

REMEMBRANCE

It was a Thursday. Madhushudan Dey, owner of the famous Dhaka University Modhur Canteen, went off on his business around noon. The day was supposed to be a regular working one—serving the canteen's famous butter bread and *shingara*, while chitchatting with students. The canteen, as usual, was filled with student politicians and the topic of the day was the 1970 parliamentary election, and handover of power to the winning party Awami League.

This particular topic had been the talk of the town since Yahya Khan deliberately postponed the national assembly. Both Yahya and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto were in Dhaka at that time, in discussion with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Events took a turn that day as both Pakistani leaders suddenly left Dhaka. Though barricades were put on the streets near BDR and other areas around early evening, the canteen's environment was quite normal. Students who were following the political discussion were obviously shocked but the atmosphere in the café was nothing out of the ordinary.

Madhushudan, like every other day, closed down the canteen around 10 at night and returned to his house. Around midnight he and his wife woke up to screams and gun shots as Operation Searchlight began its killing spree on March 25, 1971.

"My siblings and I were asleep when this monstrous act by the Pakistani army took place," says Arun Kumar Dey, son of Madhushudan Dey and the current owner of Modhur Canteen. Arun was ten years old when this massacre took place. "In the middle of the night both my mother and father rushed to our room and the first thing they said was 'Get away from the windows.'" Arun's bed was right beside the window and the first thing he saw when he looked outside was muzzle flash. "There was no boundary between our quarters and

# MEMORIES OF BLOOD AND TERROR

APURBA JAHANGIR

Jagannath Hall, and by the screams and gun shots, you could tell that the whole place was burning down." Madhushudan and his wife locked the entire house and put the children under the bed. There was nothing else they could do but wait and pray to God that the army wouldn't knock on the door.

"Around three or four o'clock in the morning the sounds of screams lessened a bit and as the rebel of the family I mustered up the courage to peak through the window. The lights were turned off so I got quite a clear vision," recalls Arun.

Arun at first saw nothing but smoke. "You could see a lot of the staff quarters of Jagannath Hall from our window, and the whole place was covered in smoke." As the smoke faded, the catastrophic view of the genocide that had just taken place came into sight.

"The first house you could see from our window was of Daswarath Majumder, a kitchen worker of Jagannath Hall, and the tin shaded house was burned down to ashes. That house was the first thing that caught my eye, and the next thing was dead bodies scattered around." Jagannath Hall is one of the places which witnessed the worst of Operation Searchlight. Of the 200 plus students killed, an overwhelming majority hailed from the dormitory catering to Hindu students.



ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED

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Meanwhile, in the Madhushudan residence, everybody came out of hiding under beds and closets and looked out their windows. "In the main road, we saw a tank rolling down which suddenly stopped and started firing towards old Dhaka. A patrol of Pakistani army was following the tank, which stopped right outside our quarters, and went towards Najimuddin Road."

Till five in the morning, what Madhushudan Dey and his family witnessed was nothing worse than hell—dead bodies, blood and bullets.

Around six in the morning the whole campus was quiet. The family thought the worst is over, but it was far from it. Just as Madhushudan was about to go outside there was a loud thud on the door. "It was not a knock but pounding on the door. Before we could even open it the Pakistani army broke it down and entered our home. The first thing they did after setting foot was kill my brother Ranjeet and his newly wed wife Rina Rani."

The next target was Madhushudan and as they lurched towards him, his wife came in between. "My mother came in front of the gun and they instantly cut both of her arms with the rifle bayonet. They then shot her in the chest." Ten-year-old Arun saw his mother's blood spattered on the wall as she lay on the floor motionless. "When all this was going on, two army officers started beating me and my brother inhumanly. Army boots smashed against our faces and chests, as they pointed a gun towards my little sister and shot her in the leg." The Army officer who killed Arun's mother now pointed a gun towards Madhushudan and shot

three rounds. Both of his legs were mutilated and the third bullet hit him above his chest.

"After firing the last shot the army officers left. My father was still alive and as he was about to tell us to get help, three people entered through the door—this time two Bangalis and one Pakistani officer." The Bangalis picked up Madhushudan and took him outside. When Arun and his brother peaked through the window, they saw them taking Madhushudan to Jagannath Hall field. "We later heard that they killed my father in a brush fire along with other notable professors."

Even after 46 years, Arun remembers the whole incident like it was yesterday. "When they took my father, I was on my knees begging them. I still remember the face of one of the Bangalis who gave me a crooked smile and said that they are taking him to the doctor."

