



I was put in a gunny bag and kept in the scorching sun

Brigadier (Retd.) M. R. Majumdar

In 1971, Brigadier Mahmudur Rahman Majumdar was the senior most Bengalee officer in the eastern zone of the Pakistan Army. He had close contact with MAG Osmany and senior Awami League leaders during the non-cooperation movement in 1971. He was arrested on March 24, 1971 and was taken to Pakistan on March 31. He was tortured and continuously interrogated. His testimony was recorded in four phases from September 12 to October 13, 1999.

I had been the commandant of East Bengal Regimental Centre at Chittagong and also the Station Commendar since year before the 1970 election till 24 March 1971. I was a senior-most Bengali Army officer in East Pakistan at that time. On March 4, 1971 I was appointed Matial Law Administrator of Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts which brought me in contact with local political leaders in general and Awami League leaders like MR Siddiqi, Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury and MA Hannan in particular. I also had working contact with senior Army officers including the Chief of Army Staff General Abdul Hamid Khan. Col Osmani was well known to me since long. He introduced me to Sheikh Mujib and some other prominent leaders of Awami League.

President Yahiya's sudden postponement in March 1 of the National Assembly Session due to meet at Dhaka on March 3, triggered explosive situation, angry demonstrations and ruthless killing of Bengali protesters by West Pakistani troops in Dhaka and many other places particularly in Chittagong where hundreds of civilians were killed, wounded and burnt on March 2 and 3 whereupon Sk Mujib openly demanded immediate withdrawal of troops to barracks and secretly sent Khandker Mustak Ahmed, MR Siddiqi and Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury to meet me at 3am in the night of March 5 or 6. In that meeting I expressed my support for Sk Mujib and conveyed to him regarding our military superiority at that time in East Pakistan.

Earlier on March 2, a Pakistani ship named 'MV SWAT' anchored at Chittagong Port. I came to know that the ship did not carry any passenger from West Pakistan. Instead, it had brought about 7,000 tons of sophisticated arms and ammunitions to suppress the Bengali by force. I requested M. R. Siddiqui, the Chairman of Chittagong Port workers association, not to permit unloading of the ship. I said, "these arms could be used against us." I thought, if we capture the entire country, the same would automatically come under our possession.

From March 2 to 24, I stopped unloading of the arms from 'SWAT' disobeying all orders and pressure of the higher authorities. Army Chief, General Hamid Khan, Tikka Khan, Mitha Khan and other high officials applied pressure on me in this regard. Mitha Khan personally met me and asked, "By hook or crook, the arms will have to be unloaded within one or two days." I said, "the ship could catch fire if we try to unload the ammunitions without the help of experts." Mitha said, "If the fire engulfs the entire country and blood fills the

Karnaphuli river, I don't care. I want my arms unloaded."

As I did not unload the arms, Tikka Khan charged me, "You disobeyed the command of your superior and stopped the unloading of 'SWAT' ship to support Awami League's non-cooperation movement." Subsequently, Mitha Khan called the Naval Chief, Commodore Momtaj, who also echoed my decision. Commodore Momtaj was, however, apprehending further deterioration of the situation. That is why he did not take any risk. He informed Mitha Khan, "Sir, my force does not know the cargo handling of commercial ships. It will be a disaster if any explosion occurs due to their handling." Mitha Khan understood this point. He said, "It's all right. I will call in merchant navy people from Karachi." He promptly phoned Army Headquarters at Karachi from my office and gave a directive to send the merchant navy people.

I stopped the unloading of 'Swat' on different excuses. Tikka Khan used to call me twice or thrice a day to ask the same question, "Whats happening about the unloading of the ship?" In the meantime, I removed all the crew from the ship with the help of M.R. Siddiqui. The ship remained at the outer anchorage.

The East Bengal Regiment battalion of which Ziaur Rahman was the second in command was ready to go to the West. There was a rule that when an army contingent is transferred from East to West or from West to East, they have to go unarmed. The battalion of Zia already surrendered their arms under this rule. Later I gave them 300 rifles and 10 light machine guns, which was their main strength during the war.

On March 21, Army Chief General Hamid visited Chittagong Port and took me to Colonel Fatemi of Baluch Regiment. He asked me whether 'SWAT' was unloaded or not. I replied, "No". The Adjutant General of Army was also there.

When we reached the Baluch Regiment, the Adjutant General took me to a separate room saying, "Majumdar, let's go to another room. I have something to discuss with you." In my absence, Fatemi and General Hamid talked for about half an hour. From the Baluch Regiment office, we went to Naval Headquarters where General Hamid also held discussions for about 20-25 minutes, in secret, again keeping me away, as preplanned by them.

From the movement of the Army Chief, it became clear to me that they were planning to conduct a secret operation against the Bangalees at the directive of Yahya Khan.

As the Army Chief left, I telephoned Awami League leader M. R. Siddiqui and he came to my house. I told him everything and requested him to talk to Sheikh Mujib and Colonel Osmani about the matter. "We have no time to waste....something will happen soon.....tell Sheikh Shaheb to give us permission. If we go for an action without wasting time, it will be easy for us to achieve victory."

On Siddiqui's request, I arranged for him a car from the Superintendent of Police. Siddiqui went to Dhaka to talk to Sheikh Mujib. Next day he returned and reported to me that Sheikh Mujib said, "Brigadier Majumdar should be patient...Negotiations are going at the political level. He should wait until the negotiation ends. I will speak to him in time." Osmani asked him, "How will you contact Brigadier Majumdar?" Sheikh Mujib replied, "Postponement of the transmission of Bangla programme on radio will be a signal of the failure of negotiations. I will record a message for him and send it to him through Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury."

This recorded message of Sheikh Mujib was sent to Chittagong after his arrest on March 25 but I was not there. On March 26, however, Awami League leader M. A. Hannan riding a rickshaw publicised the message of Sheikh Mujib by mike in the port city of Chittagong. Based on the statement, Ziaur Rahman declared independence of the country from the radio station. The message was recorded on March 21.

Tension continued for the next couple of days. On March 24, General Khadim Hossain Raja and General Mitha Khan came to the East Bengal Regimental Centre by two helicopters. They told me that the President would hold a meeting that evening. "All senior officers have been asked to join the meeting. So you'll have to go."

I said, "A tense situation is prevailing now in Chittagong. If I go, trouble may occur here. Particularly,

civilians are very agitated.” As I was suspicious about the meeting at Dhaka, I asked Captain Amin (now a Major General), “Make a call to Colonel Osmani and enquire whether or not I should go to Dhaka to attend the meeting but in vain.”

Tikka Khan said, “You must come because the President wants to talk to all senior officers. After the meeting, if necessary, we’ll send you back.” Unfortunately, I believed him. I thought what he told me could be true. So, I boarded the helicopter to Dhaka. Amin accompanied me.

The helicopter landed in Dhaka and I was taken to the residence of Brigadier Jahanzeb Arbab. He was better known as Brigadier Arbab. He was in charge of Operation “Searchlight” in Dhaka City. Arbab was one of my old friends. Arbab, Ziaur Rahman and I worked together during 1960-62. Arbab became my close friend at that time.

As I reached the residence of Arbab, I saw snacks ready on the table. I asked Arbab, “What’s the matter?. I have been told that the President would hold a meeting with officers. But I don’t see any arrangement here. Then why I have been brought here?”

Arbab said, “Majumdar, don’t tell anyone . You have been removed from Chittagong and Brigadier Ansari has already taken charge of your Centre. I have been ordered to take care of you. You’ll have to stay with me until you’re given a new posting anywhere in West Pakistan.” Arbab told me everything, but kept secret the fact that I was under house arrest.

I was surprised to hear of my transfer order and replacement, because it was done without informing me. I asked Arbab, “Can’t I go to Chittagong anymore?” He replied, “No.”

Soon after my removal, Brigadier Ansari started unloading the cargo from the ‘Swat’. Bangalee officers and soldiers also joined in the work.

Next day (March 25), I saw that Arbab was very busy with his work. He was so busy that he had no time to talk to me. His attitude and movement deepened my fears. In the evening, I left his house in his absence. I directly went to my elder brother Sajjad Ali Majumdar’s Dhanmondi residence and apprised Colonel Osmani of the matter over phone. He replied, “I’m coming soon.” My sister-in-law went to the residence of Tajuddin to bring him also, but he was not at home.

Osmani came and we sat for a closed-door discussion over the whole situation in my brother’s bedroom. I told him, “You have wasted much time. I sent messages three times — through M.R. Siddiqui, Captain Amin and myself, but you did not respond. The Pakistanis are buying time under the cover of negotiation, but it is clear that they would not compromise. I learnt through reliable source and informed you as well that they would not allow Sheikh Mujib to assume power. They army will go for action soon. We could win easily if we had gone for action a few days ago. If Sheikh Mujib permits, it is still possible to do something.”

Osmani said, “No, Sheikh Mujib does not want that. He wants to resolve the crisis through political dialogue.” He said, “You want to revolt, but do you have the arms to do so?”

I outlined my plan. “The Bangalee troops have enough strength to seize the magazines of non-bengali unit and force the Pakistani officers to surrender. They’ll definitely surrender. Because they all know that if they try to resist us in the present situation they would die. The Pakistani officers are not in a position to take that risk.”

Thereafter, Osmani went to discuss with Sheikh Mujib. At first he wanted to take me with him, but later he thought that it would be unwise to move together, because the intelligence people were keeping vigil around Sheikh’s house. Osmani went alone and told me that he would inform me of Sheikh Mujib’s views over the phone.

I waited tensely in the evening for the phone call. At 8 pm, Osmani rang me and said, “Mujib is now reached a settlement with Yahya. He has asked you to be patient.”

At 11.30 pm, the whole capital was ablaze with gunfire and bullets. I went to the roof top of the house and saw that fire had engulfed the city. The Pakistan army had struck ruthlessly. It was what I had apprehended.

After about two and a half years of solitary imprisonment in Pakistan, when I returned to independent Bangladesh, Dr. Farash Uddin Ahmed (Now the Governor of Bangladesh Bank) told me that Osmani had made the phone call to me from Farash Uddin's residence at 8.30 pm on March 25, 1971.

Next day I came to know that my family was brought to the cantonment and kept at the residence of Brigadier Ansari. I went to the cantonment on March 26 but did not find any male person. They were busy in the operation. I took my family to my father-in-law's house without any hindrance.

My wife apprised me of her terrible experience at the Chittagong centre on March 25 night. I was deeply shocked being informed how Pakistani occupied forces swooped on the centre with their tanks in the dead of the night and killed numerous Bengali soldiers including my loyal officer Colonel MR Chowdhury and rendered my wife and children helpless.

My wife Saadat Sultana told me that while she was sleeping in the night she heard the sound of bullets inside the house. Switching on the light she found that a bullet had pierced through the window and stuck onto the wall. Quickly the attack took a serious turn and she could hear the sound of bullets in and around the centre like heavy rain. The bullets were also directed towards my residence. She saved herself and the children lying under the cot.

When the attack by the Pakistan forces stopped after an hour later, she rang Colonel MR Chowdhury, but failed to get him and then called Awami League leader MR Siddiqui. She requested Siddiqui to inform Major Zia of the East Bengal Regiment about the situation, so that he could launch a counter attack on the Baluch Regiment. Later, when she tried to contact Dhaka, she found that the telephone line was dead.

Earlier in next morning Colonel Shigri of my Centre came to my residence and asked my wife to get ready to go to Dhaka. When she required how she would go, she was told that a helicopter from Dhaka was waiting in the Baluch Regiment. She tried but failed to get her ornaments, cash money and clothes for the children, due to interception of Colonel Shighry.

On the way to the Baluch Regiment, she was horrified to see number of Bengali soldiers bodies on both sides of the road leading to the centre. She identified the body of Colonel MR Chowdhury lying in a pile.

On March 27, I was sitting in the varendah waiting for Amin to go to Chittagong with him after offering morning prayers. Suddenly I saw military vehicles coming towards the house. I came outside the house and saw many soldiers guarding the house. They asked me, "Sir, are you Brigadier Majumdar?"

"Yes", I replied.

"We have come here under orders of Tikka Khan to take you cantonment. Get ready," they said.

I went with them. From March 27, I became a prisoner. They confined me, along with my family members, at an abandoned house in the cantonment area. We stayed there for two days. They did not allow us to come out of the house. Thus began physical and mental torture upon me and my family.

In 1971, the Pakistanis tortured me in two ways. Firstly, they looted my house-hold goods and tortured me physically and secondly, they tortured my family members, relations and others.

On March 26 morning, Pakistan Army went in search of me to went to my Shamoli residence in Dhaka. As they could not find me, they brought our servant Tasir out of the house and slaughtered him publicly. They also attempted to kill his son but he survived hiding in water tank on the roof top. The army arrested the husband and two sons of my youngest sister living at Zakiganj in Sylhet. When the army took them, my sister fell unconscious. She was taken to a hospital at Sylhet, where she died of the shock. The army also burnt the house of my sister.

Yahya Khan's postponement of the session of the National Assembly on March 1 flared a bloody clash

between Bangalees and Biharis at Railway Colony, Wireless Colony and Sher Shah Colony at Chittagong on March 2 and 3. During the clash, the Pathan soldiers led by Colonel Fatemi set ablaze the houses of Bangalees. They killed and burned hundreds of innocent Bangalee men, women, children. Fatemi was then the martial law administrator of Chittagong. On March 4, General Yakub removed Fatemi and appointed me to the same post. After taking charge, I went to visit the Railway and other affected colonies. I saw the Bangalee houses were burnt to ashes. I saw the Pathan soldiers guarding over the burnt houses. Almost all the inhabitants of the area had already fled. I came to know that many people were killed there. The injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and other hospitals. Then I went to CMCH and observed many people with burn injuries on various parts of their bodies were receiving treatment there. I checked their addresses recorded in the hospital register and found that most of them were Bangalees.

On March 30 in the midnight, somebody knocked my prison door. I was told to get ready in 15 minutes. I came to know that we were being taken to West Pakistan. They took us to Dhaka airport when it was raining cats and dogs.

From Karachi airport, we were taken to Malir Cantonment. We stayed there for a night and next morning we were taken to Kharian Cantonment. We were confined at an old rest house, about 14/15 miles away from Kharia.

The army authorities turned the rest house into a prisoners cage as it was secured with barbed wire and soldiers with machine guns. They kept me and my family members separately. I got a small room at a corner of the house. There was no furniture. I was told, "This is exclusively for you. Your family members are allowed to move inside the house, but you are not allowed to go outside the room. This restriction is not for your family members, but they would not be allowed to go outside the boundary."

I had to sleep on the floor. There was an open toilet. One soldier always stood nearby to guard me round the clock.

I was kept there from April to August 10 under the supervision of army. They used to take me to Jhelum, about 10 kilometres away from there every morning for interrogation. After interrogation they used to take me back to the rest house.

Sometimes I was interrogated round the clock, sometimes continuous two days and nights. I had to remain standing until the end of interrogation. I was not given food during interrogation. However, they did not torture me physically.

The interrogators used to ask me the same questions regularly. They alleged, "Sheikh Mujib, Colonel Osmani and you planned a rebellion and mutiny in East Pakistan to break the country and make East Pakistan an independent. Your East Bengal Regimental Centre was the operational headquarters."*

*A Pakistan armed forces public relation officer Sadiq Salik stated, 'The commandant, Colonel (later Brigadier) Mozumdar was a stocky little fellow fired with Bengali nationalism. He had direct contacts with Mujibur Rahman, which gave him a rare combination of pride and prejudice : pride in Bengali nationalism, prejudice against West Pakistan. I met him on the flower-decked lawns of his office and apprised him of my mission. After an hour's conversation, I was convinced that his reputation was not groundless. He talked proudly about his importance, Bengali nationalism and injustices done to the Bengali people. He said, 'Why do you want to beat your drums about doubling the quota? Even if the President's order is fully implemented, it would mean only fifteen per cent representation for the Bengalis while they constitute fifty-six per cent of the national population.'
After this 'briefing' by Mozumdar, I had lunch with a West Pakistani officer. . . . My host related a small incident. He said that when the last batch of recruits was about to sail for Karachi, the colonel told them, 'You are proud Bengali soldiers now. You are not going there to polish the shoes of Punjabi officers. Soon they will be polishing yours.' Witness to Surrender, Siddiq Salik, Oxford University Press, Karachi, Pakistan, 1978, p. 11.

They also alleged, “You wanted to capture all the arms and ammunition of Pakistani soldiers with the help of EPR (East Pakistan Rifles), Police and students. You planned to remove all the border posts with India to bring arms from that country. For this purpose, you (Majumdar) had a meeting with Commander , Indian Eastern Command, Khulna. You gave out your plan to the Eastern Command and sought their help. You told them that beside arms and ammunitions, you’ll need military training in India. You also had a plan to arrest all non-Bangalees at Chittagong and kill them if they tried to resist.”

The members of ISI (Inter Service Intelligence) and Pakistan Army Intelligence Unit interrogated me. I denied all allegations as false.

In the first week of August, Colonel Anjum and Colonel Mokhtar of Army Intelligence took me to Jhelum. They said, “a Bangalee officer named Colonel Yasin told us that you had meetings with Sheikh Mujib, other leaders of Awami League and also with the Commnader, Eastern Command of India. You have discussed in those meetings how India could help you.”

At one stage they said, “As the army failed to get a confessional statement from you, it has been decided that you’ll be handed over to Special Police.”

The next morning several military vehicles came to the rest house cage and escorted me to the headquarters of the Special Police at Lahore leaving my family members there. The Army handed me over to the Special Police.

Police Inspector Durrani received me and confined me in an underground cell. He said, “Sorry Brigadier, we cannot provide you with mosquito net, pillow or bedsheet. You’ll have to stay here without all these things.”

Cell No. 12, where I was held captive, was like a bathroom. It was actually built for prisoners. It had an iron door with grill. There was no window, fan or even ventilation. A high-power bulb was always kept on which made the cell very hot. There was a commode. There was no arrangement for food.

Before confining me in the cell, the authorities took away my shirt and trousers and replaced them with prison clothes. Their was a ozifa (religious book) in my suitcase. I wanted it, but I was told that it would be given to me later after examination.

On the first day, I was not given any food. Inspector Durrani came to visit me on the second day, but he did not talk to me. I had to go hungry the whole day. At night, a sepoy came with three West Pakistani rotis (bread) and a bowl of vegetables for me. They passed the food through the narrow space under the iron door. When I got the food, I noticed a lot of dust in it. It was not fit for human consumption, and so I did not take it. A few minutes later, the sepoy returned and took the plate back. So I remained without food for the whole night.

In the morning, Durrani came and asked, “Did you have your meal?”

“No, I haven’t,” I replied.

He said, “Why?, Didn’t they serve you food?”

I replied, “I’m not hungry.” I did not disclose to him the real reason for not taking the food.

Then Durrani said, “You’ll have to take some food. If you don’t take it, there is nothing we can do. We can’t serve you any better food.”

Then he ordered for tea and a big bread.

The space under the door was so narrow that they couldn’t pass the mug of tea through it. So one sepoy opened the door and gave me the tea mug. After I finished it, Durrani took the mug away and left.

At about 11 am, Durrani returned along with two sepoy. They opened the door and the sepoy held my hands strongly. Then they took me upstairs to the room, where I had earlier been handed over to the police by the Army.

Durrani sat on a high chair, like the boss of an office. I sat in front of him on a stool. Two police officers — Shafi and Safdar Kazi interrogated me there. They asked me many questions. They said, “You have killed many non-Bangalees in Chittagong. What have you to say about it?”

