

When will UN recognise Bangladesh genocide?



Haroon Habib is a freedom fighter, writer and researcher.

HAROON HABIB

Bangladesh celebrated its golden jubilee of independence in 2021. The celebration reminded the newer generations of our nation of the patriotism of their ancestors, who fought a heroic war against the marauding Pakistan Army that killed an estimated three million people, raped over 300,000 women, and caused enormous destruction. The celebrations also reminded us of the mass exodus of nearly 10 million people to the bordering states of India to escape military atrocities, which was one of the largest refugee crises in the 20th century.

All these human tragedies, well documented in the pages of history, will never be forgotten by the Bangladeshis as most families at that time either lost their loved ones or suffered the brunt of the military madness. In memory of the tragedy, Bangladesh observes March 25 as “Genocide Day” as the Pakistan military launched a brutal campaign of manslaughter on that day in 1971, code-named “Operation Searchlight”—a campaign that went on for nine months. The irony is that the United Nations (UN) has not yet recognised the genocide nor the use of rape as a weapon of war to this day, even though they were carried out in a calculative and cruellest fashion, as many researchers have concluded.

On December 31, 2021, the very last day of Bangladesh’s golden jubilee celebration, the US-based Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention issued a statement detailing the genocide of Bengalis. The recognition came following research carried out by the institute after Tawheed Reza Noor, son of one of Bangladesh’s martyred intellectuals Serajuddin Hossain, approached the institute, named after Raphael Lemkin, a great scholar best known for coining the term “genocide” and who initiated the historic UN Genocide Convention.

There have been consistent efforts by various Bangladesh governments, families of the victims and human rights groups for the UN recognition of the 1971 genocide. But the world body remains consistently silent over it, even though it has, in recent years, accorded recognition to the Armenian genocide, and also acted decisively on the Bosnian, Cambodian and Rwandan genocides.

The genocide of 1971 is well documented in various forms. The first detailed report of the atrocities was published by a well-known Pakistani journalist Anthony Mascarenhas in the UK’s *The Sunday Times*, on June 13, 1971. Mascarenhas, who was among a group of journalists from West Pakistan invited by the government to write in support of the military actions in East Pakistan, fled to London to report what he had actually seen. In his famous report, titled “Genocide,” he wrote, “I saw Hindus hunted from village to village and door to door, shot off-hand after a cursory ‘short arm inspection’ showed they were uncircumcised. I have heard the screams of men bludgeoned to death in the compound of the Circuit House in Comilla. I have seen truckloads of other human targets and those who had the humanity to try to help them

hauled off for disposal under the cover of darkness and curfew.”

On August 2, 1971, the *Time* magazine provided the details of the massacre. It quoted a senior US official as saying, “It is the most incredible, calculated thing since the days of the Nazis in Poland.” Genocide researcher Prof RJ Rummel said, “These ‘willing executioners’ were

foundation of conscience and human rights. In some cases, according to the studies, young Bengali women were taken from one camp to another to be used as “comfort girls.” The brutalities inflicted on them included severing of breasts and mutilation of their private parts by inserting bayonet or gun barrels. Many were kept hanging upside

majority of them Bengali Hindu women and girls, involving vicious gang rapes, sexual slavery, sexual torture, and forced maternity.” British physician Dr Geoffrey Davis, who worked in Bangladesh on request of World Health Organization (WHO), estimated that the commonly cited figures of killing and rape were “very conservative” compared to the real numbers.

Truly, the rape was carried out in a systematic manner with the aim to change the race of Bengalis!

Noted researcher Robert Payne, in his book *“Massacre: The Tragedy of Bangla Desh,”* quoted a senior Pakistan Army general as saying, “Kill three million of them and the rest will eat out of our hands.” The UN’s declaration of Universal Human Rights 1981 said, “Among the genocides of human history, the highest number of people killed in (a) lower span of time is in Bangladesh in 1971. An average of 6,000 to 12,000 people were (sic) killed every single day... This is the highest daily average in the history of genocides.”

The Lemkin institute further stated, “Given the lack of a broad international recognition of the crime, the Lemkin Institute calls upon (the) international community, including the United Nations, to urgently recognise the Bengali genocide as a way to pay tribute to the victims and to hold (the) perpetrators accountable.” It has also called upon the international community to pressure Pakistan to work with Bangladesh in its search for truth and justice.

Hopefully, the significant statement by a well-known genocide prevention institute will pave the way for many more similar international bodies to come forward with similar recognition, and help remove the UN’s inertia that it has preserved for long. The crimes committed against humanity, anywhere in the world, must not go unpunished—otherwise, justice turns futile.

