

Liberated, at last

Habibul Alam Bir Pratik recalls the moments of glory on December 16-17, 1971

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

December 16, 1971. Dhaka was gripped by euphoria. People were shouting "Joy Bangla" from the streets to rooftops. Many were hugging each other, celebrating freedom.

Amid joyous scenes on that wintry evening, a group of freedom fighters including Habibul Alam reached Hotel Purbani in Motijheel area around 5:15pm.

"We were surprised to see an official of Australian Counsellor's office in Dhaka greeting us by saying: well done! congratulations!" recalled Alam, a member of the urban guerrilla group widely known as Crack Platoon under Sector 2.

Crack Platoon, consisting mostly of students, was known for successfully conducting extremely dangerous operations on army convoys and important installations in Dhaka during the Liberation War.

"I thanked him and said your ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] has done a good job in support of

would make the first announcement of our country's victory from the radio station in Dhaka around 8:00-8:30am on December 17," recalled Alam, who left his family in mid-April to join the Liberation War.

"I became perturbed and thought that nothing could be more humiliating for us than to have a foreigner make the first announcement from our capital through our media," he wrote in his book "Brave of Heart".

In the interview, he said they had to take the matter in their own hands as the leaders of the government in exile were still not in the country and top army officers were not available at that time in Dhaka.

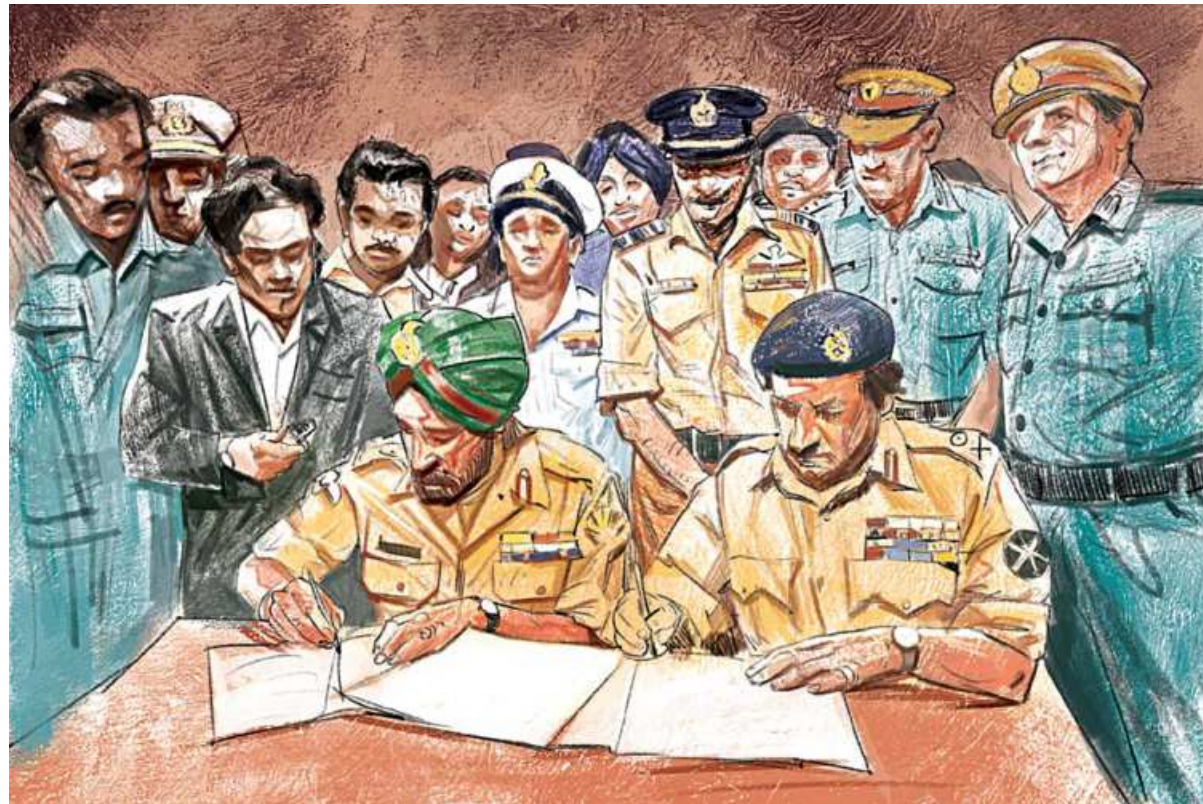
They decided that Major ATM Hyder, acting sector commander of Sector 2, will make the announcement of victory via radio.

"We needed to move fast and to do so we needed a vehicle. We found a car of a high official of parliament at Narinda and I hot-wired the car," he continued.

