

THE DEFINITIVE  
**YOUTH**  
MAGAZINE

# SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 25, 2021, CHAITRA 11, 1427 BS

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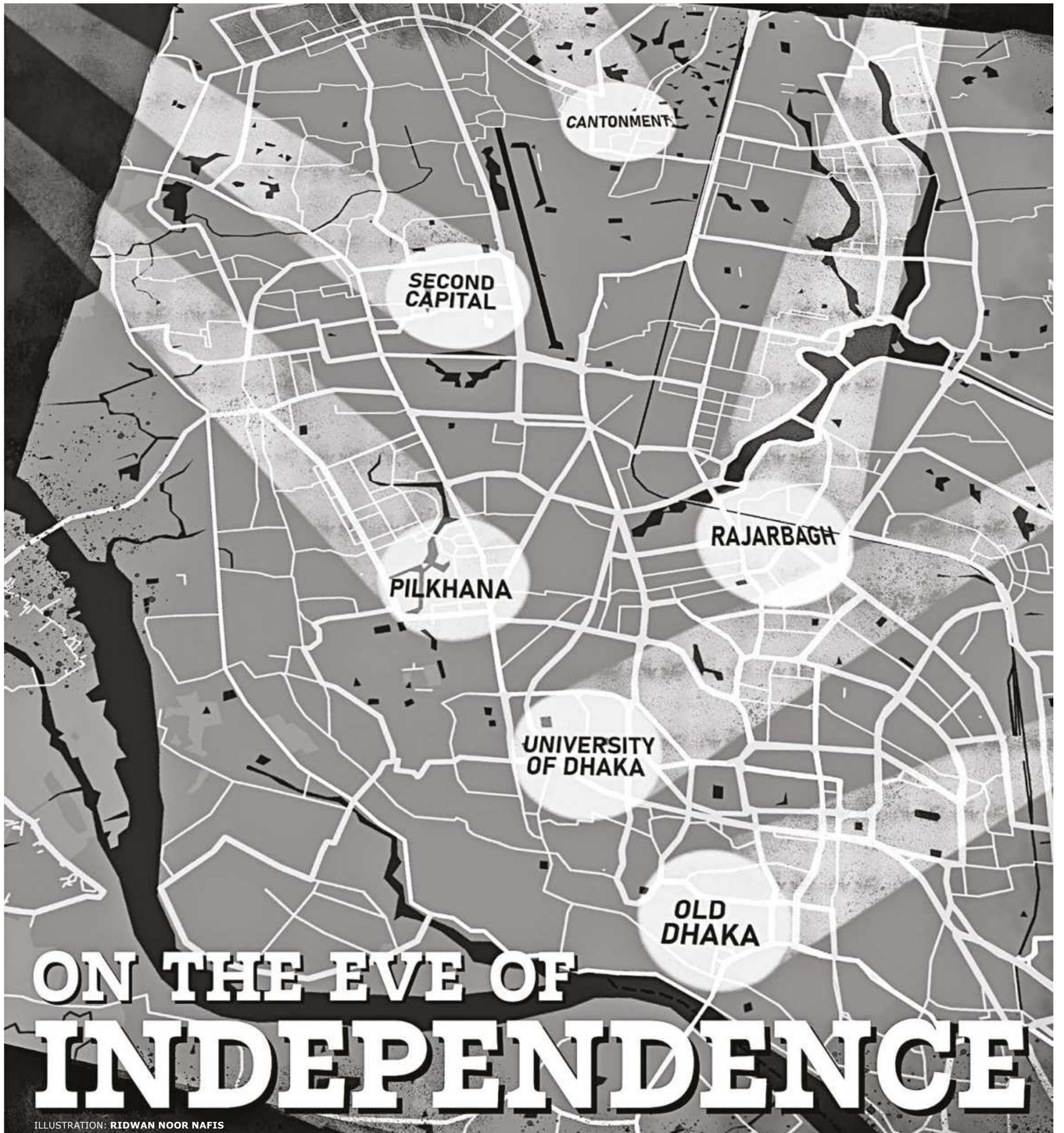


HOW THE YOUTH GAVE US  
INDEPENDENCE

PG 3

WASTELAND'S  
SYMPHONY

PG 7



# ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

# EDITORIAL

In terms of national events, most of us won't be experiencing anything nearly as important as the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence in our lifetimes. The weight of history is ever growing, and a landmark anniversary offers the opportunity to truly sit back and reflect on the past, and maybe even peek into a future.

This landmark also offers a remarkable situation – today, you don't have to consider yourself lucky if you meet someone who has lived through our struggle for independence. 50 years later, that will not be the case. Today, Bangladesh is a mix of the elderly who look at this country as a miracle that took millions of lives to achieve, and a young population who look at Bangladesh as a platform that took 50 years to build, with endless possibilities ahead.

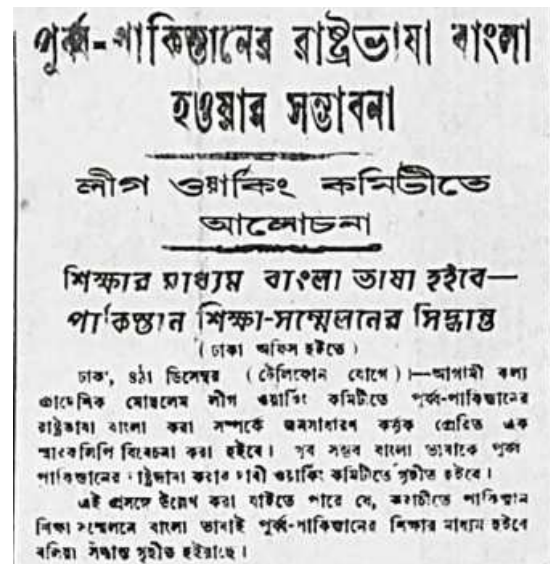
It is essential that the road ahead is paved using the knowledge and input of both these groups, that both these perspectives are respected. As the first hand memories of the war start to dwindle, we must be careful to not forget our humble and turbulent beginnings. We must also be careful that we are not hung up on the past, because otherwise, the world will pass us by.

