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EDITOR'S NOTE

Today marks 51 years of Bangladesh as an independent nation. Fifty-one years ago, in the face of a brutal massacre by the Pakistani junta, the Bangladesh Revolution was sparked. The freedom's flame endured because of the unwavering resolve and monumental sacrifice of millions of Bangladeshis. Over the course of five decades, Bangladesh has transformed itself from a 'bottomless basket' to a 'development miracle'.

As we observe the Independence Day, we recall the leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman whose clarion call on 7th March inspired us in our fight with a courage of conviction and righteousness, and that of the national leaders who guided the nascent nation through the nine-month-long war. We also pay our deepest respect to all those freedom fighters, women, men, and children whose blood and sacrifices hallowed this land

and freed the country of the occupiers.

It was promised in our Proclamation of Independence that equality, human dignity, and social justice for the people of Bangladesh will be ensured. Although we have achieved many great things as a nation, the existing democratic deficit, curbs on free speech, ever-widening inequality, widespread corruption, and nepotism betray the promise of freedom for which our Muktiyoddhas so nobly laid down their lives. On this momentous occasion, we should recommit ourselves to upholding the spirit of our Liberation War. Liberation is something that must be fought for and protected every single day.

Mahfuz Anam
Editor and Publisher
The Daily Star



ILLUSTRATION: BIPOLO CHAKROBORTY



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Remembering Shaheed Lt Col Syed Abdul Hai

“Anything may happen any time now. The children will be there for you. Khuda Hafiz,” these were the words of Lt Colonel Hai, during his last call to his wife.

ENAM AHMED CHAUDHARY

It was the tumultuous times of 1971. At the end of March, I was recovering from some major injuries sustained from a devastating car accident – in which my father Ghayasuddin Ahmed Chaudhary was killed and my brother Faruq Chaudhary and I got hurt. At that time, my sister Naseem and her husband Lt Colonel Syed Abdul Hai, with their three children Ashfaq, Adel and Aref, had come to stay with the family for a few days.

Both Lt Colonel Hai and Naseem were politically very conscious and used to participate intensely in political discussions regarding the rights of the Bengalis and the discriminations they suffered due to the arbitrary actions of Pakistan's autocratic military rulers.

Colonel Hai was posted on deputation in the Ghana army from 1965 to 1969. Upon his return to Pakistan in 1969, he was appointed the commanding officer of 7-Field Ambulance in Jashore Cantonment. After the devastating cyclone of November 12, 1970, Colonel Hai, as CO of 7-Field Ambulance, was extensively involved in the relief works and reconstruction activities in the cyclone-hit area of then East Pakistan's southwestern region, where his unit was temporarily posted.

Col Osmany had become a frequent guest at our house after the death of my father, who was like an elder brother to him. Our place at Dhanmondi actively became a centre of political discussions, frequently visited by many pro-Bengali leaders of eminence. Colonel Hai capitalised on the opportunity to meet and talk to leaders like Abdus Samad Azad, Barrister Amirul Islam and others.

Subsequently, it was revealed that Colonel Osmani's meetings with Lt. Colonel Hai had been monitored by the

army's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Colonel Hai, with Naseem and their three sons, returned to Jashore on March 13. On their way home by road, their car proudly displayed the 'Shadhin Bangla' flag with the country's golden map at the centre, along with a black flag indicating their solidarity towards the ongoing non-cooperation movement.

While entering the Cantonment, the car was stopped at the army checkpoint through which no car – without an authorised tag on insignia – could get in. The incident was reported to army intelligence and the station commander, Brigadier A Durrani.

The next few days leading up to March 25 was tense, to say the least. Any pro-Pakistan slogan was retorted by Bengali soldiers shouting 'Joy Bangla' on top of their lungs, particularly at the field ambulance unit. The 1st Bengal Regiment was undergoing an exercise at Chaugacha in Jashore. Brigadier Durrani used to call Colonel Hai and ask him to control his troops, to which Colonel Hai's usual response was that they were just expressing their views.

The tension finally reached its peak when the news of the army crackdown and atrocities committed in Dhaka came to the fore.

The 1st East Bengal Regiment was ordered back to the cantonment from the 'exercise' and the decision to disarm the Bengali elements – when known – acted as a unifying force to create a sense of togetherness among the Bengalis, fortifying their resolve for resistance.

Unfortunately, Lt Colonel Jalil, the commander of the 1st East Bengal, who happened to be the senior-most Bengali commanding officer, declined to step up to the occasion. His unit returned to the cantonment on March 29. Early in the morning of March 30, Brigadier Durrani

removed Col Jalil from his commanding position.

On March 30, Colonel Hai received an urgent telephone call and rushed to his office. Usually, his wife drove him to his office but on that morning, he left on his own. "Be prepared for any eventuality," he told Naseem right before leaving.

The shelling of Bengali units by the Pakistan Army started from early in the

Hafiz," these were the words of Lt Colonel Hai, during his last call to his wife.

At mid-day, when the sounds of the shelling and shooting had receded, a group of soldiers from 22-Frontier Force and 27-Baloch Regiment, led by Captain Muntaz, approached Colonel Hai's office from the rear door. They banged the door open, identified Colonel Hai and opened brush-fire. "We don't want to see Lt Colonel Hai alive anymore," were the orders from the higher-ups.

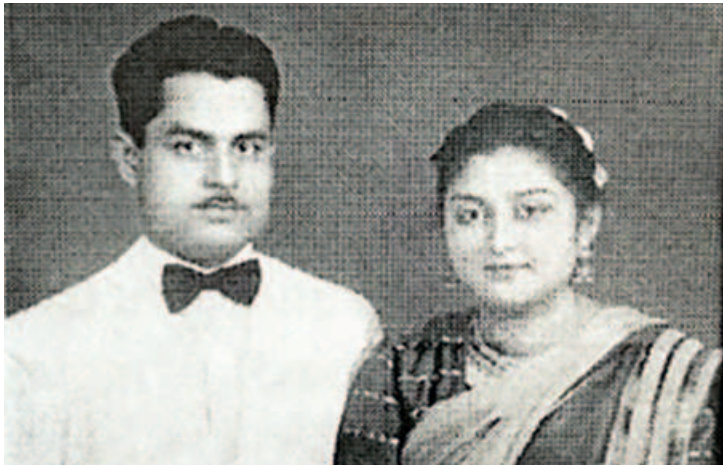
After that, the Pakistani soldiers left without any more shooting.

