

# January-March 1971: The Dawning of a Fearless Fight for Freedom

In the wake of the year of 1971, a silent uprising was surging in the agitated hearts of thousands of Bangalis residing in what was then East Pakistan. At that time, Dhaka was an indispensable (yet deemed abominable by West Pakistan) part of Pakistan. The epic win in the 1970 elections by the Awami League had ignited emotions of strength and unanimity but peace and independence were yet to be realized.

Apart from the religious, cultural and political differences that had predominantly existed in the east, language had become a formidable barrier in the path of a united Pakistan. Between January and February 1971, countless hours were spent in meetings and discussions to reach an accord between the two great leaders of the two parts of Pakistan then – Yahya Khan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – unfortunately to no avail.

The failed discussions and overall political agitation had shrouded a dense cloud of perplexity over the East Pakistan region.

However, after Bangabandhu's historic speech at the mammoth gathering at Suhrawardy Udyan on March 7th, the movement found renewed direction. Areas like Dhaka University and Paltan became buzzing hubs for students who gathered there to voice their opinions against the unjust and oppressive practices of the army and leaders of West Pakistan.

"The students' union had a strong front back then and I was quite eager to join them," recalled A.M. Amanullah who was living at Fuller Road with his older brother – a professor of the Department of Mathematics, Dhaka University – back in 1971.

By mid-March, the social and political unrest had escalated visibly. Random captures

and raids on the Bangali houses by the Pakistani army had become more frequent. "On the 24th of March, my elder brother had warned me of the possibility of an impending havoc," Amanullah recounted. While his brother had left the campus area to ensure his family's safety, he had decided to stay back.

"I still clearly remember watching the blazing inferno in the distance light up the dark night sky," Amanullah described, recalling the horrific night of 25th March, 1971. "I crouched in a corner of our veranda trying to speculate what was happening outside all the while hiding from the bright searchlights being cast upon the campus area by Pak helicopters," he added.

Maleka Perveen was in her teens living with her family at Farmgate at that time. "My heart skipped a few beats when I heard the sound of heavy boots stomping right out-

side our door," she shuddered at the traumatic memory. The Pakistani army had raided her entire neighbourhood and arrested anyone they deemed suspicious.

The atrocious killings and carnage continued till the break of dawn of the 26th of March.

The Bangali community was left shaken; many Bangalis murdered, injured, traumatized and bereaved. Operation Searchlight had been successful.

But this was merely a lost battle. The real war was yet to surface in the coming 9 months.

Thus, the 26th of March not only stands as the Independence Day but also marks the start of a great war that was fought fearlessly for freedom – the dawning of the Liberation War of 1971.

**By Nafisa Faruque**

## A CALL TO WAR How the Crack Platoon was formed

1971 had begun with the aura of grave tension and oblivion. Nobody knew what was going to happen next. The fate of the Bengali-speaking community remained unforeseen and making every little move felt like walking on thin ice.



From left to right: Major Ansar, Dr Ahrar Ahmed (writer), Zia, Fateh Ali, Sabek Singh, Habibul Alam, Major Haider, Shahdat Chowdhury, Masud Sadique Chullu, and comrades (who could not be identified).