



## **The Pakistanis used to enjoy everyday after unleashing torture on us**

### **Capt (Retd) Syed Suzauddin Ahmed**

*Syed Suzauddin Ahmed, a former director general of the Mass Communication Department, was a commissioned Bengalee officer in Pakistan Army during Liberation War. He was arrested on April 8, 1971 from Satkhira area. Then he had to suffer inhuman torture by the Pakistanis in the name of interrogation. His testimony was recorded on September 25, 1999.*

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I was at Jessore on March 25, 1971. Being a resident of Bihari Colony, I saw the Biharis get panicky amidst the tension prevailing in the town. We assured the Biharis that Bengalees would not attack them. I went to the Awami League office to know the latest situation. At that time I was on two month's leave. I did not return to Pakistan to join although my leave was finished. It was a major offense as per the rule of the armed services, but I wanted to see the result of the negotiation that was going on between Yahiya Khan and Bangabandhu. I thought that everything would be normal within a day or two and I would be able to return to Pakistan. I would have gone to Pakistan if the crack down had occurred 6 or 7 days later.

On the midnight of March 25, I came to know about heavy firing in Dhaka. I tried to make a phone call to one of my distant cousins who lived in Dhaka, but did not get him. That night I could not sleep due to the tension.

On the morning on March 26, curfew was imposed in Jessore town. It was announced that if anybody was found blocking roads, he would be shot at. We saw army vehicles making the announcement. Then, we were preoccupied with the incidents of Dhaka, because only a few days earlier we had seen the people's uprising in Dhaka. We thought that people would come out on to the streets and eventually many of them might be killed, and that was what actually happened. On March 26, one of our neighbours tried to look through window. The army shot him dead.

We were waiting for information about the incidents happening across the country. At that time the radio was the only medium. On March 26, army took position at all important installations including T&T and EPR camp. They lifted curfew for two hours on March 27. Taking this opportunity, I went to the EPR camp and met one of my friends Asmat. I asked him whether they would take any step or not. He said, "We are waiting for the action of Third Bengal and directive from Major Abu Osman who is now at Chuadanga."

The authorities relaxed the curfew the next day. Some people were already killed in the town in scattered incidents. The Pakistanis killed Colonel Habibur Rahman, an army physician. On March 28, a public announcement was made calling for surrender personal arms. My family had a shotgun, which my father told me to deposit. On my to deposit the gun, some youth stopped me on the way and wanted the gun. I told them to snatch the gun from me, but surprisingly they did not do so. Then I deposited the gun at the police station.

I realised that most people wanted to resist the Pak army, but could not be organised due to lack of strong leadership. Everybody was trying to resist individually, not collectively. As a result, we were unable to build

up a strong resistance movement. But who will bell the cat? In the meantime, we heard that the army cracked down in the cantonment area. On March 30, my friend Asmat came from the cantonment. He said, "It is now dangerous for us to wait anymore. They have already disarmed the Bengalee troops in the cantonment. Now they'll also disarm the officers."

Then all the members of EPR and police came down to the streets with their arms. The Pakistani army members who were in the town escaped and took shelter in the cantonment. The rest who could not escape, were killed. Local Awami League leader Salahuddin Ahmed played a courageous role against the Pakistanis.

On April 9, a retired army officer with about 150 people came from Narail to the Jessore district office of EPR. They were gathering in the town to attack the cantonment. At that time, we saw army planes were landing at the Jessore airport carrying troops. We heard that Major Osmani had revolted and was advancing towards the town with his troops. It seemed to me that the Pakistani army might conduct operations at anytime. I told Asmat, "Friend, if you stay here in such a disorganized manner, you will be killed. So leave the town." In the afternoon, we saw people leaving the town in fear. Then I told Asmat, "When you go with the EPR, take me with you also."

The next morning, I went to the EPR camp, but nobody was there. My friend Asmat had also left. The camp was completely empty. Returning home, I told my father, "Let's leave the town at once."

We planned to go to Barisal via Khulna. We hired a truck and took some neighbouring families with us, but could not advance towards Barisal as the road was blocked. Then we decided to go to Satkhira. We reached there safely and took shelter in the house of a friend of my father. He was a government official. Satkhira town was then free from the army. There were some EPR members who were protecting the town.

The sub-divisional officer of Satkhira was non-Bengalee, held captive by the EPR. There was no civil administration in the town, but the law and order situation was fairly normal. In the early hours of April 8, a huge army contingent (possibly it was 26th Beluch Regiment) entered the town and set up camps at PN school. Captain Abbas, a non-Bengalee officer who was my course mate, recognised me. Colonel J. J. Dil was in command of the regiment. A Pakistani officer pointed at me told Abbas, "Woh gaddar hai, usko mardo, zinda nehi chhoro" (He is a traitor. Kill him. Don't leave him alive). Saying this, he also kicked me, but Abbas stopped him saying, "we are taking him alive with us". They also took several other persons along with me. We were kept on the ground floor of a two-storied school building. We heard the groaning of women from the first floor. The Pakistani army had killed their family members. Abbas, who could speak in a little Bangla, told me, "Tell the women not to shout, otherwise it will be worse."

I saw a few dead-bodies on the playground of the school. They were killed by the army when they were entering the town. When I went upstairs, I saw about 150 women, young and old, held captive by the army. I told them not to cry and said, "They will go after a while. Everything will be all right."

I heard an army officer shouting, "Why you have killed muslims. We ordered you to kill only Hindus." Thus, I realised that they wanted to kill all Hindus of the country.

After interrogating me at PN school, Captain Awlad left the camp for Jessore taking me with him. The army personnel had killed all but two persons including me. The troops were surprised to see us alive. They also thought that we were all dead.

On the way to Jessore, we saw houses on both sides of the road burnt and destroyed by the army. They army troops did this on their way to Satkhira. At Jessore, we were kept at the cantonment. No food was given to us that night. The next morning, possibly it was April 16, they brought us to Dhaka by an F-20 plane. Through the window of the aircraft, we saw that all houses and shops of the area were burnt to ashes by the army.

We were taken blind-folded to the army headquarters in the cantonment area. At that time they were saying they they would kill us soon, but we were kept the whole day. Then we thought we would be killed the next morning. An officer opened the door in the morning and I thought I was going to be killed. However, we were not killed for reasons not known. At that time, the Pakistani army personnel were not questioned for killing Bengalees, nor were brought to trial for such killings.

They took us at the godown of the ammunition dump of the air headquarters. There were some small rooms measuring 15 by 10 feet. They used to keep 5 or 6 prisoners in each room. There was no light, no ventilation. They used to torture in various ways us regularly. The methods were slapping, punching, kicking and beating with rods and rifle butts, even using bayonets. A few days later, they took me to an interrogation cell and started beating me before asking any question. An officer, of the rank of major, asked me, "Your leave has already finished. Why you didn't you join? Why did you go to Satkhira? Did you plan to join the Muktibahini? Did you see any Indian army? How many Biharis have you killed?" Sometimes they interrogated me blind-folded, and at other times with my eyes open. They used to beat me up mercilessly whenever I refused to reply. They tortured on my feet and palms. They liked to force me to sit under the open sky blind-folded.

Once they took me to an empty room. They told me to sit on a chair and a major started interrogating me. He wanted to know why I, being an army personnel, went to Satkhira instead of going to the cantonment. I told him that the road was blocked. That is why I went to Satkhira. Captain Bashar was with me. The army men beaten him up mercilessly as his reply to their questions were not considered by them to be satisfactory. I heard that they eventually killed Captain Bashar in that torture cell. I heard his outcry on the day he was killed. Later a sepoy came and told me that Bashar had been killed. Besides, I saw the army personnel beating Captain Huda. He was also killed.

They did not keep us in the same cell for many days. They changed the inmates regularly for security reasons. The whole area was surrounded by barbed-wire. The doors of the cells were kept open during the day time. In the evening, the doors were closed until the next morning. So during the night, we were not allowed to go to toilet. Every morning, they used to take us to the toilet, where we also bathed for the day. They did not permit us to go to toilet during the rest of the day. If anyone so requested, he was beaten up by the troops.

During breakfast time, they used to serve a cup of tea and a piece of bread to each of the prisoners. A bowl of rice and some soup-like substance made of pulses and pumpkin was served during lunch time and only rice and pulses at night. They gave a jerrycan to each of us for drinking water.

The Pakistani troops, whenever they wished, used to enter the cells and started torturing us. They used to treat us like animals. They kicked us indiscriminately on our bodies. After torturing, they used to shout with joy. One day, one of them hit me on the kidney. As I tried to protect my kidney, he became angry and hit me again. I fainted in pain. They continued this type of torture on me for about five months.

They confined about 200 civil prisoners in a hall room there. Once I saw, the army men took a young man outside, forced him to sit under open sky and beat him up. In the afternoon, the young man died. Before dying, the young man jumped several times and then became silent forever. We heard that he had tried to snatch the firearm from the guard in a bid to escape.

After this incident, the troops beat up each and every prisoner with their rifle butts and boots. The sepoy posted to guard our cell informed us that all prisoners were beaten up there. Sometimes we saw the troops carrying dead bodies of prisoners.

One morning General Niazi came to our camp and asked, "Having good time?" It was clear to me what he meant by 'good time'. Many renowned personalities were confined with us like Pistol Mohiuddin of Barisal Awami League, former BNP leader Abul Khair, Major Altaf, Major Abdullah, consultant of Jamuna Bridge ANM Yusuf and S. O. Alam.

When the sepoys came every morning to serve breakfast, they used to beat up the prisoners. They poked us with their rifle butts. Colonel Rabbani died when a sepoy poked his kidney with his rifle. They used to beat us randomly, according to their wishes. One morning when a sepoy was beating up Mr. Alam in the cell, he told the sepoy the amount of money he used to get as salary at that time. The sepoy became dumbfounded and forgot to lower the rifle he had raised to beat Mr. Alam. It was quite unbelievable for the poorly-paid sepoy. I was and surprised. I saw Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury (Now working as diplomat in a foreign mission), captain Aziz, Lt Nasir and others in the torture cell.

In the month of October, we were shifted from the prisoners camp to the VIP cage in the MP Hostel in

Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. I often heard the cries of women at night from the quarters situated behind the MP Hostel.

The MP Hostel was like a heaven for us compared to the prisoners camp where we were kept earlier, because, we were allowed to go to the toilet 24 hours a day.

In the meantime, they submitted a chargesheet against me. In November, they took me to Pakistan. This was done at the directive of the chief of the Multan Regiment, of which I was an officer. An officer named Zia Masud found me out and arranged for my transfer to Pakistan. Before leaving, he told me that he was not used to seeing me in such a condition, "I cannot believe my eyes to see you in such condition," he said.

However, I could not retain my position after returning to Pakistan. They kept me under open arrest in my regiment. We were not allowed to return home even after Independence in December. They took all the Bengalee officers and confined us at Saghai Fort in Khaibar Pass. In all we were about 800 Bengalees. In 1973, we returned home under the extradition agreement.

After returning to Bangladesh, I heard many stories of the cruelty practised by the Pak Army. A relative told me that an army major at Pirojpur named Sazzad Hossain tied a woman named Bhagirathi to his car and drove around the whole town. The woman was said to have supplied information about the Pak army to the freedom fighters. After this cruel punishment, there was nothing left but the skeleton of Bhagirathi. All the people of the town witnessed the barbaric act.

It is a matter of regret that Sazzad Hossain came to Bangladesh a few years ago for business purposes and returned safely. What could be more shameful than this for us?

*Interviewed by Ruhul Motin*



## **My arms, hips and back turned blood-stained as they beat me mercilessly**

**Naser Bukhtear Ahmed**

*Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, now the Deputy Managing Director of Prime Bank Limited, was a Grade-1 Officer of the State Bank of Pakistan in 1971. He was arrested on August 30, 1971 by the Pakistani occupation forces. He fell victim to inhuman and barbaric torture by the Pakistan Army. His statement was recorded on September 9, 1999.*

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We were neighbours of noted music director Altaf Mahmud. It was early August 30, 1971. The time was 5 or 6 a.m and I was still asleep. All on a sudden I heard shouting outside my house. I saw large army contingent coming towards our house. I jumped out of bed, and came to the veranda on the first floor. I noticed that an eight-member group of Pakistani army men, led by one captain, were proceeding towards my house. I saw Samad and Altaf Mahmud along with the troops.

They came near a tubewell in the backyard of my house and started digging the earth. We did not know what they were looking for. My elder brother shouted, “Why are you digging there? There is nothing.” The army jawans pointed their rifles at our house. The captain was hurling abuses. He ordered my brother to come down.

A big trunk was found under the soil. It was full of explosives and arms. Possibly these were kept there to conduct an attack on the Pakistani army troops staying at Rajarbagh police line.

The army personnel took away 11 people, including me, my brother, Altaf Bhai and some others aged between 15-50 from the houses in the area to the cantonment.

As the space in the two vans was not enough to accommodate all of us, an army man kicked out Tonu, brother-in-law of Altaf Bhai from the vehicle. Our names and addresses were recorded in the cantonment. We were kept under detention for hours. Later, we were taken to Nakhhalpara MP Hostel. It was used as a martial-law court at that time.

At first we were ordered to stand up in a line. There were some others who were picked up earlier. All of us were later taken to the kitchen on the first floor. We were beaten up mercilessly after being taken there. The size of the kitchen was 10 feet X 12 feet. They started to call us out one after another, according to a list. As the torture session started, we heard the groaning of victims that made us freeze in fear.

At one stage, I was called in. One of the 5-man army group sitting in the room asked in Urdu — “Where are the arms? Who were with you? Tell me names of Muktijoddhas. Tell us their addresses.” I said, “I know nothing. I do a government job. I don’t know anything.” The army captain got angry. “*Suarka bachcha tum governmentka nokri karta aur rat me Muktibahini ki sath deta* (Son of a bitch, you’re a government employee and you cooperate with the Muktibahini at night).”

I cannot recall the name of the colonel. May be Colonel Rashid. Whatever his name is, I was forced to lie down. Two jawans kept my hands under their boots applying heavy pressure. A jawan kept my head down

also by pressing his boots. Another started beating me severely with heavy sticks. I could not move for a single moment and started groaning following the inhuman torture that continued for 20 to 25 minutes.

I was attired in a trouser and T-shirt. My arms, hips and back had become blood-stained by the mercilessly beating. Bleeding started also from other parts of the body. I could feel drops of blood coming out from my nose and dropping on to the floor. At one stage I fainted. When I regained sense, I found myself lying in the kitchen. The Pakistani army used to continue beating a man even after he lost sense. The torture continued on one person after another. The victims used to fall unconscious due to the inhuman torture. They were again taken to the torture room 3 or 4 hours after regaining sense, and the army person asked them the same questions.

