

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF MARCH 25, 1971 MASSACRE

'Despite threats, I stayed. The truth of what happened had to be told'

Simon Dring, a British journalist who covered the horrors of our war of independence from Pakistan in 1971, recalls what he witnessed in the early days of the war.



There are not many moments in one's life that are truly and deeply felt, and clearly remembered. For me, the night of Thursday, March 25, 1971 in Dhaka, is one of the most horrific and simultaneously

most galvanising moments in my career as a journalist.

Still today, 50 years later, the sounds and images of that terrible night, and what I was to witness in the days that followed, are as clear now as they were then.

I was among some 50 foreign journalists confined to their hotel (the Intercontinental, as it was then called, now Hotel Ruposhi Bangla) late in the afternoon of March 25. Dhaka had been put under curfew and the inevitable was about to happen.

We had heard that President Yahya Khan had, without notice, flown back to West Pakistan late that afternoon. The talks between the political leaders of the two wings of Pakistan, supposedly meant to find a solution to the crisis in East Pakistan, had come to an abrupt end.

Soldiers were stopping anyone trying to leave the hotel at gunpoint, and the city streets were slowly emptying as darkness fell. Some children started throwing together a makeshift barricade of tyres, tree stumps, concrete and old furniture across the road outside.

But shortly before 11 pm, I watched as the first convoys of Pakistani tanks and truckloads of soldiers drove into the city, relentless in their purpose, sweeping aside any barricades. And not long after midnight, from the roof of the hotel, I could see flashes of gunfire and hear the sound of artillery and the vicious clatter of machine guns in and around Dhaka University.

By early morning, the sky was lit by the flames of fires that were now burning all around the city. And the worst was yet to come.

Over the following days, when I escaped the military net that had been thrown over foreign journalists, I found the bodies of students who had been shot to death in

their dormitories and outside on the campus grounds; the rickshaw pullers, bullet-ridden and bloodied, lying by the roadside; whole families burnt alive in their homes when their street had been sealed off and the houses torched; bazaars in the old city burnt to the ground. And I would see much more, awful as it was, that would help me evidence the cold-blooded slaughter of civilians that had taken place on March 25 and March 26.

This is what Pakistan did not want

independence to begin? Now, only 18 days later, the struggle had.

Just after midnight, Bangabandhu told an aide that "if I go into hiding, they will burn down the whole of Dhaka to find me", and then, shortly before 1 am, in what was to be his last phone call that night, he said, "I expect to be arrested at any moment". He said he had sent everybody away for their safety except for his bodyguard and three servants. But then, what had happened to him?

Army's intelligence wing), came to the hotel on the afternoon of March 26, and said that all foreign journalists were to leave the country that night—clearly to prevent us from seeing and reporting on what had happened when the curfew would be lifted the next morning.

Not an order, he said, but "for your own safety". When I challenged him and asked if perhaps then I could stay, he said, with a threatening and somewhat sinister smile, "of course, if you want, but there will be a party for you."

So, I stayed. The truth of what had happened had to be told. That night I hid out behind the main air conditioning unit on the roof of the hotel until, late in the evening of March 26, I could see, down below, the foreign press corps being herded into army trucks and driven away to the airport.

I later found out that Michel Laurent, a young French photographer working for the AP, had also decided to risk staying and hidden himself in a hotel cupboard.

But our ability to escape the military net was made possible only by the courage and determination of the young Bengali workers in the hotel (the reception staff and cooks in the kitchen) who, without hesitation, and at great risk to their lives over the next three days, kept us safely hidden from the army. They were the ones who also helped us make a plan to get out into the city to see first-hand what had happened.

Late in the morning of Saturday, March 27, crammed into the back of an old baker's van and wearing kurta-pyjamas, we set off to drive around the city.

The truth was indeed impossible to hide and to be told by those who survived. At Dhaka University, I saw the bodies of some 30 students in and around Iqbal Hall; an art student was sprawled across his easel; bodies floated in a nearby lake; others near Jagannath Hall had been thrown into hastily dug graves and bulldozed over by a tank. Seven teachers had been gunned down in their quarters and a family of 12 killed in an outhouse. At least 200 students had died at the university—and other teachers, we were told, had been murdered in their homes.

In the sprawling, narrow streets of the old city—like Tanti Bazaar and Niar Bazaar—many areas had been burnt to the ground;

people dragged from their houses and shot; a police inspector wandering among the ruins was looking for his constables: "I've found only 30—all of them dead."