For two days, we didn't know of anything that happened in Jashore Cantonment.

I was Deputy Commissioner of Khulna (greater) and my friend and colleague, Khondokar Asaduzzaman was Rajshahi's DC. Both of us were withdrawn from the field and posted as joint secretaries of the commerce and industries and the finance department respectively.

Syed Shahid Hussain, a Pakistani national and former CSP – who was Additional Deputy Commissioner of Khulna – knew that I was related to Colonel Hai. In his book titled "What was once East Pakistan" (2010), Shahid recounted the events of March 30, "That evening an army captain was recounting the day's exploits. I was saddened to learn from him that they or perhaps he himself had killed our good Bengali doctor, an army Colonel. I expressed my horror at the unwarranted murder of an innocent and well-meaning human being. This remark provoked the young captain to point his gun at me because he felt I was defending a traitor: for the Pakistani troops every Bengali was a traitor."

At nightfall on March 31, an eerie silence prevailed in a curfew-afflicted Dhaka.



▲ Lt Colonel Syed Abdul Hai and his wife Naseem. The photo was taken in 1958.

morning, Bengali soldiers of 1st East Bengal, under the leadership of Captain Hafizuddin Ahmed Bir Bikram, broke open the armoury and started defending themselves from the attack of 25-Baloch, who had started firing with machine guns and three-inch mortar fire. The Bengali personnel of the 7-Field Ambulance, commanded by Lt Colonel Hai, joined them in their brave resistance.

Brigadier Durrani, along with an army contingent, came over to Colonel Hai's house, and in the presence of his wife Naseem telephoned Lt Colonel Hai to surrender with a white flag.

"Anything may happen any time now. The children will be there for you. Khuda

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‘1971 Bangladesh – With Unbound Accounts’

The cyclone and tidal wave of November 12-13, 1970, the most catastrophic in three centuries, hammered the proverbial last nail on the coffin of united Pakistan as the official and public representatives from West Pakistan failed to turn up for the relief and rehabilitation work for the millions struggling to survive the post-disaster situation.

MUYEEDUL HASAN

When Pakistan unleashed a coordinated military attack in Dhaka and Chittagong on March 25-26, 1971, there were 20,000 West Pakistani troops throughout East Pakistan. They were engaged to prevail over the unarmed but thoroughly hostile civilian population of the two main cities of the province – Dhaka and Chittagong – apart from remaining ready to fight back “5,000 East Pakistani regulars and 13,000 East Pakistani paramilitary troops, whose loyalty was ‘doubtful’.” This was mentioned at a meeting of the Washington Special Action Group on March 26, 1971 (FRUS, Vol XI, Doc 11).

Pakistan had accumulated a sufficient stockpile of arms and ammunition during the cold war era after signing its first bilateral security treaty in 1953 with the US, followed by becoming member of two US led military alliances – the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Baghdad Pact (later known as CENTO). Pakistan continued to be a major recipient of US military supplies and economic aid for more than a decade, and strengthened its military capability to go for an ill-conceived adventure to “liberate” the Indian-held Kashmir in 1965 using US-supplied weapons against India, violating the norm of not using those against a non-communist adversary.

The US promptly stopped the supply of arms to Pakistan and restricted economic aid. They also stopped weapons supply to India, who had been receiving US arms since 1962 on a different consideration, after the China-India border clash broke out. Ayub's war stopped far short of his desired goal as peace was restored through the UN-backed Tashkent Agreement, and the decline of Ayub as Pakistan's invincible ruler started taking shape.

After the 1965 war, with suspension of the western aid and steady fall in public expenditures, the economic condition in East Pakistan became grim. The demand for ‘complete provincial autonomy’, as stated in the ‘21-point demand’ in 1954, by the united opposition of all political parties of East Bengal, called ‘Jukto Front’, was again brought to the forefront.

That formulation of ‘complete provincial autonomy’ proposed to restrict the authority of the central government within defence, foreign affairs and currency, while advocating that the rest of the state portfolio be kept under the jurisdiction of the province(s). It won overwhelmingly in the East Pakistan provincial general election in 1954. In 1966, that demand for complete provincial autonomy, by and large, was brought to the forefront by Sheikh Mujib renaming it as the ‘Six-point demand’.

Earlier during 1956-63, the issue of ‘complete autonomy’ was sidelined by the AL when Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardi was its leader. It was only after his death in 1963 that his successor and ardent follower Sheikh Mujib included ‘complete autonomy’ in the AL manifesto again.

As Ayub after the debacle of the 1965 war faced a crisis in every sphere of national life, most of the opposition

parties of Pakistan assembled over a round table conference (RTC) at Lahore to demand an end to ‘one-man rule’ and return to parliamentary democracy. Sheikh Mujib was a participant of the RTC and surprised others by presenting the ‘Six-point program’ for the first time on behalf of the AL. Parties representing vested interests of West Pakistan were also participants at the RTC, who disagreed with what Sheikh Mujib demanded. As a result of opposition disunity the objective of removing Ayub failed. Ayub took full advantage of the situation, tried to misguide the public by charging that the ‘Six-point’ was a conspiracy to break away from Pakistan and to make East Pakistan independent.