They used to push needles into the fingers, while nails were uprooted by something like an iron-hook. We heard groaning from the kitchen. My brother's fingers were seriously injured following the torture. Uprooting nails was the second phase of torture. The third stage was more serious, just putting burning cigarette butts on the flesh. I still feel the pain at my back, which I received during the torture by the Pakistani forces.

Besides, they used to put off burning cigarette by pressing it on my body. Punching, slapping, kicking and hitting with the butt of the rifles were very common at any time. The method of torture was more ferocious on others than on me. Even, burning cigarettes were pushed into the rectum of some of us. Renowned artist Alvi was also among us. He was picked up from the residence of Altaf Mahmud. When he said he is an artist, the Pakistani army uprooted his nails. I heard him groaning.

The torture unleashed on Altaf Mahmud was very serious, inhuman, and terrible. I saw him being repressed. He was hung keeping his head down and tying his legs with the ceiling fan in the adjoining room. They used to keep his face dipped in boiling water. I saw Altaf Bhai murmuring and taking long breaths. Then he was asked, "*Bol sala, mal kahan rakkha hai? Koun lok tera sath tha?* (Son of a bitch, where are the arms? Who are with you?)".

For the sake of our lives, we used to reply in broken Urdu. But Altaf Bhai was the exception. He gave all replies in Bangla. He said, "*Tomra ja ichchha tai koro. Ami Kichchhu janina*" (Do whatever you want to. I know nothing.) I remembered those horrible memories for a long time — the blood stained body, continuous bleeding from his face. I can feel the pain of Altaf Bhai while describing the situation even after 28 long years. During the first year, I could not sleep well. Sometimes I saw him in my dreams and I used to get up screaming.

The torture had no end. It continued all the day and without any break. One group was coming from the beatings, followed by another group. The Pakistani troops used to throw their leftover food to us and asked us to eat those. If someone refused, he was given extra torture.

We were taken to Ramna police station after being tortured throughout the day. The Bangalee policemen supplied us medicines like pain-killer tablets and ointment. They also supplied bread and tea. However, they requested us not to disclose about the medicines and food.

The next day when we were being beaten up again, the army personnel smelled the ointment, but they did not question the matter. The army men while unleashing torture on us, used to remove this nameplate and cap. We were tortured for four consecutive days. At that time I did not see anyone to die, but several were missing. Among them were Rumi, Jewel, Badi, Baker, Azad, Bashar and some others. Later we came to know that they were killed after being taken to the cantonment. Following the daylong continued torture, I had no strength to stand up.

At about 12 p.m. on the fourth day, we were taken to the cantonment from the MP Hostel. We sat there for half an hour. At that time one captain, may be Captain Hezazi, asked me, "*Ghar ja na mangta* (Do you want to go home)?" I said, "Yes."

The captain said, "Okay. You are free for the next two weeks. You don't need to go to office during the period. You'll have to monitor the activities of others. You'll be brought back if you don't follow the order. Our people will follow you. Go straight home, but don't disclose it to anyone."

Then the captain ordered a jawan, “Get him a rickshaw.” For the first time an army officer used a respectable word to address me - Shaheb. Earlier, they used to abuse me by calling me ‘suyar ka bachcha’, ‘kafer’, ‘munafek’, ‘gaddar’, whatever they liked. A search light was projected on my face so that I could not see anything.

As I reached my home by a rickshaw, I found my elder brother also coming. I told the rickshawpuller, “Wait for a while. I have no money. I’m bringing it.”

The puller burst into tears saying, “Sir, they asked me not to take money from you.” After I came back with money, I did not find the rickshwpuller. As I was not prepared to go to any doctor, my mother and grandmother gave me some quick treatment that healed me a little.

At that time, we provided the freedom fighters with clothes, money and food. We also used to supply information that the freedom fighters needed.

I do not blame Muslim League or others, who were supporting Pakistanis out of political conviction. One may have personal liking or disliking. The most heinous criminals were those who killed millions of innocent people, raped our mothers and sisters, and unleashed atrocities on our towns and villages. They must be tried. The war criminals of 1945 World War are being punished even till today. I know even in 1998, one General was picked up from Argentina and was punished. I don’t know why we could not try the war criminals for the last 28 years. Those who were in power and now are in power must answer for this.

*Interviewed by Ruhul Motin*



## **Before hearing the sound of firing we thought that they would burn us to death**

**Durgadas Mukharjee**

*Pakistani military authorities arrested Durgadas Mukharjee, a former communist leader and a noted journalist of Bogra. He was living an underground life during late sixties. In the month of March, 1971 he came to Dhaka and witnessed the crack down of 25th night. He was arrested the following day. After his arrest, the Pakistanis took him to Shankhari Bazaar; a Hindu majority area, in the old part of Dhaka city where he witnessed the destruction, killing, torture and violation on women. Following is the written statement of Durgadas Mukharjee which was sent on October 12, 1999.*

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The military autocrat of Pakistan, General Yahya Khan postponed the first session of the newly elected National Assembly scheduled to be held in Dhaka on March 1, 1971. The entire Bengalee nation burst into protest when they came to know the announcement. Cities and towns across the country, including the capital Dhaka, turned into the cities of demonstrations and rallies.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the unparalleled leader of the nation, called for non-cooperation movement throughout the country. The Pakistani rule had limited effect on Bangladesh after the historic announcement by Bangabandhu. In a mammoth gathering at Race Course Maidan (ground), Dhaka on March 7, Bangabandhu called on the people to make strongholds in every house and remain prepared always to fight against the Pakistanis. He told the huge gathering: "This movement is for freedom, this movement is for independence".

I was involved with the then East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), which was banned by the government. I remained underground at Barisal. On March 23, the Swadhin Bangla Chhatra Sangram Parisad called for hoisting the proposed National Flag of Bangladesh across the country. Responding to the call, pro-liberation people, even Muslim League leaders and the supporters of Pakistani army at Barisal become busy in this purpose hoisted the new flag atop of their houses.

In view of the situation, some of my friends suggested me to leave Barisal. I decided to go to Dhaka along with my family members, but my grandmother informed me that my wife was pregnant and it would be risky for her to move in such a condition. Following grandmother's suggestion, I started for Dhaka on March 24 by launch leaving behind my wife. I advised her to be carefull at all times. The motorboat was supposed to touch Dhaka by 7 the next morning. But it remained stranded for several hours for dense fog while crossing the Meghna river at night. Finally, touched Dhaka at about 12 noon. One of my friends was supposed to receive me at launch terminal. But he left the terminal at 11 after waiting for several hours.

As I found no one at the terminal I got frustration on my arrival in Dhaka. The number of passengers was very small that day and the terminal was looking unusually calm and quiet. A saw few rickshaws plying on the street.

Under these circumstances, I decided to go to one of my relative's residence at North Brooke Hall Road in the old part of Dhaka city and contact my friends afterwards.

On reaching the house at about 1 p.m, I came to know that my relative had left Dhaka for Bhola two days



ago. I was in a fix. One of the residents of the house informed me that a room was vacant and I could stay there. I felt relief. I opened the room and found a cot, on which I put my bedding and took rest for a moment.

In the evening, I went to meet Syed Jafar, one of my party colleagues. We discussed the latest political situation and tried to figure out what would happen in the days to come. He informed me that the meeting between Yahya, Bhutto and Sheikh Mujib had already turned into a mockery. On the other hand, troops from West Pakistan had started assembling in Dhaka with arms and ammunition. The Seventh Fleet of the USA was seen in the Bay of Bengal. The situation was very grave. No solution could be found in the meetings between Sheikh Mujib, Yahya and Bhutto. While talking to Jafar, I noticed that the streets had become deserted, and hardly any rickshaws could be seen. By this time, I came to know that Yahya Khan had left Dhaka, and the city dwellers were apprehending a major crisis.

Syed Jafar noted down my North Brook Hall Road address and asked me to stay there at night. He assured me of taking to a shelter in the following day. On way to the temporary den I found most of the streets empty, shops had downed their shutters, and only one hotel remained open having insufficient food. I went to the house and slept overnight after taking some food hurriedly.

In the midnight of March 25, all the inmates of the house got scared hearing heavy firing with hue and cry outside. I also woke up. Coming out of the house, I found that the sky had turned reddish with flames of fire. Firing continued everywhere. Though I could not understand what was exactly going on, I assumed that the Pakistani occupation forces had started a massacre of the Bengalees.

All the inmates of the house passed the night in a panicky situation. On March 26, I came to know by a radio announcement that curfew had been imposed in the city. So I could not leave the house for whole the day.

I got more scared as some relatives of the house inmates informed us about the massacre launched by the Pakistani forces. I did not ever believe such inhuman and brutal killings could take place.

I ventured out from the house with the aim of returning to Barisal instead of going to Bogra. As I started towards the Sadarghat Launch Terminal, I found ruins of shops on both sides of the road. These had been torched by the military. Several markets were burnt into ashes. I found scattered marks of blood on the streets. I noticed signs of killing at the Sadarghat that took place in the night of March 25. The entire Sadarghat area was blood-stained.

No boat or launch was available at the pontoon. Some gunboats with cannons pointing to the terminals were anchored. I thought that it would not be prudent to stay there. Suddenly, I found a youth behind a shop listening a radio secretly. I stood beside him and tried to listen to the announcement of Major Zia on behalf of Bangabandhu. The young man concealed his radio and left the place soon, giving me a fearful glimpse.

At that moment, I decided to go to Barisal by any means, carrying food and other essentials. My wife and two children had been staying in Barisal. But I could not find any shop open in the area. I again started for the North Brook Hall Road residence. While crossing Beauty Boarding, I found some boarders and staff of the hotel were being picked up by the Pakistani army people at gunpoint. I saw several non-Bengalees with the Pakistan army. At last I reached the North Brook Hall Road residence and suggested to all the inmates of the house to leave immediately. I also told them that the Pakistan army had started arresting Bengalees.

Unfortunately, one of the aged inhabitants of the residence opposed my proposal. He said crudely, "What will happen to us? Are we the members of Naxal or Joybangla?"

I told him that the Pakistanis had launched the attack on March 25 on the Bengalee army, EPR, police, and political leaders who believed in the independence of Bangladesh. The occupation forces torched even slums where the innocent poor people lived. Then the old man did not object any more. By this time, two of his sons went out saying, "We are going out to see what is going on".

A young and beautiful housewife of that family, being informed about the torture by the Pakistan army, requested her husband to leave their residence immediately. But the husband hesitated in doing so.

While I made an attempt to cross the boundary wall of the house, the newly married housewife drew me back and said, "Please help us, my husband is being beaten up outside." I assumed that there was no way to escape. There was no way for her to flee crossing the wall. I peeped through a hole in the wall and found that the Pakistanis had cordoned the entire house which belonged to a Hindu *Jamindar* (Land Lord).

Within moments, several Pakistani soldiers equipped with deadly weapons entered the house. They

ordered us to keep our hands up. One of the soldiers punched me on chest and said, “You are the man of Joy Bangla, you have bombs, Where are the bombs?”

By this time many other soldiers had entered the house and started looting valuables breaking suitcases and boxes. I had a valuable golden chain of my wife and several thousands taka in the bag that I carried from Barisal. The greedy soldiers became very happy looting these valuables.

The Pakistanis confined five women in a room and chained them while detaining seven other men pointing guns at them. By this time, a new group of soldiers entered the room. Pointing modern and deadly weapons they said, “Don’t talk”. We were then taken outside one after another. They cautioned us not to look anywhere.

The Pakistani soldiers kept us standing in front of a park for a few minutes. Then a big lorry, carrying Pakistani soldiers, came and some of the soldiers ordered us to keep our hands on each other’s back. We were walking, as per their directions, holding hands on each other’s neck in a row. As curfew was relaxed for sometime, people were moving about on the streets. I thought I was going to die. None of my friends, children, relatives, comrades and wife would be able to know of my death.

We were moving forward in a row and were thus taken to the Jagannath College compound. I found some other people were kept tied there. Some of them seemed to be shot dead. We thought that the Pakistan army would kill us also in this way.

Then we entered a hall room after the Pakistanis had counted the number of heads. We were told to remain seated silently. I secretly observed the entire hall room to see the condition of the other detainees. All the prisoners were sitting frightened on a bench. I assumed that all the captives belonged to the minority Hindu community. The guards on duty in the hall room were hurling abuses at us while taking tea.

In the evening, I planned to escape from custody by the excuse of going to the toilet. I asked the soldiers in Urdu to go to the toilet, but the soldiers asked me to discharge excreta in any corner of the hall room. I told them that stench would be spread over the room, and only then two of the soldiers took me to a toilet. However, I found no way to escape.

Some detainees were beaten up by the soldiers when they asked for drinking water. The wide-eyed Bengalees were sitting speechless in custody while the Pakistani soldiers were taking tea, laughing and abusing the Bengalees in a joyful mood.

An old man was dozing. A soldier ordered a youth sitting beside the man to slap him. The young man hesitated. Then the soldier slapped the youth hard and said, “This is the way you must slap the old man”. Eventually, the youth was compelled to slap the old man. The aged man fell down on the floor. Then the soldiers attacked the man old and started indiscriminately punching, slapping and kicking him.

The soldiers refused other detainees to go to the toilet saying that they would not allowed to discharge urine. They continued unleashing torture and hurling abuses.

After sometime, a high official of the army came in and politely informed us that one Major would meet us immediately. We were told that we would be freed if we informed the Major that we were not the men of ‘Joy Bangla’. Suggesting this the officer started searching us for valuables. Some money and several golden rings were with some of the detainees. The officer seized all the valuables and noted down their names saying that the things would be returned later.

It was nothing but an act of cheating. I understood from hearing their conversation. There was no written document regarding the deposition of the things. I had some coins and some essential medicine with me. A pen was in my pocket. The officer took it away. Earlier there were some chits and addresses of my party colleagues with me. I tore the papers and chewed those up as it could be dangerous for me.

After sometime, another soldier came in and asked us if there was any Muslim who could speak in Urdu. Two of the young men responded positively. The soldier took the two out and soon after I heard the sound of gunshots. I realised that the two had been shot dead by the military men. They did not even spare those who had identified themselves as Urdu-speaking Muslims.

After this incident, several soldiers entered the room and asked us to stand up. They also ordered us to come out keeping our hands on each other’s back. We started coming out one after another. We were moving forward in the dark and cold night with armed vigilance around us. We were taken to the lanes of Shankhari Bazar on foot. The small houses of the area were set ablaze. The dead bodies in the houses were burning. I

thought that we would be killed in a similar fashion.