I said, “I didn’t kill any non-Bangalee. They were killed before I had taken the charge as Martial Law Administrator of Chittagong. Before me, Colnel Fatemi was in charge. He could not control the situation. The army also killed many Bangalees. That’s why General Yakub Khan removed Fatemi and appointed me in his place. Yakub gave me the charge on the telephone. There was no political killing after I had taken charge as Martial Law Administrator.”

As I was speaking, Police Inspector Shafi suddenly sprung up on his feet and slapped me so hard that I fell down from the stool. I was totally shocked. I got up and said in mixed Urdu-English, “You are of my son’s age. Look at my rank and age. For God’s sake, don’t beat me.”

Then Durrani took me to the cell and said, “I’m sorry. Don’t mind.” I was crying like a baby. Durrani said, “Don’t worry. They will not do it again in future.”

After being put in the cell. I started to read out Sura Yasin, an important verse from The holy Koran, with firm belief that whoever recites the holy scriptures will never be humiliated. While, reciting I banged my head against the wall again and again. I could not believe what was happening as I never imagined that a police inspector would slap a senior army officer like me. Even army personnel did not show such impertinence.

As I was lost in thought, Durrani came again. He took me upstairs where I found five or six fat men inside the room either sitting or standing. There was no chair or table in the room. Durrani told Shafi, “Don’t beat him even if he does not admit anything.” Shafi roared in anger saying, “What are you saying? This fellow will not say anything unless he is beaten, killed thousands of Pakistani brothers in Chittagong. He sided with Sheikh and betrayed Pakistan. He looks small, but he is a culprit. I will not get peace until I beat him.”

Shafi and Kazi started beating, slapping and kicking me. When they stopped, the people who had been standing outside, came into the room. They were carrying bags, ropes, waterbags and hockeysticks. Shafi and Kazi proceeded to tie me up from the back.

All of a sudden Durrani said, “Majumdar is a Hindu name. Examine whether he is a Hindu or a Muslim.”

Immediately the sepoy stripped me naked and I started crying. I told Durrani, “Inspector, you said that no torture will be unleashed on me. What can be more inhumane than this? I am an elderly man. Look at my face and my rank. You got me naked in front of the sepoyes” Humiliated and pain stricken, I continued to cry.

Durrani ordered the sepoyes to return my trousers and thereafter I was sent back to the cell.

The pain increased slowly and my body became blue. It was increasingly unbearable as the night approached. The nights were more terrible as high-powered lights were kept just over my head and the cell used to become hot like a oven. I kept crying throughout the night. Brutal physical torture coupled with humiliation of being stripped anguished me bitterly.

The following day they came at about 10 or 11 am. Durrani took me away. I saw the same people were standing outside the interrogation room. The room looked like the same as it was on the previous day. Shafi and Durrani said, “Yesterday you told us that you knew nothing and that you had no meeting with Commander, Eastern Command of India. But Colonel Yasin has told us everything about you.”

I said, “Okay, bring Yasin to me, and I will ask him some questions. You will then understand that he has made false statements. I had no meeting with Indian Commander of Eastern Command.”

Both of them went out to bring Yasin and returned after sometime saying, “Yasin is reading the Koran and holding the Koran he said everything he said was true, but he does not want to meet you.”

“Then bring the Koran and I will affirm that Yasin was a liar do the same.” I said, but they simply

repeated, “Yasin touched the Koran. He cannot lie.”

Suddenly Shafi jumped on me and the others tied me with a chair. I was kept in between the two other chairs as if a goat was being tied for slaughter. In the meantime, they had removed my shirt and trouser. Durrani brought a wire and connected it with a rod. In my hanging position with a hockey stick between the chairs, Durrani himself pushed the rod into my rectum and started giving electric shocks. I shouted as the pain of electric shock was unbearable and almost fainted. Durrani said, “You will not be freed until you say what we want you to say.”

I said, “Please kill me. Don’t give me so much brutal pain.”

He then said in Urdu, “*Marne se pehele to bohut kuchh baki hai* (there are lot of things to be done before dying).” I was then again sent back to the cell.

These inhuman torture continued for the following few days. One day at noon, I was put in a gunny bag and kept outdoors in the scorching sun of August. The interrogators continued their effort to get a confessional statement, and I continued to deny everything. One day, I was taken to another room adjacent to the room where I was tortured earlier. The room was full of electrical equipment.

The interrogators said, “Tell us what conspiracy you hatched along with your prophet Mujib and patron Osmany.”

As they did not get the required reply, they tied me upside down, hung me the ceiling and beat mercilessly with hot waterbag and a jute rope. They used the technique to ensure that no beating of amrks were visible on my body.

After failing to extract anything from me, they brought me down on the floor. I cried, “Please give me a glass of water.” Shafi opened his zipper and urinated on my face and said, “*Ye lo pani* (here is water).”

I cannot describe in words what a terrible physical and mental torture it was. The painful memories of those brutalities still hurt me often.

I was left alone lying on the urine. Ten minutes later the interrogators came back. Shafi made me stand up, and said, “*Tum insan ho ya hiwan ? Tumhara upar itna zulum ho raha hai, fir bhi tum sach nehi bolta? Job tak tum sach nehi bolega, hum tumko nehi chhorega* (are you a human being? Even after so much torture, you are still not telling the truth will not leave you until you tell the truth).”

They tied me on a cot holding my legs upward and Durrani again started giving electric shock on my wounded rectum and I groaned in pain.

A soldier squeezed my scrotums with his hands and I screamed. The prolonged squaeezing pain was so unbearable that I had to give in. I said, “Please stop the torture. I will say whatever you want to say.”

Durrani said, ‘*Aab dimag thik hua, aab hush aaya. Thik hai, utho* (well, now you have to come your senses. Ok, get up).’ The soldiers brought a chair, a tool and a jug of water, with which I quenched my thirst.

Durrani told me, ‘Write all the charges brought against you. Otherwise, look at the consequence.’ He pointed to the rooftop from where a rope, electric wire and other equipment of torture were hanging. ‘All these things will be applied on you. If you want your good, you will do as told.’

I said, ‘Better you write. I will sign.’ He thought I will not be able to write or if I wrote the charges may be not be rightly worded weakening the case and agreed. Then they started to behave properly with me and for the first time I was given rice and moat. But my body was sore with pain, specially the rectum and scrotum. I told Durrani, ‘Brother, my condition is very serious. My rectum and scrotums are seriously injured. I cannot urinate.’

He said, “We will take you to a doctor in the evening.”

There was a hospital in the fort and the doctor found that the tip of my penis had been plugged, the

scrotums were swollen and the rectum was infected. The doctor said, "His condition is very serious. He has to be given treatment here."

Durrani disagreed, saying, "It is not possible to keep him here." Then the doctor told Durrani something, which I could not hear. That convinced Durrani to allow me to stay in the hospital. I was given pain killers at night. After two to three days I was discharged from the hospital.

Back at the interrogation centre, Durrani said, "You know good English. I will dictate in Urdu and you will write in English." After that was done he said, "You will have to make a statement in front of the magistrate that you wrote it yourself and then sign. I will take you to a magistrate tomorrow."

The following day Durrani and Shafi took me to a magistrate's chamber in Lahore by car.

While entering the chamber, I saw the name of the magistrate in the name plate as "Bajwa". He offered me some soft drink. He asked me some questions, such as, where I came from and where was I educated. I told him that I was a graduate of Calcutta University. Then I told him, "Brother, you are not policeman, you are a magistrate, an educated person. My brother was also a magistrate. I know magistrates are men of principles. When the police take someone to a magistrate after beating him up, the detainee expects that he would get justice and makes a true statement. I also want to make a true statement. The statement produced before you is not my confessional statement. I was ruthlessly tortured by the police who forced me to sign it. One army colonel Yasin had made a false statement and they took my signature on it. I am denying in front of you that I made that statement."

The magistrate replied, "Mr. Brigadier, we are under martial law and if you decline the confessional statement that you have given to the police, you would be tortured more harsh than before. You could even be tortured to death. It is better to confess everything."

So I understood that the magistrate belonged to the same class as the police. I said, "If you say so, I will sign".

Thereafter, I was taken back to the police headquarters. After a few days Brigadier Ejaz was came there and he told me that I would have to face a court martial, on account of my confessional statement.

Earlier, Durrani, had threatened me not to do or say anything that would give a hint to Brigadier Ejaj that I was tortured. I was kept in solitary confinement in at least 10 condemned cells and jails making my meals, prayer and sleep irregular. I was worried that I might be killed or handed a court martial verdict.

I became ill in Malakand Fort. I suffered from fever, rectum infection and my face was swollen, when I was finally taken to the Mardan Combined Military Hospital for treatment. I came to know from the hospital bed that on December 16 Bangladesh had gained its independence. On January 15, 1972, the Pakistanis freed me and I went to a relative's house in Rawalpindi, where I learned that my family members had left for Dhaka.

I was summoned by the Pakistan Commission of the 1971 War headed by the then Chief Justice of Pakistan in March, 1972. Appearing before the court on March 10, I gave oral and written statements and informed the Commission that the police took the so-called deposition after torturing me. It, however, resulted in my re-arrest, and I was sent to Wana Fort in remote south Owaziristan where I was kept in solitary confinement until November 5, 1973. I returned to Bangladesh on the following day as per the extradition agreement between the two countries.

Interviewed by Ruhul Motin



One day they forced me to lie on a slab of ice

Lt. Col. Masoudul Hossain Khan (Retd.)

Lt. Col. Masoudul Hossain Khan (Retd.) was in command of Second Battalion of the East Bengal Regiment in 1971. His unit later under the leadership of its Second-in-Command, Major Shafiullah played an important role during the Liberation War. Col. Masoud was arrested on March 23, 1971, on the charge of organising a revolt in the Army on March 19, 1971. He was taken to Pakistan in the first week of April where he suffered imprisonment and was tortured brutally by the Pakistani Army and Special Branch of Police. His statement was recorded on October 9, 1999.

In March, 1971, I was the officer-in-command of a battalion of the East Bengal Regiment stationed at Joydevpur. In early March, there was a cricket match between Australia and Pakistan at the Dhaka Stadium. I went to see the game. Before beginning of the match, I came to know that the scheduled session of National Assembly had been postponed. Earlier in 1970, Awami League achieved absolute majority in the general election, but the Pakistani rulers conspired not to hand over state power to the Awami League, triggering postponement of the National Assembly session. As the news spread, the crowd gathered at the stadium burst into the protest. They came out to the streets that forced the authorities to abandon the match.

Then a non-cooperation movement against the Military Junta began at the call of Sheikh Mujib. Due to strike, banks were closed, and it was not possible for me to pay salaries to the soldiers of my battalion on the first day of March. I could not even bring food rations from Dhaka to Joydevpur. We were facing some other problems also connected with administration of my unit.

On March 19, my boss Brigadier Jahanjeb Arbab came to Joydevpur along with 8 to 10 vehicles carrying troops. He said that the purpose of his visit was to see the situation and our problems. But we were suspicious of his real purpose, due to the huge contingent accompanying him. He must have had some other intention and that was to disarm us. Since last few days, I had been getting such hints.

At that time I had only 250 soldiers available at Joydevpur out of the total of 900 personnel of my unit. There were five companies in the unit. Only Headquarter and One Rifle Company was staying at Joydevpur. Out of the rest three, two were sent to Tangail and Jamalpur on the excuse of resisting so-called Indian aggression in the boarder and one was deployed to protect Gazipur Ordnance Factory. The main purpose behind these deployments on orders from higher authority was to remove Bengalee soldiers from the headquarters at Joydevpur.

It was clear to everybody, as it was to me, that the Brigade Commander had come to disarm us. The local people put barricades on the road from Tongi to Joydevpur Rajbari, where we were staying, so that the Pakistani troops could not reach there easily.

However, we remained alert at that time, since we were alert always to resist so-called Indian aggression from border. The army contingent led by Brigadier Arbab took extra time to reach Joydevpur after removing the barricades on the roads. After lunch, when they were planning to return, the local people once again blocked the road at the Joydevpur Railway Crossing, by placing rail wagons. Brigadier Arbab ordered me to remove the barricades. He said, "Why there is so much movement here? Remove the barricades so that I can return to Dhaka. If required, shoot the people." I said, "I'll see what I can do. But it is absurd for us to shoot our own countrymen."

After a while, Brigadier Arbab realised that I was not interested in firing on the people excepting one or two casual shots. Bypassing me, Arbab ordered Major Moyeen, a Bengalee company commander of mine, to take the responsibility. I told Moyeen to fire in such a way that the bullets did not hit the people. Seeing all these, Brigadier Arbab finally ordered his own troops to shoot on the people. They were taking positions behind and on flanks of our troops and started firing from machine guns. As they were firing from behind us, we became almost captive. Some people, including one Monu Mia, were killed in the firing. The local people also used shot guns and light weapons, but finally their efforts went in vain against strong Pakistan troops.

We tackled the situation by shifting our position and making way for the troops of Arbab. At that time, we did not think about using armed measures against Arbab, because the negotiation for a political settlement between Sheikh Mujib and Yahiya Khan was still going on.

Before leaving Joydevpur, Brigadier Arbab threatened me saying, "Command your troops properly. This is not the right way." He indicated that I would have to face a tougher situation in future.

On March 23, I was called to join a conference in Dhaka. It was nothing but a ploy. I came to Dhaka in the morning, since my family members lived there. When I went to Brigade Headquarters, Brigadier Arbab was not there. He had gone to the city where a tense situation was prevailing. In fact, he was engaged in killing Bengalees in the city. The Brigade Major told me to wait with my family members until the return of Brigadier Arbab.

After about two hours, I received a phone call. The Brigade Major told me on phone that the Commander had returned and was coming on the line. Brigadier Arbab said, "Colonel Masoud, you are not returning to Joydevpur. You are no more the Commanding Officer of the Second Bengal. Somebody else will come and take over. You stay at home and don't move from the house. You must report to Station Headquarters everyday from now onwards."

In fact, I was placed under house-arrest on March 23. When I went to my house, I saw plain-clothe ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) personnel moving around the area. There was a rest house beside my house. Earlier I saw the ISI personnel at the rest house. Their duty was to intercept my friends and relations while entering my house. At that time it was quite impossible for me to go outside my residence.

In the meantime, my driver came with the car to take me back to the regiment office. But the ISI men sent him back.

I was replaced a few days later by Colonel Raqib, a Bengalee officer who was the commander of 32 Punjab Regiment. But the Bengalee soldiers could not accept him spontaneously. Major Shafiullah was actually commanding the unit as Col. Raqib was not accepted by the troops, who came from a Punjab Regiment.

On the night of March 25, trouble erupted in Dhaka. I heard sound of moving tanks. I never heard so much heavy firing in my life. I called Major Shafiullah over telephone and informed him about the situation at Dhaka. I also wanted to know from him the situation at Joydevpur. He replied, "No, nothing wrong happened here." I told him, "You should be prepared. Joydevpur is a likely target, and you may face an attack any time."

Earlier, I had told the entire battalion that we might have to leave Joydevpur and take shelter at Madhupur jungle or any other place. I said this in early March. At that time, Shafiullah had said, "Sir why are you saying this so loudly?" I said, "I'm telling this to you only. Every body here is Bengalee, so no problem." Some Bengalee officers who were present there laughed at it for this comment. Then I said, "I may not be with you in the days ahead. Nobody knows what will happen to us tomorrow. So I'm telling you what I'm thinking today."

I told Shafiullah by phone, "You better try and leave that place." Shafiullah was also thinking on those lines. Two or three days after talking to me, he left along with all his troops, arms and ammunitions. He also took away the reserve and additional military equipment which were at Joydevpur and was surplus for a battalion.

When the Pakistan army came to know that Shafiullah had fled, they suspected me. They took me to Station Headquarters on March 28 in the evening. They said that they would not allow me to stay at my house. At first I thought that they would tell me to stay in the officers mess, but later I was confined in a quarter guard (military prison) of a Punjab Regiment Battalion (32 Punjab).

Every regimental unit has a quarter guard for soldiers. I was a colonel at that time, and so the quarter guard was not a suitable place for me. However, they forced me to live there and the army officials started torturing me. They used to treat me as an ordinary soldier. At first they started torturing me mentally, and not physically.

Sometimes breakfast was given at 10 a.m. instead of 7, and lunch at 3.30 p.m. instead of 12.30. Sometimes they did not serve me any meal at all. Sometimes I was given cold tea and dry bread.

About 8 or 10 days later, in the first week of April, on an early hour (about 1am) a Subedar came and said, "Sir, get ready. You'll have to go with me."

"Where?" I said, but he did not reply.

Frightened, I asked, "Where you're taking me? And why?" I also wanted to know whether I should wear my uniform. The Subedar said, "No need, you better come in plain clothes."

I had a bag with me. I took some clothes in the bag. Then I was told to get into a jeep. The soldiers handcuffed me and tied my hands from behind with a long chain, like a prisoner.

The jeep was advancing towards Air Headquarters at Tejgaon. I had heard that the Pakistan Army used to take freedom fighters there and kill them. I thought that possibly I was being taken for the same purpose, and I was very frightened. My physical condition also deteriorated fast. My situation then can only be imagined by those who have faced death or were about to face.

After reaching Air Headquarters, the jeep crossed the air strip and stopped near the Hanger. A Boeing aircraft was waiting there. I was dragged and ordered to board the plane. At that time I was still tied with a chain. I again asked, "Subedar Saheb, where you're taking me?"

"Aap jaar ahe hain West Pakistan (You're going to West Pakistan)," he replied.

"But why you're taking me in such a manner? Why you have tied me with chain? Am I an animal?" I asked.

"I am carrying out the order of my officer. I must do it."

He forced me to sit in the plane in the same condition. I shouted, "How can I sit like this?" At this time, a pilot of Pakistan Airlines, possibly a foreigner, came and said, "He cannot sit like this. This a flight of 10 to 12 hours." At that time, Pakistani aircraft were not allowed to fly over Indian skies, and so the West Pakistan-bound flights were operated via Colombo.

On the request of the Captain, I was allowed to sit with my hands placed in front of the body, but they did not unchain me.

It seemed to me that I was the only Bengalee officer who was being taken to West Pakistan, because all other passengers were Pakistanis. They were going to Pakistan due to the war and most of them were family members, women, elders and children.

During the journey of 10 to 12 hours, I had to go to the toilet with the chain tied to my handcuffed wrist. The subedar used to hold the chain from outside.

The plane reached Karachi Airport and I had to get down in the same condition. Subsequently, I was taken to a quarter guard of Malir Cantonment. A captain received me. I wore sunglasses, and the captain said, "Colonel, You can't wear a sunglass. You have been killing our Pakistanis." He took my sunglasses, money and all other belongings.

After 3 or 4 days, three officers came one early hours of morning and said, "Colonel, You are going with us. We're taking you somewhere else."

They took me in a jeep without handcuffs this time.

According to rule, an army officer should be escorted by an officer of the same rank. For the first time I saw an officer of the rank of colonel escorting me. There were 2 or 3 jeeps with us. On the way, we stopped and Brigadier Majumdar and his family members were also picked up on the way.

We were taken to Lahore by plane. My family members still had to live in Dhaka Cantonment. From Lahore, we were taken to a place named Pannu, near Kharian Cantonment. We were confined in a dilapidated rest house of the Roads and Highways Department. It was protected by two-fold barbed wire. The roof was also protected by barbed wire. Soldiers were on guard on the roof with machine guns. Armed guards were also posted at all corners of the rest house. It was like a camp for prisoners of war.