He arrested Mujib, and fabricated a case in January 1968 against him and 33 others, charging them ‘for conspiracy to bring arms from India’ to engineer an armed revolt and make East Pakistan free. The case was brought for public hearing in open court. Ayub allowed newspapers to publish daily court proceedings of the trial to expose Mujib's ‘heinous crimes’. But his rule by then had become so unpopular that his publicity to malign Mujib made the latter the biggest political cult in the province.

By the end of January 1968, Ayub suffered a massive heart attack. The army chief General Yahya Khan took that opportunity to handle the top executive files of the state on Ayub's behalf, violating the constitutional provision of making the national assembly speaker officiate the event in the long absence of the president. As Ayub resumed his responsibilities a few months later, the post-war economic crisis had deepened in a number of areas in West Pakistan and serious labour unrests erupted, while most of the political parties united for restoration of democratic rule.

Since usual police measures failed to tackle the spread of labour unrest, Ayub attempted to deploy the army. But that could not be done without declaring a state of emergency for the country as a whole and handing over power to the army, as pointed out by Army Chief Yahya Khan. A separate plan to defuse the united move by the political parties was worked out somehow, but labour unrest continued. Yahya kept opposing army deployment without martial law cover for the whole country, and when that was promulgated on March 26, 1969, Yahya, as the head of the army, took over the state power without firing a shot.

Two months before Yahya took over, in far-away America, in January 1969, Richard Nixon of the Republican Party, became the new US President by defeating Lyndon B Johnson of the Democratic Party, in the presidential poll of November 1968. Johnson lost popular support mainly due to his involvement in the catastrophic war over Vietnam. During 1969-70, Nixon did some advance planning for pulling out the US from the Vietnam War before the next presidential election in 1972. He started to explore the possibility of improving the relationship with China by full diplomatic recognition, which was long overdue since the

Apprehending a serious threat against his leadership spreading within the army, Yahya upon returning to Islamabad thought over the action he should take. He finally called the US ambassador Joseph Farland to his residence on January 27.

revolutionary birth of new China in 1949.

China, being an important ally of North Vietnam and a backer of the South Vietnam Communist Party, needed to be brought within the orbit of dialogue to find a negotiated exit from such an unpopular war. In that context, Nixon took a view that since Pakistan was occasionally used as a conduit for exchanging messages to and from China, it would be helpful to spare Pakistan from the continuing ban on supply of arms and spare parts.

For Yahya, it was most imperative to restore the supply of US weapons and spare-parts in order to bring Pakistan's military machine back on track again, and also strengthen his personal leadership over Pakistan's armed forces. He began working on it immediately after taking over power. On March 29, 1969, only three days after taking power, he sent his talented deputy chief martial law administrator, Rear Admiral SM Ahsan, the commander-in-chief of the Pakistani Navy, to America to attend the funeral of the wife of former US President Eisenhower. Ahsan after reaching the US began lobbying for the resumption of arms supply with State Department officials and, eventually with President Nixon. The decision to resume the supply of spare-parts from the US took a concrete shape after Nixon met Yahya in Lahore in July 1969, during his fact-finding tour to Asia.

Yahya also started probing to seek cooperation with political parties at home, realising that the country could no longer be ruled relying solely on the support of the military force.

All the intelligence agencies of Pakistan kept on filing assessments that AL would be unable to get absolute majority in the national assembly to frame the

for possible contingencies that might help in the near future.

The plan was designed to meet the worst contingency arising out of any mass upsurge, and open defiance of martial law. Yahya then came to Dacca on January 12 and during the next five days, he tried his best to persuade Mujib to dilute some of the stiff conditions of ‘Six-points’, but failed.

From there, he went to Larkana on January 17 to talk to Z. A Bhutto, the leader of the second biggest party, Pakistan People's Party (PPP), who had won 81 seats in the National Assembly. Bhutto, as a minister in Ayub's cabinet, was an ardent supporter of the 1965 war against India, and was sacked for disagreeing on the peace deal Ayub had to sign at Tashkent. He started opposition politics on his own; his rhetoric became immensely popular among the common people in Sindh and Punjab as well as within the army. His success in the election created new followers amongst Pakistan's senior army officers who were increasingly getting nervous since the result of the general election, and particularly because Yahya still showed the tendency to concede to Sheikh Mujib's demands.

Yahya took with him his Principal Staff Officer Peerzada, Chief of Army Staff Hamid, Chief of General Staff Gul Hassan and chief of Military Intelligence Umar to go to Larkana in Sindh; and all of them by then were either virulently anti-Mujib or pro-Bhutto. All of them were aware that Yahya reached the dead end of the political road in Dhaka. It appeared that there was convergence of views between Bhutto and army commanders on the danger of secession underlying the ‘Six-points’ and on Yahya's incapacity to solve it. Bhutto's articulation of the dangers arising from them to the country and the army itself must have created a deep impression on the generals. Karim (Brigadier M. Iskander Karim) thinks that in the Larkana meeting “Bhutto made known to Yahya in a very subtle way that the army leadership was with him on the East-West issue.”

Apprehending a serious threat against his leadership spreading within the army, Yahya upon returning to Islamabad thought over the action he should take. He finally called the US ambassador Joseph Farland to his residence on January 27. Yahya informed him about the underlying breakup Pakistan was facing along the regional line in the process of current negotiation for a constitution, and asserted that he could not let it happen and would abrogate the constitution making process to preserve the territorial integrity of the country. Ambassador Farland responded positively to Yahya's decision and said: ‘It was the policy of the US to respect the unity and integrity of Pakistan’ (FRUS, Document 109, Volume E-7).