The soldiers ordered us to stand in rows in front of a house near Shankhari Bazar. Some of the soldiers kicked and broke open the doors of the house. They examined something in the room and came out again. Then we were ordered to march forward. Suddenly they again ordered us to halt in front of another house. Several soldiers came out from the house and ordered us to enter the house. Hearing the order, some of the detainees burst into tear. The soldiers hit them with their rifle butts. Some of the detainees, who refused to enter the room, were severely beaten.

I thought that all of us would be torched to death in the house. Some 37 detainees were gathered there in a tiny room. Having failed to secure a place under the cot, I kept lying beside it. Many people were on my back. It was difficult to breathe due to their weight and pressure.

In the meantime, the house became silent as the detainees got in. Suddenly the Pakistani soldiers started brush firing on the detainees. I was almost sandwiched by the pressure of the corpses. The stream of hot blood, still dripping from the deceased, made my body wet. At that time I was thought that I had been hit by the bullets of the Pakistani soldiers. But I was still alive. There I was with blood on my body, though the bullets had not touched me. Before the firing started, I assumed that the soldiers would torch us to death, but my assumption was incorrect.

At the firing stopped I heard various sounds in the house. One of the detainees, who was dying, caught my legs and told something in his distorted voice. I was then lying silent. It was uncertain whether the killers could see me or not. It is really impossible to describe the situation. I suddenly faced a flash of lights. I think the army men had come there to find out whether all the Bengalees were dead or not.

I was still lying motionless on the floor. After sometime I thought that there was no way to escape death as the army personnel started firing again. This time, I received some bullet injuries on my hips and right hand. Blood started coming out. All of a sudden the firing stopped. I was then trying to regain my senses as I felt faint. I would have to remain alive. I examined the wound on my body. My breathing was still normal.

Recalling the ruins of the Shankhari Bazar, where thousands of dead bodies were burning, I thought that the Pakistanis would also blow this house using explosives. I realised the army would leave before the explosion and if there was any opportunity I would have to flee. I was waiting for that moment and trying to keep myself from fainting.

Suddenly, I heard the sound of army boots. It seemed that the Pakistanis had come to torch us. I clearly heard the command (in Urdu), "Lets go". I saw the killers leaving the house. As soon as the army left, I got up from the pile of dead bodies. It is difficult to remember how many bodies I had to remove to clear my way out. I started shivering seeing that another detainee was getting up when I reached the door. I was about to faint when the man caught me by my hands.

The man started running towards Islampur, holding me. By this time, I heard the sound of several explosions. Later, I came to know that the Pakistanis had destroyed the house where we had been detained.

The two of us were running in the dark of the night. It was nearly 12 midnight. We stopped in front of a wall. The man who came with me was the owner or an employee of a battery shop situated in front of the North Brook Hall Road residence, where I had temporarily taken shelter. The man lifted himself on to the top of the wall and asked me to do the same. I was too weak and nearly dead. Unable to lift myself up or cross the wall, the man disappeared after crossing it. My vision become obscure as the man disappeared leaving me alone. I started shivering and thinking that there was no way to escape. The entire area was unknown to me.

Suddenly I heard the voice of a woman, "*Koun Hai?* (Who is there)."

At that moment I thought I would die, but instead a window behind me opened. A non-Bengalee woman was looking at me in the light of a hurricane lamp. Noticing my blood-stained shirt, the woman wanted to know my identity. She was a Bihari. Addressing her as mother I appealed in broken Urdu sought her help. I said, "The military men shot me, and I barely escaped death". The woman was kind enough to respond to my appeal. She took me in. Several women were looking at me suspiciously, after I entered the house. Of them, a comparatively aged woman eagerly wanted to know the incident. On getting my reply, she assured me that I could escape death after such torture, due to my father's blessings.

I felt weaker as the bullet wounds caused continuous bleeding, and I was shivering from severe cold. Anticipating death, I requested the ladies to keep my address. One of the women gave me a piece of paper and

a pencil. After writing several addresses of Barisal, Bogra and Dhaka, I requested them to give information about my death at the addresses.

The women consoled me and said I would survive with the blessing of Almighty Allah. Then they took my bloody clothes and gave me a fresh *lungi* and *panjabi*. I requested them to remove the bullets from my body. They tried to pullout the bullets with cotton bandage and hooks, but failed. There was no male member of the family at that time.

Finally, I fainted when one woman extracted a bullet from my body. I do not know for how long I remained unconscious, but I felt my body and head soaked with water and felt very cold when I regained sense. The women covered my body with mosquito nets and rags since I was shivering. I had to spend the entire night in the non-Bengalee shelter. The women also told me about the lack of security in their lives.

I found some young healthy people in the house in the morning on March 28. Perhaps they were the husbands or relatives of those women. I became panicky as the men were talking to the women about me. Though I was afraid of the non-Bengalee men, a middle-aged man among them, suggested to me to go to hospital and remove the remaining bullets.

As curfew was relaxed, people began moving about on the streets. Several rickshaws were plying in the lanes and by-lanes. The middle-aged man agreed to take me to a hospital. I came out after saluting the women. We got a rickshaw after walking for a while. Noticing the panicky people running here and there on the streets, the rickshawpuller dropped us off after sometime. Later, I learnt that the Pakistani soldiers shot dead several Bengalees in broad daylight on the Nawabpur Road and as a result, the people had panicked.

As I reached Segunbagicha on foot, I disclosed to the non-Bengalee man that I knew a doctor who resided there, and I would be able to get admitted into the Medical College Hospital with his assistance. The non-Bengalee urged me, saying that I could go to their shelter, if I face any problem.

I once again saluted the non-Bengalee man before leaving him on Segunbagicha road. There was a big business house 'Rahman Brothers' at Segunbagicha. The owner of the firm was from Bogra. I found three people there. Everybody became scared on seeing me. One of them was known to me but he could not recognise me. As soon as I told him my name, he gave me three takas and asked me to leave immediately.

First, I shorted looking for Dr. M. A. Karim's house, but it was difficult to find. I moved around and reached near Razarbagh Police Line. Razarbagh area was almost smashed by the Pakistani army. People were hardly moving on the streets. I was in a quandry as to where to go next.

I found some youth on the street and asked them whether they knew the residence of writer Badruddin Umar. Replying negatively, the youth were about to leave, when I told them that I was detained by the Pakistan army. I said, "I have two bullets embedded in my body. My life is near death. It will be difficult to survive if you don't help for me." The youth firstly doubted me seeing me in rags and dirty clothes. They wondered how and when I had come to Dhaka. I told them my story in brief.

Kamrul Hasan, brother of Communist Party leader Manzurul Ahsan, Kazi Akram and Mostafa Whahid Khan of Chhatra Union, were among the youth. They behaved cordially with me and took me to a secure place, but they failed to get any doctor. Then the youth decided to take me to the Medical College Hospital. One of them was trying to get through to Dr. Rafiqul Islam Zinnah of Bogra, who was well known to me. The youth hired two rickshaws and showed one rickshaw puller the way to go to the hospital. The other rickshaw followed the first one.

I reached the Medical College Hospital safely and met Zinnah at the hospital. He consulted some surgeons immediately. In the afternoon, the surgeons removed the bullets lodged in my right hand, but they found no bullet in my hip. The surgeons said that I was out of danger.

For security, I was described as Matiar Rahman in the hospital's registration book, because the Pakistani army had earlier picked up many patients bearing Hindu names. The hospital authorities reportedly took such measures.

Dr. Zinnah had suggested that I should not to stay in own bed, and so I had to go the morgue, whenever the Pakistani soldiers visited the hospital. The Pakistani soldiers used to come to the hospital at night in search of branded Bengalee people, but due to the courageous role of the doctors and other staff who were in favour of the freedom fighters, they could not find us that easily. I had to hide several times in the mortuary when the soldiers came to the hospital. A nurse used to warn me in advance.

The coming and going of the Pakistanis to and from the hospital caused fear among the patients. Dr. Zinnah told me that would I have to go elsewhere and to leave the hospital secretly. On March 30, Dr. Fazlee Rabbi, an eminent heart specialist, drove me to a house in Chameli Bagh area in the city. After a short stay in the house, owned by one Major Enamul Haque, Dr Zinnah and one of his students took me to another house at Goran area.

Later, we reached Kanchan area by boat. Dr. Ashikul Alam of Sattar Jute Mills of Kanchan was one of the organisers of the mass upsurge of 1969. He was a Marxist since his student days. After staying some days under his care, I went to a village in Lauhajang of Munshiganj district.

By this time, my comrades informed me that the Pakistani soldiers were getting prepared for launching fresh attacks on Bogra and Barisal. As my wife and children were staying at Barisal, I had to go to Barisal. My friends arranged a launch to go to Barisal along with a doctor for dressing my wounds regularly.

On reaching Barisal, I found my grandmother at our town residence. My wife and children were at a relative's house in Kashipur, a village adjacent to the town. My grandma burst into tears seeing me as they had thought I was dead. I started for Kashipur on that night.

Then I took my wife, children, grandma and a neighbor to village Kajlakhati in the next morning. Keeping them in this village, I once again went to Dhaka after some days, as my stay here was not safe.

Though I survived hiding in many villages, the *Razakars*, *Al Badrs*, Jammatt and Muslim League activists (collaborators) unleashed torture on the innocent people of the villages where I took shelter. Besides, the extent of torture by the Pakistani occupation forces also increased that time.

My wife returned to Barisal as she could not stay in the village for long. In the meantime, almost all furniture and other valuables were looted from my town residence. In my absence, my wife and the two children were compelled to convert to Islam through affidavit, due to the threat of fundamentalists. My friends sent essentials including, rice, pulses, oil and salt for their survival during my stay in Dhaka and Narayanganj, but the members of *Al Badr* and *Razakars* in Barisal looted all the valuables sent for my family. I was known as Musharraf in Narayanganj and Bikrampur area. There I started working for the liberation war in guise of a bearded Darbesh (Muslim saint).

On December 16, 1971, a new state was born in the history of the world. My wife also gave birth to a girl child in a missionary hospital in Barisal. The missionaries gave her the name 'Mukti' (Freedom).



## **The Pakistanis used to pierce needles into my nails everyday during interrogation**

**Mosharraf Hossain**

*Mosharraf Hossain was a first class contractor in Pabna during the War of Liberation. He was one of the local leaders who organised people to resist the Pakistani occupation forces. During the final stages of the war, he was arrested by the Pakistanis and faced severe torture. While giving his statement on October 18, 1999 in Pabna, Mosharraf recalled his experiences and the torture he faced 28 years back.*

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I was engaged as the Ansar Battalion Commander (Honorary) of Pabna district in 1971. I was also the founder member and assistant secretary of Pabna Rifle Club. In the first week of March we had assumed that the Pakistani authorities would not hand over the charge to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of Awami League, the party which won the national assembly election in 1970. I started providing guerilla training to some 50 youth at the Krishnapur Girls' High School in the district, though which I had to face resistance from different corners.

The then Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Pabna, Nurul Kader Khan, gave all-out support to my effort. On March 23, Anwar Hossain Ghutu, Civil Defense Commander Rahimuddin Peshkar, DC Nurul Kader Khan and I jointly hoisted the National Flag of Bangladesh, instead of the Pakistani flag, at the Pabna Police Parade Ground. We took salute at the parade when the members of the Girls' Guide, Ansar Bahini and Civil Defense presented the guard of honour.

As per the directions of the DC, I took away some 30 thousand bullets of .22 bore rifle and distributed them to the trained Ansar members. I also handed over some 49 rifles, including mine, to the members of the Ansar Bahini.

Local Awami League leaders, DC Nurul Kader Khan and the then Police Super of Pabna went to India as the Pakistani forces occupied the town for the second time. The new DC, SP and SDO (Sub-Divisional Officer) secretly called me and suggested to continue cooperation with the freedom fighters. I collected arms and ammunitions from the police line and sent those to the freedom fighters through one Idris Ali. Apart from these, the SDO sent relief goods and Taka 20 per family to provide the freedom fighters with food, through me.

However, the Pakistanis branded us as suppliers of arms and ammunitions to the freedom fighters in the early stages of the war that started on March 25. We drove out the occupation forces from the town through fierce battle during the early stages.

A fight took place at Nazirpur in Pabna Sadar thana between the freedom fighters and Naxsalities leaving 7 or 8 Naxsalities dead. Tipu Biswas led the Naxsalities in the bloody clash. The Naxsalities blamed me for killing their men. Tipu Biswas's uncle Khondaker Nurul Islam lodged a complaint with Captain Taher of the

Punjab Regiment against me, with 13 allegations. Pakistani forces cordoned my residence and took me away to the WAPDA camp tying my hands and legs, about two months before Victory Day.

I was taken into the custody of Captain Taher and he questioned me in Urdu. The captain said, "Many of my men could have been saved if I had known earlier that you are a ferocious tiger of Pabna". The Pakistani captain during interrogation, raised various topics and poked my hands and mouth with his bayonet to get information from me. I fainted at one stage when the captain unleashed severe torture on me which I still carry on different parts of my body.

I remained unconscious continuously for 24 hours. After regaining sense at noon the next day, I found my *pajama-panjabi* (clothing) had turned blackish with the stain of dried blood. Devilish torture started once again at about 2 in the afternoon. I was tied to a pillar keeping my hands up by a rope. Sitting on an easy chair before me the captain was smoking cigarettes. He ordered his subordinates to beat me up. The soldiers started beating me with sticks wrapped with hard belt, used in the rice mill to move its big wheels. The Pakistanis were enjoying while beating me. On the other hand, I was screaming with severe pain. They became desperate to make me confess the 13-point allegations brought against me. The soldiers repeatedly unleashed torture on me and I fainted after 25 minutes.

On the fourth day, Captain Taher ordered a subedar to get confessional statements from all the inmates confined there, including me, otherwise, to suffer beating again. The detainees were hung from the branch of a mango tree in front of the WAPDA control room and were lashed with stick-belts mercilessly. Everyday, in turn, we were beaten from noon to dusk.

Having failed to get my confessional statement after 12 or 13 days in custody, the Pakistani soldiers took me to an office room. Four of the soldiers pressed me down to the floor and another soldier inserted ice pieces into my rectum. "You are a gentleman, tell us the truth and we will release you (*Tumm Bahut Sharif Admi Hay! Sach bata do, tumco chhor dega*), they said when I started screaming. I fell unconscious again, as I could not bear the terrible pain. I found myself on the floor when I regained sense. After two days, I was taken blindfolded to the concentration chamber. I was laid down undressed on the ice-carpeted floor and a 25-kg ice piece was propped on my chest. At that time, four army men put pressure on my hands and legs pinning them to the floor. In unbearable agony, I fainted once again.

