

# Genocide in Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>

- *Md. Anisur Rahman*

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1. The political background

*"And stand together yet not too near together :  
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,  
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow."*

- *Kahlil Gibran*

It is most unfortunate that Pakistan was not constituted as it was originally conceived in the Lahore Resolution of 23 March 1940 ("Pakistan Resolution Day") of the All India Muslim League. The Lahore Resolution, which later came to be known as the "Pakistan Resolution", stipulated as follows:

*"No constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle: Namely, that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions, which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustment, as may be necessary, that the areas in which Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute 'Independent states' in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign." (underscore added)*

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<sup>1</sup> Part of a paper written at the invitation of Dr. M. A. Hasan, Convenor of the War Crimes Fact Finding Committee, Bangladesh, to present as the keynote paper at an international seminar of human rights scholars and activists convened to be held at New York in September 2001 to discuss approach to the Task of a Truth Commission on Genocide in Bangladesh. The seminar could not be held because of the event on September 11.

*" That adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards should be specifically provided in the constitution for minorities in these units and in these regions for the protection of their religious, cultural, economical, political, administrative and other rights and interests in consultation with them"*<sup>2</sup>

With more than a thousand miles of Indian territory separating the two wings widely apart in language and culture, implementation of the Lahore Resolution for a confederation between East and West Pakistan would naturally have been the most sensible political relation between them if at all the two regions were to hold hands in coming out of British rule. Unfortunately, after the creation of Pakistan this resolution was never respected by the rulers of the country vested in the feudal aristocracy of West Pakistan. As a clear signal of a desire for linguistic and cultural domination of West over East Pakistan, the founding leader of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, made the astonishing declaration in his very first visit to Dhaka after independence in March 1948, that Pakistan's state language would be Urdu, while Bengali was the language of East Pakistan - comprising 56 per cent of the country's population - except for a handful of hill tribes and Muslim migrants from the Indian province of Behar. Thus not to speak of the Lahore Resolution's commitment to protect the culture of minorities, even the language of the majority population of the country was denied the status of a state language. This language united the people of East Pakistan with its riverine rain-bathed green nature which had made every "other" Bengali whether from among the ordinary or from the middle class, in the same person a poet-philosopher-composer and singer with a non-communal world view notwithstanding personal religious faiths<sup>3</sup>. East Bengalees protested spontaneously on the spot to this humiliation of their vernacular (as the present writer himself then a fourteen-year old boy listening to Jinnah in the Ramna race-course also spontaneously raised his hand in defiance crying out "No!"), and were on the streets in language marches only to be fired upon by the police. This awakened the grim realization in East Bengal that it would be a long struggle for their self-determination as agreed in the original vow for holding hands together in the Lahore Resolution. And they struggled from then on.

Meanwhile, important positions in the civil and military administrations were monopolized by West Pakistanis, with a marginal representation of Bengalees in the Central Government and the armed forces. Even crucial administrative positions in the government of East Pakistan including the post of its Chief Secretary were manned by West Pakistanis.<sup>4</sup> Exports and imports were central subjects to be controlled by West Pakistanis. Inter-wing trade and banking, and industrial development both in the public

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<sup>2</sup> Pakistan Resolution (1940). [www.storyofpakistan.com/articletext.asp?artid=A043&Pg=3](http://www.storyofpakistan.com/articletext.asp?artid=A043&Pg=3)

<sup>3</sup> This world view has been evident in the poems and songs of poet-composers both from the folk tradition, like Lalan Shah and Hason Raja, as well as from the middle class like Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam who endeared themselves in both East and West Bengal.