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



## PLAYWATCH

### INSTAGRAM REVIEW



COURTESY: @BANGLADESH\_ON\_RECORD

# Learning Our History, on Instagram

#### ADHORA AHMED

Whenever social media platforms come to mind, we don't necessarily think of them as repositories of precious chapters from the annals of time that aren't explored in depth in our History textbooks. However, there are some Instagram pages who do just that, carefully documenting stories from the past that can tell us more about our struggles to get where we are today, a 50-year-old independent nation. Therefore, the following Instagram handles are more than just pages; these are precious digital archives.

#### BROWN HISTORY @brownhistory

It is undoubtedly the most popular platform in this list, boasting over 500,000 followers. This blog is filled with rich content on South Asian culture and history, focusing on the Indian subcontinent. There is a good deal on the British Raj and its aftermath on the region, including the 1947 Partition, the Language Movement of 1952, the 1971 Liberation War and post-independence Bangladeshi history. The page also has a running hashtag called #BrownHistoryPhotoAlbum under which followers DM family photos with stories, most of which are set against the backdrop of the Partition, wars and migration. By documenting the shared histories of this subcontinent, Brown History manages to connect South Asians both at home and among the diaspora. Apart from the blog, Brown History also has a podcast (@brownhistorypodcast) and an online shop (@brownhistoryshop).

#### THE 1947 PARTITION ARCHIVE @1947partition

The Partition of 1947 is a crucial link to understand why Bangladesh became Bangladesh, yet it is unfortunately glossed over in our History textbooks. The 1947 Partition Archive, a non-profit organisation based in the USA, aims to set things right by crowd-sourcing oral testimonies

of those who witnessed and survived the horrors of the Partition. This includes stories from the people of Bengal, a region now sprawled over two countries and divided by a treacherous border. The Instagram content includes the pictures of the survivors with their individual stories. Their invaluable testimonies also shed a light on life before the events of 1947, and how their lives were affected after the subcontinent was divided. They also have a website ([www.1947partitionarchive.org](http://www.1947partitionarchive.org)) with additional resources and detailed information on how to conduct and provide interviews of the survivors. The page has 10,000 followers, which is a shame because it needs more attention.

#### BANGLADESH ON RECORD @bangladesh\_on\_record

This is a blog that deals with matters closer to home by looking at the history of this part of Bengal, from the time when our *bihars* were flourishing centers of education, to the Mass Uprising in 1990, and beyond. The content includes rare pictures, newspaper cuttings and ads that offer a glimpse into how life was like during different eras of our history. The Instagram handle is a companion to the initiative's website ([www.bangladeshonrecord.com](http://www.bangladeshonrecord.com)), which boasts collections of essays sourced from Bengali and Bangladeshi luminaries, scanned copies of rare books and documents and more audio-visual content. Aside from the Instagram blog and website, Bangladesh on Record also has a YouTube channel, which highlights videos on our folk traditions and a podcast series with four episodes so far. Like the 1947 Partition Archive, this blog too deserves more love because it only has just over 800 followers\*.

\*At the time of writing.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at [adhora.ahmed@gmail.com](mailto:adhora.ahmed@gmail.com)



# How the youth gave us independence

**RASHA JAMEEL**

The youth have always been a pivotal part in the journey of Bangladesh, adding to our rich history by demanding reform wherever necessary. Bangladeshi youth have constantly exhibited strength in their resilience, unity, and the willingness to fight oppression in various scenarios. Be it during the period of war or a state of muted political tension, Bangladeshi youth have never shied away from having their voices heard in public.

It was in September 1947 – post the Indo-Pak Partition – that the Bangladeshi youth banded together for the first time to protest against the West Pakistani government's unjust food policies. The Democratic Youth League was formed by University of Dhaka (DU) students who were politically left-leaning, in an effort to combat the famine that had crippled the East Pakistani population from 1947 to 1951. In the words of historian Badruddin Umar, the food crisis of 1947 was "...very extensive and caused great hardship and misery to millions of people in East Bengal... Added to that suffering was the disillusionment of the people in general... who had dreamt of a happy, trouble free and peaceful life during the Pakistan movement and were now facing even physical liquidation and the threat of it in the new homeland for the Muslims."

A fire had been birthed by the growing sense of discontent amidst the two halves of a fragmented Pakistan. The Bangladeshi youth now fully acknowledged their political agency.

On March 11, 1948, the elderly political leaders of West Pakistan were met with an unexpected turn of events: a general strike throughout Dhaka city, held by members of the State Language Movement Council, in protest against West Pakistan's rejection of Dhirendranath Datta's proposal to include Bangla as a spoken language in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. Part of the State Language Movement Council consisted of young left-leaning politicians, who lead the strike. Amongst the picketing youth in front of the Secretariat Building was a young Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, 28 years old and the leader of the then Muslim Students' League.