At the Rajarbagh Police Lines, tanks had been used to support troops firing incendiary rounds into the men's sleeping quarters. More than 1,100 police officers were based here—many died.

And at Bangabandhu's house in Dhanmondi, neighbours told me how at 1:10 am on the night of March 25, a tank, an armoured car and a truckload of soldiers had pulled up in front of the house. "Sheikh, you should come down," an officer shouted in English. Bangabandhu replied: "I am ready, but there is no need to fire". He was arrested and taken away, and his bodyguard badly beaten for supposedly insulting the officer.

The house had been ransacked, the gates locked, and the green-red-and-yellow flag of Bengali independence shot down. Little were those soldiers to know how soon it was to fly again.

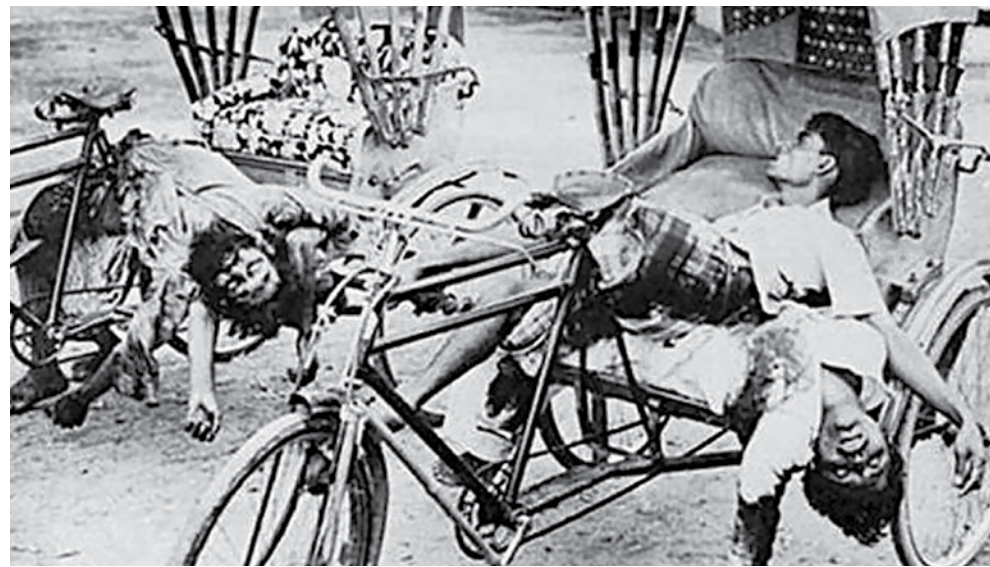
When we eventually managed to get out of Dhaka, my story and the photographs of Michel did much to expose, for the first time, the truth of what had really happened that night.

The detail was all there, but I had also made a mistake. I surmised in my story that the terrible cost in terms of human lives—then estimated to be 7,000 in Dhaka alone—might bring an early end to the struggle for Bengali independence.

"We are fighting in the name of God and a United Pakistan", one Pakistani officer had told me confidently. But how wrong I was to imagine the struggle might be over!

In fact, I had no need to look any further than at the courage and commitment of the hotel workers who had helped myself and Michel. I would have realised then that the strength and spirit of that struggle, the belief in freedom of the Bengali people, despite all that had happened on the night of March 25, 1971, was still very much alive. This is what would ultimately ensure victory over Pakistan and, only nine months later, the independence of Bangladesh.

Simon Dring is a British foreign correspondent, television producer, and presenter. As a reporter, he covered major stories around the world including Bangladesh's War of Liberation.



The Pakistan Army's premeditated attack on unarmed civilians in Dhaka on March 25, 1971 spared no one.

PHOTO: ARCHIVES

the journalists to see—and the world to know. This is what they called "Operation Searchlight", their code name for the massacres that they hoped would silence and crush the Bengali struggle for independence.

As the night of March 25 unfolded, I remember the anger I felt and my concern as to the safety of all those Bengalis: the politicians, journalists, lawyers and intellectuals who had helped me understand and report on the political turmoil of the past few weeks. I worried that they themselves would now be in danger.