Much like this account, there are millions of reports of that blood-soaked night. As we observe the 46th anniversary of our independence in the coming days, we honour all those who have laid down their lives for a free country, and all those who had to witness it. ■

YOUTH

# SMARTPHONES FOR HISTORY LESSONS

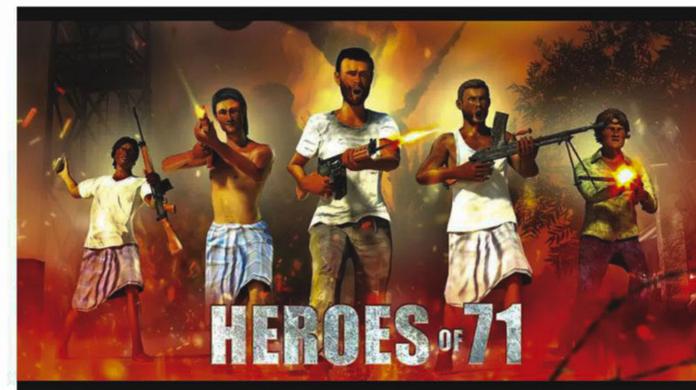
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A study by the Microsoft Corporation concluded in 2015 that the average attention span of humans has dropped from 12 seconds to 8 seconds, officially below that of a goldfish.

The same study also concluded that the advent of mobile Internet and readily available information demands less from us than ever before. Before the 2000s, the average human brain had to process more information, hold more of it and recall that information when needed, because people simply didn't have anything equivalent to the handheld

supercomputers that the average teen has in his/her hands now. That meant reading books, gathering knowledge, and retaining information for later use.

Yet, despite this access to readily available information, every year, we're forced to watch in agony as a reporter from a TV channel randomly picks a person out of a crowd and asks them the significance of February 21, March 26, or December 16 in our nation's history. Like watching a slow moving car crash, the viewer's face slowly distorts into a barely recognisable caricature of its former self as s/he cringes at the laughably wrong answers thrown around by the people



Heroes of 1971 took cutting edge mobile phone graphics tried to get the younger generations interested in Bangladeshi history.



Timeline 71 uses a daily notification system to bring you daily historical narratives from the 1971 Liberation War.

interrogated on TV. Every year, without pause, the TV channels compete on how to embarrass their randomly sampled victims, barely pausing and reflecting on the root cause of the issue – the lack of effective mediums with which to educate these people about their nation's history.

The solution seems readily obvious to Moinul Islam Shuvo, COO of Amar Source, an engineering and technology firm that recently launched an app - *Timeline 71* - to try and inform the smartphone generation of important events during Bangladesh's drive towards liberation.

"The present generation, the teenagers born after the 2000's, is not very interested in reading books outside of the school curriculum, especially books related to history or historical facts. At present, there are not enough tech-based platforms which can be used to inform and educate the average teenager of Bangladesh's history, and that is where we wanted to come in," says Shuvo, a BUET graduate.

*Timeline 71* uses a simple system that allows users to set a time of day when they'd like to be notified of what happened on that particular day back in

1971. All sources are cited, and if used properly, the app could be very useful to researchers, students and history buffs alike. Amar Source plans on expanding the app, working on the visuals, and including recording clips from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

There's a slight problem here though. As mentioned, there are people working on using technology to reach the youth, and the number of people working on similar apps can only go up from here. Question is, will the target audience even be interested?

If presented in the right format, they will be. *Heroes of 71* and a sequel, *Heroes of 71: Retaliation*, available on Android mobile platforms, were launched in 2016 and met with highly appreciative reviews which praised the gameplay mechanics, storyline, visuals and the inclusion of virtual female freedom fighters in the sequel. More importantly, there was a sense of pride among users because they realised they were playing a game set in Bangladesh and developed in Bangladesh by Bangladeshis. Since its launch, the game has been downloaded over 1 million times and has a high number of repeat users.

However, most young developers and IT professionals can't really hope to reach the same kind of levels that the developers of *Heroes of 71* reached, because they simply don't have the necessary resources to develop extensive apps, websites, or archives revolving around Bangladeshi history.

This is where state support can come into play. The Bangladesh ICT Ministry has funds worth hundreds of crores of taka to give to deserving candidates, with up to 250 crore taka available for individual projects. Those funds can be used for infomercials, road shows, campus visits and concerts to make the youth connect with their nation's past in ways that make a lasting impact. It doesn't have to stop at 1971 either – with state sponsorship and teaming up with the historians and academics from the top educational institutions in the country, motivated young developers can change the tone of the country's youth towards history, and perhaps even generate interest in the history of the Bengal region as opposed to just Bangladesh.

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