The voices of dissent arising from the oppressed Bengali population had begun to gain momentum through



the youth. A collective resistance was gradually coming to formation.

February 21, 1952 was a fateful day. The politically and economically oppressed Bengalis had had enough. Protesting students from DU took to the streets to make themselves heard throughout the nation. The protests had already been several months in the making due to the small-scale language movement initiatives led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his youth organisation consisting of Shamsul Huq, Shawkat Ali, Tajuddin Ahmad, and many more young leaders. It was eventually Khawaja Nazimuddin's treacherous announcement declaring Urdu to be the state language for all of Pakistan, which sparked outrage all over East Pakistan. Nazimuddin's speech was a direct violation of the eight-point agreement he had earlier signed in a meeting with members of the Language Action Committee. An unforgivable act of betrayal which prompted student leader Kazi Gholam Mahub to form the State Language Committee. February 4, 1952 was declared "Protest Day", followed by even more student protests on February 11, culminating in the general strike held on February 21. Pandemonium broke out on the morning of the 21st. Police attacked the chanting protesters with tear shells and bricks, ultimately opting for the usage of assault weapons which resulted in the deaths of several university students, namely Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Abdul Jabbar, Abul Barkat, and Abdus Salam.

The matters had come to a head. A new partition began to loom on the horizon.

By the time it was 1962, East Pakistan

had already been further oppressed by Ayub Khan's declaration of martial law which culminated in the introduction of the Constitution of 1962. Ayub Khan put into effect a new kind of tyranny to victimise the East Pakistani populace even more. The youth wouldn't stand for it. The growing educational disparity between the 2 halves of Pakistan was hard to miss. Throughout the 50s, school enrollment in the West had increased by 143.72 percent while in the East the increase clocked in at a shocking 6.2 percent. Tensions eventually boiled over when Ayub Khan upped the ante of his dictatorship with the announcement of the SM Sharif Education Policy. The new national education policy was discriminatory to say the least, as it sought to de-prioritise education for the Pakistani citizens via language barriers and increased educational expenses. Thus, on the morning of September 17, East Pakistani students took to the streets to voice their opposition against the education minister's offensive policy, demanding equal access for all in the education system. The students were once again met with violence with a minimum of three being reported dead due to police brutality.

Ayub Khan thought he'd crushed the rebellion. He couldn't have been more wrong.

Up until the Liberation War broke out in 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had formed a strong alliance with the students. There were student demonstrations on June 7, 1966, in support of the Six Point Movement launched by the Awami League, where protesting students once again found themselves under fire from Ayub Khan's military police. A large number of arrests were made soon after, with protestors being detained indefinitely. The military dictatorship was finally overthrown in 1969 due to a collective student effort through the Mass Uprising campaign from 1968-1969. The International Socialist Review described it as "...a social

crisis of revolutionary proportions which brought down the regime of Ayub Khan."

After Ayub Khan's downfall, another one of Pakistan's military generals, Yahya Khan, took over. The protesting student groups didn't back down, and later expressed their outrage towards Yahya Khan's political manipulation after Pakistan's General Elections in 1970. Yahya Khan kept postponing the meeting of the Pakistan National Assembly. The political climate grew increasingly tense following a speech from Mujib. The Dhaka University Central Student Union and the East Pakistan Student League came together for meetings which often ended in protest marches.

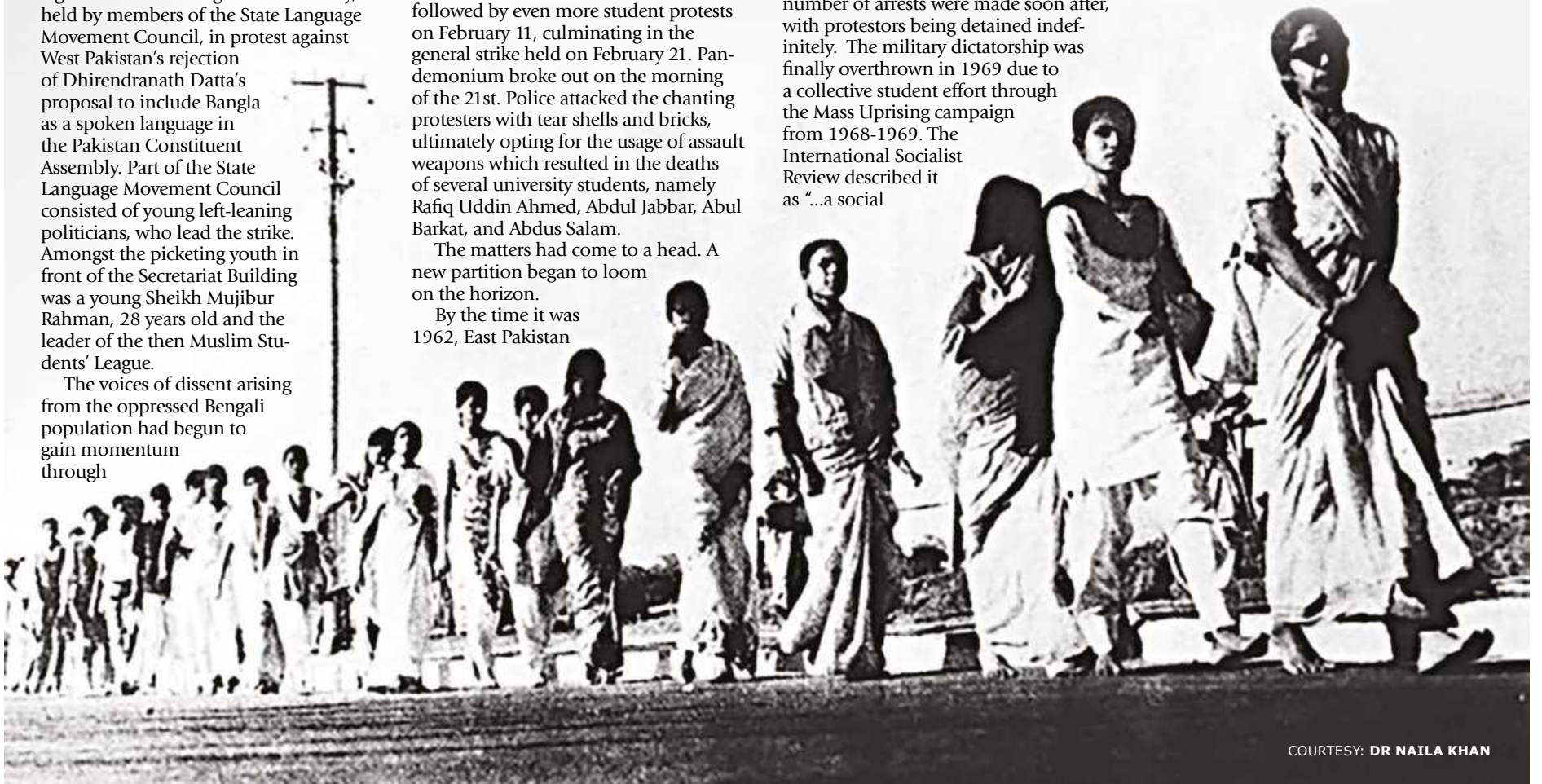
Then came the darkest night of all. March 25, 1971. West Pakistan's brutal response to the student protests in East Pakistan.