The implication of US policy to ‘respect the unity and integrity of Pakistan’ needs a little bit of clarification. The US was not expected to participate in the acts of preventing militarily the break-up of East and West Pakistan, but it was clear that Pakistan would use every resource at his disposal, including US supplied arsenal as 80 per cent of Pakistan's stocks were sourced from the US. As Gary J Bass, the author of ‘The Blood Telegram – India's Secret War in East Pakistan’ mentioned: “The on-going assault required a formidable amount of military resources, including perhaps four Pakistan army divisions equipped with armour, as well as the Pakistan Air Force. In this Pakistan was relying on lots of U.S. weaponry and equipment – everything from ammunition and the spare parts that keep armed forces operating, to major items like tanks and massive C-130 transport airplanes that shuttled soldiers from West Pakistan to East Pakistan. As the crackdown began, Bengalis begged US diplomats not to allow American-supplied weapons to be used for ‘mass murder’. The Nixon administration made no move against Pakistan's use of US weaponry.” (Garry J. Bass, pg 57) During the cold war era, there was no restriction on the use of American weapons received under defence treaties against aggression from a communist country. Those could also be used in civil strife conditions, to combat internal subversion by pro-communist organisations. Possible use of US supplied weapons in East Pakistan as viewed at the end of January, 1971 was clearly none of those two.

Muyeedul Hasan was a special assistant to Tajuddin Ahmad, the Prime Minister of the Bangladesh Government-in-exile. He is also the author of *Muldhara '71 and Upadhara '71, March-April*.

This is an abridged version of the first chapter of the upcoming book titled *1971 Bangladesh – With Unbound Accounts*.



▲ **Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with Tajuddin Ahmad and seven women leaders of Awami League listening to the 1970's election results.**

PHOTO COURTESY: MUJIB100.GOV.BD

constitution based on the ‘Six-points’ in order to shift economic and financial powers from the centre to the provinces. From the other side, Yahya was likely to be viewed differently from the usual Punjabi army officer's mould, since not only was he born and brought up in a Pushto speaking family, his sympathetic role in breaking up the Punjab dominated ‘One Unit’ system had not gone unnoticed.

Yahya, before allowing free election campaigning, had probably assumed that the appeal of ‘Six-points’ being utterly provincial would alienate the vested interest of West Pakistan and make them rely on the army to safeguard their interests. Yet, he devised the ultimate safety catch against AL's ‘Six-points’ by the ‘Legal Framework Order’ (LFO), an ordinance issued in July 1970. By invoking the LFO, the president could reject any constitutional proposal that would not conform to the regime's requirement for a ‘strong centre’; and even the constituent assembly would be dissolved if an acceptable constitutional proposal was not produced within 120 days.

But the accumulated grievance of 23 years against West Pakistan's exploitation and injustice proved more decisive than volumes of intelligence updates as dire threats were expressed through the ordinance. The cyclone and tidal wave of November 12-13, 1970 the most catastrophic in three centuries, hammered the proverbial last nail on the coffin of united Pakistan as the official and public representatives from West Pakistan failed to turn up for the relief and rehabilitation work for the millions struggling to survive the post-disaster situation.

The general election that began on December 7 made the tally of victorious AL candidates 167 out of 313 total national assembly seats.

The election result also became a nightmare for Yahya since he promised to protect the central government's authority over the country's defence expenditure and other administrative and development commitments. Soon after the disastrous election results, Yahya asked his corps commander in East Pakistan Lt General Shahebzada Yakub Khan to prepare plans

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Shoronarthir Dinolipi: The diary of a 1971 refugee

SHISHIR BHATTACHARJA

I have always believed that there exists some kind of political, economic, social, and psychological tension between North India, starting at the Iran frontier, and East India touching the China frontier. North India had always tried to impose its hegemony on East India, whereas the latter always endeavoured to maintain its freedom. The tension would possibly predate the epic *Mahabharata*, where East Indian leaders like Shishupala, Jarasandha, and Paundraka Vasudeva challenged the North Indian leader, Krishna Vasudeva. Among them, Paundraka Vasudeva would allegedly be from Pundra or Pundravardhana, the ancient name of the Bogura district in Bangladesh. The Pakistan movement would be an outburst of that tension, in the sense that the Bangla-speaking Muslims of East India dreamt of a separate Pakistan state. The dream, however, was soon transformed into a nightmare because the western wing of Pakistan enslaved the eastern wing for a long 24 years. Bengalis became independent at last, after a bloody war under the successful leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Today, if we compare political

old days, when the kings used to fight for their interests, the innocent public died in numbers for nothing. Today, when not many kings are left, the scenario has not much changed, however. It is still the grasses and reeds that suffer the most in the conflicts. They see their dear ones die, women raped, property destroyed before their eyes in wars, civil wars, or battles. The list of martyrs, memoirs of great commanders of the war, descriptions of historians are only the tip of the iceberg. Kanailal Chakraborty (hereinafter KLC) is one of many such reeds who suffered during the Liberation War of 1971. A homeopath by profession, KLC is also a connoisseur of *Jatra*, the Indianised form of theatre and Indian astrology. A practicing Brahmin, he is still performing Hindu rituals in the village temple at the age of 80 as he did in 1971 until he had to leave his paternal home all of a sudden in the morning of April 16, 1971, about an hour before it was burned down to ashes. As with most refugees, his physical and mental suffering knew no bounds during the nine months of refugee life in India. He vividly describes how two of his sons died at a few days' interval in a refugee camp in Hojai, Assam, and how he buried them himself with a hoe in his hand. A few days after their death, probably to appease his grief, he decided to put down his experience, in superb handwriting and an excellent *shadhu bhasha*, a formal register of written Bangla now almost extinct but which nevertheless remains the language of the constitution of Bangladesh.