Apart from these, the Pakistani army men used to pierce needles into my nails everyday to acquire information about our activities. I often saw Captain Taher passing orders, while on the easy chair, awarding punishment in different ways to us. He was the main supervisor of the torture sessions. The Pakistan army unleashed torture on every inmate in the custody on the same scale as they did to me. The most common form of torture was beating with sticks wrapped with hard belt. The torture of Pakistani soldiers was so terrible that the victims did not have any strength to stand again. They threw the Bengalees to the floor holding their hands and legs together. The victims, who were tortured severely, could not regain their senses for 5 to 6 hours. I saw the skin of their hips rotting as a result of the beatings. The Pakistanis used to bring 4 to 5 people everyday into their custody while some were taken outside blindfolded by jeep, never came back. When asked about their fate, the Subedar used to jokingly reply that they were sent to the moon.

Every evening, each one of us was waited anxiously wondering whether we would be taken away. Those who were taken blindfolded from custody were shot dead somewhere else.

I was taken to the District Council Hall on the 14th day of my arrest. Captain Taher produced me before Major Aslam Khatak of the Punjab Regiment. The captain lodged complaint to the Major saying that I did not make any confessional statement.

After consultations between them, the Pakistani soldiers threw me blindfolded in a truck holding my hands and legs together. The truck stopped after two-and-a-quarter hours of travel. Then the Pakistanis took me off the truck and two soldiers holding my body from two sides forced me to walk for nearly 100 yards. I felt sand beneath my feet. I assumed that I had been taken to Nagarbari Ghat, on the bank of river Jamuna and to be shot to death. The Pakistanis interrogated me again and again. They lured me saying that if I told them the

truth they would free me or else kill me. They also told me that the 13-point complaint brought against me was false.

“I know nothing about this. False allegations have been brought against me over a business contract dispute,” I replied.

I fell down as the Pakistani soldiers repeatedly hit me with their rifle butts, and they threw me again into the truck. I was about to faint. The army men started pressing me under their boots. The truck moved thereafter and reached the concentration camp after an hour. The soldiers confined me in custody at the WAPDA torture center.

I was sent to jail after staying in that cell for five more days. I was released on bail after 13 days. We were served two pieces of *chapati* and given a bucket full of water a day during our confinement. We had to sleep on the bare floor using slippers as pillows at night.

The Subedar who had arrested me asked again, “What happened between Captain Taher and you? Why did he beat you repeatedly?”

I came to know the name of Major Aslam Khatak from the Subedar later. I am sure that Captain Taher was directly involved in the killing of thousands of unarmed Bengalees at Demra, Satbaria and many other places in Pabna district. The captain was a very ill-tempered officer. He was trained in America specially on torture methods.

I had to bear the inhuman torture unleashed by the Pakistani army as I had joined the freedom struggle. The uncivilized Pakistanis brutally killed my father-in-law Muhammad Ali Khan, his three sons Siraj, Izaz and Nurul and other relatives. Despite all these incidents my name is absent in the list of freedom fighters prepared after my country's independence. Due to political tussle my name was not included in the list.

*Interviewed by Shafiul Alam Raja / Krishna Bhowmik*





## **I had to run for a mile behind a truck with a rope tied around my neck**

**Mohammad Nazrul Islam**

*Mohammad Nazrul Islam is an ordinary peasant of Brahmarajpur village in southern Satkhira district. He fell prey to the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971. He was arrested and tortured only because he was the relative of a local MP of Awami League. He still suffers physical pain following the torture. His testimony was recorded in his village home on October 11, 1999*

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I am Mohammad Nazrul Islam, son of late Mohammad Hossain Sardar, village Brahmarajpur, Sadar thana, Satkhira. In 1971, I was engaged in farming in my village.

My brother-in-law M.A. Abdul Gafur was a local Awami League leader and was elected an M.L.A. in the 1970 general elections. For this reason the Pakistani troops led by Major Naser Khan came to my home to arrest me. They came in a jeep and a truck and gheraoed the house in collaboration with local peace committee secretary Shukurali. They woke me up and asked, "Where is your father? Where are the machine guns and stenguns?"

Later they dragged me out and searched the rooms. The Pakistanis tied me up with rope and took me to their headquarters at Mahmudpur.

After taking me there, they tied my hands up at first and started beating with sticks. Later, they forced me standing in a pond with bricks on my head overnight. Again I was beaten up after being taken away from the pond in the morning.

On the following day my throat was tied up with rope, attached to the back of a truck and dragged me for a mile. They also tied up me with a pole and wounded severely hitting with bayonets indiscriminately. Three days passed under such conditions. I fainted several times following the torture. In fact, I lost all my senses and could not say what the Pakistanis did with me. I could only recall a Pakistani hitting me with his rifle and I lost all of my teeth. I was compelled to lie down on the sand and the soldiers would walk over my body with their heavy boots. On the fourth day, I was taken to Satkhira Police Station and kept there for 27 days. Inhumane torture was unleashed on me at the police station.

The nterrogators repeatedly wanted to know from me the whereabouts of Abdul Gafur. They also asked about arms,. In fact, I did know anything.

About one month later I was released from the police station at the initiative of my other brother-in-law Abdul Latif under Tala Police Station. He contacted the officer-in-charge of the police station and freed me by giving him cash money as bribe. Since then, the razakars and peace committee members (collaborators of Pakistani army) used to visit my house without any notice to find out about my activities. I recovered from the wounds after taking treatment from Dr. Siddiqur Rahman for four months.

I still feel pain in my body during the time of new moon and full moon. I have to take two injections whenever the pain rises. The injections relief me a little bit but I fell weakness in my physical condition. I am still suffering from physical pain over 28 years subsequent to the Pakistani forces tortured me.

*Interviewed by Abul Kalam Azad*



## **I found my father's body on the pile of dead bodies on the street**

**Gazi Kamaluddin**

*Gazi Kamaluddin is the son of a martyr of Chittagong. The Pakistanis killed his father Ali Karim on November 1971 and left the body at Pahartali killing ground in Chittagong. Pahartali was the largest execution field in the district. Kamaluddin's testimony was recorded on October 4, 1999 in Chittagong. He described his father's killing and the massacre launched on the Bengalees at this mass grave.*

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The people of Chittagong city were not spared from the barbaric torture and destruction done by the Pakistanis during the country's War of Liberation began on March 25, 1971. My father Ali Karim was the head clerk of the Railway Department in Chittagong. We, seven brothers and a sister, lived in my father's government housing at Panjabi Lane (now Shaheed Lane) in Pahartali area. Many Biharis also resided there.

I was only 13 years in 1971. Many Biharis joined hands with the Pakistani occupation forces as soon as they started torturing and killing the unarmed Bengalees. As the locality was dominated by the Biharis, the unleashed wide-range torture. Being disturbed by such activities, we left the government housing estate and moved our village home on foot on April 5.

We stayed in village for several days. In the meantime, three of my brothers—Gazi Mezbahuddin, Gazi Shamsuddin and Gazi Salahuddin—left the country for India to join the Liberation War, leaving us in the village home.

The war then intensified across the country. The then Pakistan government had been instructing the Bengalee officials repeatedly to join respective work places. In late September, my father came to Chittagong along with me and my uncle Ali Hossain. We started residing at our 230/B Pahartali house. Mr. Gofran of our village, Mannan and Aslam from the Railway quarter were also staying with us in the house.

We were frightened all the times as there were sounds of firing all around the house. Apart from this, looting by the Biharis and their heinous acts of Biharis kept us anxious. Despite such a volatile situation, my father and the other Bengalee officials were attending their offices regularly. The way to their offices passed through the Bihari occupied areas. As many Bengalees were tortured to death on their way to office, the Bengalees had to find out an alternative road, avoiding the road through the Bihari village.

Like on other days, my father started for his office at day break on November 10. It was the month of holy Ramadan. Usually I locked the door after seeing off my father in the morning. But that day I left the door unlocked. After a while, I heard sounds of heavy firing and outcries of people outside the door. Peeping through the door my uncles and I, saw that the entire quarter had been cordoned by the black-dressed militia and Pakistani soldiers. The Biharis under the soldiers' shelter started looting, and taking away many Bengalees from their houses to hand over to the Pakistanis.

Whenever I recall the torture unleashed by the Pakistanis in those days, my body still shivers in fear. However, my father suddenly came back home and closed the front door. He called us inside and soon departed through the back door asking us to leave the house immediately. I was too frightened to talk to my father. I went to the back door to call him, but he had already been left.

As we got ready to leave the house keeping it under lock and key as per my father's advice, a few Bihari men along with the soldiers stormed into the house. I hid myself beside a drum under the cot. The soldiers talked to my uncles and asked them to go with them. The soldiers said that they would be allowed to return home after identifying the dead bodies lying on the road. They were also told that General Niazi himself had come and that high Railway officials were there. I came out from under the cot soon after the Pakistanis took my uncles with them. I was wondering what to do.

Suddenly, some 2/3 Biharis and soldiers entered the house breaking the door and asked me in Urdu, "Where have you come from?"

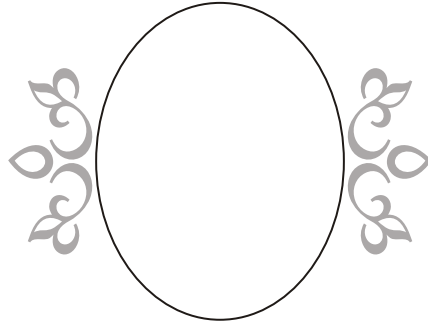
I told them that I was hiding in the house. But the Pakistanis took me away to the northern part of the colony. I found my uncles tied back and lined up on the opposite side of the Eye Hospital. Two soldiers were guarding them from two sides. The Biharis were bringing away many Bengalees from different houses and handing them over to the Pakistanis for killing. My uncle gestured to me to flee and I tried to flee. One of the soldiers followed me from behind and shouted, "Arrest him". I took shelter in a toilet tank behind the house. All their attempts were in vain. They returned after failing to catch me. After waiting for several hours I took shelter in my maternal uncle, Mohiuddin's residence. After a shower, I came out from that house in search of my father. By this time, many had come out to search their missing relatives who were picked up by the Pakistanis. After sometime, the black-dressed militia forces appeared again and cordoned the entire area.

Having failed to get any information about papa, I went to the house of Mr. Nadiruzzaman, a colleague of my father. Nadiruzzaman and my father left office at about 11.30 a.m. as they came to know about the volatile situation in Punjabi Lane area. Mr. Nadiruzzaman said that my father might have been arrested by the Pakistani soldiers. He saw my father talking to two Biharis on the way. I came back and my uncle took me to his Patharghata residence at night.

Next day I returned to the Punjabi Lane quarters and found many dead bodies in an open space, where the Chittagong Television Centre is located now. I was looking for the dead bodies of my father on the road and roadsides. Finally, I found it among a pile of bodies. At that moment the black-dressed militia and members of Beluch Regiment cordoned the entire area and fired gunshots to disperse the people who had gathered there in search of their relatives' dead bodies. I saw from a hilltop that the militia and the Beluch Regiment members buried all the bodies together in a big ditch.

Presently the mass grave is totally unprotected. We demand its proper maintenance, because this execution ground is a historic place carrying evidence of the destruction and killings launched by the Pakistanis in 1971.

*Interviewed by Prithwijeet Sen Rishi*



## **One Punjabi hound jumped on my body and raped me repeatedly**

**Rabeya Khatun**

*Sweeper of Rajarbag Police Line, Rabeya Khatun witnessed the massacre and repression on women by the Pakistan Army at the police line after March 25, 1971. The statement of Rabeya Khatun is a blatant evidence of the barbarism of the occupation forces. This statement has been obtained from the Bangladesher Swadhinata Juddho O Dalilpatra (Part-8). She gave the statement on February 18, 1974.*

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When the Punjabi forces attacked Rajarbag Police Line on the night of March 25, 1971, I was at the S.F. canteen of the police line. I had swept the barracks whole the day but did not leave the place in fear of a possible attack. When I heard the sound of heavy firing from mortars and tanks, I was shivering. In the morning, the Bangalee police tried their best to resist the attackers, but ultimately they failed. The Pakistani army set fire to S.F. barrack and unleashed an attack on the Bangalee policemen. They charged with batons and kicked and beat them up mercilessly. At gun point, they took me out of the barrack and kicked me again and again. I fell down on the ground. They physically abused me in public and burst into laughter. It was intolerable for me. I thought that they were going to kill me. To save my life, I started crying and requested them not to kill me. I said “I am a sweeper. If you kill me, then who will clean your toilets and drains? For God’s sake, don’t kill me. If I die, you will not be able to live here. The police line will become a dirty place with the dead bodies and human blood. Nobody is here to clean the place.”

However, they did not pay attention to my request. Punjabi soldiers raped me one by one. When they noticed that I was going to die, one soldier said, “Thik hai, tomko chhor dia jayega zara bad. Tom bahar nehi niklega. Harwaqt line par hazir rahega (OK, we’ll not kill you. You will be freed now. But you can’t go outside. You’ll have to be present here all the time.) Then the soldiers released me.

On the orders of the Pakistan army I had to stay in the police line. The Punjabi soldiers used to bring Bangalee women, mostly young and under-aged, to the police line from various parts of the city including posh areas, universities, schools and colleges. The Bangalee razakars and dalals (collaborators) helped them. While cleaning drains at the police line, I saw the soldiers brought a large number of young women in jeeps and trucks. Then they were confined at the SF canteen of the barrack. Some women were taken upstairs of the headquarters building and the rest were forced to line up standing on the verandah. Most school and college girls had books in their hands, some of them wore ornaments. Almost all were crying in fear. Then I witnessed the soldiers raping and torturing the girls. The Punjabi soldiers entered the barrack licking their tongues like hounds and jumping over the bodies of the Bangalee women. They tore the clothes of the hapless girls to make them fully undressed and raped them repeatedly. Some of them were performing the heinous act standing on their feet. Some burst into roaring laughter while doing the same.

I observed the mass rape on the pretext of cleaning the drains of the police line. The victims could not save themselves from the atrocities of the Punjabis. They could not even resist or protest. The soldiers did not stop only after raping the women. They were bit on their cheeks and breasts making the bodies blood-stained, scratching flesh from the bodies of young girls. The breasts, cheek, back, waist and other parts of their bodies were almost torn to pieces by the rapists. Some women refused to become their victims. The Punjabis gave

them tougher punishment. They applied third degree method to punish them. I saw the soldiers pulling out their hair and scratching their breasts. The rapists mutilated many girls' bodies by penetrating it with sharp knives, bayonets and gun-barrels were pushed into their rectums. Some furious soldiers, after raping under-aged girls, tore their bodies into pieces. I witnessed all these while cleaning drains there.