Alam discussed the matter with fellow Crack Platoon member Fateh Ali



Lt Gen Niazi flanked by Major Hyder of Bangladesh forces and Lt Gen Aurora of Indian Army (eastern command) going for the surrender ceremony.



the war of independence.

While making the announcement on behalf of Bangladesh government, Hyder said, "The country has been liberated and the Bangalees are now free citizens of the country."

He further gave a few instructions to all freedom fighters and to the people of the country for their safety and security.

Once the announcement was completed, they left the station handing over the responsibility of the premises to Sadek Hossain Khoka and his group.

Major Hyder made a similar announcement from TV in the afternoon. Fateh had made a phone call to then director of the state-run television, Ejaj Ahmed, regarding the announcement.

Major Hyder, Shahadat, Fateh, Habibul and another freedom fighter Afiqur Rahman reached the station between 4:00pm and 4:30pm.

Afiqur prepared the script for English announcement and all went smoothly, said Alam.

FREEING CHULLU FROM CENTRAL JAIL
After the radio announcement, Fateh and Alam also rescued Crack Platoon



Major Hyder making announcement of victory on TV.

members Masud Sadique Chullu and Abdus Samad, who were arrested by Pakistan military in late August, from Dhaka Central Jail.

At the second "grilled gate" they found a fair complexioned person was trying to come forward from behind the other prisoners and he was Chullu.

"We shouted with joy and tears ran down our cheeks. ... Chullu Bhai told us that Samad Bhai was there too and we also got him out," Alam wrote in the book. "I signed a document on

behalf of Bangladesh government in exile to release them from prison," he said. On August 30, 1971, Chullu was detained in Dhaka where he was to carry out an operation.

His fellow crack platoon members Bodiul Alam Bodi, Shafi Imam Rumi, Abdul Halim Chowdhury Jewel and Magfar Ahmed Chowdhury Azad were captured by Pakistan army a day before his arrest. Unfortunately, they never returned to their families.

Image courtesy: Habibul Alam's book "Brave of Heart"



Display of Major Hyder's instructions to freedom fighters on TV.

SCAN QR CODES TO WATCH VIDEOS



Bangladesh," Alam told The Daily Star, while reflecting on that "dream comes true" day following the nine-month war against the Pakistan occupation army.

The significance of the greeting for the freedom fighters was that Lt Gen AAK Niazi, the commander of 93,000 marauding troops of Pakistan military, had already surrendered.

Alam was in Mugdapara area, then outskirts of Dhaka, a couple of days before, and was anxiously waiting for that momentous occasion.

"We were simply captivated by the thundering sound of Joy Bangla, everybody was at the top of their voice,

While making the announcement on behalf of Bangladesh government, Hyder said, "The country has been liberated and the Bangalees are now free citizens of the country."

Chowdhury and also communicated with Shahadat Chowdhury so that the latter could contact Hyder for the announcement.

"Some of us reached the radio station as early as 5:30am to make it operational for the announcement. We found an elderly man, who advised us to contact former Regional Director of Radio Shamsul Huda, who lived at Eskaton Road, not far away from the station.

"After reaching Huda's home with Fateh, I put my Chinese pistol on the table with my finger in the trigger hatch and sought his cooperation to make the radio station operational within 8 in the morning," Alam said.

Huda made some phone calls and said that it would be done.

He also gave a good piece of advice to divert the friendly forces, saying, "If you come across the friendly forces, you may tell them that the crystals [used in radio receiver] are available at the Mirpur transmission centre and to get those you will have to locate the person concerned."

Returning to the radio station around 7:00am, they found Hyder and Shahadat had already reached there along with journalists Kader Mahmood and Eklas Ahmed. Shahadat and Kader wrote the speech for Hyder.

Some freedom fighters were posted at the entrance to make sure nobody enters till 8:30am.

"It was around 8:10am that the station went on the air. Fateh announced in Bangla that Major Hyder would make the announcement at around 8:15am," said Alam, who earned gallantry award Bir Pratik for his valiant contribution to



Major Hyder, Habibul Alam and Zillur Rahim

it was a tremendous feeling. We felt we're liberated, at last," Alam said in an interview, ahead of the country's 51st Victory Day.

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENTS ON RADIO, TV

For Alam and other freedom fighters, there were still some pressing issues to be taken care of. On the night of December 16, they came to know that some of the snipers implanted by the Pakistan army were creating trouble in Narinda by firing shots.

He along with others rushed to Narinda, started to trace and pinpoint the exact locations of the snipers and nailed one of them.

"Amid this operation, I came to know that the Indian army, our friendly forces,