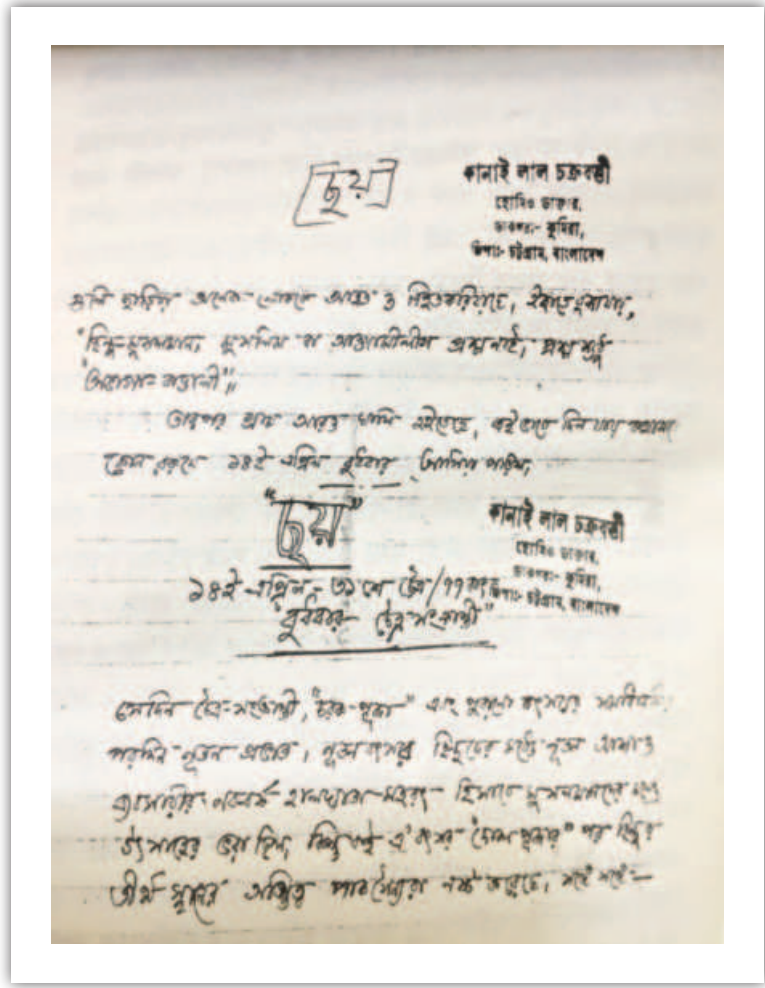
KLC was neither a freedom fighter nor had he interest in any kind of politics. He described himself as an ever-scared, rather panic-driven, and comfort-loving person. He thought Bengali EPRs and Punjabi soldiers would fight each other in front of his house, as was the case in *Ramayana*, between the armies of Rama and Ravana – bows and arrows replaced with guns and bullets, and he along with his friends would enjoy the battle scenes peeping from behind the window of their two-storied paternal mud house. However, when the Kumira battle took place on the eve of the 26th of March, 1971, when he, at last, realised the crude and merciless reality of fighting with machine guns, mortars, and shellfire, he was terrified with the sound and lost his consciousness. As he describes, "All of a sudden, we heard horrifying sounds (onomatopoeia used by KLC) *tra-tra-tra-tra-dum-shon-shon-shon-shon...* So many sounds accompanied by lightning, never in my life have I heard or seen with my eyes. I did not know, what one should do in such a situation. I had heard that during the Second World War, a siren, a danger alarm would blow up and people would run to take shelter in a safe place. No siren was heard. I completely forgot the patients who came to see me for their medicine. I locked myself in my room with my children... I was of a panicky type since childhood. Soon, I started trembling in fear and experienced vertigo. People around washed my head with water to cool me down..." When most Hindus left Kumira for India between the end of March and the beginning of April, KLC decided to stay back, like his father, who also stayed back in the then East Pakistan even though his



Kanailal Chakraborty

paternal home was burned down in the 1950 anti-Hindu riots. KLC said even in early April, "As long as there is one single Muslim left in my village, I will not go to India leaving my paternal house here!" However, when he had to leave, he felt sad among other things for his collection of dramas. When he was running on the Dhaka Trunk Road towards India, some of his Muslim friends accompanied him for a few kilometres. Some even offered him to take refuge in their houses. When the Liberation War was over, some friends sent him money to India so that he could pay his way back. Rajakars made Hindus suffer a lot during 1971, but many Muslims, like good Samaritans, tried their best to help their Hindu brothers. Most human beings usually become extremely selfish when they face a difficult situation, such as refugeehood. This may well be for survival, because no one knows how long the peril would last. During his refugee life, KLC, despite his precarious situation, tried to help his neighbours as best as he could. Refugee authorities in the Hojai camp asked him whether he had any complaints regarding the death of his sons. "You Indians provided us with food and shelter when we Bengalis needed it most, which is already beyond all my expectations. I will never complain against you, even if my own life is at stake!" was his prompt reply. The moment his second son died, the following words came to his mind, "A few minutes ago, it rained a little. Now it's a bit windy and the sky is covered with clouds. It's midnight and I have to give a funeral to my son. You are no more a Brahmin when you are tagged as a refugee. Therefore, my son will not be cremated but buried. Scoundrel Yahya Khan!" Despite all his sufferings, "scoundrel Yahya" was the only curse uttered by this Brahmin during the whole year! "I am not a writer," KLC reminds us in his diary, repeatedly. However, like

Chinese masters who, with a few strokes of the brush depict beautiful scenery, KLC with a few words describes human sufferings, without apparently being afflicted by the grief himself. At Srinagar, one of his friends dreamt his head being washed with hot water. When he woke up, he saw a goat urinating on his forehead. On his way to India, when a box full of food fell from another refugee's shoulder, a hungry KLC picked one of the cakes scattered on the ground and started devouring it at once. When his few-year-old daughter sitting on his shoulder screamed for a bite, KLC realised that he had already swallowed the cake in full. Although KLC's description is already half a century old, his sufferings are still of relevance. Every day, here and there, mostly in Asia and Africa, but also in believed-to-be civilised countries like Ukraine, as we are witnessing for the last few weeks, human clans are obliged to take refuge in a neighbouring country to save their lives. How would a person who was well off in Ukraine a few days back, but is now obliged to beg for food in Poland, feel? KLC describes such feelings, in detail, which are not easy to swallow for those who live rather a happy life. How successful was India in handling 10 million refugees within a few months? It was no doubt an easy task for Indira Gandhi, but as KLC describes, she was quite successful in her endeavour. KLC's *Shoronarthir Dinolipi* or "Diary of a refugee" (distributed by Pankowri Prokashon, Dhaka) also describes our resistance against the Pakistani army in March-April 1971 in the Sitakunda-Mirersara area of Chattogram. This 100-page long diary written in 1971 is, without doubt, an important document of our Liberation War. Shishir Bhattacharja is a Professor at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka.



