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OPERATION SEARCHLIGHT

The massacre at Ctg cantonment

Pakistan army killed hundreds of
soldiers, cadets on Mar 25 night

AHMAD ISTIAK

On March 24, 1971, the day before the Pakistani army unleashed the infamous "Operation Searchlight," its top brass flew to Chattogram Cantonment from Dhaka.

By then, a quiet but growing spirit of rebellion was taking shape among the Bangalee soldiers stationed at the East Bengal Regimental Centre (EBRC), an infantry training facility in the port city.

The delegation included high-ranking figures such as Chief of Army Staff Gen Hamid Khan, Maj Gen Khadim Hussain Raja, Maj Gen Mitha Khan, and Brig Ansari. These officials convened secret meetings, deliberately excluding EBRC Commandant Brig Mahmudur Rahman Majumdar, the senior-most Bangalee officer there at the time, according to Bangladesher Swadhinota Juddho: Dolil Potro (Volume 9).

Earlier, Brig Majumdar had defied direct orders to unload weapons shipped from West Pakistan to Chattogram Port in



PHOTO: COLLECTED

**Tomb of the soldiers martyred in the East Bengal Regimental
Centre massacre at Chattogram cantonment.**

late February, signalling his resistance.

The tension escalated further when the West Pakistan military leaders took Brig Majumdar back to Dhaka, pretending they needed to discuss some urgent matters with him there.

The very next night, the unthinkable tragedy unfolded.

The Pakistan army had picked the EBRC as one of the primary targets for its brutal massacre codenamed "Operation Searchlight".

On the night of March 25, 1971, the Pakistani military killed more than 1,000 Bangalee officers, soldiers, and cadets at the EBRC, writes Maj (ret'd) Rafiq-ul Islam, Bir Uttam, in his book "Lokkho Praner Binimoye".

In the official EBRC records, 550-600 Bangalee officers, soldiers, and cadets are listed as martyrs of that massacre.

Bangladesher Swadhinota Juddho: Dolil Potro (Volume 9), Ameen Ahmed Chowdhury's "1971 Ebong Amar Samorik Jibon", Subid Ali Bhuiyan's "Muktijuddhe Noy Mash" are some of the books that documented this carnage.

According to these books, the EBRC had over 1,500 Bangalee soldiers under training in March 1971.

Besides, the 20th Baloch Regiment, which had arrived from West Pakistan in early January 1971, was stationed there.

Lt Col Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury was the chief instructor at the EBRC.

Soon after the sunset on March 25, Pakistan forces began disarming the Bangalee soldiers.

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**Three children and their mother wave to the father, not in frame, at Kamalapur Railway Station as they leave Dhaka on a train
to celebrate Eid in their village home in Netrakona yesterday. The father, a businessman, plans to join them a day before Eid.
Many families leave for their holidays separately to avoid the late rush.**

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Northerners may hit snags on roads this Eid holiday

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

People have started leaving Dhaka to celebrate Eid with their loved ones and their journeys have mostly been hassle-free.

Transport owners and railway officials suggested that this year's Eid holiday travel will likely be smoother due to the extended holiday period.

However, as the rush of homebound travellers gains momentum, particularly on March 27 and 29, northbound passengers may experience traffic congestion unless proper traffic management measures are ensured.

Ongoing construction work on the Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway, and the expansion of the Dhaka-Rangpur and Dhaka-Sylhet highways may lead to further congestion if adequate police presence is not ensured.

Additionally, any potential road

blockades by groups, particularly garment workers, could worsen the situation during the Eid rush, said transport leaders.

The nine-day public holiday for Eid-ul-Fitr will start from Friday. More than 1 crore people are likely to leave the capital and surrounding areas to celebrate the festival at their homes.

After the opening of the Padma Bridge and the widening of three major bridges on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway, people did not face major traffic congestion in the last few Eids.

But lengthy expansion of the Dhaka-Rangpur highway from Elenka of Tangail and pressure of passengers at Savar, Ashulia and Gazipur industrial belts often cause traffic congestion, resulting in suffering to the home-goers.

The work of the Dhaka-Rangpur highway saw 82 percent progress and the project authority said they managed

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CONSENSUS COMMISSION Parties criticise 'yes-no' format in spreadsheet

Call it insufficient to convey views

MD ABBAS

The BNP and several left-leaning parties have expressed concerns over the spreadsheet format of the recommendations sent by the National Consensus Commission (NCC) to the political parties.

The spreadsheet offered options such as "Yes", "No", "Agree", and "Disagree".

They believe this approach could lead to misunderstandings, arguing that a simple binary choice is insufficient to fully convey their views on the reform proposals that the NCC has collated from various reform commissions.

Most proposals, they said, require thorough explanations, reasoning, and counterarguments, stressing the need for meaningful dialogue on the proposals.

Apart from the BNP, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Biplobi Workers Party, and Socialist Party of Bangladesh have shared similar views on the spreadsheets.

On March 6, the consensus commission sent a letter to the BNP and 37 other parties, seeking their feedback on a spreadsheet containing 166 key reform proposals related to the constitution, electoral system, public administration, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the judiciary. The parties were asked to submit their feedback by March 13. So far, 21 parties, including the BNP, have submitted their responses.

At a press conference at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office on March 22, the party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir

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UN seeks nearly \$1b for Rohingyas

AFP, Geneva

The UN said yesterday it and partners were seeking nearly \$1 billion to provide life-saving aid this year for some 1.5 million Rohingya refugees and their hosts in Bangladesh.

The United Nations said that it and more than 100 partners were launching a 2025-26 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis, amid "dwindling financial resources and competing global crises".

The appeal, it said in a statement, "seeks \$934.5 million in its first year to reach some 1.48 million people including Rohingya refugees and host communities".

Around a million members of the persecuted and mostly Muslim minority live in squalid relief camps in Bangladesh, most of whom arrived after fleeing the 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar.

"In its eighth year, the Rohingya humanitarian crisis remains largely out of the international spotlight, but needs remain urgent," the statement said.

It stressed that "any funding shortfalls in critical areas, including reductions to food assistance, cooking fuel or basic shelter, will have dire consequences for this highly vulnerable population".

It could, it added, "force many to resort to desperate measures, such as embarking on dangerous boat journeys to seek safety".

The UN said that more than half of the refugee population in the camps are women and girls, "who face a higher risk of gender-based violence and exploitation".

And it highlighted that a third of the refugees are aged between 10 and 24.



A DREAM COMES TRUE: The ferry Kapotakkho transports a BRTC bus and passengers from Sitakunda's Banshbaria to Sandwip, the island upazila of Chattogram yesterday. This marks the opening of direct ferry services connecting Sandwip with Chattogram. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Vested groups out to put wedge between army and people Says Tarique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman said some sections are trying to create a confrontation between the army and the people.

"Right now, we can see there is an attempt to make the army controversial. [A group is] trying to bring the army face to face with the people. Just as reform and elections were placed in opposite directions some days ago, a similar attempt is now being made to have a face-off between the army and people. You as a journalist and I as a political activist, we both understand that certain vested quarters are behind this," Tarique said at an iftar event yesterday.

He made these remarks virtually at an iftar event hosted by the BNP Media Cell in honour of journalists at a city hotel.

"If all patriotic citizens remain aware and vigilant, we will surely be able to counter this conspiracy. We must

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