Most of the soldiers were drunken, and behaved like animals. Not only the soldiers, the Punjabi officers also took part in the heinous activities. I saw many high-ranking officers raping the Bangalee women and shouting with beastly exaltation. They were always engaged in raping and torturing the ill-fated undressed women. They did not allow any of the victims to take rest. Many young girls died due to the inhuman torture. They used to cut the dead bodies into pieces and put them into sacks before taking them outside. Seeing their fate, the others became panicky. To save their lives, they were compelled to surrender themselves, but even after becoming instruments of entertainment of the Punjabis, these women were not spared. Sometimes the Punjabis used to rape a girl collectively, cut her breasts, flesh from her hips and push a sharp knife into her rectum. They used to celebrate and burst into laughter when the victims were groaning.

After raping them, the soldiers used to take the victims to all the floors of the headquarters building. I saw the soldiers kicking the women before confining them in the rooms of the barrack. They locked the rooms so that the victims could not escape. Some women were kept hanging with wire from the verandah of the police headquarters. Everyday the Punjabi soldiers used to baton charge the hanging bodies. Some of them used to stab them and cut their breasts, some push their sticks into their vagina. Some brutal soldiers liked to celebrate by cutting flesh from their hips, some liked to bite their breasts scratching flesh from the bodies. Sometimes the victims used to cry in severe pain. The soldiers used to push iron rods into their vagina and kill them brutally. The hands of each and every woman were tied behind their backs. They were the victims of regular torture. Parts of their bodies became mutilated. Some lost their teeth, some received severe wounds on their lips, fingers of some women were fractured due to regular torture by the soldiers with sticks and iron rods.

The soldiers did not allow the women to go to toilet freely. Their hands were always kept tied behind their backs. Those who were kept hanging on the first floor of the headquarter, were compelled to respond to natural calls there. I had to clean their excreta everyday. I saw some of the hanging girls dying of inhuman torture. I saw many Punjabi soldiers removing the dead bodies. I had to stay there almost 24 hours a day. The soldiers used to remove the mutilated deadbodies from the barrack and bring new girls from different parts of the city. Some armed soldiers were deployed to guard the women so that they could not escape. No Bangalees were allowed to enter into the barrack. Only I was allowed as the sweeper.

I witnessed these devilish acts of the Punjabi soldiers at Rajarbag, but despite having every intention of saving them I could not play my due role in this regard. I could not help the poor Bangalee women who became victims of rape and torture. In the month of April I was able to free a girl named Ranu (a resident of Siddheshwari). She was a college student. I dressed her as a sweeper and helped her escape from the police line. Until the victory in December 1971, the Pakistan army unleashed such brutal torture on the Bangalee women. I am an eye-witness of the incidents. When the allied forces started bombing Dhaka city in the first week of December, the Punjabi soldiers killed many women confined at Rajarbag Police Line with bayonets. The entire building of the police headquarters was stained with the blood of the victims. All the Punjabi soldiers surrendered when the allied forces entered the city of Dhaka just before the country's victory over the Pakistan Army.

L.T.I.

Rabeya Khatun

18.2.74

## **Description and photographs of some killing fields**



## Mass Grave of 1971 Found Even 28 Years After Liberation War

*Twenty-eight years after the Liberation War, another mass grave of 1971 has been found in Dhaka's Mirpur. It was totally unknown to the nation. The lately detected mass grave revealed a new dimension of mass killings of 1971. As journalist Julfikar Ali Manik had an intensive investigation over the Muslim Bazar mass grave, he also unveiled the mystery behind the killing of celebrated film-maker Zahir Raihan who was "missing" since January 30, 1972. Occupation Pakistani forces and their local allies were involved in the killing in independent Bangladesh. Discovery of Muslim Bazar mass grave inspired journalists to find out many undiscovered slaughterhouses of 1971 across the country.*

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The capital city Dhaka's Mirpur area was freed from the enemies on January 31, 1972. It was among the places of independent Bangladesh, which were freed from the enemies after the occupation Pakistani forces surrendered on December 16, 1971. Mirpur was also the last one to be freed one-and-half months after the Liberation War. Every year January 31 is observed as Mirpur Free Day.

Another bloody war was fought to free the area from the enemies, although Bangladesh had won the war before it. The history remained unearthed for the last 28 years. The unknown history started to come out in public after the Muslim Bazar mass grave was discovered at block D of Mirpur section 12 on July 27, 1999. It reflects the barbarity that was perpetuated by Pakistanis and Biharis one-and-half months after the Liberation War ended, after the heroic war for nine months.

Digging a mass grave to find the proof of history after unearthing it three decades after the Liberation War was the first such bid in Bangladesh. The discovery and digging created a sensation among the people. Not only newspapers, but also ordinary people tried to find out about this unknown portion of history. Relatives of martyrs thronged the mass grave as newspapers carried news items of the discovery of human remains and other evidence.

The bid to find out the truth of history, by digging beneath the earth began all of a sudden. It was the month of July 1999. Construction work to expand the Noori Mosque at Mirpur section 12 was going on. The mosque committee members on July 27 found an abandoned well under the ground as the construction workers were trying to set up a pillar there. The opening of the well was covered with a concrete slab. As soon as the workers broke a part of the slab, they found three skulls and some human bones. The next day another skull and some more bones were found. A local organisation "Ekatturer Smriti Parishad" (Memorial Council of 1971) collected the skulls and bones and deposited those with the Muktiuddho Jadughar (Liberation War Museum).

It was Dainik Prothom Alo that first published a news item on discovery of human remains while constructing the new building of Noori Mosque. Other national dailies also started to publish news of the discovery with due importance. The land adjacent to the mosque was identified and declared a mass grave.

The Liberation War Museum decided to dig under the soil. Its target was recovery of human remains and other proof under the ground and thereby identification of the martyrs as well as unearthing the untold history. The Museum authorities officially started digging the abandoned well adjacent to the Noori Mosque on July 31. The digging continued till September 7. In the meantime, the Museum requested of the government to provide help of the Bangladesh Army. The government appointed the Bangladesh Army on August 12 to help in digging the well to recover human remains of the martyrs and other historic documents.

The Liberation War Museum at a press conference on August 8 declared that the human remains at the well were of Bengalee freedom fighters and innocent people—they were killed by bullets and sharp weapons during the Liberation War. They reached this decision after examining the formation of the skulls, their size and the clothes, shoes and other usable items found along with the human remains.

As experts confirmed to the Museum authorities that the human remains were of Liberation War martyrs and other things belonged to them, the well and the areas around it was formally declared as a mass grave of

1971. It was named Muslim Bazar Mass Grave due to its proximity to the market called Muslim Bazar.

Every day more and more human remains were found when the digging took place from July 31 to September 7. Ministers, members of parliament, the mayor of Dhaka and deputy commissioner, various pro-liberation political parties and organisations, leaders of Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, celebrated intellectuals and children of martyrs visited the newly found mass grave. Besides, people from far-flung areas also thronged the mass grave to have a glimpse of the human remains and other things found. The Liberation War Museum arranged an exhibition of photographs of the human remains and the digging operation. A comment book was opened. From renowned personalities to ordinary people, all wrote in the comment book, demanding the trial of the killers of the martyrs. They expressed their hate for the killings.

Close relatives of martyrs thronged the mass grave to find out whether their father, mother, brother, sister, husband or wife was killed at that spot, and many elderly local people recalled as to how innocent people or freedom fighters were killed by Pakistani occupation forces and their local agents and Biharis as well.

So far, the personal identity of any of the martyrs whose remains were found at Muslim Bazar mass grave is not known. It may be an impossible task, but the discovery, 28 years after the Liberation War gave a new pulse to history. While elderly people recalled their memory, the younger generation showed a fresh interest to know the bloody history of their independence.

The newspaper, Daily Bhorer Kagoj carried a series for several months to dig the untold history of the area stained by blood of the martyrs. It had a number of investigative reports to bring the undiscovered tales to the public. As a result, many witnesses of unearthed historic incidents were found. Their statements revealed many untold chapters of our history.

There were two unions (local area) — Mirpur and Harirampur — under the post-liberation Mirpur. Bhorer Kagoj found out the post-liberation first Chairman of Mirpur Union Parishad. By interviewing the Chairman, Fakir Shafiruddin, Bhorer Kagoj unearthed much hitherto unknown information. Shafiruddin disclosed that there were seven more mass graves in Mirpur. He had seen thousands of bodies in the slaughterhouses.

Elaborating the “Ambagan Mass Grave” at Bangla College, he said: “Immediately after the liberation, we found the signs that Bengalees were slaughtered there.” Shafiruddin said that they found signs of hits by sharp weapons at the root of old mango trees. They saw skulls on the low-lying area beside the trees and human body parts on the highland on the other side. It gave them an idea that the Bengalees were slaughtered keeping them at the root of the mango trees. The heads fell on the low-lying area while the rest of the body remained on the high land.

Mirpur was occupied by the Biharis during the Liberation War. They helped the Pakistani soldiers directly or indirectly in killing the Bengalees in the area. Important information about these collaborators came out from the testimony of Fakir Shafiruddin. He informed that one Akter Gunda was leading the mass killing in Mirpur. The post-liberation government in 1972 had formed a ‘Collaborators’ Court’ in Mirpur Union Parishad as elsewhere in the country, for the trial of the accomplices of the Pakistani killers. Chairman Fakir Shafiruddin was the chief of the three-member jury board. Akter Gunda was arrested soon after Mirpur was freed, and sent to the jail, he said. The union level court sentenced him to death as punishment for killing the Bengalees and unleashing torture on them during the war. The higher courts also upheld the verdict given by the union court. After the assassination of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, the then government scrapped the Collaborators Act and Akter Gunda went over to Pakistan after being freed from jail.

Apart from giving the account of seven mass graves in Mirpur, Fakir Shafiruddin, in his interview, said that they had seen many skulls and bones scattered on the streets while walking along the roads. Most of the ditches in the then villages in Mirpur were filled with the corpses of Bengalees. Many skeletons would be found in the ditches even today if these are dug. Recalling his post-independence days, 28 years after the Liberation War, Shafiruddin said, “In fact the entire Mirpur was a mass grave.” But, the bodies went deeper into the ground as massive infrastructural development took place in Mirpur after Independence. Fakir Shafiruddin said they had marked seven killing grounds in Mirpur after the Liberation War. These are: Shialbari, the slaughterhouse at Section 10, Kalapani at Section 12, Aalokdee, Aambagan at Bangla College, Shareng Bari at Section 1 and Shernirtech near the zoo. Of those, the Shialbari is the largest mass grave where he witnessed thousands of corpse and skulls soon after the war. The bones were not more than six inches in



length. The Pakistanis chopped the Bengalee corpses into pieces like butchers. He also saw a huge swerage reservoir full of corpses at the slaughterhouse in Section 1. The bodies of Bengalees were dumped there after killing them brutally.

Shahiduddin Ahmed, Sub-Divisional Engineer of Mirpur Housing Estate of post-liberation Bangladesh, gave an account of another mass grave near the Mirpur Zoo. Ahmed was engaged in various development projects taken up by the government in Mirpur for a long period. During his work in the area he found a mass grave at Raainkhola near the zoo. The Daily Bhorer Kagoj disclosed information about the mass grave, given the testimony of a government official, whom the daily located after a hectic investigation. Shahiduddin also elaborated about the mass graves at Shialbari and Slaughterhouse in Mirpur Section 1, which were earlier disclosed by Fakir Shafiruddin.

As the discovery of Muslim Bazar and other mass graves at Mirpur were made public through newspapers, the dailies also unearthed some other slaughterhouses across the country. The newspapers published the discovery of the mass graves in Laksham and Bogra. It has been learnt that nearly 10,000 Bengalees were killed in the mass grave of Laksham. The dailies and weeklies also published series of news item on how brutally the Pakistanis and their local agents — Razakars and Al badrs — unleashed torture on the Bengalees and killed them.

The mass graves of 71' became a much talked about issue all across the country in mid-99. From the government side much effort and arrangements were made. The 'National Committee for Demarcation of the Mass Graves' decided to set up six mausoleums in six divisional headquarters. Apart from this, the government has also announced its intention to set up two other memorials in newly discovered mass graves at Muslim Bazaar and Rajshahi University.

While investigating the mass graves at Mirpur, the Bhorer Kagoj also disclosed that renowned filmmaker Zahir Raihan was killed in the area on January 30, 1972. On that day, Pakistani soldiers who had gone underground after the liberation war and took shelter at Mirpur's Bihari occupied area, launched an ambush attack with the help of Biharis and killed many Bengalee police and army personnel. The attack was launched when police and army teams went to the area to recover illegal arms and ammunitions. They fought a fierce battle with the Biharis and the Pakistani soldiers to free Mirpur and recover illegal arms.

After this bloody war Mirpur became free on January 31, 1972, but the history of the Mirpur war was still unknown before the discovery of the Muslim Bazaar mass grave. Filmmaker, writer and journalist Zahir Raihan was the only civilian who participated in the Mirpur Operation along with the army and police on January 30, 1972 and since then he remained missing.

January 30 has been observed as the Zahir Raihan Missing Day for the last 28 years. After the Muslim Bazaar mass grave was discovered, Onol Raihan, a son of Zahir Raihan, conducted an investigation to discover the history of Mirpur war after which his father remained missing. On completion of the investigation he presented a cover story in the Bengali magazine, Weekly 2000. The title was 'In Search of Father's Bones'. Onol Raihan took testimonies of some of the indirect witnesses of the Mirpur War. Though he did not get any direct witness who saw his father die, he was sure that Zahir Raihan was shot dead by the Biharis during the war between the Bangladeshi soldiers and the armed Bihari people. The mystery of Zahir Raihan's disappearance came to an end through an interview of a witness, who had seen the dead body of Zahir Raihan. Bhorer Kagoj interviewed the former Bangladeshi soldier and published a long report confirming the death of Raihan. The interview also disclosed many untold stories of the Mirpur war after the liberation.

Returning to Dhaka after the liberation war ended, Zahir Raihan had started an investigation to collect evidence against war criminals in 1971. He was the chairman of the Enquiry Commission to Probe the Killings of Intellectuals and gathered much of the evidence on the genocide within a short span of time. Due to his prompt and efficient performance, Zahir Raihan had become the target of the killers. The killers took the opportunity of the Mirpur war. During a planned ambush, the Biharis, Pakistani soldiers in plainclothes and Razakars killed many Bangladeshi soldiers, policemen and Zahir Raihan, by firing bullets and chopping the injured.

The cruel clues of history came to light with the discovery of the Muslim Bazaar mass grave. Indeed, it is painful to unearth such history, but it is also a must for the sake of the history itself. The new generation wants to know the truth.