Brigadier Majumdar and his family members were confined on one side of the building. However, I was not given even a suitable room. I was confined in a tiny chamber under the staircase where there was no electricity or furniture. I got a blanket and a cot. It was the month of April. Soon I felt exhausted with the hot weather in that desert-like place. The mosquito menace added to my miseries. After repeated requests, an officer gave me a mosquito net and a small fan. The food was fair, but it was not usually served on time, though served from an officers mess.

One day I asked an officer whether I could contact my family members in Dhaka. He allowed me to do so. So, I wrote a number of letters to Dhaka, but all my letters were censored. My family members also wrote to me, but I used to get the letters after a long period, sometimes even after a month. All the letters from Dhaka were read by the army authorities. My address was : C/O M.I. Directorate, General Headquarters, Rawalpindi, West Pakistan. The name of the place where I was confined (Pannu or Kharian) was not in the address. I had to write all the letters in English so that they could read those or censor.

After about one month, I used to be taken to Jhelum from Pannu. It was on the way to Rawalpindi. I was regularly interrogated there. Sometimes the interrogation continued for 3 to 4 days in a row. They used to interrogate me by setting up some high-powered bulbs towards my face. My interrogators used to ask various types of questions like “How do you know Sheikh Shaheb?” “What sort of discussions did you have with him?” “What you have done at Joydevpur?” “How have you maintained contact with the Awami League?”

I used to reply some of their questions and avoid some others. My old colleague Colonel Quaiyum Anjum from the MI Directorate was among those officers who interrogated me at Jhelum. He was my old friend. He allured me a lot. He used to tell me, “Masoud, you were my cadet-mate. I know you well. Please tell the truth. I’ll free you. You’ll become a full colonel.” He further said, “Colonel Yasin gave us a statement about you. According to it, you had a meeting with other high ranking Bengalee officers at Joydevpur. You were planning to make East Pakistan an independent country.”

I replied, “Let him face me.” As they could not succeed in getting any information from me, they sent me to the Special Interrogation Centre of the Punjab Police Special Branch at Lahore Fort in the month of August. I was told earlier that Colonel Yasin was there and I would have to meet him and confront his statement.

I was confined in a cell near the special interrogation centre of the fort. I was taken to the centre everyday for interrogation. During interrogation, I saw Mr. Durrani, a Punjabi, and Mr. Mohammad Anwar, both Special Branch police officers. They referred of Colonel Yasin while interrogating me. I denied everything.

On the very first day, Mr. Durrani asked, “What sort of link have you maintained with the Awami League? We know that you had direct contact with Sheikh Shaheb and Awami League. You were involved in politics and planned to make East Pakistan an independent state.” I denied the allegation outright, “Question does not arise, I’m an army officer. I never got involved in politics breaking discipline of the armed forces. I have never maintained contact with any political leader.” When he realised that I would not say anything, he started beating me up. Once he slapped me and pushed a burning cigar onto my leg. I cried out in pain.

Durrani and Anwar used to initiate the torture sessions. Then others carried it on thereafter.

Both the officers used to watch this standing by the side.

Once they posed me a new question. “You arranged a picnic at Joydevpur Rajbari in early January and invited some serving and retired army officers to join. Many senior Bengalee retired officers like General M.I. Majid, Colonel Osmani and their families joined the picnic. When the ladies were busy cooking, you had a meeting to hatch a conspiracy to divide the country.”

I denied it also. Then they said, “Colonel Yasin and Brigadier Majumdar said this. Why you are denying?” I said, “Take me to them for cross-examining their statement.”

They thought that I was lying. So they began another session of furious torture. Beside slapping, fisting and boxing, they pierced needles into my nail, pushed burning cigar onto my legs— from knee to toes. At one stage, I fell unconscious. When I recovered slightly, they gave me electric shock on my nipples, and other sensitive parts of the body making me unconscious again.

After a few days, one Brigadier Kader came and said, “You had a good career record in the last few years. However, your career has been finished by the negative confidential report submitted by Brigadier Arbab. General Khadim Hossain Raja, the G.O.C. and General Yakub of Eastern Command however gave good reports about you. Why you are not telling the truth? If you do so, I’ll arrange your freedom. You’ll be promoted to the rank of Brigadier. Why you are spoiling this great opportunity?” This Brigadier was a few months senior to me.

I was not convinced by his temptation. The interrogators again they started torturing me. Durrani beat up me with an iron rod wrapped with rubber. They wrapped rubber so that there was no stain on my skin. I fell unconscious many times during the torture.

Sometimes they used to apply unusual method of torture. One day they forced me to lie on a slab of ice. In severe pain, I shouted loudly. At that time they held my hands and legs. I fell unconscious again and remained so for hours.

Sometimes they used to hang me upside down with rope tied with my legs and beat me up mercilessly. My nose often started bleeding, but the torture continued. Sometimes I found myself lying in a pool of blood. One day they brought a red hot iron rod. One of them said, "Tell everything, otherwise it will be pushed into your rectum."

They again started the interrogation, but I denied all the allegations. Then they applied the hot iron rod on my back. I fell unconscious for several hours. When my sense came back, I found myself on a bed in the Police Hospital.

One day I felt severe pain in my gums. I asked to be taken to a dentist, but instead of doing this, one of the soldiers boxed me with his full strength and my tooth broke. My mouth started bleeding. I have no language to express the barbaric torture unleashed on me by the Pakistani army and police.

After about two months, a captain came with a signal message from Dhaka that had reached Pakistan a month ago. They had already read it. I came to know that my 8-year-old son was suffering from pneumonia. But the army authorities did not allow my family to get him admitted to Combined Military Hospital (CMH). Due to movement restriction, my family could not take him outside the cantonment. So the CMH was the only hospital where he could be treated. However, due to lack of treatment one of his lungs was damaged. When the other was also infected, the authorities finally gave permission to admit him at the CMH. According to rules, when an army person or his family member falls seriously sick, the head of the family is informed and allowed to stay beside the patient. In my son's case, they only informed me that he was on the D.I. list, but did not allow me to go and see him.

Some officers said, "Your son is very sick. If you want to see him, you can tell us." I said, "Yes, I want to go." The officers said, "You'll be sent back to East Pakistan soon, if you confess your guilt."

A few days before this, my family members sent some photographs of my sons and daughters. They opened the envelop and saw all the photographs. Then they threatened me saying, "Your children are good looking. They are also good students, but they are now in our palm. If you do not confess everything, we'll crush them to instant death."

They threatened me again and again, but could not convince me. One day they showed the statements given by Colonel Yasin and Brigadier Majumdar and said, "They are being freed as they told the truth. You also do the same and get freed." In this way, the interrogators tried to allure me, tried to confuse me. At that time I was so mentally disturbed that I could not think about promotion. I only thought how could I see my sick child.

At last I agreed to their proposal. I said, "O.K. I'll do whatever you tell." The Pakistani interrogators brought a typed statement which I signed. In late September, I was shifted from Lahore to Layalpur Jail. The guards used to tell me that Sheikh Mujib and Dr Kamal Hossain were there. Later I came to know that there was a Special Tribunal Court inside the jail. I also came to know that I would be tried in the tribunal. If I agreed to be a state witness, I would be released. I would have to tell before the court all that contained in my signed statement.

The chairman of the tribunal was one Brigadier A Rahim. A civil judge and three or four other military officers were the members of the tribunal. Brigadier Rahim handed me an album during the trial. Showing a photograph, he asked, "Do you know these people?" I said, "No." A few minutes later, he further asked, "Tell us which one is Motia Chowdhury." I said, "I can't, because I never saw her." Thus all the information mentioned in the statement proved to be irrelevant.

Then Brigadier Rahim showed me some other photographs and asked, "Tell us which one is the residence of Sheikh Mujib." I said, "I can't recognise." Sheikh Mujib was present in the tribunal and was smiling hearing me.

I was present before the court for five minutes only. Then the tribunal allowed me to go.

Two days later, I was brought to a rest house in Rawalpindi. At one noon, one of my old colleagues, Major Sarwar said, "Sir, you're returning home by the evening flight. Your son is still very sick."

On October 8, I reached Dhaka from Pindi via Colombo. Sarwar also came with me. He handed me over to another officer. I was taken directly to my house so that I could meet my family members. Then I was taken to CMH where my son was admitted. My son started crying on seeing me. After about half an hour, the major escorting me said, "You'll have to go with me." I said, "Where? To my house?" He said, "No Your house is not safe, because the Muktibahinis will kill you. You'll be taken to the officers mess."

Before being taken to the mess, I was allowed to meet my family members again. I went to my house, but could not enter it, because a guard was sitting in the drawing room. The guest room was also occupied. Mrs Khaleda Zia and her two sons were there. The same soldiers were guarding two families confined in my residence.

I was taken to a guest room of the Ordnance Corps Officer Mess. Taking permission of the authorities, I brought my youngest son aged about 3 years to stay with me. I used to go to see my other son at the hospital everyday under strict escort and security. A few days later, I saw Mrs Khaleda Zia and her sons sitting near the lawn, since they were also shifted from my family residence to the Ordnance Officers Mess premises. I was allowed to keep my transistor with me. I told my wife to put my small pistol inside the transistor. At that time we used to listen to Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra which mainly broadcast the victory stories of the Muktibahini. Hearing these news, I also started dreaming of becoming free. I wanted to keep the pistol with me for protection of my son and also to resist any sudden attack. The guards never noticed that I had a pistol in the transistor.

My son did not recover even in late November. He was being given oxygen everyday. In such a condition, the hospital authorities discharged him abruptly, because the number of injured people and dead bodies from war front increased at that time. As the hospital authority failed to accommodate all, they decided to remove the Bengalee patients. The hospital authorities told us, "Try to get your son admitted somewhere else." I said, "There is no other hospital inside the cantonment area. So I'll have to go outside." They said, "No, you have no permission to go outside. If possible, bring doctors from outside."

My son was released from the CMH in a serious condition. I could not manage further treatment for him. Finally, both his lungs were damaged and he died lying on my lap, a few weeks later.

On December 14, the allied forces conducted an airstrike on the cantonment targeting the headquarters of General Niazi. Several bombs fell near our officers mess creating a large ditch. But we remained unhurt miraculously. Then I sent my youngest son back home and I stayed alone.

It was December 16. I heard that the Pakistani forces would surrender that day. Without delaying a single moment, I rang a telephone number, that was of the ISI, and said, "You're surrendering today. Now permit me to return home. I want to meet my family." The ISI men said, "We can't. Because we can't contact Rawalpindi and we have no orders for you."

I said, "You'll never be able to contact Rawalpindi. How do you expect that? Bangladesh has already been established. The surrendering ceremony is going to be held this afternoon." The ISI official said, "We have nothing to do. We're surrendering and going to become prisoners. You'll also be with us, as our guest!"

I said, "You are going to be the guests of Muktibahini."

Refusing my request to release me, they took me to the Combined Workshop, where I saw about 150 Pakistani officers surrounded by Indian guards. Suddenly a Pakistani officer named Major Iftekhar came and said, "Sir, you have still been kept confined unnecessarily." Then I told him to make arrangements for my release. Iftekhar said, "If you give me your jacket, then I will try." I wore a warm jacket as it was December, but I agreed to give it to him. Iftekhar promised me that he would try to free me in the evening. For this reason, he went round the area to find out ways. In the evening, he took me near the position of Indian army. A Pakistani guard asked, "Where are you going?" Iftekhar somehow managed him and said, "My duty has finished. Now you have to face the Indian guards. You'll have to manage it. If they see me with you, they will not allow you to go free."

A Sikh soldier intercepted me and started interrogation. I told him that I was a Bengalee officer. The Pakistanis confined me for long nine months and tortured me. I also showed him the torture marks on my body. The Indian soldier observed carefully and allowed me to go.

Thus I was freed on the evening of 16th December. I got rid of the mental and physical torture. However, what was more painful for me was that I could not regain my position after independence.

Even after 28 years, whenever I look at my feet or touch my back, I go back to that horrible chapter of my life. I recall those frightful moments shivering in fear again and again.

Interviewed by Ruhul Motin



They pressed lighted cigarettes on my throat

Masud Sadique Chullu

During The Liberation War of Bangladesh, Masud Sadique Chulla was a valiant Freedom Fighter of the Guerrilla Squad, Crack Platoon, under Sector 2. On August 30, 1971, he was arrested in Dhaka where he was to carry out an operation. He was taken to the Nakhhalpara MP Hostel Concentration Camp, Dhaka, and was tortured brutally. Fortunately enough, he was spared death as his elder brother Mr. ASHK Sadique (present Education Minister) was a key bureaucrat in the then Pakistan Government. Masud Sadique Chullu's testimony was recorded on September 20, 1999.

During the liberation war I was a member of a, 17-18 member Guerrilla group, known as 'Crack Platoon.' We spent nights at 1 Tenament House, Elephant Road (Near Ramna Thana) the official residence of my elder brother Mr. S.S.H.K. Sadique, who was a top civil servant of the then Pakistan Government. There we stored enough arms and ammunitions to resist the Pakistan army for three to four hours.

On the midnight of August, 29, 1971, the Pakistan army attacked our house. Lead by Major Quaiyum, followed by a small group, knocked at the door. When my brother opened the door the Major asked, "Sir, how many people live in this house?" My brother replied, "My mother, wife and children." The Major asked again, "Anybody else?" My younger brother Masud Sadique," replied my brother, carefully avoiding my nickname. The Major, however, wanted to know my nickname, to which my brother said, "Chullu".

I was hearing all this from an adjoining room. My brother asked me to get up. I came in front of the army team. The Major said, "Sir, we want to take him to the police station for an hour. Don't worry, he'll be back in' the morning.

Such a situation was apprehended as we were making preparations for an operation at Azimpur that very morning. For this I had to go to my house at Dhanmondi Road No.28. Which was used as a camp of the Guerilla group and arms and ammunitions were hidden underground. While entering my house, a guard of an adjacent house informed me that some members of our group were caught by the army and were brought to that house. Although I could not know who were arrested, I suspected possible danger. For security reason, members of our group were careful not to live in the same place, but to divide and live in different places in separate small groups. We never took permanent shelter. When I told my brother about the arrests they advised me to go into hiding and thus I decided to leave the house next morning with all the arms and ammunition. I spent a restless night. However, before I could leave, the army reached my brother's house to arrest me.

My brother asked the guard to open the gate. The Major said sarcastically, "No need. he (indicating me) is used to jumping over walls." I could understand what the officer actually meant. I started to get mentally prepared to face a tough situation. When I got into the army jeep they blind folded me and tied my hands. I could not figure out the destination. On the way, the jeep stopped several times. They whispered to each other. I was still in the jeep, when they surrounded the house of Major Dalim to arrest his brother Swapan, who was able to escape by jumping from the roof.

After about half an hour, the vehicle finally reached its destination (I came to know later that it was the Nakhhalpara M.P. Hostel).

They took me to a small dark room measuring about 10 feet by 10 feet. When I entered the room, Colonel Hejaji of field intelligence unit asked rudely "What is your name?" I replied. Then he shouted in Urdu "Musalmanka bachcha, musalmanko marta hai? (Being a Moslem you are killing Moslems) You have killed my brother." He kicked me on the face. My teeth broke with the spikes of his boot. Then he asked in English, "How many Pakistanis have you killed so far? How many operations have you conducted?"

I replied "I don't understand what you're saying." The Colonel said "You will understand in a few moments" and ordered Havildar Shafin Gul to hang me up. He hung me from the hook of the ceiling fan. Then the Colonel himself started beating me up. After his turn, Havildar Shafin Gul and three others took charge. Shafin Gul was the most notorious person among the Pakistan army contingent camped at the M.P. Hostel. He continued interrogation while torturing me. He asked, "Where are the arms?" Groaning in pain, I replied, "I don't know."

As I repeatedly denied their allegations, they increased the level of torture and at one stage I fell unconscious. I can not recall how long I remained unconscious, but I do remember somebody bringing me down and projecting a search light towards my face. Suddenly I heard the sound of a window opening. Hejaji came and asked a man beyond the fence "Is this Chullu?" I heard the reply, "Ha, yeto Chullu hai" (Yes, this is Chullu).

Hejaji said, "Well, you're the commander of Dhaka city? You couldn't recognise them, but they recognised you. Now tell me where are the arms?" As I refused to disclose, Hejaji shouted in anger and ordered his men to torture me again.

They hung me up again and beat me up mercilessly. I fell unconscious again. On the afternoon of March 30, I regained consciousness. I realised that my white shirt and black pants had become blood stained. I tried to open my eyes, but could not. I could not make out whether I was alive or dead. I could not move my legs as they felt heavy like stones. I failed to raise my head too. I was thirsty, but I was not given a single drop of water.

I felt pain in my hands also. The army men thought me to be dead. One of them told somebody to bring down my 'dead body'. When they brought me down, I heard the azan of magreb prayer. I saw all the soldiers offering their prayers on the balcony. A few moments later, they returned and realised that I was alive. They again hung me with clamps attached to the wall. I heard them asking the same question, "Tell us, where are the arms?"

"I don't know", I replied. Shafin Gul punched my belly with full strength and started beating me with a cane. Then four soldiers began to torture me pressing my body to the wall with bamboo sticks and iron rods. Before falling unconscious, I said, "Stop torturing me ... I'll tell you everything."

However, when they released me, I refused to tell them anything. They started torturing me in the same manner and I fell unconscious again. Before falling unconscious, I gave them the addresses of some houses where we used to keep arms previously. They conducted raids on those houses, but failed to recover any arms. I never told them the real address, because we kept arms at my brother's official house. If I told them that address, they would have killed my brother and other members of my family.

The next morning, I locked myself inside a bathroom. I was feeling severe pain in my leg. My skin had become mutilated due to torture. They once again brought me to Colonel Hejaji for interrogation. Then the same story of interrogation and torture continued. I did not disclose anything. They handed over me to Shafin Gul and Capt. Sajjad again. He ordered to torture me more severely.

Shafin Gul took me to a 10 feet by 10 feet room. Several soldiers sat on my body and pressed me down so strongly, that I felt as if all the internal parts of my body were coming out. After some time, they clamped me to the window of the torture cell. All arrangement of torture were ready in the cell. There were many clamps on the windows, walls and ceiling of the room. Light could barely enter into the cell as there was a high wall outside the window.

During the torture session, they used to press burning cigarettes on my throat and I screamed in pain. From my throat to knees, they carried out the same method of torture. Once they pressed a burning cigarette into my rectum. I lost all sense due to the acute pain. I can not recall how long I remained unconscious. I could

not make out whether I was alive or dead or on the borderline between life and death. When I regained my senses, I found myself in a dying condition.

They tried to collect information from me by inserting ice into my rectum. They applied new methods of torture everyday. After the first 5/6 days of torture, I could not open my eyes. But I could hear a little. Once I saw the father of a freedom fighter, Ashfaq. The army brought that innocent man to the torture cell. He was astonished to see me there and said, "Don't tell them anything ... if you tell, they'll get the arms and our struggle will remain incomplete. You know, you'll have to die one day". I said, "Uncle, I didn't tell them anything so far. But I can't bear the torture anymore."

When I recall those days, I still feel pain. I don't know how I withstood the torture. I did not tell them about our arms and ammunitions only for the safety of my Brother and others. It became a routine for them to torture me, hanging me with clamps against the wall of the torture cell.

During interrogation, a Captain of the Pak Army asked me, "I'll release you, if you tell me where you have kept the arms." I realised, he was bluffing. So I did not tell him anything. They brought me down from hanging position. I lay in the small dark room alone. I could not see who were being tortured beside me. I only could hear them screaming.

During the first few days, I couldn't distinguish between day and night. They used to bring me to the torture cell at dawn and take me back to Ramna police station late in the night.

