. Elated by the victory achieved by the Muktijoddhas and the Bangladesh Army, people ran up to our Jeep to shake our hands. The brave hearts who had achieved freedom after a long and difficult war, we held our heads high as we drove into Dhaka, victorious!

Even today, I am optimistic that we will build a country of which we can all be proud of and that Bangladesh will inevitably surge ahead. I see Bangladesh as a spirit of liberation, a spirit that can only be matched by the blue sky yonder and the infinity beyond. In order to do this, we must infuse into the new generation the passion of patriotism that the Muktijoddhas were imbued with in 1971 - the passion that can only be the true spirit of Independence.

*This is an excerpt taken from Colonel (Retd.) Towficur Rahman's recent book *The Guerrillas of Dhaka in 1971*.*

hours, we managed to collect a Jeep from the Savar Dairy Farm and several pick-up trucks from Savar Bazaar. Asad also brought some vehicles from the Rajarbagh Police Lines for us to use. We loaded up the trucks with the weapons and ammunition that we had collected from

the raids and ambushes we had conducted during the war. It took us nearly four hours to pack up and move. The Muktijoddhas loaded on to the back of the trucks and we got into the Jeep. Our convoy was led by our Jeep. Arif drove the Jeep and Zahidul sat in the seat next to him, while Bachchu