## **Killing Fields in Rajshahi**

### **Ten thousand skeletons were found in one hundred mass graves**

*Dr. Sukumar Biswas is one of the researchers of Swadhinata Juddher Dalilpatra, a book on the documentation of the liberation war history. He traveled all over the country and gathered information about the killing fields during his period of service at the Bangla Academy from 1972 to '74. Several stories, based on data and statistics gathered from interviewing witnesses and victims, have already been published in some newspapers and also in the Swadhinata Juddher Dalilpatra. The following description on the killing fields of Rajshahi is a compilation of those reports.*

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The village Pakuria is situated 30 kilometers north of Rajshahi Sadar, now under Manda police station in Naogaon district. This village experienced mass killings in 1971 during the war of Bangladesh's liberation. The Pakistanis turned the Pakuria High School ground into a killing field. The ground was full of dead bodies and smeared with the blood of more than a hundred peace-loving innocent Bengalees.

In the early hours of 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1971, Pakistani army troops and their local collaborators entered the village. They announced that a meeting of the 'Peace Committee', an organisation formed by the collaborators to repress the Bengalee people, would be held at the High School ground. They also ordered all villagers to attend the meeting.

The villagers were hardly prepared for such an announcement, but there was no way to escape. By kicking, slapping and punching, the Pakistanis forced some 128 people to go to the school ground. They were told to sit in the centre of the field. Suddenly, Pakistani machine guns roared on the innocent people. All were finished after screaming and groaning for sometime. Thus the Pakistanis killed the villagers under the plea of a meeting of the Peace Committee.

Naogaon was then a sub-division of greater Rajshahi Division. The small town is full of mass graves and killing fields. A correspondent of Purbadesh, a vernacular daily, reported in 1971: 'While entering the town you will find an old but beautiful bridge on the river Jamuna that flows through the town and a cinema hall named 'Taj', which was destroyed. Numerous dead bodies would be found piled up south of the cinema hall. There is a well which was also filled up with many decomposed dead bodies. Such a vivid instance of genocide cannot be found even at the village of Mai Lai in South Vietnam. There are two big tin-shed houses near the place. Uncountable ropes are hanging from the roof in the houses. You will find some shoes and clothes left here and there on the floor.

A small mosque would be seen on the left side after crossing the Veterinary Hospital near Taj cinema hall. Beside the mosque, there is a building where Idris Ali, a Bihari businessman, lived earlier. He used to arrange a three-day religious gathering at the house every year in the name of Khawja Baba, a Muslim saint, but everyone would be frightened after entering the house, because it was a slaughterhouse. One could see the signs of brutal killings in the house, innumerable ropes hanging in one of the rooms and blood marks in another room. You would think that the Bihari businessman painted his doors and windows with the blood of the Bengalee people after slaughtering them. There is a well in the house where many Bengalees were buried. None can imagine such a horrible scene without seeing it with ones own eyes.'

In the book titled *Muktijuddher Anchalik Itihas* (Regional History of Liberation War), edited by Abu Mohammad Delwar Hossain, there is a vivid description of Naogaon's mass grave. It says : Local people discovered this killing field on December 18, 1971. They found no male corpse there. Uncountable dead bodies of women and children aged from 4 to 35 years were found in the killing field, the ground of Par Naogaon Primary School. The Pakistanis and their collaborators used to bring young women to a house in the

area and rape them repeatedly for several days. Then they used to slaughter them before dumping them in a big well.

A similar well was discovered on the western side of the Naogaon branch of Janata Bank. Apart from these, several other killing fields were discovered in Par Naogaon. Many corpses were found in the garden of one Rouf Miah, on the eastern side of Mardula Girls' High School, and in a wasteland located near one Dr. Hasan Ali's residence. These were the killing fields of Naogaon. However, presently new houses and other structures have been built up on the fields.

At village Dogachi in Naogaon district, there is another killing ground where many Bengalees were brought from Pirojpur, Khidirpur, Chandipur, Raninagar, Balirghat, Shimulia, Ilishbari and Sultanpur. These people were killed brutally afterwards. Another killing field was found at Balihar Union in Naogaon.

Many other mass graves were also found in Chapainawabganj district. The mass graves were found at Rehaichar, Sona Masjid in Shibganj thana, the then Nawabganj EPR camp, Shamasan Ghat, Kashampur, on the bank of the river Punarbhava, behind Rohanpur high school, Boalia village, Kalupur, Dorshia village and Gomostapur Bazar. The then treasury of Nawabganj, now AG office, was made the torture center of the Pakistanis. Many people were killed after being tortured there.

There is a mass grave in the heart of Rajshahi city. Collaborators of the Pakistan army created the mass grave. It is located behind the residence of Muslum Shah, a contractor, some 25 yards off Boalia police station. The collaborators set up a concentration camp occupying the building after he went to India during the war. The collaborators brought many people from in and around Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj and repressed them at the camp. They used to rape and kill the women and bury them together in the jungle behind the camp surrounded by a wall.

In the third week of December, 1971, after the historic victory in the liberation war, several thousand skeletons were recovered from this mass grave. The mass grave lies parallel beside Katasur, Shialbari and Godnail. Another killing field was found there. The body of A. Z. Shawkat Reza, a student of Engineering University was found in this grave.

On January 12, 1972, a report published in Dainik Bangla, a vernacular daily, said: 'An armed group of 14-15 *Al-badars*, (a group of collaborators) supported by fascist Jammata-e-Islami activists and Officer in Charge (OC) of Rajshahi town police station, stormed the hostel room and picked up four students, including Shawkat Reza, and led them away, blindfolded. One of them escaped and later identified two of the *Albadars*. The OC was Shamsul Alam while the *Albadar* members were Abdul Hai Farukee, a student of Rajshahi University, and Mazharul Islam, a student of Engineering University, son of Anisur Rahman. Reza and his friends could not understand where they had been taken as they were blindfolded. They were detained in a dark room for more than three days, said Shahabuddin, a classmate of Reza. Shahabuddin was able to escape from the hands of the collaborators.

The Pakistani army used Shahid Shamsuzzoha Hall of Rajshahi University as a cantonment for the entire nine months of the Liberation War. They used a one square mile area behind the hall as an execution field. The Pakistanis and their collaborators killed thousands of people there. A mass grave was also discovered some half a mile east of the hall on April 23, 1972 when a brick field was started there. Freedom fighter Nurul Islam and contractor Zober Mia collected skeletons and skulls digging the field. They recovered five watches, five pens, two *tupis* (a cap usually used by Muslim religious men), 300 taka, a key ring, two keys, ear rings, three cigarette lighters, wallet, kohl tubes, female scarfs, stone rings, combs, cardigans, shoes and other things from there.

Villagers of Mohonpur informed that Pakistani occupation army killed thousands of people bringing them from different areas by trucks and jeeps on May 5 and 6, 1971. Uncountable Bengalee people, hands and legs tied, were brought to the Shamsuzzoha Hall and killed. Many trenches were found on the southern side of Rajshahi railway station. The trenches were filled with the corpses of men and women. The body of Mohammad Abu Sayeed, the Daily Azad correspondent and the then Secretary General of Rajshahi Journalists Union, was also found later. Collaborators of Pakistan army took away 28 people, including Abu Sayeed. He was initially taken to the Rajshahi Circuit House and detained in the residence of a Rajshahi University teacher for a week where he was brutally tortured. Sayeed was then taken to Zoha Hall on July 5 with 15 other people. The Pakistani collaborators killed a railway official of Dinajpur in front of them. They

compelled the detainees to carry the body up to the railway station. They dug a large ditch under an acacia tree beside the station. Then by poking with the bayonets and by other means of torture, the Pakistanis tried to kill all of them, but two of them survived — Abdul Kader and Rupbhan Mia of Shampur. They helped each other to escape from the place and flee to India. After independence, they described the horrifying story.

Moloy Bhaumik, a correspondent of Daily Sangbad writes: ‘Those who were killed after torturing at Zoha Hall camp, were buried carelessly under the soil of the horticulture center, located at the northern side of the hall. Many skeletons and bones were found while digging the grave.’

In fact, Pakistanis took over the control of Rajshahi city within April 14. They set up a stronghold in the Rajshahi University campus. They set many houses on fire on both sides of the roads and killed hundreds of people soon after they entered the city on April 13. They launched a reign of terror at Katakhal, Maskata Dhigi, Shampur, Dashmari, Talaimari and Kazla by torching houses and unleashing torture on innocent people.

On April 14, the army set camps at Zoha Hall, Abdul Latif Hall, Zinnah Hall, Arts Faculty, Chemistry Building, Science Building, Experimental School Building and in some staff quarters in the university campus. Later they used Zoha hall as the main camp. The Pakistan army completely destroyed the university Shaheed Minar and looted the dormitories, teachers and staff housing areas. They even destroyed apparatus in the science laboratory and books in the library. They also looted money from the Habib Bank branch in the university campus. They picked up Kazi Saleh of the Statistics department, Mujibur Rahman of Mathematics, Dr. Rakib of Applied Physics and Dr. Abu Hena of Bangla department and unleashed inhumane torture on them day after day. Many women fell victim to their torture. Even a 12-year-old girl, daughter of a third class employee of the university, was not spared. The then Vice Chancellor of the university, Syed Sazzad Hossain directly helped the Pakistanis in doing such heinous and destructive acts. He even handed over a list to the Pakistanis mentioning the names of the departmental heads of the university. On the other hand, Dr. Matiur Rahman of Psychology department, Dr. Jamil of Philosophy, Dr. Shamsee of Geography and the Dean of Law faculty, Shah Zillur Rahman fled to Pakistan after looting huge quantities goods and money of their colleagues.

Shukhranjan Samaddar, an Associate Professor of the Department of Sanskrit, was a nonpolitical personality in the university. He was reputed as a simple and a peace-loving man. He did not leave his house when the Pakistan army invaded in the campus on April 13. Some 5 or 6 army men entered his house in the name of searching for EPR (East Pakistan Rifles) members. When the soldiers were going back from his house, Dr. Matiur Rahman, a non-Bengalee teacher of the university, informed the soldiers that he (Shukhranjan) was a Hindu. On that count alone, the soldiers picked him up, and it was his final journey.

A Purbadesh correspondent reported in 1972: ‘...Sree Shukhranjan Samaddar was brutally shot to death by the soldiers near a pond at Kazla, a village in front of the university, at noon on April 14. The villagers buried his body with due sanctity the next day. Risking their lives, Abdul Hakim, Haran Mandal, Joinuddin, Asgar Ali, Kanubashanta and Fazlu buried his dead body. The body was reburied at the campus on February 25 this year (1972).’

Joinuddin, a brave son of village Kazla later studied at Rajshahi University. He is now a Professor of Bangla in Rangpur Cadet College. While visiting Dhaka in 1994 he told me that the body of Samaddar was found in a ditch at Kazla. Giving a heart-rendering description of the killing field of Kazla-Ghoshpara, Joinuddin said, vast areas of Kazla and Ghoshpara were full of human bones. Many innocent people were killed during the war by the Pakistan army and their local agents.

The Daily Sangbad’s correspondent Moloy Bhaumik further informed: ‘Another mass grave was discovered at Kazla at the southern border of the Rajshahi University campus beside the Rajshahi-Natore road. Skulls and skeletons of more than one hundred martyrs were found there. One Nayan Banu of Rajshahi court area identified the skeleton of her husband seeing the wrist watch found with the skeleton. It is a matter of regret that this mass grave is still ignored. No step has been taken to preserve the grave. Another mass grave was discovered on the bank of the Padma river where the dead body of Mir Abdul Qaiyum, a lecturer of Psychology department of the university, was found.’

Moloy Bhaumik said, there is another mass grave in an acacia garden on the bank of the Padma beside the Boalia club, which is still ignored. Local people preserved this grave fencing it with bamboo and cane. The

Pakistanis killed hundreds of people at this acacia garden during the war. Most of the people killed here were intellectuals of Rajshahi city. Many of the bodies were drowned in the Padma. Several intellectuals were killed in the city in the first and second week of December. Habibur Rahman, head of the Mathematics department of Rajshahi University, has been missing since. He was picked up by some Pakistani soldiers and taken to the guest house of Brigadier Aslam and Colonel Taj, but he never returned.

A survey was conducted in 1972 by teachers and students of the university to collect information about the killings and destruction by the Pakistani occupation forces during the war. The surveyors questioned many people in at least 25 villages during their week-long investigation. On the last day of the survey, the then Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University, Dr. Khan Sarwar Murshid, Begum Noorjahan Murshid, local MCA and Regional Commander of freedom fighters Gias Uddin visited different areas. They also addressed the war-ravaged people.

During this survey two other mass graves – Gaganbaria and Jogishwar – were found. Of them, the grave of Gaganbaria covers a vast area. An eyewitness, who miraculously escaped from the killing field, explained his horrible and painful experience. He said: ‘It was the first week of holy month of Ramadan. The people were brought away by the Pakistan army in phases from Gaganbaria, may be from elsewhere also. At least 500 people were lined up and fired upon suddenly in that dark of night. The entire Gaganbaria village was shattered by the screaming of 500 bullet-wounded people. Some of them were still groaning, but they were not spared. The Pakistanis shot them again. After the Pakistan army had left the place, I found myself miraculously alive, and then I started running to save my life leaving behind the piles of dead bodies and stream of blood.’

It was May 1971. The occupation forces called the local people of Jogishwar village saying that a ‘Peace Committee’ will be formed and everybody would have to attend its meeting, but only 27 people came. The Pakistanis ordered them to be lined-up keeping their hands behind. Then the soldiers sprayed bullets on them and all of them died instantly. It was not the end of the story. The Pakistani soldiers destroyed villages after villages and unleashed torture on women. At least 55 women of the area were raped by the Pakistanis during the period.

Pakistani military also established a mini cantonment at Sopura Colony in the suburbs. It was a temporary but well protected camp. Sub-Divisional Officer of Rajshahi sub-division with the help of the activists of Awami Sechhasebak League (a front organisation of Awami League) discovered at least 100 mass graves in the cantonment area. Skeletons of some 10 thousand people were recovered from the graves. Thousands of people thronged to the grave area hearing the news.

The 5th May, 1971 is a red letter day for the people of Rajshahi. There was a big pond at the North Bengal Sugar Mills compound in Lalpur thana of Natore district. On that day brutal killings took place on the banks of the pond. The Pakistani soldiers lined up some 50 Sugar mill officials and employees, including the General Manager Anwarul Azim, and killed them in brush fire. They were buried on the bank of the pond. Earlier, the huge pond was named *Gopal Sagar*, but it was renamed as *Shaheed Sagar* after the War of Liberation to show respect to the martyrs. Many others were killed at the same place before the country’s independence. The *Gopal Sagar* turned into a mass grave as the Pakistanis used its banks as a killing field. They threw hundreds of dead bodies into the pond. As soon as the war ended, uncountable humane bones were recovered from the pond.