<sup>4</sup> "by the mid-1950s, of 741 top civil servants, only 51 were Bengali, none of whom had the rank of a secretary. Of 41 joint secretaries, only 3 were Bengali; of 133 deputy secretaries 10 were Bengali. With respect to the military, in 1955 there was only 1 Bengali brigadier, 1 colonel, and 2 lieutenant colonels out of 308 of equivalent or higher rank. As late as 1963 only 5 per cent of the officer core of the Pakistan army and 7 per cent of the other ranks were Bengali. In the air force, Bengalis constituted 17 per cent of commissioned officers and 30 per cent of other ranks, and in the navy they constituted 10 per cent of the commissioned officers and 29 per cent of other ranks" (Sisson & Rose (1990), p 10)

and private sector were also totally under the control of West Pakistanis. East Pakistan was made a captive market of West Pakistan's goods. The allocation of development expenditure as well as of foreign exchange to East Pakistan was negligible in comparison with allocations to West Pakistan even though the bulk of foreign exchange earnings of the country were generated from East Pakistan's jute exports. The federal capital being located in Karachi, federal expenditures toward development of the capital city had no beneficial effects on the economy of the eastern wing. East Pakistanis started resenting these discriminating policies of the Central Government, and the feeling started growing that the region was being treated virtually as a 'colony' of West Pakistan.

While dissention in East Pakistan continued, the West Pakistani rulers of the country procrastinated on giving the country a constitution. The Constituent Assembly's Basic Principles Committee presented in 1950 a set of interim proposals for a unitary government with Urdu as the state language disregarding ongoing protests from the majority region. East Pakistani leaders rejected this and demanded autonomy with Bengali as one of the state languages. Firing by the state machinery on language demonstrators on February 21, 1952 resulted in deaths that has made this day the Language Martyr's Day of the land ever since<sup>5</sup>. The Constituent Assembly was abrogated in 1953. Provincial assembly elections took place in East Bengal in 1954 in which the all-Pakistan-based Muslim League was routed and a coalition of parties, the "United Front" led by A.K. Fazlul Huq with its support-base exclusively in East Bengal and "complete autonomy...according to the Lahore Resolution " as one of the 21-points in its manifesto, won 223 of the 237 seats. The Huq ministry was dismissed the same year by Governor-General Gholam Mohammad who imposed "governor's rule" in East Bengal, sending General Iskander Mirza as the new governor with a contingent of some ten thousand troops to handle protests against the shutting down of democratic rule in the province.

A second Constituent Assembly was constituted in 1955 and a constitution was promulgated the following year providing for a federal structure of government with essential economic and administrative powers concentrated in the centre rather than the confederation envisaged in the Lahore Resolution, so that dissatisfaction in East Pakistan continued.

The democratic process itself was thwarted in October 1958 when General Iskander Mirza who had by then assumed the office of President of the country from the position of defence secretary abrogated the constitution and declared Martial Law, making General Mohammad Ayub Khan the Chief Martial Law Administrator of the country. Two weeks (xx ?) later Ayub Khan deposed Mirza and assumed the presidency, formalizing the militarization of the political system. In May 1962 Ayub introduced his own constitution to reinforce his authority without Martial Law. A period of planned economic development followed with advisory inputs from the Harvard University Advisory Service, when aggregate economic growth of West Pakistan shot ahead of East Pakistan's using the bulk of foreign assistance to the country as well as foreign exchange earnings of East Pakistan. Reduction of economic disparity between the two regions and equitable

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<sup>5</sup> and from the year 2000, the "International Mother Language Day" declared by the UNESCO, "specially in the context of celebrating global diversity and empowering indigenous cultures around the world".

allocation of foreign development assistance and foreign exchange resources became an explicit demand from East Pakistan.

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 gave East Pakistan a deep sense of vulnerability as deployment of the army was totally concentrated in West Pakistan leaving the eastern wing fully exposed, demonstrating also that the substantial military budget which was used as an argument to appropriate resources of East Pakistan to support federal expenditure was meant primarily for defence of West Pakistan. During the Indo-Pak war the central government also banned the singing on the radio and television and in public, of songs of Rabindranath Tagore dear to Bengalees and sought to propagate the works of West Pakistani poets and composers instead - a perverted move for cultural domination perhaps unique in history. Tagore lovers in Dhaka gathered to sing their beloved poet within tightly closed doors for fear government's agents would report against them; but this only strengthened their resolve to resist and to attain economic and cultural self-determination.