A leaf from the diary of Kanailal Chakraborty

achievements, Bengalis are more successful than any other nation in South Asia, because even though Bengal had to suffer a separation, Bengalis are the only nation to have a state of their own. No victory, and no change comes without sacrifice. There is a proverb in Bangla that reflects the reality, "*Rajay rajay juddho hoy, ulukhagarar pran jay*" which would mean "Kings fight among themselves, but innocent grasses and reeds have to die (under their feet)". In the

যারে ঘরে উড়ক জাতীয় পতাকা

বিকশিত হোক স্বাধীনতার স্বপ্ন

স্বাধীনতা দিবসে যেখানেই থাকুন QR কোড স্ক্যান করে ডাচুয়ালি উড়ান জাতীয় পতাকা

বিকাশ



“If Pakistan acknowledges what its Army did in 1971, it will do a favour to itself” In conversation with Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy

Bangladesh may be more multicultural and liberal than Pakistan but Islamist forces are a threat to its internal cohesion. In India, Muslims and Christians feel horribly discriminated against. As for Pakistan: the situation for Ahmadis, Hindus, and Christians is dreadful. That's how it is today.

The Daily Star (TDS): How do you look at the events of 1971 and the birth of Bangladesh?

Pervez Hoodbhoy: In retrospect, it was a pretty absurd idea to create a new country in 1947 with its two parts separated by one thousand miles of a hostile country with the sole basis of unity being a shared religion. In retrospect you can ask: how could it have possibly worked out? Jinnah called it an experiment but it became clear very soon that it was an experiment that would soon fail. He said religious faith would ensure its survival. It could not and did not.

But we can't blame Jinnah alone. Let's face it: Pakistan was born in Dhaka, not Karachi or Lahore or Bombay. A commonly forgotten fact is that most Pakistanis at the time were Bengali and most were sold on to the Two-Nation Theory.

As it turned out, language was just as important as religion. Liaquat Ali Khan, an Urdu-speaker, and Jinnah – whose only real language was English – insisted on Urdu as the proper Islamic language that would bind the Wings together. Jinnah's visit to Dhaka in March 1948 was seven months after the birth of the new country. It underscored the low priority of the East Wing in the minds of West Wingers. Jinnah's visit was a disaster because of his insistence on Urdu.

As for 1971: The country had a serious birth defect and should not have expected to live very long – and it indeed did not. Exploitative relations meant that it didn't take long for the Bengali majority to realize that it was actually a minority and that the “real” Pakistan lay towards the West. Yet the manner of death could have been far less cruel than it actually was. The seeds of destruction were thoughtlessly sown by West Pakistani leaders. Economic exploitation, disrespect for Bengali culture, and the army being at the helm made catastrophe inevitable.

I was 21 years old when that happened and was doing my undergraduate degree at MIT. Reflecting the character of Pakistan's elite, all other Pakistani students studying there were from

Karachi or Lahore. I had bitter fights with colleagues who bought into the standard national narrative of this being an Indian conspiracy. To my mind India took advantage of a fundamental weakness but did not create it. Many of my earlier friendships evaporated.

TDS: In terms of the ruling classes and hegemonic ideas in the two wings of Pakistan prior to 1971, was there any meaningful difference between East and West Pakistan? For example, did East Pakistani politics have more popular-democratic content and West Pakistan more feudal-aristocratic hegemony?

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Absolutely! Bengal was different from what is now Pakistan. There was no Muslim landed aristocracy there and Bengali Muslims were conspicuous by their absence in the British Army and even the lower levels of the bureaucracy. In 1947 there was only one Bengali member of the former Indian Civil Service. When Partition happened, Bengali Muslim bore the brunt of Hindu violence – the carnage of Punjab was to come much later. As you can see from videos of that period, the joyous celebrations of 1947 were entirely spontaneous.

But now that Pakistan had arrived, it turned out that this was going to be a country imagined by the Muslim ashrafiyya of north India and run by a largely Punjabi army in colonial fashion. North India's Muslims had a very specific outlook. They subscribed to Sir Syed's loyalty to the British. Their principal fear was that a joint electorate with Hindus would lead to their under-representation. This was not what Bengalis had bargained for!

West Pakistan eventually conceded on language but constitution-making and economic centralization proved irresolvable because they amounted to handing provincial autonomy over to the East, a demand that the West was not willing to entertain. There was a half-way solution: a one-time relaxation of rules could have brought Bengali officers into the provincial bureaucracy and army, leading to a more responsive and representative government. But there was

little interest in pursuing such ideas.

TDS: How do you see the impact of 1971 on the post-1971 history of the subcontinent, particularly Pakistan?

Pervez Hoodbhoy: The election of 7 December 1970 – Pakistan's freest and fairest in its entire history up to and including those of the present times – led to 1971 because the Pakistan Army and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto refused to share power with East Pakistan under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. To this very day, with just a few exceptions, there is no soul searching. Punjab's ruling class remains uninterested in why 1971 happened. Pakistan Army officers were never punished for cowardice, tried for atrocities, or had their pensions taken away. The man on the street in Lahore is also likely satisfied with the story that General Yahya Khan's penchant for Black Label whisky and beautiful women had done Pakistan in.