Pakistan, even after 50 years, has not apologised to Bangladesh for the crimes committed by its army, nor has it put on trial those 195 war criminals identified by Bangladesh in 1972 as the principal perpetrators. Pakistan’s own Hamoodur Rahman Commission recommended taking effective action to punish those POWs who were responsible for committing the atrocities in the former East Pakistan. However, the listed war criminals were subsequently repatriated to Pakistan along with other POWs following the Tripartite Agreement signed among Bangladesh, Pakistan and India in 1974. But they were not freed from criminal charges. Bangladesh contends that the clemency mentioned in the Trilateral Agreement never implied that the masterminds and principal perpetrators of crimes against humanity and genocide would continue to enjoy impunity. The customary international laws also provide ample opportunity to try the Pakistani POWs.

True, the UN recognition is important for the victims’ families as well as for the aggrieved nation that is now 51 years old and also an important member of the United Nations. However, it is also no less important for the world body itself to protect its mandate and image. It must not be forgotten that such recognition is not merely a formal signing of a document, but also a new pledge and fresh commitment against the recurrence of such crimes in the future.



ILLUSTRATION: BIPOLO CHAKRABORTY

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down till death. Tens of thousands of bodies, both male and female, with their hands and legs tied in the back, floating on ponds and rivers were a common sight across the country.

Belated, yet welcome, since it was the first such public statement by a global genocide research institute, the Lemkin Institute’s statement narrated the historical backgrounds of the genocide and remarked that the Bengalis, who constituted the majority of Pakistani population at that time, were perceived by the Pakistani ruling coterie as “inferior” or not “true Muslims.” The statement stated, “The genocidal policies of the postcolonial era became expressed in extreme and mass physical violence throughout the entire process of the Liberation War (of Bangladesh), from its very beginning, when West Pakistan implemented ‘Operation Searchlight,’ to the end of the war, when West Pakistan, facing defeat, proceeded to kill thousands of Bengali intellectuals.”

It further echoed the documented history, “The atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army and their local collaborators—Razakars, al-Badr and al-Shams—included a systematic policy of sexual violence against Bengalis, the

fuelled by an abiding anti-Bengali racism, especially against the Hindu minority. Bengalis were often compared with monkeys and chicken... and the soldiers were free to kill at will.”

Archer K Blood, the US consul general in Dhaka in 1971 who disagreed with his country’s handling of the Bangladesh struggle, reported that naked female bodies in Dhaka University’s Rokeya Hall were found “hanging from ceiling fans with bits of rope,” after apparently being “raped, shot, and hung by heels” from the fans.

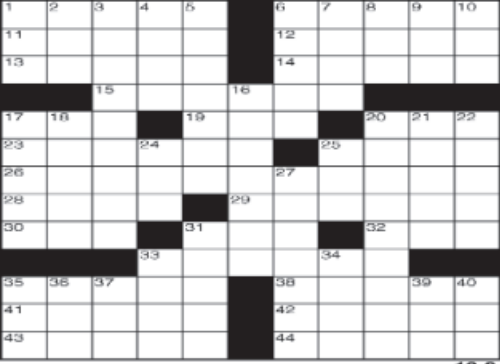
Remarkably, the UN could not act decisively to stop the bloodbath as the massacre happened during the Cold War era, although the then UN Secretary-General U Thant, on June 3, 1971, had remarked, “The happenings in East Pakistan constitute one of the most tragic episodes in human history. Of course, it is for future historians to gather facts and make their own evaluations, but it has been a very terrible blot on a page of human history.”

Apart from committing heinous crimes, the Pakistan Army and their fanatic cohorts raped hundreds of thousands of women, shaking the very

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- ACROSS
- 1 Cheated, in slang
- 6 Pork servings
- 11 Baghdad native
- 12 TV’s Mandel
- 13 Diner pages
- 14 Building wing
- 15 Golf ball feature
- 17 Strange
- 19 Nettle
- 20 Butter unit
- 23 Liner trip
- 25 Bowling site
- 26 Cheer-leader stunts
- 28 Some sheep
- 29 Hawk
- 30 Hosp. workers
- 31 Play judge
- 32 Dripping
- 33 Snake-haired Gorgon
- 35 Coffee bar order
- 38 Forum garb
- 41 Blow away
- 42 Wear away
- 43 Store patron
- 44 Slow-witted
- DOWN
- 1 That fellow
- 2 Mine yield
- 3 Sahara sights
- 4 Prefix for distant or angular
- 5 Shrug off
- 6 Blackboard need
- 7 Sharpen
- 8 Hold title to
- 9 Chart model
- 10 Kinsey topic
- 16 Got ready
- 17 Earthy color
- 18 Sketched
- 20 Popular movement
- 21 Slant
- 22 Stopwatch button
- 24 Check-cashing needs
- 25 Pot part
- 27 Proved false
- 31 Allude
- 33 Puzzle book feature
- 34 Steamed
- 35 Bit of ointment
- 36 Outback runner
- 37 Coral island
- 39 TV spots
- 40 Spot

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YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS



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