The political movement for East Pakistan's self-determination was led by the Awami League which presented in 1966 the "Six Point Programme" for autonomy of the province. The Ayub government reacted by putting Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in jail under the "Public Safety Act." Thereafter a charge of conspiracy - known as the "Agartala Conspiracy Case" - was brought against Mujib and a number of his associates, charging them with colluding with India for secession of East Pakistan. Public trial of Mujib and his associates started in 1968. The unconvincing charges and the long period of jail preceding the charges made Mujib a hero in East Pakistan, the symbol of oppressed Bengali nationalism.

As East Pakistan's demand for autonomy was gathering momentum, forces within West Pakistan were also demonstrating against inequalities in that region and repression of political opposition and dissident intellectuals. People there could take it no longer when in 1968 government started celebrating "A Decade of Development", meaning ten years of the "growth miracle" under Ayub rule. Student demonstrations and police firing upon them in Rawalpindi in November 1968 sparked off a national upheaval which reached epic proportions in East Pakistan: in Dhaka students and the general masses violated curfew in thousands after one of the accused in the Agartala Conspiracy Case Sergeant Zahirul Huq was killed in the Dhaka army cantonment in mid-February and a couple of days later a very popular professor of Rajshahi University Dr. Mohammad Shamsuzzoha was bayoneted to death by the soldiers at the university gate when he was pleading with them not to enter the university premises. The uprising forced Ayub to release Mujib and to withdraw the Agartala Conspiracy Case, and Mujib was invited to attend a Round Table Conference (RTC) at Rawalpindi.

While RTC proceeded at Rawalpindi, troops proceeded eastward. RTC ended about the same time that heavy troop reinforcements by sea landed on East Pakistan. At the end of RTC Ayub formally announced return to parliamentary democracy but nothing on East Pakistan's demand for autonomy. As agitation in East Pakistan continued Ayub handed over power to General Yahya Khan who clamped Martial Law on March 25 of 1969.

Yahya defused the tension somewhat by announcing preparations for the first ever general elections in the country.

Analysis of the present writer at that time already did not see a peaceful resolution of the east-west conflict<sup>6</sup>. For East Pakistan, its demand for autonomy was seemingly non-negotiable. As for the ruling oligarchy in West Pakistan led by its military, they had gotten used to power and economic privileges for more than two decades that had to be surrendered if East Pakistan got its autonomy. Uninitiated as it was in democratic traditions, and with military blood ruling in particular, such concession from the 'masters' of the country could not be easily expected. The expectation of the generals may still have been to kill East Pakistan's demand for autonomy through the democratic process, for no one at that time seemed to have anticipated the landslide victory of Mujib in the general elections held in December 1970 - there were national-level parties like the Muslim League, Pakistan Democratic Party and the Jamaat-e-Islam contesting the Awami League in East Pakistan and not committed to the province's autonomy. Asking that the elections be treated as a referendum on the Six Points, Mujib won 162 out of the 164 seats in East Pakistan with more than 80 per cent of the votes cast, and got an absolute majority in the National Assembly. This vindicated the region's demand for autonomy as a non-negotiable democratic right of its people. Two irreconcilable interests now stared at each other.

But if a peaceful solution to the conflict was not to be expected it was an unarmed population pitted against the West Pakistani military, and only the worst could then be expected.

## 2 The military crackdown

General Yahya kept delaying the National Assembly with the pretext that Mujib and Bhutto - whose Party won 83 of the 138 seats in West Pakistan - should agree on the revision of the country's constitution. But the two could not agree. Yahya finally announced that the National Assembly would meet on March 3 at Dhaka. Meanwhile troops continued to move eastward with an ominous message. Initially the troops were flying across India, but after India forbade the flying of troops using its airspace they flew via Sri Lanka and also sailed across the Indian ocean.