As they failed to unleash any information from me by torture for a week, they brought freedom fighter Badiul Alam in front of me and said, "Bodi told us that you have some arms." Due to the torture by the Pakistan army, Bodi's face had become deformed and it was difficult to recognise him. I realised that he might have said something to save his life. The soldiers tied Badi and me with chains in the corridor. Then he described the story of his arrest and torture. Due to pain, he could not speak clearly. He told me that he would try to escape from the torture cell. "I must take revenge" and "I am ready to die for that."

I was surprised to hear of his plan considering his physical condition. He even advised me to flee, but at that time, I did not have sufficient strength to run. My knees were broken due to torture and I could not even stand or walk. I used to crawl on the floor. Badi did not forget his plan. One morning when the soldiers were taking him to another room, Badi attacked a soldier. He snatched the sepoy's stengun and started running. I tried to get up but failed. The soldiers caught us and started to physically abuse us. Badi's nose and mouth started bleeding. We fell unconscious. Two days later, the army took away Badi somewhere else. After that I never saw Badi. To punish me for trying to flee from the torture cell, they tied my hands and legs and kept me there alone. I could not make out whether it was day or night, whether I was dead or alive. The soldiers used to give me water in a container and bad smelling food.

From September 10 or 11, they started threatening me that I would be hanged if I did not tell them about the arms and the guerrillas. I was awaiting death. My face by then, was disfigured due to their torture. Everyday, soldiers used to inform us about the fate of freedom fighters they had already killed. They wanted to threaten and make me frightened. They used to say, "Your trial will begin soon."

My elder brother A.S.H.K. Sadique, having obtained permission from higher authorities, came to the M.P. Hostel to meet me. He was shocked to see my condition. My face was distorted, my gums were protruded, and eyes were almost shut. I could not see clearly. My brother told me that the army also took him for interrogation. They interrogated him for several hours and wanted to know the whereabouts of arms and guerrillas. They told my brother, "You must know something. Some young men used to come and stay at your house every night." As my brother was a CSP officer, his colleagues protested the army interrogation. They lodged a complaint to the central government that the army was compelling the CSP members to be aggrieved.

In mid-September, I was shifted to Ramna police station from Sher-E-Bangla Nagar M.P. Hostel. A professor of the English department of Dhaka University, Ahsanul Haq and one Abdus Samad were with me. The army used to take us to the M.P. Hostel interrogation cell everyday.

After about a month and a half, we were taken to Dhaka Central Jail. For the first few days, we were confined in the condemned cell usually kept for the convicts of capital punishment. A few days later, I was shifted to another cell in front of the condemned cell. Up to the time I was brought to the central jail, I had only

one set of dress which had become rough as my blood, urine and stool had dried on it. The whole body had marks caused by burning cigarettes. The jail authorities gave me the clothes used by other prisoners. Fortunately, they did not torture me in jail.

During the stay in jail, everyday I heard the screaming of other prisoners. I heard the news of killing of freedom fighters from the army sepoy, prisoners and jail police. Jail Super Shamsur Rahman was sympathetic towards me.

One day some soldiers came to my cell and forced me to sign on a piece of blank paper. By November 7/8, they finalised a charge-sheet against me. The allegations were : leading a guerrilla group, possessing and supplying unauthorised arms, carrying out bomb attacks, killing civil and military Pakistani citizens and so on.

One morning, a soldier informed me that two prisoners would be hanged on that day in the ground in front of my cell. Both the victims were employees of PIA (Pakistan International Airlines) who were arrested in April for killing a Pak militia at Gulistan in Dhaka city. The entire arrangement for the hanging were made in front of me. I witnessed it from my cell through the grill of the ventilator. Both the convicts roared like lions when they were hanged.

Everyday we used to get news about mock trials and execution of freedom fighters. My trial began on November 22 or 23. At that time I was waiting in my small dark cell for the verdict. The date of verdict shifted several times. During the trial, my brother came to meet me.

It was the month of December. The Indian army joined the freedom fighters in the war against Pakistan army. At this stage, my trial was postponed. I heard that I would be shot after being taken to the cantonment.

After December 3, every day, I heard news of victory of the freedom fighters and Indian army over the Pakistan occupation army. I started dreaming of survival once again. Other members of our guerrilla group 'crack platoon' did not know whether I was alive or dead.

On the morning of December 17, Alam, Zia, Maya Fateh Ali and other members of 'crack platoon' came to take me out of jail. They were shooting blank shots. The Jail Super informed them that he can not release me without a government order. As the guerrillas became enraged, the Jail Super released me.

I was overwhelmed to see thousands of people fervently awaiting in front of the jail to receive us. Amongst them were apprehensive eyes searching their relatives. Amidst firing, everybody was cheering to celebrate the glorious victory.

Interviewed by Ruhul Motin



I had seen many deaths, heard about many incidents of women repression, but never thought that I'd also have to become the victim of such cruelty

Ferdousi Priyobhashinee

Ferdousi Priyobhashinee, a renowned sculptor of Bangladesh, was virtually imprisoned by the Pakistani occupation forces and their collaborators at Khulna during the nine-month Liberation War. She was on the secretarial staff of Crescent Jute Mills. She witnessed the genocide, atrocities and destruction of the occupation forces. While giving her statement, she narrated how the Pakistani troops slaughtered innocent Bangalees by guillotine with jute cutting machines of the mill. She also became one of the victims of the barbaric Pakistanis. She gave her testimony in seven installments between September 25 and November 2, 1999.

I am Ferdousi Begum. In my early childhood, my grandfather Abdul Hakim who was the Speaker of the then East Pakistan Provincial Assembly, had given me an adorable name – Priyobhashinee (girl with a sweet vocabulary). I'm one of the quarter million Bengalee women who were raped by the Pakistani forces in 1971.

I want to tell you about those horrible days and nights of 1971, as the trial of those who killed three million Bangalees and raped a quarter million women is yet to be held. The new generation is completely ignorant about the frightful time we spent during the war in 1971. I want to recall those terrible times also because we know very little about the Pakistani repression on women during our Liberation War. This is because of our conservative society and family environment. I hope that my statement will encourage other repressed women to come forward with their own experiences and raise their voice against the barbarism.

You may have read about the repression on women in 1971 in the 8th volume of 'Bangladesher Swadhinata Juddher Dalilpatra' (Documents of Bangladesh Liberation War). Professor Neelima Ibrahim in her book has also described experiences of some rape victims without disclosing their names. Three such victims had come from Kushtia to make their statements when Jahanara Imam and others organised a mock trial of Ghulam Azam in a public court held on 26th March, 1992 in Dhaka. Later, I came to know how they were humiliated after returning to their homes.

Neelima Ibrahim in her extraordinary book 'Ami Beerangana Bolchhi' has elaborated how Bangladesh society after independence has denied the role of repressed women in the war. Not only society, but many families had also refused to accept them. She wrote that many of the heroic women were not accepted by their fathers, husbands and other family members. Although they knew their fate, some of these women preferred to go to Pakistan along with the Pakistani soldiers after the war was over.

The father of the newly-born state Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wanted to rehabilitate the repressed women. He addressed them as 'Beerangana' (heroic women) showing due honour to them. Even he could not succeed in securing their rightful place in society with honour and dignity.

I have experienced the persecution by the Pakistani forces and have also seen the same barbaric act among the local Bengalee collaborators. Those who handed me over to Pakistani troops were people of this land. We know about the courage of the freedom fighters during the war, but I did not see the same courage

among them after the country was freed from the occupation forces. They did not stand beside the rape victims. When a woman of a family was being repressed during the war, male members of the family were either in hideouts or had already laid down their lives. Most of the women did not have any means to flee, they had none to protect them. It was one of the main reasons that they were the victims of repression.

Before presenting my testimony of 1971, I will say something about myself.

I come from an aristocratic family. We had the inane pride of aristocracy in our family, but our financial condition was endurable. I was the eldest among eight children of my parents. My father and mother were separated when I was only 15. This compelled me to engage myself in a job just after I completed high school education.

I got married with a student of engineering in 1962. I had to bear the educational expenses of my husband, apart from my younger brothers and sisters. I completed graduation but could not continue my studies further.

I was divorced in 1968 when I was mother of three children. Since then my children lived with their paternal grandmother at Khulna. I was working at Crescent Jute Mills and residing with my mother and younger brothers and sisters in the Khalishpur area of the town.

In those depressing days, one of my senior colleagues, named Ahsanullah, had extended his hands of sympathy to my helpless family.

I was never involved in politics. But my family had a radical cultural environment. My father was involved with the cultural troupe of renowned dancer Bulbul Chowdhury and had made many visits to Europe. My mother had learnt music from Ustad Munshi Raisuddin. My uncle, Nazim Mahmud, who passed away recently, was a leading cultural personality of the country. Mainly because of him, I was associated with a cultural organisation, *Sandeepon*. Music and dance were part of our family heritage.

In the early 1971, Ahsanullah proposed to marry me when the country's political situation was very uncertain. Ahsan's family was very much against his decision to marry a divorcee with three children. In fact, considering the future of my children and bitter experience of my earlier marriage, I myself was not interested in a second marriage. As Ahsanullah failed to convince me, he sought help from my uncle Nazim Mahmud. Though we were not married, Ahsanullah used to act like the guardian of our family. Later, I agreed to marry him on advice of my uncle.

Like all other places, Khulna's Khalishpur also became turbulent with scattered clashes between Bengalees and Biharis during the first half of March, 1971. As the situation was deteriorating, we were paid off our salaries on March 20. Salary day was always pleasing to me as I had to bear almost all the expenses of my family. I used to wait for that day throughout the month.

I went to my office on March 24, but returned hurriedly following a riot between Bengalees and Biharis in Khalishpur. The Biharis set fire to many houses of Bengalees in the area. It was the time of non-cooperation movement throughout the country called by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of Awami League, the party which won majority seats in the parliamentary elections of 1970. The Pakistan army junta was reluctant to hand over power to the elected representatives. Like other government and semi government officials, the members of East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) also joined the non-cooperation movement against the military government. The political situation was very uncertain.

Everything was dependent on the ongoing meeting between Sheikh Mujib and Yahya Khan, the then President of Pakistan. Failing to apprehend the consequences of the political situation, I could not decide what to do. Earlier, we had seen political unrest and series of strikes for a certain period which became normal eventually. So I thought everything would be normal again. I was optimistic that the legitimate demands of Sheikh Mujib would be accepted. Even then I was tense as I watched the anxiety among my colleagues. I was more concerned about my job because if the jute mill went on strike and the office remained closed for a long time, what would be the fate of my family? If there was any irregularity in receiving my salary, we would have to starve.

On 25th March, I did not go to office. I saw EPR personnel were deployed on the streets. Some EPR personnel came to our house and asked for drinking water. They also wanted to know whether we were Biharis or Bengalee. We hesitated for a while. Later, we informed them about our Bengalee identity. After knowing our identity, they wanted to have some food. They also cautioned us saying: "The situation is not

good. We don't think the negotiations will be effective. Don't leave the place."

The riot between Bengalees and Biharis spread throughout the town on March 26. It turned more serious in the next two days. Everywhere there was fire. The army came entered the town on 29th March. Ahsanullah used to visit our house regularly and everytime he insisted that we leave the troublesome area.

He was a labour officer of Jessore Jute Industries. As we were not married at that time, he could not stay with us and was not in a position to give us protection. However, he tried his best as a family friend.

On March 30, he came with a jeep amidst a horrifying situation. He parked the jeep near a graveyard close to our house and told us to get ready to leave the place. I asked him, "Where shall we go with such a big family? Who will give us shelter?"

"Don't argue. We shall have to leave the house immediately," he said and proceeded towards the main road. He returned shortly and said, "The army and Biharis are coming."

Without delaying further, we came out of the house. The Bengalee houses around the area were on fire. People were running for safety. We could not board the jeep because it was on the main road. We had to make a short cut through the graveyard moving towards Jessore-Khulna highway. When we were crossing the graveyard, I felt something abnormal under my feet. I saw scores of corpses scattered on the ground. Those were the bodies of Bengalee people killed by the Biharis.

After running for sometime, we reached the house of a village leader, who was known to us. But he refused to give us shelter saying that he could not provide shelter to supporters of the Awami League. The man was involved in Muslim League politics. So we had to look for another shelter and we decided to go to my mother's house in Khulna. We took rickshaws from Goalkhali gate. We found some Pakistan army men had set fire to a bus and a rickshaw at Noornagar. We were afraid and started walking, apprehending that the army might open fire if the burning wheels of rickshaws blasted.

Late in the evening we reached the house of my maternal grandfather at Muslimpara in Khulna town on foot. But we were not feeling comfortable in the house. We felt that we had become a burden on the family. The house had become too crowded because many people had already taken shelter there. It was quite embarrassing for us to stay there, but there was no choice. Though we came to that house for security reasons, the area was not free from army movement. The army used to come quite often and we had to leave the house and take shelter in a nearby paddy field or somewhere else.

I remember an interesting incident that happened during our stay there. One day as the army came, we were rushing to hide. An elderly woman of a neighbouring Hindu family asked me, "Why are you fleeing?" I said, "The army is coming." I told her to flee also. The old woman had never heard the word "army" before this. She asked me whether the army was good or bad. I told her, "It's not the time to discuss. Move at once." Then the elderly lady said, "If I flee what will happen to my cattle?" Most of the innocent people in the countryside were like that woman. They were totally ignorant about the holocaust of the Pakistan Army, and that is the reason the Pakistani forces could kill so many innocent Bengalees during the war.

The entire day we had to take shelter in the cowshed of a house, because firing was going on like hailstorm all around us.

After some days, the situation became apparently calm. I told my mother, "Let's go back to Khalishpur. We're not even safe here. If we have to die, it's better to be at our own place."

We came back to Khalishpur. The house was ransacked and everything was looted. We were totally helpless. One day my mother washed our clothes and hung those on the rooftop for drying. Ahsanullah somehow saw the clothes and came to our house. He was quite worried, and asked me, "Why have you come back? Killings are taking place everyday, everywhere. I'm leaving the place today. Because the army is looking for me."

He also asked my mother, why we had returned. My mother told him, "What else shall we do? Is there any place to go?"

Suddenly I saw an army patrol on the street. We closed the door immediately. Hearing the noise of massive firing, we looked through a hole in the window and saw the killing of 15/16 people of Munshibari, a neighbouring house.

Ahsanullah left the house saying that he was not safe because the army was looking for him. "If I stay here, the army will kill you."

Along with my mother, brothers and sisters, I came out of the house. Mother asked me to hire rickshaws for them. She planned to go to Jessore to one of my brother's house. I gave her my last hundred taka and said, "I'll join office as soon as it opens. Then I'll send you money regularly."

Mother said, "Don't be upset. If we survive, we'll meet again."

Thus I became alone as my family and Ahsanullah left the town. I went to many houses which were previously known to me. Everybody was busy looking after their own safety. Nobody gave me shelter. I stayed in the house of an engineer for some days, but here too there was also a problem. His wife did not want me to stay there. The engineer wanted to help me which created a family problem. The engineer pleaded with his wife, "How could I drive away a helpless girl in this situation?" But his wife was adamant and I had to leave the place.

I felt very bad finding myself totally helpless. Standing on the road, I was thinking what should I do? Where shall I go? All of a sudden I found my non-Bengalee colleague Jahangir Kerala, an accountant of our office. And that was the beginning of my miseries and nightmares.

Jahangir asked me in a sympathetic voice, "Hi sister, what you're doing here?"

I said, "I'm in a very bad situation." On finding the accountant, I was thinking of getting some advance. I wanted to know whether the office was open or not.

He said, "Yes, do you want to join?" Then he proposed to give me a lift on his motorbike to reach the office. I told him that I could not board the bike. I took a rickshaw and followed him.

He led me to a beautiful olive-coloured house in the Wireless Colony area of the town. It was 'Muscat House', residence of a rich non-Bengalee. While going to office, I used to see the house many times and wondered who lived in that beautiful place. As he took me inside the house, I asked him, "Why have you brought me here?" He did not reply.

After taking me to a room, he started behaving in an indecent way. The man who never dared to talk to me before, pushed me hard and said, "Don't move from this place. Some army officers will come in the evening. You will be given a job." Then he left the house.

I decided to leave the house at any cost. I saw two guards of the house, through a hole in a window, who were discussing something, pointing to the room where I was staying. I went to them and said, "Could I have a cup of tea?" The younger one replied, "Yes. But it will be cold." I told him it was fine. As he went to bring tea, the other guard made a gesture to leave the place. He seemed to be an angel to me.

The guy who had gone to bring tea returned to the gate when I came down to the street. He shouted, "Where you are going? You're not allowed to leave this house." Riding on a rickshaw hastily, I replied, "I'm going to bring my clothes. I'll come back soon."

Then I went to my office. The first man I found was the elderly general manager Mr. Fidai, who was smoking a pipe casually. He asked me, "Where have you come from?" To get his sympathy I told him, "Sir, everyone has left me. I'm completely alone. I don't know what to do."

He asked me, "Do you want to join the office?"

I said, "Yes sir, but I've no shoes, even my clothes are not adequate. How can I attend office?"

He gave me a chit and asked me to meet the chief accountant. The chief accountant gave me three hundred taka and said, "Take a car and go shopping now. The car will also go to your place tomorrow morning. Where do you stay?"

By that time, I had decided to stay at the house of a police inspector at Pabla, instead of Khalishpur because it was dominated by the Biharis. I knew the family of this police officer. Two young boys of this family, who could sing very well, used to visit us quite often. As I did not want to let the accountant know my address, I said, "It's a very remote area. The car can't go up to my house."

"Okay, no problem. Tell the driver where to wait. The car will go at 7:30 in the morning," he said.

The car came the following day. I attended the office. Within half-an-hour, an accountant named Sultan Panjwani, a non-Bengalee who had never dared to talk to me earlier, said me in an intimate voice, "How are you? You're looking very nice." He also made an indecent gesture. I gave him a hard look.

After some time, Mr. Fidai phoned me and asked, "Where you're going to have your lunch today?"

I replied, "In the office, sir." Then he said, "Why don't you take lunch with me?"

To keep the general manager in a good humour, I agreed.

While having lunch he told me casually that, Captain Ishtiaque would come in the evening to take me to the cinema.

I was afraid and said, "I don't watch films."

"Don't argue. There are many allegations against you. You have to go with him," he ordered me in a commanding voice.

Before 1971, the man was like a saint to us. I worked with him for a long time, and had never once thought that he could do any misdeed or something bad to others. But, as soon as the Liberation War started he emerged as a devil. He told me, "Go upstairs and chat with Captain Ishtiaque."

As I went upstairs, Captain Ishtiaque asked me whether I watched films and TV. I replied, "No, I don't watch films."

"Let's enjoy a movie today," he proposed.

Fidai ordered me to give Ishtiaque company. He came in the afternoon to take me to cinema, but I told him that I was sick and I would go some other day.

However, Fidai would not give up. When office was over, he came to me and said, "Let's go out. I've some important things to talk with you."

All the employees of the office were afraid of Fidai. They did not have the courage to disregard his order. He made me more afraid by saying, "Your brothers have joined the Liberation War, so the army will not spare you. You'll have to compensate."

Finding no other way, I sought mercy from Fidai, and requested him saying, "You're like my father. I joined office on your assurance. So please rescue me."

"I can help you if you cooperate with me," he said and tried to embrace me. I burst into tears in fear. I felt humiliated. Then he said, "Don't shout. It'll be no good. The army people will tear and grab you."

The fact was that Fidai himself tried to tear me that night before the army people grabbed me. I tried my best to protect myself before I lost my sense. After I regained sense, Fidai shouted, "You didn't cooperate with me. You shall have to face consequences."

I said, "I want to go home."

"Go," he said.