In her book, *Dead Reckoning* (2011), journalist Sarmila Bose described the incident calling it "a night of infamy" where "...The spectacle of a military regime sending the army to crush a 'rebellious' university put the conflict in the starkest possible terms for most people and earned the regime lasting condemnation."

The former youth leaders of Bangladesh didn't have much of a youth. But they were relentless in their fight to be heard.

The least we can do is remember their fight. Remember that we are, have been, and forever will be, in their debt.

*Rasha Jameel is your neighborhood feminist-  
 apu-who-writes-big-essays. Remind her  
 to also finish writing her bioinformatics  
 research paper at rasha.jameel@outlook.com*



COURTESY: DR NAILA KHAN

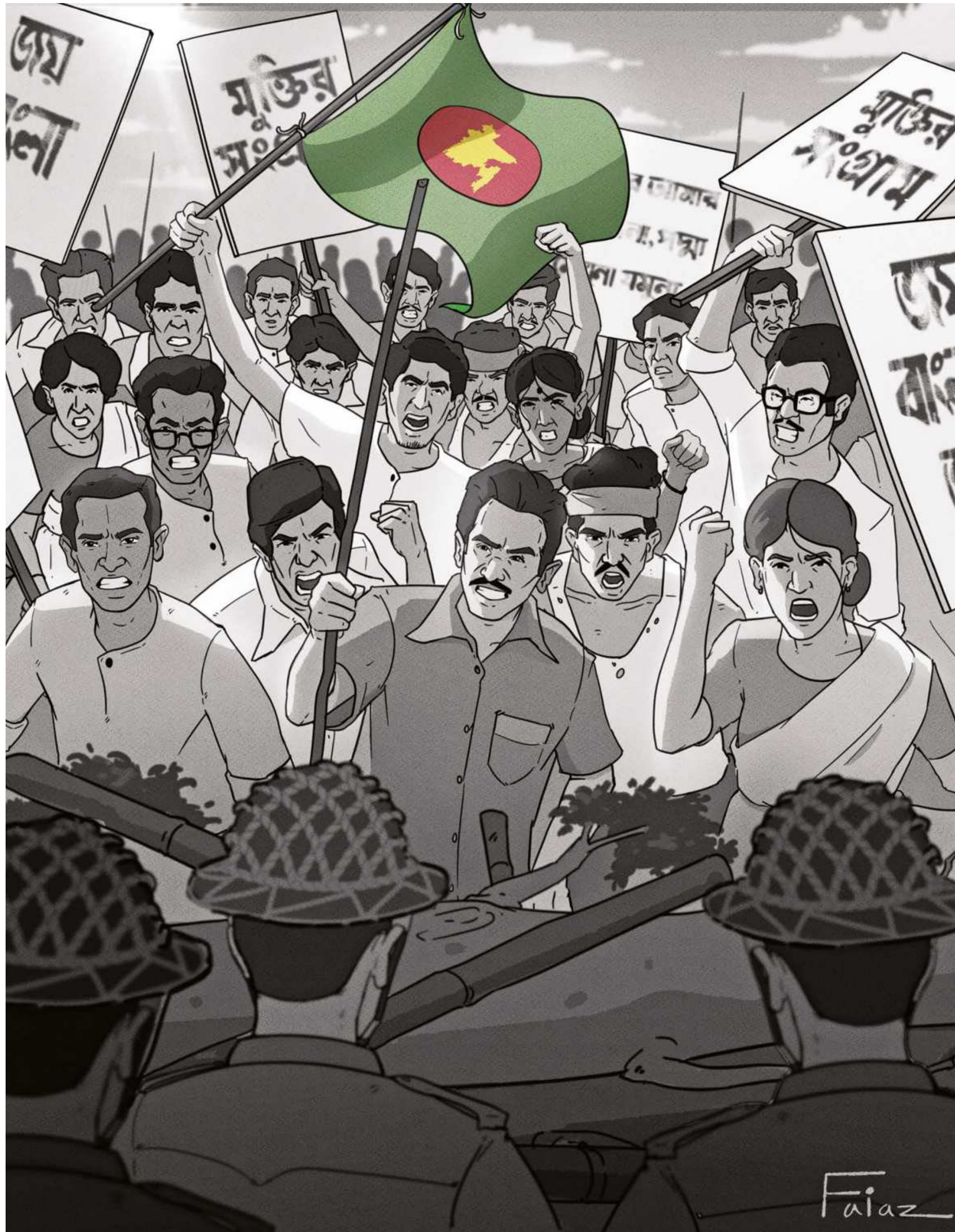


ILLUSTRATION: FAIAZ RAFIQ

# ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

50 years may seem like a long time, but for those with memories of a harrowing night where life and freedom came under attack at once, March 25, 1971 lives on with clarity. For the young readers of SHOUT, it's impossible to imagine the horrors of an enemy on your doorstep, of impending doom for an entire nation, of what it might have felt like to witness a massacre. But it's important to know these stories, and what better way to hear them from those who saw it first-hand.

For this week's cover story, SHOUT spoke to a handful of people who were present in Dhaka on March 25, 1971, and we got to hear their stories and experiences, what they had to navigate to ensure safety for themselves and their family members. We listened to their recollections of the horrors of the "Kalo Raat", and attempted to present it in a format that makes a mark on our readers. As young people, we want to be transported to the hour that made our nation, because only then will we know what got us here, and what it will take to move forward now.

Dhaka, March 25, 1971.

The air has an eerie quality about it. There is a discomforting sense of inactivity, although nobody could have predicted what was about to unfold. In the countless homes in the countless areas across the city, countless stories are about to unfold.

In the narrow winding lanes of Narinda, Old Dhaka, lives Sabera Begum. The eldest of ten siblings and a postgraduate student, Sabera, like many others, has been hearing faint whispers of an approaching war since March 22 or 23. She can almost sense that something big is about to happen.

On the morning of the 25th, the growing tensions translate to a numb fear for the whole day. In the afternoon, Sabera tries to distract herself - she focuses on weaving the covers of their living room cushions. It's around evening when she's done with three covers and about to move to the fourth, when she's interrupted by shouts and cries nearby. Dogs start to bark and whimper - a bad omen.

She and her siblings rush to the rooftop of their two-storey house to find the sky red-ened with distant fires all around the city.