Mujib declared that the National Assembly would first act as a constituent assembly to revise the country's constitution in the light of the Six Point programme. But Bhutto declared that he would not attend the Assembly to sign such a constitution. On March 1 Yahya announced postponement of the March 3 session of the National Assembly and clamped curfew in Dhaka the same night. East Pakistanis felt that the door had been slammed on their face once and for all. Students and hundreds others violated curfew and clashed with the army the same night and many were shot. Next morning curfew was lifted. Students now came out demanding outright independence, and the Students' League linked with the Awami League hoisted the flag of independent Bangladesh on the

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<sup>6</sup> "East Pakistan: The Roots of Estrangement". *South Asian Review*, London, Vol 3, No. 3, April 1970, reproduced in Rahman (1993).

Arts building of Dhaka University. The aged leader Maulana Bhashani also addressed the nation in the Dhaka race course on ...xx...and called upon Mujib to talk of independence. Shooting on demonstrators continued. Mujib announced a civil disobedience programme virtually taking over rule of East Pakistan, and forbade payment of taxes to the central government and bank transfers from East to West Pakistan. Thousands of people all over the country spontaneously watched over the relevant offices to see that these directives were implemented in one of the most impressive civil disobedience movements in history. On 6 March Yahya announced that the National Assembly would now sit on 25 March but sternly warned against any move against the nation's "integrity", putting the blame for postponing the National Assembly upon Mujib's "unreasonable posture". The following day Mujib addressed the nation in the race course and declared that "the struggle now is for freedom, the struggle now is for independence". He, however, announced that he would consider attending the National Assembly but only after Martial Law was lifted and power was handed over to an interim civil government prior to the sitting of the assembly. Under Mujib's directive the civil disobedience movement continued, with the Awami League becoming the *de facto* head of government in East Pakistan in the teeth of Martial Law. Meanwhile, heavy reinforcement of troops continued coming, by sea and by air, and sporadic confrontation between unarmed demonstrators and the military, with shooting, continued. The governor and Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan, Admiral Ahsan and Mohammad Yakub respectively both known to be moderates, were removed and Lt. General Tikka Khan, known to be a hard liner was flown to replace both. The Chief Justice of the East Pakistan High Court refused to swear him as the Governor and Tikka Khan waited in the cantonment for the final signal.

Yahya convened another conference with political leaders in Rawalpindi which Mujib refused to attend. Yahya then flew to Dhaka with his junta and civilian advisers to meet Mujib, and talks were held day after day between Yahya and his team and Mujib and his team, until the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. Meanwhile the flow of troops from Karachi continued.

To many in East Pakistan it had been clear that the talks were a ploy to buy time for sufficient troops to land on East Pakistan after which a military crackdown would be signalled. Others were hoping that a political solution would be reached. As the present writer has reported in his own testimony on the events (Rahman 2001, p 28), he was himself on the pessimist side, and had pleaded in vain with a senior and widely respected Dhaka university professor that he exert his influence to have the university premises vacated, as he was seeing the students and intelligentsia as a special target of the West Pakistani military. He has also reported (*loc. cit.*) having been witness to a meeting in March 1971 in the house of an eminent artist where the artist's brother a colonel in the Bengal Regiment at Dhaka appeared and pleaded that unless a surprise well-coordinated first strike was made from the East Pakistani side jointly by civilians from outside and Bengali army officials from inside the cantonment, Bengali officers and soldiers in the cantonment would be totally wiped out, and apart from the human loss East Pakistan would be deprived of a core trained military to lead the resistance against the Pakistan army after they cracked down. This message had been transmitted to the Awami League high command but with no effect. The Awami League, a non-militant party oriented only to constitutional procedures, did not seem to have or be inclined to look for any strategy for an armed resistance in collaboration with Bengali soldiers in the Pakistan army.

Seeing the writing on the wall and in a desperate personal move the present writer had sent cables on March 17 to known and unknown dignitaries all over the world saying "GENOCIDE IN BANGLADESH IMMINENT. DO WHAT YOU CAN."<sup>7</sup> The writer has been told that some other university colleagues also sent similar messages abroad.