It was around 8 or 9 p.m. One rickshaw was waiting in front of the house in the dark of the night. It took me to my house. I cried for the whole night recalling the threat by Fidai that the 'army will tear and grab you.' I could not sleep all the night.

Once I thought of committing suicide. I also thought of fleeing, but could not. The faces of my children as well as my brothers and sisters, who were dependent on my income for the last nine years, kept me from killing myself.

I felt some anger at Ahsanullah. In my heart I considered him to be my husband. He was like the guardian of our family. Why had he left, leaving me all alone?

When one of my brothers joined the Liberation War, I had felt very proud, but later I felt that he was the cause of my humiliation. I also felt that nobody in the world was more helpless than me. I had seen many deaths, heard about many incidents of women repression, but I never thought that I would also have to become the victim of such cruelty.

As the sleepless night was over, another day began. I took a long shower and got ready to go to office. I felt like a prisoner kept in a condemned cell. I thought that I would not get freedom until the country is liberated. I realised the fear of the army was a perennial matter for me, but at the same time I would have to work to feed my children and family.

Fidai did not say anything to me for the next few days. I thought he might be repentant, but I was wrong. Calling me to his room again, he said, "Naval Commander Guljarin has called for you. You were on the spot when Professor Bhuiyan was killed. You are charged with murder."

I smelt of a fresh conspiracy.

Professor Bhuiyan was a colleague of my father at Doulatpur College. He was a leader of the Peace Committee. The day I had gone to the house of Afiluddin at Pabla, the naxalites killed him in front of me.

I heard that Guljarin was a very ferocious person. He was infamous for torturing women. I requested Fidai to protect me saying, "You asked me to join the office. Now you're doing all this against me. Then who will protect me?"

However, all my efforts to convince him went in vain. He ordered me, "You'll have to reside in the bungalow of the mills from today."

"According to my position, I am not entitled such a big bungalow," I said, but he pressed me to go to the bungalow and threatened to bring murder charges against me if I did not agree.

Finally I said, "I'll be afraid to live alone in such a big bungalow. So please allot me a flat in the junior officers' colony."

At last Fidai compelled me to go to Naval Commander. Commander Guljarin, an elderly man who looked very dreadful, but spoke gently. As I entered the room, he told me to sit down.

With a devilish smile on his face, Guljarin looked at me and asked, "What do you want to be – a friend, daughter or anything else?"

Very nervously and in broken English I said, "Please behave with me like a gentleman."

He said, "I'll make some proposals. You can accept or refuse. Stay with me for one month. However, I'll not be able to give you something special. But I'll be happy." Then he patted my back and shook me holding my neck.

Shivering in fear, I said, "How is it possible, sir? How could I stay here?"

Guljarin said, "Why not? I'll give you a lot of money. I'll send money for your family."

After a pause, he said in a firm voice, "Your brothers have joined the Liberation War. You need security. Stay with me. I selected you as my secretary. You're the right person."

I started crying and pleaded with him to let me go.

He became restless and said, "Haven't you heard that women who come to Commander Guljarin cannot go back? Perhaps you don't know that. But don't worry, you'll be able to go back."

At that time two officers entered the room. When they saw me crying helplessly, they started mocking me. One of them told Guljarin jeeringly, "Sir, hand her over to us. We'll take her out for a while."

Guljarin refused, but they continued to scoff at me.

I was still crying. As they wanted to misbehave with me, I pleaded with Guljarin: "I'll come to you later. Please let me go now. I've a big family who are totally dependent on me. So it's impossible for me to escape.", but Guljarin did not allow me to go. He gradually became more terrible and tortured me like a beast.

In the afternoon, he made me promise that I would have to come to him whenever he called, and then only could I leave.

The next noon, two officers came to my office. They were Naval Captain Aslam and Captain Ghani. Aslam was younger. Ghani was older as he was promoted from non-commissioned rank. They brought along an elderly jute inspector Fazlur Rahman whose house was taken away by the Biharis and turned it into a slaughter house. Mr. Rahman was looking very pale. Ghani took him outside. As Mr. Rahman was leaving my room, he gave me a blank look.

Captain Aslam wanted a glass of water from me. As I was busy with my work, I asked the peon to give him the glass of water.

After a couple of minutes, Ghani came back. He handed over Fazlur Rahman to the Biharis. Some time later the Biharis killed him and played 'hulia' (game with human blood). Some Biharis, besmeared with the blood of Mr. Rahman, came to Captain Aslam to confirm his death. I felt doomed watching the Biharis whose hands were blood-stained.

The river Bhairab flows beside the Crescent Jute Mills. The jute godown of the mill was on the bank of the river. It was only 200 yards from my quarter. One night I watched another terrible incident near the godown.

One of my younger sisters was with me in the quarter. I kept her as I was panic-stricken all the time. One night she told me, "Sister, while I was sleeping last night I heard people shouting 'Save me, save me.' I'm afraid of living here."

I had assured her saying, "Okay, now please go to sleep, I'll look after that." In those days I was so tired it was almost impossible to remain awake all night. but I did not sleep that night.

It was about 3:00 a.m. I heard someone shouting from a distance “Save me, save me.”

I sat on the bed and peeped through the window. There was a truck parked in front of the godown. Some people, their faces covered with black cloth, were walking around the area. Suddenly the lights went dim. One person was brought down from the truck. He was taken to a jute-cutting machine, which looks like a guillotine. Then I saw the terrible incident. The men with black cloth on their faces, put the man under the sharp blade of the machine and within a couple of seconds, he was beheaded. This barbaric act continued one after another.

After watching four killings in that way, I closed the window. I could not sleep that night. I still cannot get rid of that nightmare. Quite often I see in my dreams the images of the killers, faces covered with black cloth ; through a hole in a window, the beheaded dead bodies of those Bengalees ; the truck ; and the cry – ‘Save me, save me’.

Since then, I never stayed in that room. I could not tell my sister about the blood-chilling incident, because it would make her more frightened and she might have left my apartment

One night my sister told me, “Sister, the army has cordoned-off our house.” I noticed it too and asked her to hide. One army man came forward and told me that Major Altaf Karim was calling me downstairs.

I wanted to know who Altaf Karim was, but didn’t reply and asked me again, “Who is Ferdousi here?”

I told him, “She’s not here. She has gone to Jessore. I’m her maid.”

He said, “You must be Ferdousi. We’ve come to take you with us.”

“No gentleman comes to anyone’s residence in the middle of the night. Please go away,” I told the army personnel.

I recognised Lieutenant Korban, Captain Khaleq and Captain Sultan among the group. That night they came to me after attending a dinner in the house of Fidai, the general manager. When the dinner was over, Fidai showed them my house. They had also told me that Mamtaz, a niece of the then minister Mr. Amjad was in the car.

My sister told me that she would commit suicide if they take me away. I pressed clothes into her mouth to keep her from speaking. If they come to know her presence, they would have definitely taken away both of us.

I told the army men, “Don’t take me now. My younger sister is here. I’ll send her to my mother. After that you can take me.”

Then I asked them why they were so desperate to take me with them. One of them replied that there was murder charge against me.

I said, “Whatever it is, I’m not going now. I’ll go in the morning.”

It was almost dawn and they left my house.

I decided to send my sister to my mother as I realised that it was not safe for her to stay with me any longer.

After going to the office, I phoned the general manager and described the incident that had taken place that night. He told me that he knew everything. “Didn’t you entertain them? You have been kept here for that purpose. Don’t try to escape. If you try to flee, you’ll be killed.”

I said, “How I can stay here in this situation? This is tantamount to killing me.”

At this stage, he got angry and said, “Colonel Khatak will talk to you. You’ll have to go to Jessore. His people will come to take you. If you disagree, you’ll be sent to a concentration camp. You’ll never be able to return from there.”

Captain Sultan, Lieutenant Korban and a non-Bengalee businessman Malik Yusuf came to me at night with a letter from Fidai. They took me to Jessore. On the way they raped me in the car.

I was raped again by them in the billiard room at Jessore Cantonment, before I was handed over to Colonel Khatak.

I have no language to express my mental condition of that time. I saw the dumping of dead bodies of Bengalees killed by Biharis and the Pakistani army, in the graveyard. Their burial was not held. I felt that my body was not mine, and it seemed to be decomposed. Several times, I lost my senses following continued torture. Once I remained unconscious continuously for 28 hours. I cannot remember when the doctors visited me, or what treatment I was given.

Colonel Khatak and Colonel Abed interrogated me over Professor Bhuiyan’s killing. They accused me of

having contact with my brothers who had joined the Liberation War.

There was no dearth of excuses for unleashing torture on me. However, I know they tortured and killed millions of people without any cause. I knew my answers would not make them happy and they would not release me. At one stage, I stopped replying to any of their questions. I told them, "Please kill me. Don't torture me in this way, but unfortunately it was not my fate to be killed by the Pakistanis. I was brutally tortured by both Colonel Khatak and Colonel Abed. Colonel Abdullah and Colonel Zafar also tortured me at Jessore Cantonment in the name of interrogation. My request, my tears, my resistance, my hate — nothing could stop the Pakistani army officers who held high ranks. I read many stories of repression by the Nazi soldiers, I also watched many films on the second World War, but all those incidents of repression faded in front of the brutality of the Pakistani forces I witnessed everyday in 1971.

During the horrifying days of my nine-month long captive life, I found only one Pakistani army officer who seemed to be comparatively gentle. He came to Jessore Cantonment one night. Watching my condition, he became astonished. He said, "Could you remember me? I met you at Crescent Jute Mills. I'm Major Altaf Karim. I liked you. I think you're a woman with self-respect. I still like you. Whatever it is, I want to tell you something. My father is the principal of a college. I did not want to come here. But I've been compelled to do so. I've been asked to take you to the concentration camp. Would you please go there to have a glimpse?"

Today I know what a concentration camp is, but in those days, I had no idea. I asked him, "Where's the camp? Would I be able to return to my home from there?"

Altaf said, "I've been asked to take you to the camp for a visit. As you have denied every allegation brought against you, you're being taken to see the camp. I can't help you to go back home. Anyway, how do you want to go to the camp? By rickshaw or jeep?"

I said, "I can't walk. It will be better to go by jeep."

The concentration camp was like a small barrack. There were so many rooms. I heard the sound of beating and the groaning of people who were tortured there. Altaf informed me that the sound carries the message of torture. He also asked me whether I wanted to see more.

The scenes made me frightened and I lost my strength. I was unable to remain standing. I told Altaf, "I don't want to see anything more. Please let me free."

"You have a pact with Guljarin. I can't do anything. However, I can submit a report that you were kept here for two days."

Later I saw Altaf hurling abuses on me in front of others.

One day he took me to Brigadier Hayat on a jeep. Hayat gave me a letter, and said, "You'll be staying at the place where you have been told to stay so that we can get you whenever we need. The interrogation is not yet complete."

That day, Major Ekram took me to the jute mill at Khalishpur at the request of Major Altaf, who was his friend. I came to know more about Major Ekram later through some important works.

One day an officer from Khulna Army Headquarters phoned me and asked whether I knew anyone named Farid of Pabla.

"Yes, I know him," I said. I had met Farid at the residence of the police inspector, where I had taken shelter.

The officer said, "He has been caught. He requested that you be contacted."

At first I thought it was a trap. Later I figured that if it was true, I would have to do something for Farid. At the same time I also knew I would have to return the favour to the army people if I asked for any favour for Farid. Grippled in shock and frustration, I told the phone caller that I would do something the next day.

The officer informed that Farid had been sent to Jessore the previous day.

I knew that Major Altaf was in Jessore. Immediately, I made a phone call to him and giving a description of Farid I told Altaf that army had arrested an innocent boy. Altaf said, "Your case was an exception. I tried my best for you. But I can't do anything for that boy. Major Korban is at this moment beating him up."

Later Major Altaf inquired about Farid and told me that he would not be released, because, the army had recovered a letter of the Muktibahini from his possession. Altaf also advised me to come to Jessore and contact Major Ekram.

Accordingly, I went to Jessore and rang up Major Altaf, who helped me meet Major Ekram. Farid was then under Ekram's supervision.

Ekram asked me how I got to know Farid. He also told me that they had found a letter of the Muktibahini on him. I said, "It's a conspiracy. In fact, one of his step-brothers conspired against him and kept the letter in his pocket."

"Well, come three days later to take Farid," Major Ekram assured me. Later he made arrangement for me to meet Farid. As soon as I entered the room, Farid touched my legs and said, "Sister, rescue me please."

I tried to console him saying, "Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you."

After three days, I went to Jessore to bring Farid. Major Ekram behaved very politely with me. Perhaps, Major Altaf had told him something about me.

Meanwhile, my brother Shibli met up me. He told me, "Sister, you know Major Ekram. He has some maps of important places of Jessore. Besides, I need to visit their conference room. Could you take me to him?"

At first, I hesitated out of fear, because I knew it was very easy for the army to know that Shibli was a freedom fighter. Later I thought I could take Shibli keeping his identity secret. He was 19 at that time, but looked only 16. His face was very innocent looking.

I phoned Major Ekram and told him, "You did a lot for me. I like to see you just to express my gratitude."

Ekram asked me to come the next day.

It was a holiday. Along with Shibli, I went to see Major Ekram. I introduced him as Syed Hasan, my younger brother.

Shibli had the ability to gain a person's confidence within a very short time. He started talking with Major Ekram on various subjects. Ekram was also very cordial. He tried to convince Shibli to his point of view, saying that if the country is divided, the economic condition would further worsen. Shibli agreed with him. Ekram invited us to the lunch. I said, "I have to do overtime in the office. So I have to leave now. I'll come another day."

Shibli asked Ekram, "Do you play cards?"

"Why not? Will your sister also play?"

"She can't play," Shibli said, adding, "I'll show you some tricks."

Later Ekram took us to the adjoining room where he used to take rest. Although Ekram was entrusted with some important responsibilities, things in his room used to remain at sixes and sevens. Many important documents were on the table.

Ekram went to the toilet before the game started. Shibli searched the room for some papers he needed. He found them under the mattress and kept them in his pocket. Shibli looked very nervous at that time.

Then they started playing cards. After some time I said, "Now I have to go. Otherwise, it will be difficult to get a bus to return."

Before seeing us off, Ekram said, "Please let me know if you face any trouble."

Later, Shibli and his comrades blew up some important installations in Jessore with the help of the maps he had taken from Ekram's room.

There was some trouble when we're returning from Jessore in that afternoon. The local Razakar (militias collaborating with the Pakistani army) commander Sabdar Ali followed us and boarded the bus. He pushed at me with his gun and asked, "What's your name?"

I replied confidently "Why are you asking my name?"

He said, "You'll be taken into custody. You are a naxalite."

In an angry tone, I said, "What will you do?"

"I will arrest you," the Razakar said.

He again hit me with his gun and said, "Come on. I'll teach you a good lesson." He also pointed the gun at me and threatened to shoot, but could not do so due to protests by the bus passengers.

After sometime, he disembarked from the bus as it reached near Avoyanagar police station. Before getting down he said, "I have already hung two heads (of Bengalees) at the Shaheed Minar. I'll hang more heads."

Later I was shocked to see two heads hanging on the Shaheed Minar beside the road. The two ill-fated Bengalees were killed and beheaded by the Razakars.

After some days, I received a phone call while working at my office. "I'm Captain Zafar from the Naval headquarters. I heard a lot of good words about you. I would like to see you," the caller said. I refused to meet him, but he used to visit me frequently. Captain Jalil, who came from West Pakistan, also used to disturb me.

I was not spared by any of the junior officers.

In late September, I became pregnant after being raped repeatedly by Pakistanis. I was bewildered. I could not sleep at all. I used to feel the unholy touch of the Pakistanis on my body each and every moment. There was nobody to console me. I could not share my pain and agony with anyone. At last I decided to remove the stigma of the Pakistanis from my body through abortion.

I knew Dr. Kader of Khulna. When I went to him and told him about my decision, he said, "Arrange for the money required. I'll manage everything." He wanted 250 Taka, but I could not collect more than 200 despite frantic effort for seven days.

Dr. Kader said, "I don't take less than 250 taka."

"It is impossible for me to collect any more," I said, requesting him to perform the operation.

Then Dr. Kader said, "I need the permission of your husband."

In those days, the process of abortion was not as modern and easy as these days. It was compulsory for a doctor to have the consent of the husband of the patient. I pleaded Dr. Kader saying, "My husband is not available here at this moment. So I am my own guardian." At last he agreed to do the abortion and I was freed from the filth.

In the month of December, the Pakistani army started retreating in the face of strong resistance by the freedom fighters. But the scenario inside the Crescent Jute Mills and Khalishpur area was different.

Since late November Biharis had started killing Bengalees living in the area. Killings were also taking place inside and outside of the jute mill. Everyday hundreds of Bengalees went missing. The general manager of the mill, Fidai, made frequent visits to Pakistan at that time.

Meanwhile, another untoward incident occurred on December 2. One Bihari driver named Rashid used to drive me to my house everyday. That day he was drunk and forcibly took me to a dark street near Newsprint Mills instead of my house. He was driving like a mad man. I protested and he shouted abuses in Urdu and also made indecent gestures. I screamed and hit his neck, and then got down from the car by breaking the lock. At that time my left hand was badly injured. I still carry the marks of that injury.

The next day Khawaja Mohammad Ali, a senior officer of the mill, asked me about the previous day's incident. He also asked me why I did not tell him about the incident earlier.

I said, "Sir, these days it is very difficult for me to decide on to whom I should lodge any complaint. I don't know who can help me."

On December 4, I received a telephone call from Ahsanullah. He informed me that a conspiracy had been hatched to kill me. He advised me to rush to another jute mill, Jessore Jute Industries. He also said that all the four gates of our mill were already closed.

After a few minutes I had another phone call from Major Altaf Karim who was in Jessore. "The situation here is very bad. We're battling with Mukti Bahini face to face. I don't know whether I'll survive," he said. He apologised to me and said, "If you come to know that I'm no more, please inform my father and brother." He gave me his home address. Finally he said, "I know our fight is unjust. But I'm a soldier. I have nothing to do."

Once Altaf had proposed marriage. He also wanted to carry the responsibilities of my children. He told me, "The non-Bengalees here know that I love you. They will kill you in my absence. In Pakistan you'll get the honour of being my wife. If your husband comes back, I'm sure that he will not accept you."

I refused his proposal promptly and told him, "I don't bother if my husband accepts me or not. You're a good human being. But I can't think of marrying a Pakistani. You know the reason. The hate for Pakistanis in my mind will remain forever."

Altaf didn't proceed further. I saw him for the last time on December 4. It was very difficult to recognise him as his face was pale. We did not talk that day. He gave me a salute before leaving the place.

During the war, Altaf was the only Pakistani I met who had some conscience. He knew the Pakistanis were doing wrong. Except Altaf, all the Pakistanis — from soldiers to high ranking officers — were sadists. They used to enjoy killing innocent people.

After receiving the phone calls, I went to my house. I tried to come out after packing my clothes in a wooden box, but the Biharis intercepted me at the gate. I could not leave the place.

I got another phone call from Khawaja Mohamad Ali the next noon. He said, “Major Belayet Shah is coming to my office today. If you want, you could go out with him.”

In fact, I told Mohammad Ali earlier that I wanted to leave the area. At first I hesitated to go with Major Belayet Shah. He was crazy for women, but I had no alternative. That day he made an indecent proposal. He wanted to take the car to a dark place on the highway to Khulna. To save myself, I told him, “Mukti Bahinis are guarding the area. They will kill you.”