And what had happened to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who I had heard give his historic speech on March 7 calling for the Bengali peoples' struggle for

I remember the anger I felt when I saw West Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the early hours of March 26, under protective guard in his Intercontinental hotel suite, slumped on a sofa, chain-smoking and ash-faced, as if in fear of his life and clearly not really sure what would be the outcome of this so-called "Operation Searchlight".

We know now that he knew what the military action was meant to achieve and was himself part of the planning. But he would not speak to me (though on his return to Pakistan, he was reported to have told newsmen: "Thank God, Pakistan has been saved.")

I remember the anger I felt when Major Siddique Salik, the Pakistan Army's public relations officer (and a senior officer in the

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The vaccination gap is jeopardising climate action



WILL negotiators from the Global South be barred from attending the United Nations climate

ago. But it might view the North's vaccine selfishness as a sign of irresponsibility on the immediate vital issue of health—and refuse to engage in the necessary give-and-take in combating global warming. The vaccine-induced erosion of collective responsibility, together with the economic impact of the pandemic, could result in countries announcing very disappointing

vaccines to people everywhere.

This is a good start. But advanced economies should go further and offer the Global South a "solidarity package" encompassing vaccine distribution, debt relief, and climate goals, with the objective of securing fair and balanced efforts from all governments on all three fronts. Rich countries should recognise that while they are negotiating over the transfer of hundreds of billions of dollars from North to South for climate action in the coming years, it would take only USD 10-20 billion to fund COVAX fully.

In order to prevent the North-South divide from widening further, leaders should announce the first part of that package before the April 22 international climate summit hosted by Biden. The second part could be timed to coincide with the summit on financing African economies that French President Emmanuel Macron will convene in Paris on May 18.

Rich countries, therefore, have an opportunity to provide developing economies with extra resources for both short-term vaccine procurement and long-term recovery. Financing could come from new allocations of special drawing rights (the International Monetary Fund's reserve asset) or the quick use of special instruments like vaccine bonds issued by the International Finance Facility for Immunization. Above all, developed countries must ensure that Covid-19 vaccines are widely available—and continuously adapted to new coronavirus variants—with no delay for the Global South.

Exceptional dangers call for exceptional measures. With vaccine tensions and the ongoing economic crisis threatening to undermine international efforts to save the planet, a global North-South solidarity package represents the best way forward.

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Welcome to 2021, where global climate negotiations could become collateral damage of vaccine nationalism.

"nationally determined contributions" to reduce CO2 emissions in the run-up to COP26. This risk is compounded by rich and poor countries' differing priorities. Whereas the developed North puts tackling global warming first, health and development often take precedence in the Global South.

In this regard, US President Joe Biden has tasked Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen with promoting "debt relief initiatives that are aligned with and support the goals of the Paris Agreement"—in other words, green conditionality for debt reduction, restructuring, and cancellation. But developing economies that have suffered severely in the Covid-19 crisis and seen their development prospects stall might perceive such schemes as an extra burden imposed by the North.

What should be done? At their February 19 virtual meeting, G7 leaders agreed to provide an additional USD 4 billion to shore up the international Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator and the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility, which aims to ensure rapid, fair, and equitable provision of

summit (COP26) in Glasgow in November because they are not vaccinated against Covid-19? This scenario will not arise, one hopes, because developing country officials will almost certainly receive their shots in advance. But whether they will want to negotiate with rich economies that have been hoarding vaccines is less clear.

Welcome to 2021, where global climate negotiations could become collateral damage of vaccine nationalism. In normal times, the bone of contention between rich and poor countries was who should bear the brunt of efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. But the pandemic has already pushed back climate talks by a year, and now threatens to create an additional North-South rift.

In January, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his last month as chair of the African Union, lambasted developed countries for ordering vaccines amounting to "up to four times what their population needs." Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, warned of a possible "catastrophic moral failure" owing to unequal vaccine distribution. And both the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, and UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima have denounced the current global "vaccine apartheid."

Failure to heal divisions over vaccine availability for developing countries could poison the well of global coordination and imperil the COP26 climate negotiations. The Global South accepted the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in addressing climate change 30 years

Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of The Executive Engineer
Pirojpur
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Memorandum No.46.02.7900.000.07.001.2021-378
e-Tender Notice No-16/2020-2021

e-Tender is invited in the national e-GP system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of works office of the under signed.