It is widely believed that Yahya was preparing for a military solution from the beginning, and the dialogues he initiated with Mujib were merely a ploy to buy time for sufficient troops to land on East Pakistan. This is corroborated by no less a body than the War Inquiry Commission of the post-1971 Pakistan Government popularly known as the Hammodur Rahman Commission (HRC)<sup>8</sup>. The following extracts from Pakistan's leading newspaper, *Dawn* (Jan 4, 2001, Internet edition), quoting from the Commission's report, speaks for itself:

"ARMY OPERATION: At about mid night between 25th and 26th March, Dacca was awakened to the noise of thunderous gunfire. The military action which has since become so well known had started. ...

"About the military action, the HRC remarked, "quite obviously such an action could not have been taken without some previous preparations. Indeed no secret has been made of the fact before us (Commission) that a contingency plan known as "Operation Blitz" had been in readiness for a long time and it has been on that account suggested that the negotiations which were carried on from about the middle of March upto the date were no more than a camouflage, it being all along the intention of Yahya and his military advisors to cow down the AL with a heavy hand."

"The Commission went on to say, "it is said at no time Gen Yahya was sincere in his expressed desire to transfer power to the elected representatives of the people more specially in East Pakistan."

Sitting in terror with his family on the floor of his study in his apartment in the university staff quarters the present writer was himself an witness by sight and sound in the night of March 25 to the crackdown on Jagannath Hall, a students' dormitory in Dhaka University and on University professors living in his apartment building and across it, in which a large number of students, and a number of Professors none of whom were known to have had any direct involvement in the autonomy movement, were shot to death by the army (Rahman, 2001, pp 31-32). Sheikh Mujibur Rahman stayed in his own residence when the crackdown occurred and surrendered to the Pakistan army who arrested him and took him to Karachi, leaving a taped declaration of independence for the nation as follows:

*"This may be my last message to you. From today Bangladesh is an independent country. I am calling you, wherever any of you are and with whatever you have in your hands to build resistance against the occupation army until your last breath. Carry your struggle until the day when the last soldier of the occupation army is driven out from the land of Bangladesh and final victory is won"* (Hasan 2001, p 23 - translation by the author).

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<sup>7</sup> see Rahman 2001, pp 28-29, letter of Professor Wassily Leontief to the writer, pp 48-49 and of Senator Fulbright to Robert Geise, p 59.

<sup>8</sup>The War Inquiry Commission headed by Justice Hamoodur Rahman was appointed by the President of Pakistan in December 1971. The Commission examined nearly 300 witnesses and hundreds of classified army signals between East and West Pakistan. The final report, submitted on October 23, 1974,[[?]] was never made public in Pakistan until it was leaked in the Indian Press in August 2000 whereupon it was fully released by the Pakistan government.

In his personal surrender to the Pakistan army and in the above last message of his to the nation also there is no hint of any previously planned armed resistance.<sup>9</sup> This is also supported by the author's personal experience in Agartala, India, where he fled on April 1, '71 and met a number of second rank Awami League leaders who had also fled to Agartala who seemed to have absolutely no idea of what was going on and no brief from the Party high command: when Indian Government security arranged for two from among them to fly to Delhi to meet Tajuddin Ahmed the General secretary of the Awami League who had also crossed over to India and was under Indian Government custody in New Delhi, they all opted out and pleaded that the writer, and his economist colleague Professor Rehman Sobhan who had also fled with him to Agartala, both independent intellectuals not associated with the Awami League, fly instead to talk to Tajuddin! (Rahman 2001, p 44). Organized armed resistance against the occupation army was built up progressively after the crackdown with surviving Bengali soldiers in the Pakistan army as its nucleus and with Bengali men and women and youth from all ranks all over Bangladesh who volunteered to join the "Mukti Bahini" (Freedom fighters) to be trained to fight. The Awami League regrouped under the leadership of Tajuddin in the absence of Mujib to give this resistance the needed political umbrella and direction, but it was clearly a people's struggle for liberation that was born spontaneously and then got organized to achieve its objective.