Elsewhere in Dhaka, 15-year-old Rasel is also on his rooftop. He lives in his house in Kalyanpur with his family but a week before March 25, his mother and siblings felt something dangerous was about to transpire in the city. So they handed the heavy bundle of keys to their house to a trusted neighbour who swore she'd keep an eye on things, and left Dhaka for Barisal, their hometown. Some family members were staying back in Dhaka and Rasel wound up being one of them.

On the afternoon of March 25, Rasel hides alone in an empty water tank on his roof. For three days, he hides in the tank.

Stocked with sufficient food to survive and only sporadically venturing out when it felt safe, Rasel holds his breath in the empty darkness as he hears boots running across the rooftop - boots that must belong to the enemy. They are here. The troops search but don't discover Rasel's hiding place. Unsure if the troops have really left or if they will return, Rasel continues to breathe quietly in a corner of the tank.

Back in Old Dhaka, Khaled Hasan lives with his brother on Jagannath Saha Road. On the morning of March 25, he gets out early to visit his parents, who live at the PWD staff quarters in Palashi. The air - he could feel - is different on that day.

Ever since Bangabandhu's speech on March 7, Khaled and his friends have been preparing for a war in their own ways. He gathers with the team at the grounds of the Salimullah Muslim (SM) Hall, University of Dhaka, around noon for training. The entire operation is voluntary; Khaled does not study at the university but has been taken in by student leaders as one of their own. In the afternoon, they are instructed to create barricades to resist any vehicular movement coming in from outside the area. They fell large trees and set up a roadblock on Orphanages Road, right next to Dhakeshwari Temple. The next one is set up near the Baby Ice Cream factory. After a day's work, the teams reconvene at SM Hall in the evening, and Khaled starts making his way back home.

At midnight, pandemonium. The Pakistani Army start attacking the university halls. The sound of heavy mortar and machine guns from a distance jolts Khaled awake. He runs outside, fearing not for his own life, but for the lives of his parents and younger siblings who live close to the

university halls. The night is terrorised with shells and mortars; flares light up the sky as they spend each minute in horror, each moment feeling like an eternity.

In a dark bedroom in Elephant Road, a young mother named Aliya wakes up. To live in Elephant Road meant living in the heart of chaos - traffic, pedestrians, noises and smells from neighbouring markets.

However, that night, Aliya and her family spring up to a furious avalanche of gunshots. They turn off all the lights and spread out blankets in front of the bathrooms, so they remain invisible from outside. Aliya knows her toddlers can cry out any minute, so they need to be fed and put to sleep. She crawls across the room to prepare their food and eventually falls asleep lying face down.

Trying their best to ignore the chaos outside, Sabera and her siblings also hunker down in her house for the rest of the night.

In a government colony in Banani, Rita, another young mother is also asleep. Along with her husband and very young son and daughter, she wakes up to the hounding sound of bullets right before midnight. Her husband rushes up to the rooftop with the neighbours to find out what is happening while Rita tries to watch from the balcony. Her children are curious to know what is happening outside, but she keeps pushing them inside the house to keep them safe. The family spends three stressful days in that flat in Banani before getting any news. It won't be until days later when they get to know the tragedy that befell their city and people.

The gunshots after midnight have no intention of fading out. Nine-year-old Masuda and her brother are hiding under their table in their home in the capital's Siddique Bazar area.

Everyone in their house stays awake for the rest of the night. They are curious about what is happening outside, terrified because the gunshots do not seem to end and helpless because there are noises of people screaming seemingly from all directions.

Their rooftop has a small room with windows, where the family relaxed in normal times. The war turns the room into a watchtower for peering into what is happening outside.

At the break of dawn, Masuda and her family all go into the room and witness the carnage. They see flames and smoke all around. Structures are being burned down, the whole city ablaze. The gunshots and screams were still loud and clear.

In Elephant Road, Aliya wakes up to find army vehicles and tanks milling the area. Crowds gather over the many dead bodies strewn across the streets. The face of her neighbourhood, once a hub of students, writers and thinkers, is about to be transformed. Aliya's brothers-in-law start making phone calls to try to find out what has transpired in the night. After a few days, the family moves to a small press office a few roads from their house, sleeping surreptitiously on floors.

It's another whole day before Khaled comes to know his parents' whereabouts and that many near and dear ones - his brothers in arms - have fallen victim to the Pakistani Army's brutality.

Sabera remains in Old Dhaka for the rest of the war, in the dimmed light of a *hariken*, sometimes down in their makeshift bunkers in fear of falling shells, sometimes sneaking between the congested homes of Old Dhaka through brick tunnels to avoid Pakistani patrols.

*The war had just begun.*

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**ECHOES BY**  
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

# SWADHIN BANGLA BETAR KENDRA

*The Songs of Freedom*

**I**  
 Dacca, Thursday March 25, 1971. Operation Searchlight. Pakistan starts a systematic war on its own people, beginning in University of Dacca. A just cause in East Pakistan became a peoples' war overnight. The wheels of history are set into motion.

Chittagong, Friday March 26, 1971. 2.15 PM. Badamtali Betar Kendra, Agrabad. MA Hannan, Awami League leader, reads out Bangabandhu's speech from March 7, 1971 and declaration of independence over radio.

Chittagong, Friday March 26, 1971. 7.40 PM. Belal Mohammad, Abul Kashem Sandwip and Syed Abul Kahhar decide to broadcast programmes. For security, the Kalurghat emergency studio outside Chittagong city is used. The journey of Swadhin Bangla Biplobi Betar Kendra starts. "Biplobi" is later omitted.

Chittagong, Saturday March 27, 1971. Major Ziaur Rahman 'on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman' declared 'that the independent People's Republic of Bangladesh has been established'.

million in neighbouring states of India. The war needed a platform to let the outside world be aware of the situation.

The stage was set for SBBK to echo its way into history.

**III**  
 Tripura, Saturday April 3, 1971. 9.00 PM. First broadcast of SBBK from BSF 92 Headquarters in Bagafa, Tripura. Tripura aided with a 200W Short Wave Transmitter.

Tripura, Thursday April 8, 1971. SBBK moved to BSF 91 Headquarters in Agartala, the capital of Tripura. Broadcasting started with a 400W Short Wave and a 1KW Medium Wave Transmitter. This centre broadcasted SBBK programmes until Monday May 24, 1971. Within this time, Tajuddin Ahmad's April 11 speech and the oath-taking ceremony of the Mujibnagar Government on April 17 were relayed from Agartala. It was now time for SBBK to move to Calcutta. End of Phase II.

**IV**  
 Calcutta, 57/8 Ballygunge Circular Road. If there were eleven sectors in the battlefield,



COURTESY: TAREQ MASUD MEMORIAL TRUST

Chittagong, Tuesday March 30, 1971. 2.10 PM approx. Kalurghat radio station is bombed. Phase I of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (SBBK) ends.

The founders of SBKK disperse towards Tripura.

**II**  
 Bangabandhu was in custody in Pakistan. The Mujibnagar Government couldn't function freely within Bangladesh. A platform was needed through which the war could be conducted.

The war also needed a platform that could reach out to the sixty-five million people inside Bangladesh, and the ten

this house was the twelfth sector; it existed in the soundwaves.

Tuesday May 25, 1971. The birth anniversary of Kazi Nazrul Islam. And with it, SBBK started Phase III.

The two most popular programmes were *Jallader Darbar* (a satirical play on Yahya Khan) and *Charam Patra* (a satirical talk). These two programmes were pivotal in boosting the morale of the people in Bangladesh and those in India.

The legacy of SBBK is in its songs of freedom. SBBK was the only point of contact for an entire nation to keep up with the war. The thread that bonded the nation were its songs of freedom.

*Joy Bangla, Banglar Joy; Karar Oi Louha Kopat; Teer Hara Oi Dheu-er Sagar; Purba Diggonte; More Ekti Phoolke Bachabo Bole Juddho Kori; Shono Ekti Mujibor-er Theke; Ek Sagar Rokter Binimoye; Salaam, Salaam, Hajar Salaam; Nongor Tolo Tolo; Maago, Bhabna Keno* and many more songs and tunes resonated through the green fields of Bengal in Bangladesh and the Bangla-speaking places in India where the people of Bangladesh had found refuge.

The songs came from the heart of its composers, lyricists, singers and all the people involved with SBBK.

**V**  
 Why did the people of India shelter Ban-

gladesh? Simple. Only twenty-four years before, in 1947, Bengal was partitioned forever. People of *Purba Bangla*, what first became East Pakistan, and then Bangladesh, left their homesteads forever to find shelter in India.

When they heard, the people of *Purba Bangla* came to India for refuge, the thread of the *nareer taan* came back. It had to. They had to give back to the land they were born in, or at least where a part of their family came from.

Gouriprasanna Mazumder (Pabna), Shyamal Gupta, Shibdas Bandyopadhyay (Khulna), Sachin Dev Burman (Comilla), Meera Dev Burman (Dacca), Manabendra Mukhopadhyay (Barisal), Debabrata Biswas (Mymensingh), and many others jumped at the opportunity to help their *Purba Bangla* through SBBK.

SBBK songs were not only aired, they were also performed in the refugee camps by the artistes of Bangladesh and India.

That was the first and the last time, the two Bengals and Tripura united with love for each other. It was the songs of freedom of SBBK that made the emergence of Bangladesh ever so worthwhile.

**VI**  
 Very few nations have had the privilege of fighting a war of independence. Bangladesh had that privilege. Bangladesh also had the privilege of the love of its own people who sheltered their own in the refugee camps and helped however they could. Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra was one of the threads that gelled the people of Bengal. When another day comes, and the need arises, the songs will come back to guide and give hope.

*Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com*

# WASTELAND'S SYMPHONY

**UPOMA AZIZ**

1. "I have an idea," I came soaring into the living room, which looked desolate with the sofa and the tables gone. "We can rent out our house and then we won't have to move." I announced proudly; if I could pat my own back for my incredible ingenuity, I would.

"But sweetheart," my mother smiled and looked up from her precious pots and pans she was stuffing in a box, "it is going to be our *own* home."

I left for the veranda and stared at the railing clothed in my blue pea vine. It couldn't be salvaged for it was all tangled up and settled, I was told. The magnificent ultramarine flowers blurred and disappeared in a sea of green.

"Hey," my father put a hand on my shoulder, "you will make new friends there. And we will have a huge garden in front of the house, alright? With all the varieties of pea flowers we can find." I nodded, and a teardrop landed on my left foot, my eyes filled up immediately after. My father sighed.

"There is also a bird next door," he said after a brief pause, glancing at me to detect any change in my mood. "It can talk," he continued in a sing-song voice. "Birds can't talk." I grumbled. "But this one sure can," my father grinned and pulled me up on his shoulders.

2. "You can get closer, but don't touch the bars," Tahmeena warned me, "he pecks." I progressed carefully. Tahmeena lifted the cloth off the cage and revealed a Myna bird with a yellow collar. It squint-

ed at me, I squinted back.

In the next few days, as we settled into our new home, I acquainted myself more with our new neighbours – to play board games with Tahmeena, to chase their pet chickens or be chased by their pet geese, to sit and stare at the Myna pacing inside the cage like an eighty year old. I'd started to familiarise myself with the distinct aroma of their cooking, the unknown language they used to talk to each other in, which, I was later told, was Urdu. The bird, however, wasn't taught Urdu, or he was modest enough not to make me uncomfortable. "Kemon acho?" was the only sentence he'd repeat. The bird would whistle out a high-pitched tune frequently, which I'd return from my home, and that was how we communicated, but when I whistled in front of his cage, he grew restless and jumped around but didn't reply. Perhaps he wanted to believe another bird with the same fate was calling out to him from afar. Maybe that's what kept him going.

3. It was the year 1971.

Changes came in small sparks here and there. My school closed down. My mother wrote letter after letter to my brother for him to come back home, I wrote one asking him to bring me a bird.

I wasn't allowed to go to our front door neighbour's anymore, nor were they visiting us. The bird, however, kept on calling, and I'd return the calls. Two weeks later, on an evening in March, my brother did come home. He didn't bring me my bird; he didn't bring anything at all. The grownups in the house had a meeting and soon after we were packing up again. Only this time, we didn't know where we were headed.

On the day of our departure, we realised that most of the neighbourhood had already left in secrecy or were planning to do so. When I asked my mother why our front door neighbours weren't leaving, she told me offhandedly that they didn't need to. But she still went to check up on them and she returned surprised.

"Firoz told me they're leaving too." She told my father. "Where to, West Pakistan?" My father spat in disgust. "No, close to the border. They said that they consider this their country and their loyalty stands here." She declared. "That's what they all say," my father muttered.

4. "Nazma, come inside, it's about to rain." "Come on," Nazma pulls my sleeve; I follow her inside the house, dragging the heap of fodder we collected behind me. It had been a few months of us living in India. We stayed at a school at first, which was definitely not meant to accommodate over a thousand people. My father befriended some locals, and when the refugee camps were inaugurated, a man named Ishak offered to take us in and even gave us a room. My father now helped him run his small grocery shop.

We had grown accustomed to the abnormality of the situation swiftly. My father, originally an engineer, weighted rice in a tin room, my mother sewed *kanthas* for children she didn't know, and my brother somehow got lice. At the end of each day, as all four of us fell asleep in the cramped, windowless room, we couldn't remember ever having a house with a garden in this very realm.

All the upsetting news we received, we learned to toss with the stones that skipped

seven times across the water before sinking into oblivion.

5. The days were going by in a daze, until one day, with the icy breeze came the news that the war was coming to an end, we were just about to win, and we could finally go back home. A month passed and one crisp morning in January, we took our leave from the kind, hospitable people and left to find our home.

We couldn't. There was no home anymore, only mile after mile of debris. Some freshly installed shabby settlements were sticking out like sore thumbs. Some of our old neighbours were there, many weren't; some were people who had decided to stay. Within a few days, we too had a makeshift tent of our own. I laid in bed and gazed at the ruins in front of me.

"Can't sleep?" my brother asked softly. "No it's just that –" I closed my eyes. The weight of what had been lost came screaming suddenly and I grew ten years older that instant. The Shangri-La I built in my head broke down.

"Do you think the Myna survived?" I asked.

"I don't know." He said after a small pause.

I whistled out to the caged bird with clipped wings that hopped around even in its compact enclosure. The wind joined the shrill, haunting tune and it resonated across the lifeless prairie.

No one answered.

*Upoma Aziz is now a slouching, crouching, grouchy diffused bomb that is too tired to go off. Reach her at [fb.com/upoma.aziz](http://fb.com/upoma.aziz)*



# 50 YEARS SINCE

## *Hope, dreams, and grievances of a young Bangladeshi*

**ALIZA RAHMAN**

As Bangladesh nears its 50th year of independence, it seems befitting that the jubilee is considered to be a golden one. Bangladesh has recently graduated from its LDC status nearly five decades after Henry Kissinger infamously used the term “bottomless basket” to describe our nation. To say that we have smashed that latter label is an understatement. We are not devoid of problems, but we stand today, our territories undisputed, our autonomy untouched, and our sovereignty unquestioned.

As a region, many might say we’ve been highly unfortunate, with our exploitation spanning eras and regimes. The independent country that was born in 1971 was war-ravaged and famished, the bleak picture of the sorrow and misery immortalised in the works of Zainul Abedin and others after him. However, despite the immense challenges and deprivation suffered, we still managed to construct a nation on four pillars which can guide us today and tomorrow.

At the time of writing this, Bangladesh has made strides in the international arena and the domestic sphere. Bangladesh’s name is in the tags of nearly every foreign apparel, our people are spreading out across the globe and making their mark, and the youth are labouring daily to bring about the change they wished they’d seen in the short amount of time they’ve been alive. However, to rejoice uncritically and without acknowledgement of the deep-seated issues that plague us is an injustice to what the nation has achieved since its conception. We ought to celebrate and be concerned simultaneously, for the necessity of both are inseparable to the health of our nation.

Today, even as we rise in world rankings measuring changes deemed positive, lives of countless individuals in the margins and the centre continue to be one filled with avoidable suffering, direly needing assistance to allow a life of dignity.

As young people who have our lives before us, we have wishes. We want to stand for, with, and beside everyone within our territories, whether in the hills and valleys, roads and the roadsides, sites standing for centuries and sites yet to be constructed. We want to be able to hold the past in our hands and see it beyond our screens, with a permanence that transcends generations and fills us with pride for our heritage. In our present, we want simpler wishes like bicycle lanes and breathable air and the more complex needs such as education systems that nurture and value our individuality while teaching us the importance of community. Lastly, we want the chance to dream for a future here without fear, doubt and anxiety while being true to who we are and with the people we love and care about.

It is time we make staying back in Bangladesh a choice where people feel secure that more opportunities await them in their homeland, instead of it being a compromise or a romanticised endeavour of a patriot. We want recreation, but not at the cost of heritage, people, and the environment. We want a redefinition of freedom, and want people in every crevice of the city to let out what is on their minds, practicing caution in speech only when it comes to interpersonal relationships or the spurring of hatred. We want a change in our mindsets, and be more resilient instead of being the kind of fragile that leads to dangerous eruptions. In fact, let us be anti-fragile and fight our urges to snuff out the opinions that diverge, for being anti-fragile isn’t an additional quality for superfluous improvement but a necessity if we are to sustain the progress we’ve made. In this golden jubilee, let us emulate gold, and be open-minded enough to be ductile so as to welcome the possibilities of ideas and processes that differ from what we are used to instead of being painfully brittle and cracking at the slightest pressure or threat.

Bangladesh continues to be a young country with a sizable portion of the population yet to come of age.

They, as I, have hopes invested in the country, a country whose existence is a miracle in itself. But we want more, because more is possible. We want more, because what we have now isn’t enough. We have hopes and dreams for the country, and we hold onto them.

When we stand in the scorching sun holding square papers to create a massive national flag, when we protest on the streets for what we deem are our rights, we are doing so because we believe change is possible, and we’re doing so because we think our nation and its people are worth it.

Our generation has been given the awe-inspiring images of citizens of this nation protesting on the streets for their rights even as they fought resistance we couldn’t imagine. 50 years from now, another group of young Bangladeshis will have pictures from today to look up to.

In the years that have since passed, we have lost figures both famous and little known, figures whose contributions have had an impact on our lives even if we fail to realise it. In the coming days, we shall have more figures who show us better ways of living and make it possible for the masses to thrive.

On the golden jubilee of our independence, we have to look past the glitter and confront the myriad realities of our country. As we proceed holding the threads of our history between our fingers, we must remember the sacrifices the nation is built on, not just to mourn the lives lost and the pain endured, but to remember the duty we owe to each other.

We are sitting at the cusp of immense transformation that if fulfilled might fill the pages of our history books for decades to come. However, it continues to be up to us to see the direction in which the pendulum will swing.

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