Sl no	Tender ID No.	Package No & Name of work	Procurement Method	Last selling date & time	Closing & Opening Date & Time
1.	559647	BJP/PIR/AN/DW-204 Improvement of BC road from Assan Golder house to Uttar Junia Board school bridge road at Ch. 0.00-2000m including 03 Nos 2.00mx2.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 520m 1200m & 1720m under Bhandaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. ID No 579145076.	OTM	21.04.2021 17:00 PM	22.04.2021 01:00 PM
2.	559649	BJP/PIR/MAT/DW-206 a) Improvement of BC road from Uttar Mithakhali Fulmollik Bari - Pachim Patakata Asraf Majee Bari Bridge via Rohim Uddin Bari road at Ch. 1260-1900m including 01 No 4.50mx4.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 1747m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585093. (b) Improvement of BC road from Sapleza Bazar to Hogolpati bazar via Hogolpati Madrasa Embankment road at Ch. 1865-2865m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579584104. (c) Improvement of BC road from Tetultala Bazar road-liner par Wapda via Kumirmara Cyclone shelter road at Ch. 2000-3000m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579584075. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 1417285.00	OTM	21.04.2021 17:00 PM	22.04.2021 01:00 PM
3.	559650	BJP/PIR/MAT/DW-207 (a) Improvement of BC road from Nagarabanga GPS- Lahu Farajee Bari Via Kabir Member House road at Ch. 2500-3500m including 02 Nos 0.625mx0.900m U-drain Culvert at Ch. 2563m & 2666m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585011. (b) Improvement of BC road from Tikikata Senior madrasa road-Singa Kumirmara Road via H/o Sumanto Chairman road at Ch. 0.00-1000m including 01 No 1.00mx1.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 385m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585007. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 1830390.00 (c) Improvement of BC road from Sapleza Nali road- Jatubnia Madrasa via Tulatala Bazar road at Ch. 500-1150m including 01 No 1.00mx1.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 879m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585025. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 745086.00	OTM	21.04.2021 17:00 PM	22.04.2021 01:00 PM
4.	559651	BJP/PIR/MAT/DW-208 a) Improvement of BC road from Amragachia union Parishad-Manikkhali Bazar via Sonakhali Bazar & Tutala bazar road at Ch. 0.00-612m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579583010. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 126136.00 (b) Improvement of BC road from South Mithakhali Pourashava End- Sarif Bari Bridge via Asura Member house road at Ch. 0.00-1200m including 01 No 0.625mx0.900m U-drain Culvert at Ch. 430m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585062. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 1616238.00 (c) Improvement of BC road from Barrow Masua Brzar bridge -Mathbara Bachua R&H via Mira Bari madrasa road at Ch. 0.00-700m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585183. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 203047.00	OTM	21.04.2021 17:00 PM	22.04.2021 01:00 PM
5.	559652	BJP/PIR/MAT/DW-209 a) Improvement of BC road from Laxmana Altaf Member House- Battala Laxmana GPS road via Jomdar hat road at Ch. 0.00-1000m including 01 No 0.625mx0.900m U-drain Culvert at Ch. 302m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579584115. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 1028877.00 (b) Improvement of BC road from North side Manikkhali karimiah Madrasa to South Betmore GPS Via Safi Munsee Bari road at Ch. 790-2000m including 02 Nos 0.625mx0.900m U-drain Culvert at Ch. 1185m & 1423m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585176. (c) Improvement of BC road from Mirukhali Hasemer Bari road at Ch. 0.00-500m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579585153.	OTM	21.04.2021 17:00 PM	22.04.2021 01:00 PM
6.	559653	BJP/PIR/MAT/DW-210 (a) Improvement of BC road from Pathakata Madrasa to Dakatia bridge Mathbaria Mirukhali UZR Road-Dakatia Culvert Via Pathakata Madrasa road at Ch. 1450-2450m including 01 No 1.500mx1.500m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 1856m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579584032. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 1999940.00 (b) Improvement of BC road from South Mithakhali LGED Road to Mithakhali Reg. road via Shahajan BSC house road at Ch. 0.00-1100m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579584053. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 1563446.00 (c) Improvement of BC road from Alam Bazar-Algi hat road via West patakata GPS road at Ch. 2400-3000m under Mathbaria Upazila District-Pirojpur. Road ID No 579584086. Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 1017694.00	OTM	21.04.2021 17:00 PM	22.04.2021 01:00 PM

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the national e-GP system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the national e-GP system portal have to be deposited through on line at any branches of registered Banks branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)

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