The blindness of those who refuse to learn from the past is reflected in current narratives, such as that of (former) Senator Javed Jabbar, who has been gifted state resources to produce doctored versions of Pakistan's history on video. Sadly, Pakistan has turned into Punjabistan where narratives from the other three provinces are sharply suppressed. In textbooks written after 1971 the Hindu conspiracy narrative is promoted across the board. By and large there is only cursory mention of East Pakistan's separation. Having examined several, I have yet to see a school textbook published by an official Pakistani school textbook board that explains this momentous historical episode in a manner that would make sense to a student today.

TDS: What's your view on the post-1971 relations between Pakistan and

Bangladesh? How do you see the future of their relations?

Pervez Hoodbhoy: If Pakistan acknowledges what its Army did in 1971, it will do a favour to itself even more than to Bangladesh. The memory that India took 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war is lost; an ordinary student would disinclined to believe that a valiant army could have been thus defeated. Just as the Afghan National Army collapsed in 2021 for lack of local support so too had the West Pakistan army in 1971. Absolutely nowhere can one find the bald truth which is that the responsibility of the East Pakistan tragedy rests squarely upon West Pakistan and its arrogant military rulers who even today refuse to discuss this episode of history.

Pakistan must develop good relations with all its neighbours and with Bangladesh. It must learn that economic development is not possible until it does that. Pakistan's war economy must be converted to one for peace. That realization is still some way away. It has been made harder by anti-secular Hindutva forces in India. India's present trajectory bodes ill for all its neighbours.

TDS: What's the future of secularism in the subcontinent?

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Bangladesh may be more multicultural and liberal than Pakistan but Islamist forces are a threat to its internal cohesion. In India, Muslims and Christians feel horribly discriminated against. As for Pakistan: the situation for Ahmadis, Hindus, and Christians is dreadful. That's how it is today. But look at the world now and how it was in centuries past when everyone lived under some local tyrant who belonged to some local tribe. We live in an age of temporary setbacks. Even in South Asia we have learned to be much more accommodative of differences. So let's keep our faith in the better world to come.

Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy is an Islamabad-based physicist and commentator. His book Pakistan: Origin, Identity, Future is scheduled for publication by Routledge this year.



Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy

Remembering Shaheed Lt Col Syed Abdul Hai

FROM PAGE S2

Around 10:00pm, a convoy of machine-gun-mounted jeeps and an ambulance arrived at our Dhanmondi house. At first, some of the soldiers with rifles surrounded the house. We partly removed the curtains and saw through the windowpane that they opened the main gate, through which an ambulance entered. A coffin was brought out by some armed personnel.

There were sounds of heavy boots on the balcony and loud knocks at the door. Amma asked us to stay behind and opened the door. To her great shock, she saw Naseem standing there with the children. “Where is Hai?” Amma asked her. Naseem stretched out her hand and slightly pointed to the coffin laid on the balcony.

“There should be no protests and any mourning should be strictly kept indoors. The burial should be done within the grounds of the house,” these were the instructions of an officer who brought Hai's body.

Our brave Urdu-speaking driver brought a Moulvi Sahib from the neighbourhood mosque, who recited the holy Quran for the peace of the departed soul. The next morning, the army officer on duty, after much pleading and a reference to the HQ, relented. Domestic aides from our house and one or two other neighbours were sent to prepare the grave close to my father's at the Azimpur graveyard, where he was buried only about two months ago.

Escorted by an army contingent and troops mounted with machine guns, we took the dead body to Azimpur in an ambulance. During the entire ritual, we were kept under the strict surveillance of ever-vigilant armed troops. There were no loud mournings. Just absolute, stunned silence. With muted utterances from the Quran, the body was laid inside the grave, after we saw the last glimpse of Shaheed Syed Abdul Hai.

And that was the moment when we realised – the war of independence had already started.

Enam Ahmed Chaudhury is a former Chairman of the Privatisation Commission.

স্বাধীনতা তুমি

পতাকা-শোভিত স্লোগান-মুখর
খাঝানো মিছিল...

২৬ মার্চ

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মহান
স্বাধীনতা
দিবস

স্বাধীনতার মহান হুপ্তি আতির পিতা বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান ও
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S7

Revisiting 1971 sagas through the lens of a silent witness

When Moinul Hossain Choudhury looked back on the events of 1971 after a considerable period of time, he was frustrated by observing the post-liberation developments. Revolutions often disappoint their participants by their eventual outcomes as facts do not necessarily bear out dreams and expectations.

PRIYAM PRITIM PAUL

Major General Moinul Hossain Choudhury (Retired), Bir Bikram (1943-2010), was one of the twelve majors of the then-East Bengal Regiment who joined the war after a revolt at the first instance of resistance, which was when the Pakistan Army unleashed a spectre of violence against the people of this land. A tiny section of relatively junior officers made up the initial backbone of the regular Bangladesh Army during the resistance movement in 1971. He never wrote a comprehensive book or memoir on the war of liberation, but events from 1971 frequently came up in his writings, particularly in his two books. When looking back at the last 50 years, his testimony is invaluable for deciphering some of the events that took place in 1971. He was candid when he elaborated why he joined the war when he was serving in the Pakistan Army and revolted against the commanding military, which had been decisive. He pinpointed that for the sake of honour, self-respect, and Bengali nationalism, he came to a position for the supreme sacrifice and, thus, he joined the full-fledged war in 1971. When he looked back on the events of 1971 after a considerable period of time, he was frustrated by observing the post-liberation developments. Revolutions often disappoint their participants by their eventual outcomes as facts do not necessarily bear out dreams and expectations. The extent of Moinul Hossain Choudhury's frustration might have become all the greater after, as an independent country, Bangladesh made a name for itself for corruption, lawlessness, and lack of direction. He suggested that the cause of these regressive developments was a lack of 'total faith and commitment' among various professionals who could have played a significant role in 1971. For instance, he estimated that there were around 200