Whatever the reason, Major Shah did not proceed further. I got down from the car in front of Jessore Jute Industries to meet my husband. As soon as I saw Ahsanullah, I became very emotional and angry with him, for having left me in a helpless situation. I was shouting and crying as if I had gone insane. I do not know what happened to me. In anger, shock and pain, I came out from Jessore Jute Industries and returned to Crescent Jute Mills in the evening.

On December 6 at noon, Aktar, a Bihari clerk of my office, phoned me and said, “I always liked you, but couldn’t express myself. Now I’m giving you an important news. Just now I got a message that you’ll be killed shortly. So leave the place without delaying any moment.”

I came out. The main gate was a quarter mile away from my office. I was apprehending an attack on the way, but I was lucky and got a rickshaw. I asked the puller to drive the rickshaw speedily.

On the way I found Anwar, another clerk of my office, who lived on the third floor of my building. He was going to office. When I reached the main gate, the gatekeeper said, ‘Just now Anwar was killed.’

I got a baby-taxi in front of the gate. The driver demanded a fare three times higher than the normal rate, but I was not in a position to bargain. I quickly boarded the taxi and went to Jessore Jute Industries. Ahsanullah was waiting, and as soon as I reached there, he received me with a hearty embrace.

I told him everything. He said, “You’re a great freedom fighter. Don’t worry thinking about how Pakistanis treated you.”

The general manager of Jessore Jute Industries Mr. Idris was a non-Bengalee. However, he was not like our general manager Fidai. Mr. Idris protected the Bengalee staff of the mill from the attack of the Pakistanis. Ahsanullah had joined work in November on his assurance.

On December 6, Mr. Idris was ordered by the military authority in Jessore Cantonment to leave the mill along with all non-Bengalees and go to Khulna.

The order was given because the army had planned to kill all the Bangalee staff of the mill. But Mr. Idris was committed to protecting each and every staff member of his mill. He took all his staff, along with us, to Khulna. We took shelter at Hotel Selim. The mill authorities bore all the expenses and Mr. Idris made the arrangements. He was the only non-Bengalee who was duly honoured by his Bengalee staff after independence.

Finally Bangladesh came into being as the occupation forces surrendered on December 16.

The next day Ahsanullah said, “Let me take you to a particular place.”

We boarded a car. He took me to Gallamari mass grave in Khulna where we found thousands of dead bodies lying on the ground. We saw many corpses also on the cultivated lands – jute fields, paddy fields. Those were the dead bodies of innocent Bengalees who were killed by the Pakistanis and their collaborators only three or four days back.

It was a horrible scene. But there was a strange feeling inside me. Standing in front of scores of human bodies, I was thinking about the terrible experience I had undergone during the nine months of the Liberation War. I thought, though I am alive, there is no difference between my body and the corpses lying on the ground before me.

Today, whenever I recall the dreadful days and nights of 1971, I feel that for the last 28 years I have been carrying a body, which is fatigued and decomposed.

Interviewed by Shahriar Kabir



A burning cigarette was pushed into his limbs and needles pierced into his finger nails

Syed Abul Barq Alvi

Syed Abul Barq Alvi, a Professor of the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University, is a noted painter. He took part in the liberation war. He was arrested along with others on August 30, 1971. The Pakistani occupation force conducted barbaric torture on him. He gave the following statement.

I was working in the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) in 1971. I was not involved with political parties. But since my student life, I was influenced by leftist thought. Being a conscious artist, I had experience of writing posters and making festoons during different movements and struggles. We had also been bringing out a cyclostiled magazine long before the Pakistan Army launched their attack on March 25, 1971. It was an underground publication. It had carried news items on organised protests against repression of the Pakistani junta.

As the Liberation War started, I crossed the border in May through Comilla and got shelter in a refugee camp in India. After formation of a “Mukti Camp” there, I joined it. I came to Bangladesh several times to gather information and collect maps of important installations like the airport and cantonment in Dhaka. Another job was collecting donations for the freedom fighters. I used to return along with people seeking shelter in India. During my fifth visit from the camp to Bangladesh, I had carried huge quantities of arms and ammunition. I came with three others —Baker, Fateh Ali and Komol. We entered Bangladesh in the third week of August. While travelling by boat along with the arms and ammunition, we narrowly escaped capture by Pakistani troops. Finally we reached Dhaka and kept the arms and explosives at the residence of a relative of Baker at Badda area. According to the plan, we were to meet at USIS Library at Topkhana three days later. But we had to change the plan following the absence of Baker. Later on August 29, I went to the house of noted music director Altaf Mahmud. He intended to send with me one of his businessman friend to India. But due to curfew at night, Altaf Mahmud told me to stay at his house.

It was the early dawn on August 30, 1971. I was sleeping in the drawing room of Altaf Mahmud’s residence at Rajarbagh. A pickup came and stopped in front of the house. I heard the sound of parking and the noise of stepping of boots. Surprised, I got up from bed. Some 5/6 uniformed Pakistani army personnel started kicking the door of the drawing room. I was frightened and confused on whether I should open the door or not. All residents of the house, in the meantime, woke up. Altaf Bhai came forward slowly and said “I’m opening the door.” As soon as the door was opened, Pakistani army soldiers pointed their guns at the chest of Altaf Bhai and shouted, “Who is the music director?”

“It’s me,” replied Altaf Bhai.

“Where are the arms?” one soldier asked loudly.

As there was no answer, they took Altaf Bhai to the backyard. Some of them stormed into the bed-room and checked everything. They put me, Altaf Bhai and his two brothers-in-law on to the pickup. Some boys from a neighbouring house were also taken. While taking us to the pickup, the Pak soldiers beat us with the butts of their rifles.

The pickup van took us straight to the martial-law court. The court was at the then MP Hostel, which is now the residential area of the employees of Prime Minister's Secretariat. Three buildings were being used as martial-law courts. We were lined up and later taken to the kitchen of the last building. All of us were asked to sit on the dirty and damp floor. I was seated after one or two persons. A sepoy called one of us who was very close to the door. He was taken to the torture room. We could see a little of what was going on there. Sound of whipping could be heard from there. As the questioner was asking in Urdu, I couldn't understand all the questions, but one thing was clear that he was asking the man about who were the persons with him. We were frightened as the whipping, shouting and groaning continued. He was taken to another room after being tortured for about 15-20 minutes. We saw his body was bleeding. His face was badly wounded. It was a horrible scene. The next one was a brother-in-law of Altaf Bhai. He was tortured in same way at the interrogation cell but the army couldn't collect any information from him. In fact, he did not know where the arms were, who were freedom fighters and where they stay. A burning cigarette was pushed at his limbs and needles pierced into his finger nails. Later the sepoy said, "Come on, mister music director."

Altaf Bhai looked at all of us and went to the adjoining torture room. I heard, he was being questioned: "Tell me where are the rest of the arms?"

"Don't know."

"Who had kept the arms?"

"Some people whom I don't know."

I heard Altaf Bhai being whipped and hit by rods. The repression was slightly visible through the window. Altaf Bhai was not able to bear the pain of the torture. As he didn't disclose the names, the level of torture on him increased. He was being hit with rifle butts indiscriminately. Burning cigarettes were also pushed on him. Altaf Bhai did not shout like the others, because, he knew that he would not be freed and it would be his last day. He admitted everything about himself, but did not name any one else. He fell down many times as he could not bear the torture. But every time, he was compelled to stand up. The questioning and repression continued. He was taken to another room after about an hour. Another person was taken from us and the repression continued in the same way. I was the next to be taken away. So I decided what I would say. They asked in Urdu, "Who is Alvi?"

I was surprised to hear my name. How they knew my name? Did Altaf Bhai tell them my name? No, he couldn't have. Then the next person? Or was it anyone else? I was silent for a while thinking of all these things. The sepoy again shouted, "Alvi Koun (Who's Alvi)?" I stood up.

Others in the waiting room were observing me. I could not escape denying my name. They knew it. As soon as I entered the torture room, one officer mentioned a date and said, "You came from India along with the arms." He also mentioned the names of the freedom fighters who came with me. Everything in his statement was correct. How did they come to know? I understood that one of our team had been caught. Nervousness started gripping me.

I firmly denied everything — I never went to India, I knew none. Showing a piece of paper, one of them asked, "Do you know Fateh Ali Chowdhury, Komol and Baker?"

"I know none of them," I replied confidently.

The army personnel wanted to know, "Are you Alvi?"

"Yes, but I don't know any of them."

One of the interrogators said, "You will be freed if you admit everything."

Again I said, "I know nothing."

Among the three or four army men, one started beating me mercilessly. Such indiscriminate beating continued. He struck me hard in the abdomen with the butt of a rifle. At the same time, I was also being whipped and questioned. A soldier said, "Do you think you'll be freed after denying everything?"

I was feeling severe pain at the beginning of the torture. At one stage my feelings became numb. My palms were seriously wounded as I tried to resist the beating with my hands. Bleeding started from the hands. As I had no sense following continued torture, I could not fathom the exact condition of my body. Later, I found bleeding from the back and legs. The beating stopped after a long time. Again the questions were repeated. I denied again. They mentioned many other names who were known to me. They had gone to India along with me at the beginning of the war.

The middle-aged armyman who was torturing me became ferocious like a blood hound after he had failed to dig out anything from me. He hit my abdomen with the butt of a rifle. He also repeatedly punched and kicked me with full strength. I fell down, but was forced to stand up again. The extent of torture increased. I had no strength to remain standing up. I fell down repeatedly.

At one stage Baker was brought. He was our team leader. Only one week back we carried arms from India under his leadership and kept those in the house of one of his relatives. He was to come on August 29, but he did not. We were worried about his fate. Now seeing him in front of me, I understood everything.

The army personnel asked Baker, "Is he Alvi?"

Slowly raising his head, Baker looked at me and said, "Yes". Then he was taken to another room. His entire body and face was stained with dry blood. It was for the last time I saw Baker. I told the army personnel, "I don't know him. He gave a wrong statement. He lied to save his life. I never saw him."

In fact, from the very beginning I had decided what I would tell them. I knew they would not spare me if I admitted the facts. The army officer asked me, "Do you know Fateh Ali Chowdhury?" I replied in the negative. "I've no friend by that name. However, I can try to check whether he is known to me if you could bring him in front of me."

The officer tried to lure me that I would be freed if I tell the truth, otherwise, I could have to die. But he could not get any information from me, and became almost like a mad dog. He started hurling abuses and asked a sepoy to take me and beat me. He said in Urdu, "*suaarka bachchako udhar le jao. Aur maro usko*" (Take away the son of bitch and beat him up). Being excited, he also threw a paper on my face. Perhaps, the paper was the torture report containing the list of those who were picked up or would be arrested later.

The sepoy took me to another room where torture continued until evening. I was not given a drop of water all day. An elderly army man, perhaps a subedar major, secretly brought two pieces of bread for us at about 3 p.m. He also brought some sugar. The man was a Beluch. Among the barbaric soldiers, only he showed a little kindness.

Looking at me, he told the sepoy, "*Itna mar na maro. Ye bachcha hai. Itna mar marne se ye mar jayega*" (Don't beat him too much. He is a kid. He will die if he is beaten anymore.) The blood over my body made me more confident that I would not admit anything. Never.

At night we were taken to Ramna police station by a bus. The army troops handed over us to the police. A policeman told the troops to record the names of those who were taken to the police station. I thought, my name should be changed and it would be helpful to prove myself innocent. In fact, except for my close relations no one knew my full name as it was a long one. I mentioned my name as Syed Abul Barq. Intentionally I hid the last name Alvi.

We were kept in custody at the police station. There were many others like us. I told Altaf Bhai the story behind my name. He said, "Ultimately there is no way to escape. Baker might be called again tomorrow. He will again identify you. They will again interrogate and torture you."

In police custody, we're kept along with some thieves and pickpockets. They were very sympathetic to us. The Bangalee policemen at the thana were also sympathetic. A pickpocket cleaned my face and back with his towel while others rubbed ointment on our wounds. At that time, the prisoners kept medicines like paracetamol and painkiller, iodox etc. Their relatives used to supply those. We could not sleep at night due to severe pain all over the body.

The next morning we, as per the list, were taken to the martial-law court. This time they took us to another building (building no. 2). On not seeing any of the previous day's army men there, I felt courageous. We were kept in a room, with a wide balcony. We were taken to the balcony one after another, according to the list, for interrogation. But the torture was not like the previous day. There was only questioning. Altaf Bhai was the last man to be interrogated. I was not called. Somehow I was dropped from the list. Maybe my name was on the paper which was thrown at me. I stood up and said, "I was not called."

The army officer looked at me, and asked me my name.

I said, "Syed Abul Baraq." Now the officer looked at the list he was carrying. He went through the list from top to bottom several times, but did not get the name. He asked, "Why were you caught?"

"I don't know. I had gone to the house of Altaf Bhai in the evening and was picked up from there the next morning."

“Why had you gone there?”

I said, “His parents are related to me.”

“Did you not know that he is involved with the Mukti Bahini (Freedom fighters)?” asked the army officer.

“No.”

“What do you do?”

“I do work at the DFP.”

“Do you attend your office?”

“Yes.”

“What is the telephone number of your office?”

I didn't go to office after March 25 except for some days to get my salary. In fact, the entire time I was in India. At first I thought I should give him a wrong number, but that could be more dangerous for me. So, I told him the correct number. I was thinking if the officer rings up my office and anyone asks about my absence, I would get into trouble. However, I was confident that everyone at my office would say that I was attending office regularly as they liked me very much, specially, my boss Mr. Bari. The army officer took the telephone set. He dialed thrice keeping an eye on me. Perhaps, he was trying to observe if there was any change on my face. Again I thought that I was going to face trouble. Instead he said at last, “Okay,” and asked me to stand beside him. In the meantime, one army man brought a copy of the holy Quran. The officer ordered, “Touch the Quran and say I never went to India. I don't know anyone.” I did the same without any hesitation and said to myself, “May Allah pardon me. Saving one's life is the prime farz (duty).” These incidents, one after another, were making me feel more and more confident. I heard, the army people talking among themselves, “He is a kid. He has been tortured enough.”

A new problem arose when it was confirmed that I was going to be released. The subedar major who had brought bread the previous day came into the room at the last moment. He heard everything about me. He could tell others about me. It was my good fortune, he did not say anything. Other than Altaf Bhai, all of us were released. But I had some more problems. The sentry on duty at the gate, was the one who had told me on the previous day, “Do you think you'll be freed after denying everything?” To avoid him, I said, “How shall I go? I can't even stand up. If you give me a lift up to the road, I'll manage somehow to go thereafter.” The officer enquired and found out that there was no car. He said, “You are young enough. I believe you can walk and go.”

As my attempt to avoid the guard at the gate failed, I said, “I will not be allowed to cross the gate in this condition.” The subedar major ensured my crossing the gate by carrying my body on his shoulders.

We came to the main road on foot. The sepoy who had threatened me the previous day was looking at me with anger as if a tiger had lost his prey, but he could not say anything as one of his senior colleagues was accompanying me. The Beluch army man coming near the road touched my back and said, “Go home, you must call a doctor to check your condition. Take care.”

I was on the main road but there was no vehicle. At this time, a private car came back after crossing me. I was astonished. The driver said: “Come on.” He was a neighbour of Altaf Bhai, father of TV actress Nima Rahman.

I stayed at Altaf Bhai's house for 15-20 days. I went to India again along with a group. My fingers started to become normal after treatment at Muktiyoddha Hospital for many days. At that time, my only work was drawing pictures of war fields.

I still feel the pain on my fingers whenever I paint for a long time. The horrible memories still haunt me and take me back to those tormenting days I spent at the Pakistani army camp during the Liberation War.

Interviewed by Ruhul Motin



As we entered the building, we saw many other dead bodies lying on the floor

Abul Fazal

On the midnight of March 25, 1971, the Pakistani occupation forces launched an attack on Dhaka University campus with mortars and tanks. They killed many teachers, students and employees of the university. Abul Fazal is one of the eyewitnesses of the massacre. His statement was recorded in October, 1999.

I was at the Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University in the night of March 25, 1971. At that time I was working in the postal service. I came to Dhaka for official training and decided to stay at Jagannath Hall with my school friend Shishutosh Dutt, nephew of General C. R. Dutt. It was Room No. 8/A of the Extension Building, which was later named October Smriti Bhaban.

On March 1, 1971, General Yahiya Khan postponed the session of National Assembly that sparked instant protest by the people. The students of Dhaka University also came down to the streets and staged demonstrations against the government decision. Tension was mounting on the campus due to the political trouble since early March.

On the midnight of March 25, we heard heavy firing on the streets. The students came out of their rooms and saw many trucks carrying Pakistan Army soldiers. The military trucks stopped near the east gate of the hall where the students earlier put up barricades. We saw the troops shouting and hurling abuses as they had to stop there. I cannot recall how many trucks there were. Due to a wall, I could not see all the vehicles from our room. But I think at least 8/10 trucks came there.

Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta lived in a university quarter near the east gate. We heard firing and outcries of women from that direction. Then it became clear to us that the army had started killing operation. Beside, Shishutosh and me, and two other students were inside the room. One of them was my friend Mostak, who was a student of the English department and the other was Shibu, a student of Botany. Shibu left the hall after March 7, but in that evening, he returned with a guest named Niren. Shishutosh, Mostak and me had our supper at a restaurant at Purana Paltan that day. We saw Shibu and Niren returning to the room. Shibu came back to Dhaka as he was a private tutor.

When the firing began, I went to the adjacent room to see what was going on. The soldiers were firing from machine guns in a bid to lower the new national flag of Bangladesh hoisted atop the five-storied building where Professor Guhathakurta lived. I had never seen a machine gun before. I was involved in politics during my student life, but I had never faced such a troublesome situation. I could not decide what to do.

From the adjacent room, I saw that the military men were trying to break the locks of the east gate in order to enter into the hall. We had some dynamite powder in the room. We collected it to make bombs. At first we threw the containers through the window so that the military could not blame us. We thought that they would not accuse us anything due to lack of proof.

But the army started indiscriminate firing after entering into the hall. Sensing trouble, we crawled from the room and took shelter in a toilet. After a few minutes, we saw the army set fire to the tin shed canteen owned by one Sudhir. Smoke was entering the toilet and it soon became difficult for us to breathe.

The toilet had a small window. I came out through the window and took shelter in the apartment of a fourth class employees of the hall. Shibu also followed me. To protect myself, I tore my vest so that the army men would not recognise me as a student. Then I jumped over the wall and fell into a drain outside. As I tried to get up, I saw some army men standing there. Then I again jumped over the wall to come inside. I went to a tin shed building inside the hall and stayed with the sweepers, gardeners and other fourth class employees of the hall. Shubhash, Shibu and Niren were also there. We saw some dead bodies on the fields in front of the building. The army had killed them as they tried to escape. They continued firing in the direction of the main building of the hall. We also heard firing from the residence of Professor G.C. Dev. Mostak also jumped over the wall and ran quickly towards the Kalibari (temple) of the hall. The army men fired to kill him but missed their target.

The army members were observing us, but we thought that they would not recognise us. They would consider us as hall employees.

Among us, there were a number of female employees. A few minutes later, a soldier came and ordered the male employees to stand separately. We carried out the order. I was then thinking about my fate. Suddenly some soldiers came and started beating us with branches of trees kept there for use as firewood. Then they took us to the field near the hall laundry. As ordered, we sat in front of the laundry. The army had a plan to kill only Bangalees. So they ordered the Bangalees and Biharis to sit separately. Those who knew Urdu, claimed themselves as Biharis and sat separately.

Then the army soldiers took the Bangalees including me, to the quarter of Professor Guhathakurta. In the meantime, they finished their operation in the teachers' apartments and started operation in the main campus. The army men ordered us to bring the dead bodies from the teachers apartments to Jagannath Hall.

