



Interview - Jalaluddin Haider

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I took many of their photographs with Sheikh Shaheb at the airport, I still have all those pictures.

There must have been a lot of risks at that time, being a photographer.

With age, I have forgotten so much about those days. But I still remember, there were many times I would risk my life for work. And then there were the times when I could not take photos out of fear. At the time of the crack down on March 25, a few photographers came from India. Some were able to capture some pictures, others could not. When the curfew was lifted on March 27, I took out my Vespa. I kept my camera in the toolbox on the side. I had one other person with me. He said, "Let's go and look around." We went over to the staff quarter beside Shahid Minar. There was no one there, just blood on the stairs, torn up pillows. When we left the place, I let go of my companion, and went over to TSC by myself. The army was camped at the field in front of TSC. I boldly parked my Vespa on the street in front of the nearby temple, and headed inside. That is when I saw the heaps of dead bodies, one on top of the other. The army camp was right outside, so I did not have the courage to take any picture. I had taken many photos of movements, but it was quite a shock on the 25th. On the 27th I did go out, but it was in vain. I could not take photos for many days after that day. The situation was so bad that it was not possible to take photographs. Once a boy was shot dead right in front of me! He was on his Vespa, he was ordered to stop, but he did not listen, so they shot him. I do not know if he had anything incriminating on him, he was probably trying to run away in fear. They just shot him dead! Is it



PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER

Bhutto arrives at Intercontinental Hotel for a meeting, 1971.

possible to take pictures after seeing that? Many newspapers had stopped publication by then, most of us did not have a job. Many had escaped. The curfew used to start from 6 PM, so everyone had to return by 5. I again started taking out the camera from or around December. This one time, photographer Mohammad Alam, a newcomer back then and very young as well, had heard that there was a camp at the foreign ministry office in front of Press Club, so he climbed over the wall and got caught. He got severely beaten up.

What sort of censorship was there when it came to printing photos taken throughout your career?

Of course there was censorship. Such as, the newspapers would print photos where Sheikh Shaheb is giving speech or holding meetings but would not print photos of protests or dead bodies. Then again, many photographs never got published here, we sold them to be printed abroad.

A few days back I saw that you had gone to the Prime Minister with photographs. Not one, I took with me a lot of photographs, of Sheikh Shaheb. She became very happy, which made me happy as well. She gave me a pension-based savings certificate. I get a certain amount of money from that every month. But unfortunately, I have not been able to redeem it. Apparently it cannot be redeemed.

Has our National Museum or Liberation Museum been in touch with you regarding these photographs? Or are you interested in providing them with these

rare images?

I myself wanted to give some of the photos. But no one wants to give credit for the photo or mention the name of the photographer, nor do they want to pay the price. Bangabandhu Museum's curator NI Khan came to my home once, to talk about collecting the photographs. Later my son and I also went over to see him regarding it. But they want the photos for free even with the negatives. Even, there is a photograph taken by me in Bangabandhu's room, of him giving a speech, but there is no credit given to my name. There is another photograph where he is hoisting Bangladesh's flag, no mention there either. Then again, there is a photograph taken by Pavel Rahman, where of course he is properly credited.

It is my good fortune that my negatives are still in good condition. I have been very careful with cleaning and preserving them. Golam Mawla was a very good photographer, from the *Dainik Bangla*. I have learned a lot from him. He used to say that negatives should be washed under running water. After fixing with hypo, I would always wash the negatives under running water. And now my son is the one scanning those negatives.

Your works are a testimony to much of our history. What have you thought regarding these photographs?

I have done two exhibitions. Then again, one day someone from the *Kaler Kantha*, proposed another exhibition alongside a book publication. Later it did not pan out due to lack of sponsorship. It is not possible to say if these things will happen in my lifetime. The character of our country is such that we can never properly evaluate anything on time.



PHOTO: GOLAM MAWLA

Jalaluddin Haider



A partially damaged Hardinge Bridge, 1971.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER