

WHEELED RELICS OF THE LIBERATION WAR

Four wartime cars that stood the test of time

RAHBAR AL HAQ

1956 CHEVROLET 210 BEAUVILLE

CURRENT OWNER:
DURJOY RAHMAN

If the staying “The man, the myth, the legend” was applied to a car, that would be this one. This Chevrolet TRI 5 series with a Fisher body was originally acquired by the Forest Department and registered officially in early 1957, and that is pretty much the only on-paper information we have on it. As legends go however, it has quite a few. The car was still in government service when hostilities began and allegedly saw action during the Liberation War.



1967 VW Beetle.

PHOTO: SHADMAN AL SAMEE

named Durjoy Rahman then purchased the car from him, who restored it back to immaculate condition. Shift is currently working on a full feature on this vehicle, watch this space.

1953 OLDSMOBILE SUPER 88

CURRENT OWNER:
E.M. FARUK

Much like many other stories from the liberation war, the story of this Oldsmobile Super 88 is that of a victim. Originally brought to the country as a US embassy car, the car was later

purchased by a Hindu businessman in Faridpur for personal use. During the Liberation War, Pakistani forces came to his home to kill him, but found the house empty. Angered, the soldiers opened fire on the car and left. After the war, the vehicle was handed over to a scrapper at Dhaka, where it sat. When E.M. Faruk found the car, it was a time capsule, complete with bullet holes and its original East Pakistan number plate. The 88 is currently undergoing restoration, and might one day get the chance to cruise around on the roads of our liberated nation.

1967 VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE

CURRENT OWNER:

DR. KAMRUL ISLAM

While the Oldsmobile was a victim, the Islam family's Beetle can be best described as a guardian angel. When Dr. Mafakhkharul Islam bought the beetle in 1969 for a then steep price of TK 1,200, he had no idea the car will end up saving him and his family. When the war broke out in 1971 Dr. Islam

Beetle to take his pregnant wife and two young daughters out of Dhaka city to safety. During their exodus, the car had to work around difficult terrain, Pakistani army check-posts, and Indian air-raids, a feat the car achieved with flying colours. After the war, the car remained with the family, with Dr. Islam refusing to sell it. Dr. Mafakhkharul Islam passed away in 2007, and the ownership of the bug was passed over to his son, Dr. Kamrul Islam. This Dr. Islam restored the Beetle to his formal glory and intended to pass it on to his own son, Mushfiqul Islam Fahim, as a family heirloom.

1968 MORRIS MINOR 1000

CURRENT OWNER:

LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM

Of all the cars on this list, the story of this Morris Minor is the most tragic. Once as ubiquitous as PremAllions in the streets of Dhaka, this particular 1000 belong to Dr. Fazle Rabbi, the then joint professor of Cardiology and Internal Medicine at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital. During the hostilities, the car did its job, ferrying the doctor around from patient to patient. However, on the night of 15th December 1971, Rabbi was taken away from his home by Pakistani and Rajakar forces. He was then Martyred, with many other scholars as part of the infamous killing of Bengali intellectuals. His family later donated the car to the Liberation War Museum, where it remains preserved to this day.



PHOTO: SHADMAN AL SAMEE

1953 Oldsmobile Super 88.

Indeed, when the car was rediscovered, there was a bullet-like hole in the passenger side bed window. After the war, the car reportedly became part of the presidential fleet, where it supposedly chauffeured around both Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman.

Decades later, the car was recovered by vintage car collector E.M. Faruk in decrepit condition, who put it back into running order. Another collector



1958 Chevrolet 210 Beauville.

PHOTO: SHADMAN AL SAMEE

COVER STORY

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra

the source of inspiration and bravado during the liberation war

JINAT JAHAN KHAN

The brutal armed operation carried out by the Pakistani army in Dhaka on 25 March 1971 had plunged the life of common people into complete darkness. People were confused and uninformed about the actual situation prevailing in the whole country. The interference of the Pakistani military forces in the communication media wasn't letting people home and abroad know about their barbarities and mercilessness.



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

Amid this anarchy, an emergency and temporary radio station at Kalurghat called the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (SBBK) declared the independence of Bangladesh to the world on 26 March 1971. Airing almost every day during the liberation war, the journey of this covert radio station came to an end on 16 December 1971 and was turned into Bangladesh Betar, as we know it now. From a temporary radio station to the main media source during the liberation war.

As the country was pushed into despair and hostilities, this radio station was set up in a two-storey building in Kalurghat, Chattogram. It had no professional studio or proper instruments to record programmes. However, it continued to carry out the inspiring and uplifting programmes how much they could. It relayed the important messages of the government to the common people, gave updates of the battlefield and the war, and connected the whole nation with an unseen thread. Besides, lively patriotic songs, satirical programmes, and short plays kept the spirit of the nation high during the war days. It aided psychological warfare in 1971 and motivated people to keep on living and fight for freedom in the most devastating days of Bangladesh.

Many gifted and incredibly talented artists were involved with this radio station. However, 10 of them were with the SBBK from its beginning till the end. This covert radio station was discarded by the Pakistani force on March 30 because the programmes on it were continuously boosting the nationalistic spirit in people craving for an independent country and the daily news bulletin let people know about the progress of the war and brutalities of the Pakistani army.

JALLADER DARBAR

Another popular program of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra was Jallader Darbar. It was a series of satirical short stories written by Kallyan Mitra. The drama was intended to expose the cruel and barbarous side of General Yahya Khan.

On the other hand, the conversations between Yahya Khan and his wife or followers were caricatured making him look less dangerous to the Bengalis or freedom fighters. The eventual goal was to reduce the terror of General Yahya so that people didn't move backward from the fight against injustice and oppression. He was called 'Kella Fatey Khan' in it and the main role of this humorous serial was played by Raju Ahmed.

A popular assorted program of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra was Agnishikha. It had a set of sub programmes such as Darpan, Oikatan, Kabikhantha, Ranaveri, Recitation etc.

Other popular programmes were- Bajrakantha, Pindir Prolap, Kathgorar Ashami, Pratidhdhani, etc. These became the source of inspiration and strength for the freedom fighters as well as for the mass people.

However, the second phase of this legendary radio centre soon started at Bogafa, a Tripura state on April 3. And the third phase commenced in Ballygunge, Kolkata on the 25th of May.

SONGS OF INSPIRATION AND FREEDOM

Music can elicit different kinds of emotions, even if the words fail to do so. In a devastating time when there is no source of media other than radio, the SBBK took the responsibility to empower and inspire the freedom fighters with some fiery, uplifting, and emotion-filled songs. A shiver still runs down our spine when we hear the songs of freedom of that time.

Thanks to Govinda Halder for the songs with such powerful lyrics that boost up the strength and unite us to this date. Some of his worth-mentioning works during the war are- Ek Shagor Rokter Binimoye, Purbo Digonte Surjo Utheche, Mora Ekti Phul Ke Bachabo Bole Juddho Kori. Besides these, Apel Mahmud's 'Teer Hara Ei Dheuer Shagor', Kazi Nazrul Islam's 'Karar Oi Louho Kopat', Fazl-E-Khuda's 'Salam Salam Hazar Salam', Gazi Mazharul Anwar's 'Joy Bangla, Banglar joy' are some of the best songs played by the SBBK for Bengali people as their inspiration often sank low due to the situation. The SBBK singers were known as 'Voice Soldiers' because they turned their powerful songs into lethal weapons to fight against the enemies.

The Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra represents the importance of freedom in the communication media and how the right approach or use of this media can change a whole nation. And the satirical yet constructive shows convey the message that the agony or devastating state can be overcome in a humorous and fun way through creativities and diversities.

After independence, this legendary radio station started its journey as 'Bangladesh Betar' on the 22nd December of 1971.