Wife of Anwarul Azim, the GM of the mill, informed that non-Bengalee collaborators including Sugarcane Supply Officer Massadi, Assistant Agro-Chemist Jamil Siddiqui, Foreman Hazi Asgar Ali and Assistant Engineer Ansari created a reign of terror in the entire sugar mill area. They looted many houses and raped a large number of women.

The non-Bengalee collaborators of the Pakistan army did not allow the relatives of the martyrs to come near the dead bodies on the banks of the pond even after the soldiers left the place. The bodies remained there for several days. The collaborators took away valuables like watches, golden rings and money while searching the corpses. They buried the bodies on the pond banks after digging ditches.

## **Killing Fields in Khulna**

### **Bodies of the Bengalees drowned in the river after mass killing**

*The Pakistani occupation forces slaughtered and shot dead many Bengalees in the killing fields of Khulna during the War of Liberation. Before killing them the Pakistani soldiers used to torture the Bengalees. The rivers of the district turned reddish with blood spread from thousands of beheaded dead bodies dumped by the killers.*

*The bodies in the mass graves became the source of food for carnivorous animals like jackals and dogs. Journalist Gouranga Nandi gave this hellish account of the torture unleashed by the Pakistan army. He visited many killing fields and talked to several witnesses. The final report is based on the information he collected and some newspaper reports of 1972.*

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The river Gallamari flows by the southwestern side of Khulna city. A bridge was recently constructed on the river. On the other side of the bridge, there is a memorial column. It was established on the left side of Khulna-Satkhira road in memory of thousands of martyrs who laid down their lives in the liberation war. The Khulna University campus was established on the right side of the road.

In 1971, Khulna was not a populous town. There was no bridge on the Gallamari river. The Khulna-Satkhira road was constructed after the war. In those days, Gallamari was a solitary place three kilometres off the city. The building now used as the administrative office of Khulna University was used as a radio transmission centre in those days. During the war, the Pakistani forces occupied the building in the name of capturing the Radio station. They turned the adjacent area into a mass grave within a few days through mass killings. The Pakistanis used to pick up people irrespective of religion, age and gender from different places and kill them by shooting and slaughtering. After killing them the uncivilized army used to dump the dead bodies in the river Gallamari.

In 1972, Dainik Bangla, a vernacular daily reported : ‘The Bengalee people were brought from different places and gathered at the heliport and UFD club ground throughout the day. In the middle of the night, the Pakistanis used to kill the unarmed Bengalees in brush fire. The Pakistanis used to shoot the tied-up innocent Bengalees after lining them up in front of the building. People from the adjacent areas heard the screaming of the hapless people who were taken to the killing ground by trucks. However, they could do nothing in those days because curfew was imposed outside. A resident of Sher-e-Bangla Road of the city was shot dead by the Pakistani soldiers as he opened his window to see who was screaming outside.

The occupation forces used to kill at least a hundred people every night and then dump the dead bodies in the river. At the time of high tide, some bodies used to come close to the river bank. Relatives of the victims could recognise the bodies, but nobody dared to bury those with due rituals. They knew it very well mean death as punishment, if the Pakistanis came to know of it.

After somedays, the killers introduced slaughtering instead of firing. They continued to kill around one hundred people per day. Earlier they used to kill the people at night, but later, they started killing innocent Bengalees in broad daylight. The Bengalees were usually taken to the killing field by trucks. Every day many trucks used to leave for Gallamari carrying Bengalees and then return empty after an hour. The dead bodies remained piled up at the Gallamari killing field. Soon after Khulna city was freed, two trucks of human bones were recovered from the Gallamari mass grave.

The report of Dainik Bangla also said that an inhuman scene was also seen in a paddy field at Gallamari village when the reporter entered there for taking a photograph of the dead bodies. ‘Many bodies lay there. A dog was eating one body while the other was taking rest sitting on another body’.

A monument was erected there to highlight the memories of the Bengalees whose laid down their lives in the killing field. But the work of the memorial column was not done as per the original plan. Elderly freedom fighter Abdus Sattar presently looks after the monument. He hoists the National Flag every morning at the altar of the memorial column. He lives in a house adjacent to the mass grave.

In an emotion-choked voice freedom fighter Sattar said, ‘I’m doing the work of this memorial column with those hands with which I held arms to resist the occupation forces during the War of Independence. I can remember even today the terrible incidents of those days – groaning of people, sound of firing and the bloodstained dead bodies floating in the Gallamari river’.

Sattar was shivering with emotion while describing the torture unleashed by the Pakistani occupation forces. He said, ‘‘On December 16 and 17, it was really difficult to walk in Gallamari as innumerable skulls and skeletons lay everywhere. It was a scene beyond imagination. The air was heavy with the stench of rotten dead bodies. Thousands of bodies were found in the mass grave at Gallamari. The entire area — Gallamari river, its banks, paddy fields, Radio Transmission Centre and other adjoining places — were filled up with thousands of dead bodies. To find out the dead bodies of their near and dear ones, people continued their search at the killing field by putting their hands on their noses to get rid of stench spread from rotten human bodies. Some people found their relatives, some did not.

Not only the relatives of the victims, some other people also went there to witness the brutality of the Pakistanis. Poet Mollah Fazlur Rahman was one of them. He wrote : ‘Except Khulna, entire Bangladesh was freed from the occupation forces on December 16. Khulna became free on 17<sup>th</sup> December. The flag of freedom was hoisted all over the country. A new sun rose in the sky unchaining the nation after a long confinement of decades. I walked through the roads in Gallamari to see the killing field. I found either side of the road was full of skulls and skeletons. I saw clothes of a young couples. Dogs and jackals were barking around the area and tearing apart fresh parts of the human bodies. Many dead bodies of young men and women were also found abandoned in the muddy canal of the river Gallamari.’

The heliport of Khulna was situated near the Circuit House. Now it is the office of District *Shilpakala Academy*. In this place, the Pakistan army used to unleash torture on innocent Bengalis in broad daylight everyday. Many people died here after being tortured. The Pakistanis used to express joy in a devilish manner after killing the innocent people. They used to dump the dead bodies in the river Bhairab also.

Kamruzzaman Tuku, a freedom fighter in Khulna, said, ‘‘We returned to the city during the final stages of the war after fighting in rural areas. I heard about the killings at Heliport Forest Ghat and Gallamari when I was engaged in fighting.’’ Expressing his agony about the war he said, ‘‘Horrible! It was beyond description. Many dead bodies remained scattered here and there. Bloodied clothes of men and women were also found all over the area’’.

He further said. ‘‘People were brought to the heliport, located in front of the Judge Court and adjacent to the Circuit House. While torturing, they were hung upside down. The Pakistanis beat them up and hit them with bayonets until they fainted. When they regained their senses, they were hung up once again and tortured.

The Forest Ghat is nearly 500 yards from the heliport, just behind the Judge Court. The Bengalees were slaughtered there. The bodies were dumped in the river. The residence of the Judge is beside the Ghat (river terminal). The Judge perhaps heard the screaming of the hapless people as the air became soaked with their cries. The Judge became anxious about such actions of torture at heliport in the daytime and in the Ghat area at night. The Judge once requested an army officer to refrain from unleashing torture on the Bengalees there. The officer got angry and threatened to kill the Judge, but did not get the opportunity, as a few days later the Judge died of cardiac arrest.

There was another slaughter ground at Chuknagar in Khulna. Several thousand people were killed there on a single day.

A.B.M. Shafiqul Islam, the Principal of Chuknagar College, described the mass killing that took place on May 20, 1971, “Thousands of people from Khulna, Jessore, Bagerhat and even Barisal started fleeing to neighboring India when the uncivilised acts of the Pakistan army became unbearable. The fleeing people had to use the only route to India via Chuknagar. The savage Pakistanis staged a ‘festival of killing’ at Chuknagar by murdering thousands of people who were on their way to India.

Many people coming from different places were taking rest there. Some of them were making breakfast for themselves. The village market on the bank of a river was crowded with thousands of men, women and children. Most of them came by boats. The river Bhadra was full of small boats carrying India-bound people.

Suddenly, Pakistan army soldiers who came in 3 or 4 trucks opened fire on the crowd. Repeated brush firing by the soldiers made the entire crowd quiet for a brief period. A few moments later, screaming of the victims created a terrible scene there.”

Mr. Shafiqul Islam was at the village market when the Pakistan army launched the attack. He said, “Hearing the dreadful sound of firing, I started running towards my home, one kilometer off the market. On the way, I saw many people like me running to save their lives. I saw many children fall victim to the stampede while people were rushing here and there. I saw a child sitting on the ground crying and seeking help from passers-by.”

When he once again went to the village market in the evening, he found dead bodies everywhere. Blood was still fresh all over the road. The stench was everywhere as the blood started drying up. The river was also full of corpses. Many of the victims were killed by bayonet charge by the Pakistanis. About 35 to 40 corpses were found under a huge banyan tree in the market place. The Pakistani soldiers not only killed the Bengalees by firing, but also drowned them when they tried to survive by swimming or crossing the river by boats. “The Chuknagar market looked like a vast cremation ground”, Mr. Shafiq said adding, “It is impossible for me to forget the cruelty shown by the Pakistanis. It is really beyond description”.



## Killing Fields in Chittagong

### **Skulls of at least 20 thousand Bengalees would be found if the ground of Pahartoli is excavated**

*After visiting greater Chittagong district of Bangladesh, Sukumar Biswas writes : The Pakistan army launched genocide in at least 20 killing fields in the district during the liberation war. As many as three hundred thousand Bengalees were killed by the occupation forces in Chittagong. At least 20 to 25 thousand skulls of Bengalees would be found if the grounds of Pahartoli area including the Foy's Lake, Sher Shah Colony, Wireless Colony and Ambagan of the city and suburbs are excavated.*

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Some 2500 trainee soldiers at the East Bengal Regimental Centre (EBRC) in the Chittagong Cantonment were nearly unarmed when the War of Liberation began. Lieutenant Colonel M.R. Chowdhury, Captain Akhond, Captain Bashar, Captain Aziz, Captain M.S.A. Bhuiyan, Captain Enamul Haque Chowdhury, Captain Mohsin, Captain Nurul Amin and Lieutenant Abu Taleb were among the Bengali officers. On the frightful night of 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1971, the 20th Beluch Regiment launched an attack on the unarmed Bengalee soldiers at the EBRC. Tanks were also deployed. Several hundred Bengalee soldiers and officers were killed in the first round of attack launched by the Beluch Regiment. They tried to resist the attack, but could not stand up against the Pakistanis for long.

Captain Enamul Haque was on duty at the EBRC on March 25, 1971. Recalling the memories of the black night, Captain Haque said in an interview: "...I heard the final outcries of the dying Bengalee soldiers. Most of them were moaning in pain, some were requesting for water, but the savage Pakistani soldiers continued torturing the Bengalee soldiers who were almost at death's door. They were pressing the unarmed Bengalee officers under their boots so that they die soon. I saw more than 100 dead bodies of the Bengalees killed by the Pakistanis being loaded in a truck by the army men on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> March. Four soldiers, holding the hands and legs of the victims from two sides, were taking each of the dead bodies. They treated those like the corpses of dogs, not of human beings. I saw some soldiers dragging the dead bodies on the ground." Perhaps, this was the biggest killing incident in the entire Chittagong city on that day. Nearly one thousand Bengalee soldiers were killed on that day. Innumerable people were taken to the Chittagong cantonment and killed there. There are several mass graves in the cantonment area. Nobody knows how many people were actually killed in Chittagong. But most of the local people are of the opinion that a huge number of people were killed there.

According to a correspondent of Daily Purbadesh, there are 20 mass graves in Chittagong district. I had visited Chittagong cantonment, city and suburb, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Kaptai and Teknaf during 1972-73, and so I think the number of mass graves is higher.

A report published in the Daily Purbadesh in 1972 on the mass graves is considered an important one from many points of view. The report says: The Pakistanis launched massacre action at 20 killing fields in Chittagong city and its suburb, nine other thanas of the district. In the city and in its outskirts the occupation forces created 10 killing fields. It is assumed that on an average at least 5000 people each were killed in eight of the ten killing fields. It is practically impossible to know how many people, whose dead bodies were dumped in the river Karnaphuli, were killed in the Chittagong Port area and Navy Barrack area during the nine-month long war. Some quarters estimated that about one hundred thousand people were killed in Chittagong. But I think the number will stand at three hundred thousand. Skulls and bones of some 20 to 25 thousand people would be found if Ambagan, Wireless Colony, Sher Shah Colony and Foy's Lake area in the

city and its outskirts are searched. Thousands of people were also killed in Chandgaon, Lalkahan Bazar, Halishahar, Cantonment and Circuit House in the city, and in the remote hilly and forest areas of Mirsharai, Sitakundu hills, Rawzan, Patia, Satkania and Banshkhali. The skulls and bones of the martyrs are still found sometimes in these areas. In the Wireless Colony, Jhautala and hill areas of Nasirabad in the city, skeletons would also be found if a massive search is conducted. I saw many skeletons in safety tanks and hillside jungles.

Several thousand Bengalees were killed at the Shibnath hills in Sitakundu. A permanent centre for slaughtering people was set up at Jorarganj and Wireless area in Mirsharai. The Pakistanis used to bring hundreds of people by bus, truck, train and other vehicles to the center and imprisoned them. They used to kill at least 50 to 100 people daily. Many graves are still seen in these areas.

According to the local people, 15 to 20 thousand people were murdered in the Mirsharai and Sitakundu killing fields. Similar killings took place at Rawzan, Patia and Banshkhali thanas. In the coastal district of Cox's Bazar, at least three mass graves were found at Kelatoli, Baharchhara and in front of Cox's Bazar Rest House. Some five thousand dead bodies were recovered from these killing grounds. A large number of skeletons were also recovered from the areas adjacent to Motel No. 1 and 2 in the resort town.

Nearly half of the bodies recovered from the mass grave in front of the rest house were of women. These were identified as female bodies by means of the clothes found. The Pakistanis used to rape the women at the rest house before killing them.

The Dainik Bangla reported in 1972: 'Seven dried up bodies were found in a room of the rest house. Two of the bodies were beheaded. They were slaughtered. The storeroom was marked by dry blood stains everywhere. Eleven human skeletons were found in a well in front of the rest house while 77 others were recovered from the grave of Teknaf Cantonment. Mass graves were found also in Takiya.'

In 1993, Priyotosh Pal Pintu, a correspondent of the Daily Sangbad wrote: 'A concentration camp was opened in the rest house at Cox's Bazar while a killing field was created on the sea beach in front of the rest house. Hundreds of men and women were taken there and shot to death after being tortured. The Pakistanis used to bayonet the women after raping them. Apart from these, several other mass graves were found at different places of the district. The local agents of Pakistanis helped them all the time. During the eight months of occupation, several thousand people of Cox's Bazar district were killed by the Pakistanis. People of Moheshkhali thana were the worst victims.'