I can still recall, I carried the dead body of Dr. Moniruzzaman, who also lived in the same building as Professor Guha. I also brought the bodies of two other unknown young men. We just brought the dead bodies from the apartments, crossed the road and kept the bodies on the ground. Another group took the bodies to the main building now called G.C. Dev Bhaban. When we were told to go there, we saw some other dead bodies in front of the main building. As we entered the building, we saw many other dead bodies lying on the floor.

I saw the body of a young man on the right side of the ground floor. It was almost half-burnt. Some people were still carrying dead bodies there. I saw the dead body of my friend Shishutosh. He was one of my two closest friends. We were a trio — Shishutosh, Mostak and me— all from Sylhet district. I took the body of Shishutosh and placed it on the pile of dead bodies. His shirt was stained with blood. I also saw the bodies of those who claimed themselves as Biharis. The Pakistan Army had killed them too.

The army men then ordered us to line up near the Shahid Minar of Jagannath Hall. We were a group of 6 to 7 people including Shubhash and Shibu. It was the last batch to kill. The operation was nearly over. We were lined up near the boundary wall. A portion of the wall was broken. The students used to move through the broken wall. I saw some army men take their morning tea there, after finishing their successful killing operation. Through the hole of the wall, I saw one or two army convoys moving on the street. Possibly they were returning to the cantonment after conducting operations in the city.

We were directed to line up facing towards the north. The wear end of the of line turned towards a pond. A soldier standing at about 8 yards from the line-up raised his machine gun to fire. He was waiting for the order of his commanding officer sitting behind him.

However, the officer ordered him to lower his weapon, because he had spotted a Pakistani army officer was coming from the direction of the pond. He had gone there to wash his hands. The army men did not fire to save their colleague.

I was somewhere in the middle of the line-up. I was thinking about saving my life. But Shubhash, being frustrated with the situation, said, "It is meaningless to live anymore.....They also killed Dr. G.C. Dev."

As the officer ordered not to fire, the soldier lowered his machine gun. He brought out from his pocket two packets of cigarettes. I still recall that one was 'Gold Leaf' and the other was 'King Stork'. I thought they must have taken the packets from the house of some teacher while conducting operations in the teachers' apartments. The sepoy threw the packet of King Stork to the officer and lit a cigarette from the packet of Gold Leaf. He was a little unmindful.

At that time I sat on the ground as I was tired, but I was observing them with attention. At one stage, I saw the officer turn his back and advance towards a sepoy who was leaving the place. Taking advantage of the situation, I slipped towards the pile of dead bodies and I lay on the dead body of a guard of the hall. The body was still bleeding. My face and other parts of body was stained with his blood. I lay there like a dead body. Thus I succeeded in deceiving the killers.

A few moments later, they fired from the machine gun. The people standing in queue fell down. Some fell upon my body. After the brush fire, they found some people were still alive and shot them again. Fortunately, the soldiers could not see that I was alive under the pile of dead bodies. I lay motionless and in silence until the army left the place.

I lay there for 5 or 6 minutes, before raising my head, and saw nobody was there. Some women and children were running towards the place. All of them were wailing, because, they were the family members of the victims. They came close and tried to find out the bodies of their dear ones. They had come with some hope of finding their beloved ones alive.

On seeing those people approaching to the killing site I was sure that the army personnel had left. I started running towards the gate. Another boy too got up from the pile of dead bodies and also started running. Later, I came to know that the boy was from Bazitpur. He was not a student but he lived in the hall.

I crossed the area of Jagannath Hall and went to a building on the other side of the road. I knocked on the door, but nobody opened it. Then I went to the roof and saw a helicopter flying above. A few minutes later, a boy came with a jug full of water. He said, "I heard you, but could not open the door. My family members did not allow me. I became desperate to see you." The boy helped me to drink water and further asked, "What can I do for you? I can't do much. Stay here, I'll take care of you."

After an hour, I came downstairs and entered a flat on the second or third floor of the building, where a gentleman lived alone. A few days back, he sent his family members to the village. Many people in Dhaka city did the same after the 7th of March.

The gentleman requested me to sit in his room. He told me to change my blood-stained dress and wash my body. He said "These could prove dangerous for you." I went to the bathroom and washed my clothes and body. The gentleman said, "You are not safe here. You'll have to go somewhere else."

After about 3 or 4 hours, he took me to another building. The boy from Bazitpur was also there. I saw blood along the staircase of the building. I concluded that either the Pak army had conducted an operation in that building or that injured people had taken shelter there.

The gentleman thought this building too would not be safe for us to live. He took us to another building from where the playground of the hall could be seen clearly. At noon, we saw some army men in the field. A man wearing a tupi (cap used by muslim religious man) was with the army men. The dead bodies were still there. Nobody removed those from that place. On the morning of 26th March, the army brought a bulldozer and drove it over the pile of dead bodies in order to bury those. The barbaric Pakistan army razed the bodies to the ground. We witnessed the tragic scene through a window of the building.

We went to the field when curfew was lifted the next morning. We saw about 50 dead bodies there. Hands and legs of some victims were on the ground while the bodies under the soil. I still feel frightened whenever I

recall that horrible scene. I have never heard about such cruelty of men. I never saw such killing of men like birds. We have read the history of Halaku Khan and Chengiz Khan, but could not imagine that such cruel incidents could happen in a civilized world. I could not even think of committing such a barbaric act.

When we were at the killing field, my friend Mostak came looking for me. Until then I had thought that he had also become a victim of the massacre. Another student, Suresh, also came. He had bullet injuries on his shoulder. He said, he was in a line-up of some people who were killed by brush firing by the army on the roof of a building, but being a short man, the bullets hit his shoulder, instead of the head.

As we were hungry, Suresh, Mostak and I bought some puffed rice from a shop near the hall. Then we went to Dhaka Medical College Hospital on foot. Suresh was admitted there for treatment. Mostak and I decided to leave Dhaka and go to Sylhet.

On the way, we saw Anwar Zahid prying out the dead bodies from Curzon Hall of Dhaka University. When we were crossing Baitul Mukarram mosque, we saw many dead bodies on the street. We reached Matuail with the stream of home-bound people. We took shelter at the house of Bazlu, one of my colleagues. After two days we ate warm food Bazlu's house. In the afternoon, he gave us some money and helped to cross the Demra area.

While returning to Sylhet we saw the uprising of the people and their spontaneous resistance against the occupation army. We saw the new national flag of Bangladesh, inscribed with the map of the country, flying atop houses across the country.

Interview by Ruhul Motin



I saw signs of terror everywhere

Protiti Devi

Protiti Devi is the daughter-in-law of Dhirendranath Datta, the first man demanded Bengali as state language of Pakistan in 1948 in the then Provincial Assembly. Datta, a member of the Provincial Assembly, also played a vital role in the anti-colonial rule. He was tortured by the Pakistanis after being arrested in Comilla. Protiti Devi, in her testimony, describes the inhumane torture unleashed on him.

When barbaric atrocities by Pakistani forces continued in Dhaka on the night of March 25, firing also started in police line area in Comilla town and quickly spreaded to other parts of the town. We were in fear as my father-in-law Dhirendranath Datta was a famous political leader. So, we were apprehending the worst. Many of our family friends had suggested my father-in-law to leave home, but he did not agree saying “If I leave this place, they will kill my innocent people here.”

The firing continued all through the night. The Pakistanis killed the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police in Comilla on March 26. Curfew was imposed in the town. Movement of people was hardly seen on the streets. We could not understand what was happening outside. As the shops were remained closed many people came to us to take rice. Our house was in Dharmasagor area. This area as had some significance jail, main offices, court and residences of elite were also located in this area. Curfew was withdrawn on March 27 afternoon.

A road in front of our house goes straight to Sonamura border. We saw a stream of frightened people of all ages and walks of life heading towards the border. Three of six our house helps were sent to their village homes. Only 10-year-old Sadek and two others were in the house.

My father-in-law was not convinced to leave the house. Others, present in the house were my brother-in-law Dilip Datta, daughter Aroma, son Rahul and me.

On March 28, we saw some trucks dumping human bodies in Faizunnesa Girls High School ground. There were, perhaps, some wounded people among the bodies brought from the outskirts or nearby villages. The barbaric Pakistani troops sprayed petrol and burnt the bodies reducing the injured people to ashes. We heard a big bang outside our house at about 10 pm on March 29. The sound continued for about an hour. Later we came to know that the house of Bachchu Kaka (Awami League leader Zahirul Quaiyum) was attacked.

Firing and explosions continued amidst the curfew. I was very puzzled. My father-in-law looked restless. His blood-pressure rose very high. It was 266. He took medicine after I had washed his head. All of us were sleepless.

We heard heavy firing in front of our house at about 1:30 am. It was horrifying. I went to my father-in-law’s room and again back to my room. The doorbell rang. Dilip rushed towards me and asked “What should I do?”

I said, “We have no option but to open the door.”

I tried to get up, but he rushed and opened the door. Immediately some Pakistani soldiers pointed their bayonets at his chest and stormed the room. They took Dilip to the chamber-room of my father-in-law, who was also dragged to that room. Aroma and Rahul were in the adjoining room. I tried to come out. Since minor Rahul was being taken away. But a young Beluch captain carrying a torch-light intercepted me. I heard shouting from Aroma's room. The entire house became a horrifying sight.

I did not hear anything other than firing and shouting since the door was open, as if, several thousand army men had occupied the house. Firing followed by sound of breaking of glasses continued. I could fathom that the pictures in my father-in-law's room were being broken by bullet shots. Blood started to flow from that room. I heard someone moaning, "Let me free, let me free". I could make out that they were being bayoneted. I tried to come out forcibly, but the Beluch captain would not allow me.

The soldiers in Aroma's room were looking for female university students. On being asked, Aroma replied that she had appeared for the matric exam. Somedays back I had brought some female students from Dhaka University' Rokeya Hall along with Aroma. The army's main target was to kidnap university student, Aroma. Since Aroma was being interrogated, the Beluch boy didn't allow me to go there nor did he allow anyone from the other side to enter. As a result, Major Bokhari, known as killer of Comilla, did not realise there was any female inside the room. Among the soldiers, there was one who knew Urdu a little bit. He kept repeatedly asking, "Who is from Dhaka? Obviously, there is someone from Dhaka." I tried my best to shout loudly that there was no one from Dhaka. In fact, they were looking for university student, Aroma. At one stage one of them had allowed Aroma to leave the room telling her, "Go to your mother."

As the firing continued breaking windowpanes and blood flooded the floor, I felt that no one could have survived. Perhaps not even Rahul?

The dreadful operation was over after 11 minutes. Army officers of all ranks, including a brigadier and a colonel, had come. Stenguns were set up on both sides of the house. The road in front of the house was crowded with troops.

An ambulance came and took away my father-in-law and Dilip. Rahul was sent back to me. He was saying time and again, "Uncle needs a bandage." In fact, minor Rahul had become very nervous. It was not possible for him to bear the pain of seeing such notorious atrocities. He fainted time and again.

The ambulance disappeared. The army officers also started to leave the house in phases. The house was freed completely of army personnel by dawn. I had lost my all senses, I did not know what to do then. Until the last soldier left the house, the Beluch boy remained standing. Later, I realised Aroma and I could survive only because of him.

The entire house bore signs of blood. A deathly silence gripped the entire home. The only sound was the groaning of Aroma.

I went to my father-in-law's room. There were signs of destruction wherever I looked. Blood covered the floor; the walls bore the signs of indiscriminate firing and damaged-pictures were lying on the floor indiscriminately. Sadek was in my room during the operation. He boiled milk and served it to Aroma and Rahul. As I lost my father-in-law and brother-in-law, I was thinking about how could I save my daughter and son and how to leave the house. I did not find any way as curfew was going on outside. Army guards were in front of the house. They were also patrolling the streets. I stood up on a chair and tried to looked outside peeping through a ventilator. All of a sudden, the door of the bathroom was knocked from the backside. I thought the soldiers had come back again.

I opened the door frightfully and was astonished to see a neighbour, Mr Rahman, a C&B service holder. He secretly came to know of our condition. Defying strong army guard around the house, he came to us crossing the boundary wall with a high risk. His courage and humane amazed me.

I said, "Please manage two burkhas (veil) for us. Then we could try to leave the house."

He said, "There is curfew outside. Soldiers are patrolling in the streets and in front of the gate. You'll not be able to go out."

"What's your suggestion then?" I asked.

He advised me to wait and told till Curfew withdrawn at about 11am for an hour, then he would back again.

I myself thought several times of fleeing through the back of the house, but it was not possible to open the old door on the backside as it would create a sharp noise drawing attention of the soldiers.

I heard knocking on the bathroom door at about 11am. Frightenedly, I opened the door and found Mr Rahman. He asked me to come out, and brought Aroma and Rahul over the wall to backside. I crossed myself, but I did not know how Mr Rahman could cross the high boundary wall alongwith Aroma and Rahul.

After reaching to Rahman's house, he asked me, "Didi (sister) where will you go now? The army might come as soon as the curfew is withdrawn."

I replied, "At first I'll go the Daroga (police inspector) bari (house)."

Aroma and I wore the burkhas. Mr Rahman took sick Rahul and advised us not to glance back while walking on the road as it would make the soldiers suspicious.

The gate of our house is on the way to Daroga bari Police officer's residence. While crossing the gate, I started weeping. The area around the gate was marked by signs of blood. Our pet dog and cat were crying around a blood-stained shoe of my father-in-law was in front of the gate.

As we were barefooted, it was very tough for us to walk through the street. Elderly people were consoling us saying, "Oh! Obviously they are from an elite family. Now they have to walk barefoot."

Aroma was weeping while walking. I tried my best to stop her. I told her, "My child, don't cry now. We'll have to cry throughout the lives. If you cry now, soldiers will come and pick us up."

After walking for sometime, we reached the Daroga Bari. Mr Kamal of the house said, "Sister, it'll not be wise for you to stay here anymore. You'd better to go hide where." They kept Rahul along with them and managed a safer place for us. Mr Rahman gave Rahul a new name- Bacchu Mia- for his safety.

I still did not know where we would be taken to, where we would be kept. However, I heard that we would be taken to a close relative of theirs. After sometime, one man came and took Aroma and me away. Our new destination was five-minutes walking distance away. It was the residence of Mr Eskander Ali, a nephew of Mr Kamal. Mr Ali was a captain and physician in the Pakistan Army. He was stranded after coming from Chittagong. He had no contact with his mother, wife and 10-month-old son who were in Chittagong. Eskander took the responsibility of Rahul's treatment. Aroma was still abnormal. She continued weeping all the time. In the meantime, Eskander got news that his family members in Chittagong were shot dead. He told Aroma "Why are you crying. You at least have your mother. But I have lost everyone."

He was able to console Aroma. It is impossible for us to the gratitude I cannot express sufficiently what the doctor did for us at that time. Taking a life risk, he had in wards cooked food himself and took special care for Aroma like his own daughter.

Army personnel used to come to that house to interrogate Mr Eskander everyday. He talked to them keeping us in secret places. A Pathan cook, was appointed for him, also helped us. The cook even tried to make the army understand that there would be no point killing the doctor as he might help them in case of need.

When ever the army personed came we were kept in the bathroom or the kitchen or other secret places. Had the army known of our presence in that house, a death penalty was certain for Mr Eskander. Our domestic help, Sadek used to visit us and brought clothes, rice and other things from our Dharma Sagar house. We also came to know about other developments from him. He told as about the killings inflicted by the army and their atrocities. I felt very tense all the time. Rahul was yet to recover, Aroma was still sick. I used to know the developments from Radio Australia and All India Radio.

At the end of April, I came to know that army personnel was hunting for us. They had also announced a cash prize for our capture. In this condition, I did not want to be a cause of trouble to Eskander. So I requested him to, rent a house for me. On April 30, the Pathan cook informed us that the house would be raided in the next day. Then I asked Eskander to take us in another place.

In the dark of the night, Aroma and I were taken away to another house. I did not know where the house was situated. It took 10-15 minutes to reach there after walking thorough a garden. Here we faced another trouble. People gave us suspicious looks. They started questioning — who are we? From where have we come? Where would we go? We requested them just to allow us to stay for a single night.

On May 2 morning we again went to Mr Kamal's house, where we heard a Akashbanee (Indian radio service) news item in the morning that the Parliament in Delhi would adopt a condolence motion to show respect to Shaheed (martyred) Dhiren Datta. I realised it would not be wise to stay here furthermore as the army had intensified raiding many houses to hideout the family members of Dhirendranath Datta. May be they were looking for us to compel us to make a statement that we were in safe. The reason was simple, they did not want to let the world know about their brutal atrocities. It should be mentioned here that Radio Pakistan had broadcasted the death news of Dhirendranath Dutta saying he died of cardiac arrest. I thought Dilip had died immediately after he was taken away from the house. Dhiren Babu was not supposed to be alive for a long time enduring the inhumane torture. However, Ranimohon Sheel, a barber of our area, who was also picked up to the cantonment, said he saw Dhiren Babu and Dilip being tortured in the cantonment. Army personnel killed them unleashing brutal repression for straight five or six days. The barber claimed he had even witnessed their burial.

After the news of Akashbanee the Daroga bari advised us to cross the border. But it was very risky. At last Mr Kamal could convince his cousin Syed Mia to reach us to the border.

Accompanied by Syed Mia, we started the journey from Daroga Bari by a rickshaw at about 12:30pm. I still could visualize the people of Daroga Bari were crying to say us good bye. The road and the destination were unknown to us. The rickshaw proceeded towards the Goumti river. There was risk of death at each and every moment. Indiscriminate firing could be heard from the direction of the cantonment. Like us, many rickshaws were bound towards the Goumti and then to the Sonamura border. On either side of the road, we saw the bodies of many people, including women and children. Many rickshaws behind us were blown away by shells. We were still confused of our destiny even after crossing the Goumti. There was only an endless void. We went through a route of which I knew nothing.

On our arrival at the dam after crossing the Goumti, Syed Mia said, "Mother, now we are free from risk. No shell from Pakistani forces can reach here."

While passing through the dam, we saw signs of atrocities of Pakistani forces — many houses were burnt to ashes. We could still hear the sound of shelling. In the evening we reached Sonamura border. As we were about to cross the border, I saw some soldiers jumping out from a convoy. They were 'Gurkha' soldiers. For the first time I realised how would we cross the border, as we did not have passports. I introduced myself and told the Indian border authorities about our situation.

They said, "Papers and passports are not please follow us." They took us to the Sonamura Police Station.

Then, began a new chapter in our lives, leaving behind the peace of home.

Interviewed by Ruhul Motin



They used to uproot the prisoners' nails by piercing knives to their fingers

Singer Linu Billah

Nakhalpara MP Hostel was the biggest torture centre in Dhaka during the 1971 liberation war. Music Director Altaf Mahmud and many other people were killed there by the Pakistan Army. Singer Linu Billah, who is a relative of Altaf Mahmud, was also arrested with Mahmud and brought to MP Hostel camp. Linu Billah described his experience while making a statement on September 23, 1999.

In the early hours of August 30, 1971, everybody at home woke up hearing the outcry of my younger sister Shimul. I rushed to her room and found that some black-dressed Pakistani army soldiers had rifles pointed at her neck. The Pakistani army men entered the room through the kitchen door which was always kept open. Shimul was at that time practicing of her singing.

One army captain asked, "Who is Altaf Mahmud?"

Altaf Mahmud came forward to introduce himself and said, "I'm Altaf Mahmud".

"Mall Kaha? (Where are the arms)", asked the captain.