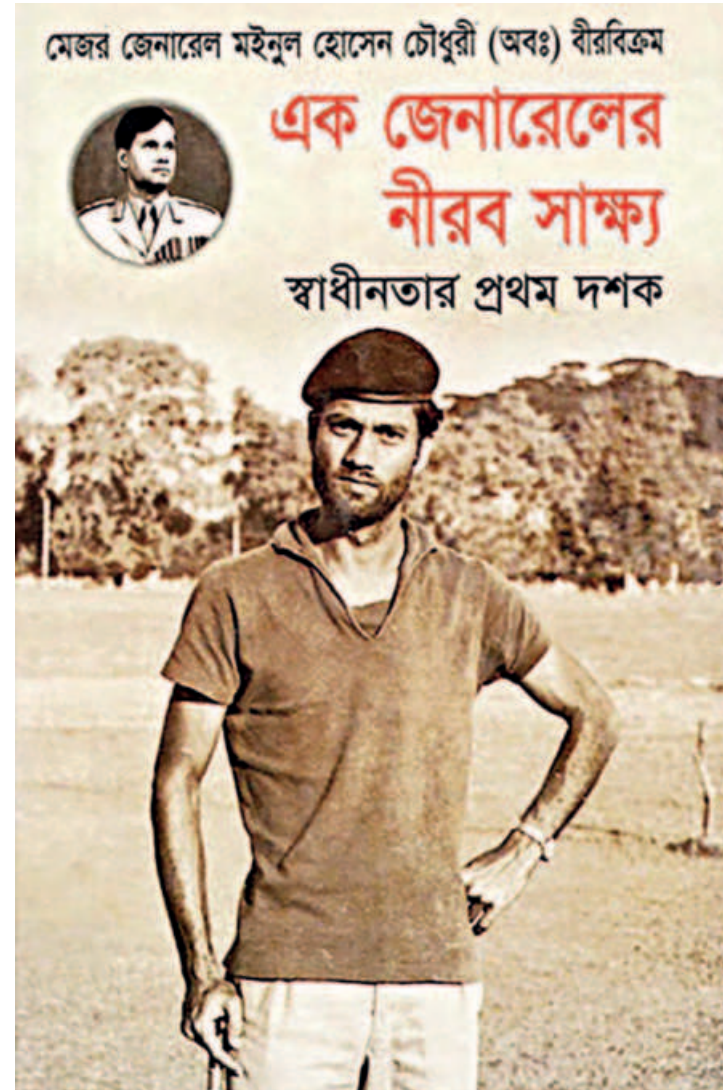
Bengali Army officers at the time of the war, and less than half of them joined the fight.

The picture in the civil administration and the police administration is yet more dismal, since—according to Moinul Hossain Choudhury—their contribution was not up to par either. In his recently published memoir, Akbar Ali Khan, mentioned that only 14 Bengali CSP officers, out of more than 100, joined the Liberation War.

Lack of proper planning and guidance from the political leadership at a critical juncture certainly exacerbated the situation. A lot has been discussed about the planning and preparation of the liberation war. Political leadership that had spent their entire political careers in a constitutionalist system might not have been well predisposed for facing a full-scale war. Unlike the transfer of power in 1947, the independence of Bangladesh had not been possible only by political demand and negotiation.

Moinul Hossain mentioned some incidents that illustrate the importance of critical analysis of macroscopic and microscopic aspects of 1971. He joined the war from the Jaidevpur Cantonment. He dutifully participated in many frontal wars and battles with colossal courage to face great danger, and he served in both the 1st and 2nd East Bengal Regiments. He was present in Dhaka with his 800 soldiers on the 16th of December when the Pakistan Army had surrendered to the India-Bangladesh joint force. Before reaching Dhaka, he was advised by Indian Brigadier Misra to stay at Narsingdi, but instead, he headed towards Dhaka. The history of the Second World War came to his mind when Russian generals and generals of the other Western allies were contesting with each other regarding who would take control of Berlin first.

Contesting decisions on the basis of actual field situations is not uncommon in war history. In the 1971 war, General



▲ Cover of Moinul Hossain Choudhury's book

Jacob's denial of the decision made by Indian Chief of the Army staff General Manekshaw has been regarded as a textbook example of this fact. Manekshaw was undermined by Jacob in the capture of Chittagong and Khulna. Instead, the General Jacob marched to Dhaka by

avoiding the towns in between and using secondary routes to reach the capital city, which ultimately ensured the quick fall of Pakistan in this land. When we retrospectively look at the particular decision of Moinul Hossain Choudhury regarding reaching Dhaka on the 14th of December, we can see that a fraternal but often contesting relationship was prevailing between Bangladeshi and Indian army officers.

As his troops were marching to Dhaka, he observed that the people of Dhaka were leaving. Foreseeing a heavy street fight waiting before the final victory in Dhaka, he felt tense about the massive casualties. Since the moral courage of Pakistani armies was very low as an invader who committed numerous crimes and lost their Air Force in the first stance of December, they did not opt for a street fight. When the fall of Dhaka took place, Moinul was cautiously vigilant with his troops to maintain law and order in the newly independent country—a most challenging effort.

A few civilian freedom fighters informed Moinul that some of the affluent families in Dhaka were inviting the Indian soldiers to family parties. These guys had made the same offering to the Pakistan Army in the occupied period. Referring to the book of Siddiq Salik, an important Pakistani army officer in Dhaka, Moinul pointed out that such events took place in the occupied Dhaka. In the celebrated film Guerrilla, there was also a scene that takes place at a meeting between Pakistani army officers and Bengali civilians. Money invariably speaks in the times of conflicts and human tragedies. 1971 was no exception. Thus, his silent witness would contribute a lot to the perceptions regarding what happened in the liberation war in 1971 and afterwards.

Priyam Pritim Paul is pursuing his PhD at South Asian University, New Delhi.



আয়োজন বা প্রয়োজন দারাজই সলিউশন

রোজার বাজার সহজেই, নিমিষেই

অর্ডার করুন এখনই



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(দারাজ অ্যাপ শেক করেই জিতে নিন
ভাউচার ও আকর্ষণীয় গিফট)

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