The Pakistan army formed the 'Civil Pioneer Force', a well-organised group to kill Bengalees. The force was formed in different government and non-government offices secretly. It is learnt that this group killed some 1300 employees and 18 officials of the Eastern Railway department in Chittagong. The Pioneer Forces were very active in the government controlled Chittagong Port and other offices. The then central government maintained secrecy in forming these forces. The group started its operations in September as the process of its formation was successfully completed in late August. The group was formed mainly from among the non-Bengalee officials aged below 40 who worked in the railway department. Later a few Bengalee officials joined the force for assisting the Pakistanis in the killing operations. It is estimated by their killing action, that the group was a large one though the accurate number of its members is still unknown.

The headquarters of the Civil Pioneer Force was situated in Chittagong with several branch offices at Shantahar, Saidpur and some other railway towns. Chittagong Circuit House and Pahartoli were used as its training centre. This force, in cooperation with the Pakistan army, killed many people in the forest areas of Pahartoli, Foy's Lake and Jhautala. The killing fields of these three areas were mainly used by the Civil Pioneer Force. The force not only killed 1300 railway employees, but also a huge number of people in other killing fields at Mirsharai and Sitakundu. They used to bring people travelling by train and murdered them in the killing fields.

The then Assistant Accountant of Pahartoli Railway Centre, Mohammad Shamsul Haque gave an interview to the National Council for History of Liberation. In the interview he said, "...It was November 10, 1971, 20th day of Ramadan. From the daybreak some people had been picking up Bengalees from Panjabi Line, Wireless Colony and Bahadur Shah Colony and taking them to a hill near Wireless Colony. They deceived the Bengalees by telling them that military officers had called for them, but when they reached the hills, the Pakistanis and their local agents slaughtered the innocent Bengalees with sharp weapons. The killing continued till 3 p.m. from the morning. Along with Afsar Uddin, Sabed Mia and Abdus Sobhan, I observed

the killings from a nearby jungle. The killers poured petrol and set fire to the clothes stripped off the dead bodies after killing about 200 people. At about 3 p.m. a military official came to see the scene. About 300 local people went to the place and saw hundreds of dead bodies lay there. The killers burnt some of the bodies. They refused to hand over the bodies to their relatives. Some bare bodies of women having severe injury marks were also lying on the hilltop.” Shamsul Haque said that military men and the Biharis launched the killing operation.

Some 83 skeletons were recovered from a pond in a village west of Hinguli in Mirsharai of greater Chittagong district. The pond was located in a jungle area near the rail-bridge on the river Feni. The freedom fighters comprising Bengal Regiment, EPR, Ansar, Mujahid, and students destroyed the bridge to resist the occupation forces. Failing to cross the river, the Pakistan army stopped there and killed at least 240 people of village Chhagalnaiya in Feni district. After this incident, the Pakistan army used to kill some people on the bridge everyday. Thus the bridge turned into a killing place.

There is a mass grave near Dampara police line. Many people were brought to the police line from different places and buried there after killing. The erstwhile Superintendent of police A.H.T. Zaman laid a foundation stone of a Shaheed Minar at the Dampara Reserve Police Line premises in memory of the martyrs of liberation war. At the foundation stone laying ceremony, he said that some 73 people, including two Superintendents of Chittagong Police, three inspectors, four sub-inspectors and four head constables were killed there. He also mentioned that 24 others were missing during the war.

After the liberation war, a grave was discovered at Panchlaish Dumping Depot. Hundreds of human bones, some of them with bullets, were found after removing the soil from there. It is assumed that more than 500 people were killed at that place. Near CDA Market in Sholashahar area, another mass grave was discovered where thousands of bones and skulls and clothes were found. Observing the bones and skulls, it was deemed that people were killed there in early December.

Perhaps, the worst ever mass grave was found near Garibullah Shah’s Mazar at Dampara. According to the witnesses, some 40 thousand people were killed in the killing fields between March 30 and December 16. One Nasir Ahmed, a shopkeeper near Garibullah Shah’s Mazar, witnessed the entire massacre during the war. There are two other witnesses of the genocide — Abul Kalam and Abdul Zabbar, both guards of the mazar.

Quoting Nasir Ahmed, the Dainik Bangla reported in 1972 : ‘Between March 30 and the first week of December, every evening five to six trucks full of people were brought to the mass grave under tight security by the military men. The hapless people were always blindfolded. The trucks used to leave after dumping the victims. Then they were lined up and killed. Afterwards another group of army men removed the dead bodies and took away then to another place by trucks. A deep well was dug at the place for burying the dead bodies. The remaining dead bodies were dumped somewhere else. The grave was surrounded by hills. The shoes and clothes were found here and there in the killing fields. The ground was enveloped with blood. It proves that several hundred people were killed till early December. While walking along the grave, I saw dozens of suits on the ground. These belonged to the officers of the railway and Port Trust who were killed there.’

According to Nasir Ahmed, The barbaric army killed 40,000 people at the mass grave. The army fitted silencers to their guns, because the people who were brought to be killed used to scream after hearing the sound of firing on others in front of them.

Another mass grave was discovered at village Shakpura in Boalkhali thana of Chittagong district. On April 20, Pakistani forces and their collaborators surrounded the village. The villagers were sleeping. So they could not resist the attackers and escape. Some tried to flee, but received bullet wounds on their way. The occupation forces torched the village and then started indiscriminate firing. When the village Shakpura turned into an inferno with the screaming of people of different ages, the collaborators started looting their valuables. They raped many women. At one stage, the outcry turned to silence as everybody was finished. About 150 people were killed in the massacre. The people, who had fled during the destruction in the morning, returned in the evening, but they found nothing in their houses. Some lost their sisters, some lost their brothers, some lost their children, wives, fathers and mothers. There was no food in their houses. They held each other and started crying. It was a heartrending scene. Such tragic scenes were a common feature everywhere in Bangladesh during the War of Liberation.

## Killing Fields in Laksam

### **Rape became a regular phenomenon in those days**

*Sridham Chandra Das alone dug more than 125 cavities in the killing fields in Laksam. He buried several hundred dead bodies. The Pakistani occupation forces used the Chandpur Tobacco Factory in Laksam as a concentration camp. For the sake of his job, Sridham had to go there everyday during the War of Liberation. He witnessed the barbaric torture on Bengalees by the savage Pakistan army and their local agents. Journalist Mustafa Hussain recorded Das's statement at the office of Jahangir Mawla in Laksam on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1999. He unveiled his tormenting experiences and what he witnessed during the war: Jahangir Mawla, Chowdhuri Abdul Bari Majumder, Nazir Ahmed, (all freedom fighters), Professor in the Department of Accounting of the University of Chittagong Dr Shantiranjan Das and retired officer of Railway Mohammad Bashiruzzaman were present during the interview. Dr. Das and Mr. Zaman also witnessed the torture of the Pakistani occupation forces. Zaman was the only survivor of the concentration camp. Thirteen others who were with Zaman were shot dead. Sridham Chandra Das went to the mass grave after recalling the experiences of the liberation war and brought out many skeletons which were later deposited with the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka.*

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I was a cleaner in the Railway Hospital in Laksam in 1971. I was then 18 or 19 and my service age was four.

When Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for the country's independence in early March, we extended support from our respective positions. Then came the frightful night of 25th March. The situation in the entire country was volatile. We were in a fix - where to go and what to do. We thought that the Pakistanis would not show much hostility on us as we were engaged in low ranking but essential jobs.

They did not get angry on us, but unleashed some form of torture on us which we had to tolerate. Witnessing the mass killings and atrocities by the Pakistanis I questioned myself again and again, "Is it possible for human beings to do so? Why they are killing hundreds and thousands of innocent people?" I find no answer even today.

My frightful memories are still haunting me. I get totally upset while recalling the horrible experiences of those days. It is not possible for me to get rid of those frightful memories until death. I have no language to describe those horrible scenes. The Pakistanis used to unleash torture on Bengalee men and women in front of the Chandpur Tobacco Factory's gate, near the southern part of the railway cabin and on both sides of the bunkers which was used during the World War II.

The Pakistanis set up their Sub-Sector Headquarters inside the tobacco factory. It was their main concentration center. The Pakistanis used to bring away the Bengalees from many places and unleash severe torture on them. Their main target were the freedom fighters, but, in those days it was very difficult to find the freedom fighters. That is why the Pakistani army and their collaborators targeted all young people of the area.

The Pakistanis were especially malicious towards the Hindu community. The activists of the Awami League, the party which led the War of Independence in 1971, were also one of their main targets. Initially the killers used to target selected groups of people, but later they launched mass killing and torture on the entire Bengalee nation. They considered neither age nor the gender. They used to unleash torture on whoever they wished. They used to beat up people mercilessly in the concentration camp. Rape became a regular phenomenon in those days.

I saw the signs of rape on the dead bodies of many women. I saw bite marks on the poor women's breasts and lips. The barbaric Pakistanis cut the breasts of some women into pieces. I had to see the unclothed dead bodies of many women with severe injury marks. It was unfortunate for me that I had to bury all of them. Sometimes, I had to bury them separately in one or two feet deep cavities, sometimes together in deeper trenches.

They used to bring women to the torture centre from near and far. The so-called 'Peace Committee' (a forum of anti-liberation elements) members and the collaborators directly assisted the Pakistanis in doing these heinous acts. Some people of Laksam and its adjacent villages were involved in the Peace Committee. Many people of the Paschimgaon village were engaged in doing these inhuman acts with the help of razakars and Al-Badars (groups of local people who collaborated with the Pakistanis).

The members of the Peace Committee and razakars and Al-Badars used to hand over the girls, brought from different places, to the Pakistani soldiers. They were shot dead after being raped overnight. Many of them died before shooting, following repeated sexual abuses. Then the barbarians used to take the survivors to the killing field situated several hundred yards away from the torture centre.

Many women were taken directly to the killing field. The Pakistanis used to line up the women beside the trenches and then shoot them. Some of the victims used to fall into the trenches or beside the trenches. Then the killers used to kick the bodies into the trenches. After their death, the Pakistanis used to order me or Upendra Chandra Das, my maternal uncle, to bury the dead bodies.

It is really difficult for me to give actual statistics on the number of people who were killed by the barbaric Pakistanis. Everyday they killed many people — men, women, children, youth and old people. As far as I could make out, at least 20 to 25 women were killed everyday on an average by the Pakistanis. Of the victims, a few were freed and taken to other places from the concentration camps. Maybe, one or two women were freed after suffering barbaric torture in the camps.

During my stay there, I knew only a few people in the concentration camp. It was difficult to recognise them as they were brought from remote places like Chandpur, Noakhali, Feni, and the southern zone of Comilla district. I will never forget three of them, who were from our locality. I knew them from my very childhood, and all of them had affection for me.

One of them was freedom fighter Abdul Malek. He organised the local youth for the liberation war by providing them with arms and giving training soon after Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib had delivered his historic speech on 7<sup>th</sup> March in Dhaka calling for the independence of the country. The other two were Mr. Sobhan of Paikpara and Nuru Miah of Bainchatia village. They were taken away by the Pakistanis with the help of their local collaborators and brought to the concentration camp at night. They were kept in the torture center until the next day. Everybody in the area came to know it, but there was nobody to rescue them. None dared to request the Pakistanis to release them.

The next morning, I went to the cigarette factory, my workplace, with my equipment a little earlier than usual. I decided that I would try my best and beg the Pakistanis to spare the lives of the three. Pakistani soldier Bakaul Hawlader, who led the operation to arrest them, was well known to me. However, I did not have enough courage to request him for the release of three people though I had earlier decided to do it.

The detainees saw me in the concentration camp. They were thirsty and requested me for water. I saw anxiety on their pale faces. I thought they were expecting some help from me to get rid of the Pakistanis. On seeing their faces, it was difficult for me to control myself and I burst into tears, but wiped my eyes quickly so that the Pakistanis could not see it.

Failing to do something for them, I felt as if I was the most ungrateful man in the world. It was my duty to rescue Mr. Khaleq who had earlier helped my family a lot. My father brought rice and other foodstuffs from Mr. Khaleq many times to feed us. I thought I must do at least something for him. I must try to give them at least water, if not food.

So I went to the nearby pond to bring water. I brought a pot full of water secretly so that the Pakistanis could not see, but when I was handing over the pot to Mr. Khaleq, one of the soldiers noticed it. The soldier got

angry and broke the pot with a kick. Hurling abuses, he said that they would not allow the detainees to drink water. The savage soldier told them to drink their own urine.

Returning home after finishing my duty, I told everything to my mother. Mother asked me to pray to the God only. She said God must not tolerate such cruelty. He must punish the repressors.

Thus I failed to do anything for them. I failed to save them. Bakaul Hawladar's bloody eyes refrained me from trying to save the three lives.

I knew Mr. Sobhan well. He was a priest like man. I knew Nuru Miah, a pious man. But what an irony of fate for me! I had to dig ditches for them!

Bakaul Hawladar shot them one after another in front of me. I heard Nuru Miah's screams after bullets hit his body. That day for the first time in my life I heard such a loud cry from a human being. A man can cry in such way only at the time his death. Nuru Miah uttered the name of God so loudly I thought his body had blown up in the sky. I thought his screams had shattered the all-pervading seat of God.

At the time of shooting, I closed my eyes and recalled mother's advice. I started praying to the Almighty to save their lives, but God did not respond. I had to witness the killing of the three men who were respectable to me. Moreover, I had to bury them under the soil on the orders of the Pakistanis. I could do nothing for them except bury them in separate graves to show respect to their departed souls.

After the country's independence, I exhumed the three dead bodies from the mass graves. Their family members buried them at their respective graveyards with due solemnity and rituals. At the same time I also exhumed another corpse of a woman from the same mass grave.

I had conversations with many of the barbaric Pakistanis during the war, but I cannot remember the names of all the soldiers. I can remember some of them, like Bakaul Hawladar, Captain Gazzali or Gadrazi.

They set up several camps at the Railway School, Railway Rest House, cigarette factory and its adjoining areas. The Pakistanis used to launch attacks on the villagers from those camps.

One day, a soldier went to the house of Kanu Das, one of my relatives, to torture one of his family members. When Kanu resisted the soldier, he beat him up mercilessly.

Like me and my uncle Upendra, the soldiers too buried many people at the western side of the cigarette factory and on the bank of the pond digging many cavities.

I have been living with such terrible memories for the last 29 years. I still cannot think or imagine, how human beings could do such inhuman acts.