"I don't know," replied Altaf boldly. Without waiting a moment longer, the captain struck Altaf Mahmud with his rifle. Altaf felt severe pain on his abdomen. His nose started bleeding. Then the army men compelled him to unearth some boxes full of arms and ammunition near the tube-well behind the house.

From then, the army formally began to torture him. Before taking us from our residence in front of Rajarbagh Police Line to the MP Hostel, the army unleashed torture on us several times. I cannot say how I was taken to MP hostel. Soon after the car carrying us reached the front of the Hostel, the Pakistani army burst into joy as if their favourite food stuff had been brought for them. The soldiers started torturing Altaf on the street. They asked us to walk for a while and line up there. Then we were taken to a small kitchen. Many others were confined in the room. At about 8 a.m. they noted down our names after taking us out from the tiny house. Then the formal torture session began.

A well-trained group of army personnel took us to an adjacent room and started torturing us. Before entering the room, I heard the groaning sounds of other people who were being tortured at that time. The soldiers continued torture on them for 20-30 minutes and then sent them back to the kitchen.

Havildar Shafin Gul was the leader of the torture group. He used to unleash torture in many ways. I heard Altaf Bhai groaning at regular intervals as he was being tortured mercilessly in the room. From another room, the screams of other freedom fighters were also heard. Through a hole of the kitchen door I saw a man who's face was almost distorted. His right eye was about to come out while the left one was bleeding. His face was badly injured. He was yelling in Urdu, "Mujhe goli mar doo, lekin mat maro (Kill me, but don't beat me anymore)." Hearing the voice, I thought I might know the man, but I could not recognise him then. Later, I found out he was Hafizur Rahman, a close aide of Altaf Mahmud. He was a skilled player of various musical instruments.

I found a group of 5 or 6 army men inside the room when I was called in. Shafin asked me, “Who were with you and where are the arms?”

In reply, I said, “I know nothing.” Then the barbaric Pakistani soldiers forced me to lie down on the floor. Two of them stood on my hands while two others on the legs. Another man pressed my neck to the floor with his legs. They started inhuman torture on me. They beat me mercilessly from my shoulders to the knees as if they were chopping meat like butchers. It was their routine torture on freedom fighters. It was a common punishment for those who claimed to be innocent from the beginning.

They continued torture on me for about 15 minutes. I found my clothes had got wet with continuous bleeding from my back and other parts of my body. At the same time, the devilish army men unleashed torture on the other Bangalees confined in the balcony and in a room next to it. I could realise the extent of torture by hearing the screams. I also realised that I was tortured less than the others. I was sent back to the kitchen after torture lasting for about 20-25 minutes. The torture on the others, continued.

I saw the detainees taking care of the injured people back from the torture cell. They washed the blood from their face, shoulders and clothes. Spraying water on their faces, some detainees tried to bring back the sense of those who had fainted. I did not know the whereabouts of Altaf Mahmud. The barbaric soldiers took Altaf away from the camp at about 10 a.m. They also tortured my elder brother in a barbaric way.

By this time we met two handsome guys in our room. We realized that they were badly tortured. They were continuously bleeding from their nose, lips and face. Their clothes were stained with blood. The elder one was looking towards me, my four brothers and Alvi by reclining his head on the wall. Despite such unbearable torture by the army men, he was smiling. He was Sharif Imam, husband of Jahanara Imam. The younger man was Jami, his youngest son. Mr. Sharif Imam made gestures to us not to make any noise, because the army men used to multiply the level of torture on those who made noise.

We were confined in a 3-room flat of the MP Hostel. One evening, about 7 or 8 p.m, we got frightened with the sound of kicking on the door. We heard the sound of unlocking of the room. The soldiers brought in a young man, aged about 27-28 years, who was about to die. They kicked and left him in the room. One of the army soldiers said, “Bloody, want to flee? We’ll not kill you by shooting”. The young man was moaning and said, “Don’t beat me, please kill me.” The boy lay with us in the room, but as the door was open, we could not do anything for him. When the door was closed, we tried to raise the boy so that he could sit by the wall, but he was too weak to sit.

His face was almost distorted. His nose and mouth were bleeding continuously. He tried to get up several times, but failed. We could not recognise him. Later, Alvi told me that he was Badiul Alam, a freedom fighter. He was known as Badi in the Dhaka University campus. Badi made an attempt to flee from the concentration camp as he thought it was better to die than to be tortured, but the Pakistani army men foiled his attempt and arrested him. Badi fainted as the army men unleashed brutal torture on him. The devilish Pakistanis left him in an unconscious state in our room. His off-white trouser and shirt were stained with dry blood which made the clothes blackish. At about 8 p.m. the army men took him away. I never saw him again.

After several rounds of interrogation and torture till 8 p.m. the army men took us away from there in two pick-up vans. At about 9.30 p.m. the army men took some other people from adjacent buildings. They picked up another handsome young guy in a separate jeep from Building No 2. He was severely tortured, but still strong enough to stand. He himself got into the jeep. His name was Rumi, a freedom fighter and the eldest son of Jahanara Imam. It was my first and last meeting with Rumi.

We were taken to the Ramna Police Station by 10 p.m. Everyone was lined up in the verandah. I was surprised to see Chullu Bhai in the line-up. He was also severely tortured. Chullu Bhai told us not to disclose anything.

On August 31. Pakistani soldiers came to the Ramna thana by bus. They packed all of us in the bus and took us again to the same Nakhhalpara MP Hostel at about 10 a.m.

Everybody was feeling severe pain on their body due to the previous day’s torture. The army men started torturing us again that day in same way, asking similar questions. The torture turned more violent. I applied the strategy according to tips given by the detainees in the Ramna thana custody. It worked. At one stage the severity of punishment was lessened. I gave Alvi and others the same tips. In the meantime, one of Alvi’s

finger was fractured. It happened when he tried to resist the stroke of the baton. His finger was still bleeding. The army men slapped Dilu my younger brother, on the ear, as he did not give satisfactory replying to their questions. His ear was also bleeding. He could not even hear anything after the blow. Dilu is still short of hearing. We spent the whole day in a reign of torture. At about 10 p.m. they took us to a cell at the Ramna police station.

The next day was September 1. At about 9 o'clock an army bus was brought and the army men asked us to get into the bus. For the first time there I saw cricketer Jewel sitting beside me with bandage on his finger. I heard that he had received bullet wounds on his finger during an attack on the Pak army near Dhanmondi Road No 18. I heard Jewel reciting from the Quran. Perhaps he thought that he was going to die soon. His injured finger was proof of his active participation in the war. Jewel was an active fighter in several important operations against the Pakistani occupation forces. On August 30, when he was being brought as a prisoner, he told Mr. Samad, "You have helped the Pakistan army to arrest freedom fighters. If I return I will kill you." But Jewel never returned. He embraced martyrdom.

We were detained again in the same rooms after getting off the bus. After a few minutes, all the prisoners were taken outside the buildings. The soldiers ordered us to line up and walk slowly towards the ground floor of the biggest building of the three. They also ordered us to be seated on the floor. The place resembled a court room. A colonel was sitting nearby along with two captains. It was Colonel Naser Hezaji. One of the captains was called Quaiyum, but I cannot recall the name of the other. Among others, Shafin Gul and his accomplice Bihari Muktar were there. We understood that they were going to take the final decision as to who was to be killed and who to be released.

I was observing the captain who was sitting beside Colonel Hezaji. I recalled that the captain used to go to the DIT television centre. I decided to talk to him. The captain was so ferocious that he used to remove the prisoners nails by piercing knives to their fingers. The colonel was delivering the verdicts like a judge, by pointing his finger to the right or left — release or punishment.

At about 12.30 p.m. I was called in. The colonel asked me, "What's your name?" I replied. Then he asked the names of others. The Captain was moving the knife about as if it was a pistol. Suddenly I told him, "I've seen you earlier." Surprised, the captain said, "Where?" I said, "At the Television Centre." Then the captain said, "Yes, I used to go there, but what did you do there?" In reply, I told him that I was an artiste. The captain smiled and asked what my job was. I replied that I used to sing and play the tabla (a musical instrument).

As soon as I replied, the captain kicked a small table towards me saying, "Play on it and sing a song also." I felt a new lease of life, and I started singing and playing on the table like a tabla. I cannot recall which Urdu song I sang. All of us were released, except Altaf Bhai. The captain once again ordered us not to disclose anything of what happened there. He also asked us to supply the names and addresses of the freedom fighters and report regularly about their activities.

When we were leaving the Hostel, Altaf Bhai said, "Don't worry about me. Take care of Shaon, my child."

Interview by Ruhul Motin



They broke ribs by beating with iron rods

Professor A. M. M. Shahidulla

University teachers were one of the main targets of Pakistani occupation forces during the liberation war. From March 25 to December 15, 1971, they indiscriminately killed the teachers and unleashed inhumane torture on them. Professor A. M. M. Shahidulla of the Department of Mathematics, Dhaka University was picked up and fell victim to their torture during the war. The statement of Professor Shahidulla was recorded on September 28, 1999.

It was midnight on August 13, 1971. I couldn't sleep in anxiety. I had been sick for the last two days. Suddenly, I saw a group of Pakistani soldiers coming from the Fuller Road towards my residence. Another group of 50 to 55 soldiers were following them. They came straight to Building No. 12 and took position in and around the house. I lived at flat No. 12/C. Having observed the situation for the last few days, I guessed that they came to arrest me. Before any untoward incident could take place, I opened my door. The group led by City SP climbed up to the first floor. They verified a list containing the names of five university teachers with my name on the top. The other names were Professor Saad Uddin, Professor Ahmed Sharif, Professor Abul Khair and Professor Rafiqul Islam. Indicating my name, the group leader asked me, "Are you this person?"

"Yes, I am," I replied and the group leader tightly slapped my neck asking me to follow them.

I told them to wait for a while so that I could change my dress and take essential medicines with me, but the officer, possibly a Colonel, did not pay heed to my request and said, "You will get everything after going there."

I was identified by Kazi Mohiuddin, the then Officer-in-Charge of Ramna thana. They took me near the garage of Building No. 16 where Prof. Saad Uddin resided. The Colonel asked me the address of Saad Uddin. I replied that I just know he (Saad) had been residing in the Building No. 16, but I did not know the flat number.

Then the City SP slapped me, hurled abuses and said, "Don't you know the house of your friend?"

Then the troops moved to Ahmed Sharif's residence. Failing to reach Prof. Sharif, the army men stormed into and brought out Dr. Abul Khair from his residence, Building No. 35 located another side of the Fuller Road. Then they divided us into two groups. The soldiers put Dr. Abul Kahir and Saad Uddin in a jeep while me in another vehicle.

I was taken to Nilkhet where Professor Rafiqul Islam lived. The army ordered me to crawl and snake into the house as the main gate was closed.

'I don't know how to crawl', I told them. Suddenly, one of the soldiers shoved me on to my knees. I felt severe pain and was compelled to crawl into the house and to call Prof. Rafiqul out of residence.

I guessed that somebody had made allegations against us to the Pakistanis and it was the reason behind the arrest. Earlier, the then university Registrar issued a circular through the Vice Chancellor Professor Sazzad Hossain asking submission of our present addresses to the authorities. I had given a fake address and my other colleagues did the same. The Pakistanis verified the addresses and found the fake ones. Then the university authorities issued a similar circular further. Thus we understood that someone had supplied our names to the Pakistani occupation forces.

From the month of June, we had been receiving letters regularly from some unknown sources who claimed themselves as *Jamdut* (The angels of death). In those letters, we had been branded as 'traitors' because of supporting country's independence and the freedom fighters. They even threatened to feed our bodies to tigers, dogs and foxes. Other teachers who were still at large also received similar letters. Later, when we discussed the matter ourselves, understood clearly that some of our colleagues were orchestrating conspiracy against us collaborating with the Pakistanis. They told the Pakistan authority that the university would run well if we were arrested. During my interrogation in concentration camp, I came to know that the Pakistanis apprehended something wrong against us. They thought that we would do something dangerous before Pakistan Day. For this reason, they treated us like members of a guerilla group.

We were taken to the Ramna Police Station at around 2.30 am. I was surprised to hear what the City SP told Kazi Mohiuddin, the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ramna P.S. He said, "You have been asked since last one week to report me about the listed people, but you said they are not available. I will see you tomorrow".

Next morning I was surprised to see my wife and two colleagues at the police station along with residential caretaker Syed Daliluddin. Later I came to know that the OC had told my wife to come to the police station in the morning to meet me while I was being picked up on the previous night.

Seeing Daliluddin, the angry OC said, "I'll shoot you. I told you to inform the teachers to go hide. Why had'nt you cautioned them earlier?"

I realised that Mohiuddin was very sympathetic towards us. The night before night he allowed us to sleep on some benches instead confining us in lockup. I saw the miserable condition of the detainees, including a radio engineer and other officials, who were kept in the lockup. It was clear that the Pakistanis had left them in police custody after inflicting brutal torture.

At about 11 a.m. we all were taken to the MP Hostel concentration camp. The army personnel first kept us in a room for one and a half hours and then shifted at a fenced building in the hostel compound. There were many small rooms in the first floor of the building. There I met one of my former students Fariduddin, the Police Super of Faridpur, and many other well-known personalities, including film director Khan Aatur Rahman.

We were not given food till 3.30 pm. The OC of Ramna Police Station had arranged some food for us on the previous night, but due to unfavourable circumstances we could not take then.

In the hostel four or five people were kept in each room which was ... very small in size. They used to change our room-mates regularly so that we did not get unite and exchange views. However, in the process of changing rooms, I met A.N .M. Yusuf, Cabinet Secretary Azizur Rahman, T &T official Sajedur Rahman, Petrol Service official Ahsanullah, Alamgir Kabir, Mulikutur Rahman and other high officials.

The Pakistan army had arrested Mulikutur Rahman, one of my college friends alongwith arms from Kurigram area. A teacher of Political Science Department, Mulikutur Rahman was involved in a guerilla group. He was caught by the Pakistan army while bringing arms from India. He was sent to Dhaka by a helicopter after severe tortured. Many army officers including Major General Majid came there. Awami League leader from Barisal, Mohiuddin Ahmed was also in the torture camp. On the third day in the MP Hostel, we were brought to the interrogation cell. There they gave me a blank paper to write the names of all my friends.

We used to write the names of such friends who were in hiding by this time. We also provided fake addresses. We were detained in a dark small room before being taken to the interrogation cell. We had to sit and sleep on the floor. We were served some food brought from the central jail. The guard used to enter the room at regular intervals to check on what we were doing. The army officers also used to come to see us. One day Brigadier Fakir Mahmud came along with a Flight Sergeant. The sergeant taking his split to his eyes said ridiculously, "Oh my Bengalee brothers (!), What pain you have! We will give you freedom only after 25 years!" Fakir Mahmud also ridiculed me saying, "You used to teach Bengali nationalism in the Trigonometry subsidiary classes".

It make me clear that either one of my students or my colleagues had informed the army. It was not possible for Brigadier Fakir Mahmud to know what I taught in classrooms. I understood that such information was supplied regularly to the cantonment from the university.

During interrogation, one day a man came and asked me, "Can you recognise me? I met you at the Dhaka University Club". I recognised him instantly, but could not recall his name. Once he had gone to the Club to become an external member of the club, but he was not given the membership.

While interrogating me he said, "You were the house-tutor and treasurer of Iqbal Hall. Is it true that you had contact with Razzak, Tofail, Shahjahan Siraj (student leaders) and others? What is your opinion on Bengalee nationalism?".

Failing to get a satisfactory reply, he slapped me, stripped off my clothes and kept me standing in public for hours together in broad daylight. Sometimes he used to push cigarette butts on my back. Other detainees were also tortured in front of me in the same way. The Pakistanis used to press them on their chests with iron rods and break their ribs by beating mercilessly. They also used to remove their nails using needles.

Sometimes they used to pierce needles into their heads. I did not know the people who were tortured in front of us. Later, I learnt that they were Bengalee army officers. I witnessed some of the victims being taken in stretchers in an unconscious state. I heard that some of them were beaten to death.

An army officer was always on duty to torture me. The officers were changed by rotation. One day a Major named Bashir came and told me, "See, what a miracle! I have studied only upto class four, but now I'm a Major in the Pakistan Army". Brigadier Bashir came on another day. He wanted to know the name of my district. I told that I was from Comilla. Then he said, "All the people in Comilla are Hindus. So you are named Shahidulla unnecessarily!"

I got angry and protested.

He again questioned, "Do you say prayers?" I said, "Yes, I'm a Muslim". However, he asked the same question again and again. They interrogated me for nine days. A new officer used to come everyday. On the last day of my imprisonment, Colonel Hejaji, a notorious army officer, interrogated me.

The Pakistanis treated everybody as a Bengalee, not as a Muslim during interrogation. I witnessed that bearded old Muslims, wearing caps, were also tortured. They took our photographs tagging name badges on our chests as if we were criminals. We heard the sound of firing around the area every day and night. The guard on duty used to inform us that they were killing some people. Prof. Saad Uddin and I renamed the sentry as *Janowar* (animal), because he proudly claimed that he had killed some 13 people so far. I heard the screams of women every night. The Pakistan army picked up many women and raped them repeatedly in the concentration camps.

In mid-September, we became panicky one day as the Pakistanis came and suddenly shut down our windows and doors. We thought that we were going to be killed, but within an hour the windows and doors were reopened and we came to know that they had taken such cautionary measures as Tikka Khan had flown away to Pakistan at that time. It was also known that he had declared amnesty before leaving Dhaka. However, at about 1.30 a.m. we were charge-sheeted so that we could not get amnesty. I was charged on seven

allegations that included anti-state activities and giving shelter to a Bengalee army officer's wife. All the complaints were false and fabricated. The Pakistanis considered university teachers as dangerous elements. That is why our activities were regularly monitored in those days.

A Bihari physician used to come to our cell often to provide us some minimal medical treatment. His assistant, a handsome guy, used to pass important information to us. He even made an arrangement to send my messages to my family members. He was later killed by the army.

In October, guerilla activities increased in Dhaka. We were sent to jail then. The Pakistanis introduced a special provision for the university teachers giving them the opportunity to get released on bond. One day I saw Professor Ahsanul Haque, a simple and soft-hearted man, getting down laughing, but he returned wiping his eyes after a few minutes. I asked him "What's the matter?" He told me that he had tried to be freed on bond, but his mother told him not to do so. She said, "The country will be independent. Don't come out from jail giving such bonds. If need be, you die in prison'. I'll never forget it. I'm proud of such a mother. It inspired me a lot."

Notorious *Razakar* (collaborator) Moulvi Farid Ahmed once met us in prison. He acted as if he was going to help us to be released from the jail. Instead, he took us to Brigadier Bashir's chamber. Muslim League leader and collaborator Nanna Mia was also there. He was taking bonds from us all. Dr. Khair, the bravest man in our group, forbade me to give bond though Nanna was his relative. However, we were freed with the help of Nanna Mia. We were taken straight to the VC Sajjad Hossain by a jeep and asked to stay in certain houses only, as per the authority's choice. Within a few days, I came to know that the teachers, who were freed, were being picked up once again and killed by the Pakistan army. The brother of Professor Rashidul Haque and Professor Abul Khair were killed in the same way.

In early December, Dr. Murtaja, one of my physician friends, helped me to escape along with my family members from Dhaka by a car which was marked with the sign of the International Red Cross. Keeping my spouse and two children at a house in Kamalapur, I passed my time here and there, and thus I survived. After the victory in the War of Liberation against the Pakistani occupation forces, I returned to Dhaka University campus. On my return, I learnt that my friend Dr. Murtaja was no more. The uncivilised Pakistani army brutally killed him.

Interviewed by Ruhul Motin