### 3. Evidences of genocide

#### Dr. Hasan's study

Many accounts of the genocide on Bangladesh, by nationals of the country as well as by foreigners, have been published.<sup>10</sup> A recent 838 page study by Dr. M.A. Hasan (Hasan , *op.cit.*) gives the most comprehensive eye-witness accounts and other forensic evidences with scientific analyses of grueling details of the genocide and of its manner. The general pattern of the genocide as revealed in this study includes:

- *unannounced raids upon university premises, market places, temples and other public places and residential centres to kill hundreds and thousands by mortars, gunfires and burning, at Dhaka on the night of 25 march and subsequently elsewhere in the other major cities, country towns and villages;*
- *bringing people of villages in open fields in the name of meetings of "peace committee" and then machine gunning them to death;*
- *indiscriminate killings of hundreds and thousands in hundreds of mass execution centres all over the country;*
- *excavations of mass graves often ordering Bengalees to do so, and then forcing Bengalees to jump into the graves and shooting them there to death. Thousands of such mass graves have been discovered and they are being discovered even today;*

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<sup>9</sup> Although the HRC said that the Commission had reason to believe that the AL itself intended to take action at 3 am on 26 March. The reason was not stated explicitly by the Commission.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Hasan's study provides a list of a number of these publications (*op.cit.*, pp 789-790).

- *indiscriminate killing of Hindus as a specially targeted community, often first examining men if they are circumcised or not to determine their religion;*
- *killing of cream Bengali intellectuals and professionals as a special category. A mass killing of intellectuals - teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, writers, dramatists - systematically picked up from their residences in Dhaka executed before surrender by Bengali collaborators of the army allegedly under the direct orders of the military, revealing design to wipe out the best brains of the society;*
- *raiding villages burning houses after houses and killing hundreds of men and women;*
- *enticing frightened people to return to village or office assuring safety and then killing them;*
- *carrying men women and youth in trucks and vans to unknown places never to return;*
- *forcing people's heads in-between two branches of trees and chopping heads off by sharp weapons (added)*
- *snatching infants away from mothers' laps and throwing them in rivers (added)*
- *sadistic acts of raping and torturing women of all ages from teens upwards - pattern detailed below;*
- *women rounded up from villages by force, some raped on the spot, some carted off to military camps;*
- *hundreds and hundreds of young girls and women taken by Pakistan armies never to reappear;*
- *thousands and thousands of cases of individual killings, tortures, rapes, very often in front of family members;*
- *assisting non-Bengali local collaborators in various parts of the country to do such killings and tortures, biharis taking a very active role in the atrocities.*
- *rampant looting by soldiers of property and belongings of Bengalees;*

*etc.*

Some accounts from Dr. Hasan's study will illustrate the nature of many of the killings and tortures some of which were unbelievably perverted:

- In the Baraitala area of Kishoreganj district hundreds of men were lined up with their hands tied with each others'. Then the captain ordered their killing by brush fire. But as it was difficult to kill so many by brush fire the men were sat on the rail line and with special axes their heads were broken to pieces one after another. Thereafter the corpses were brush-fired upon. Those bodies which were still moving a little were then bayonet-charged. (Hasan, *op. cit.*, 7-8).
- On June 13 the army called some 150 men, particularly hindus, to come to a "meeting" and took them to the Dhaka cantonment with this pretext. They were huddled together under lock and key in three rooms. Accounts were taken from them individually about properties, ornaments and moneys, and these were looted for seven days at a stretch. Then they were taken to the railway station with the pretext of reaching them to India. Some of them were sent to their houses on some pretext or other to bring other members of their families as well. In the station four bogies were waiting for these men and women old and young and children. The women and children were put in two bogies and the men in the other two. The doors and windows of the bogies were closed and closely guarded by armed soldiers

and Beharies. At one time the train started to move. After moving two kilometers the train stopped at a culvert of a railway workshop. The inmates of the bogies were then brought down one after another and their bodies were chopped into two pieces with open swords. Those who tried to flee breaking the windows were brush-fired upon. (Hasan, *op. cit.* 10).<sup>11</sup>

### **Atrocities on women**

- In one village the Pak military entered after an exchange with the liberation forces and started indiscriminate killing and setting fire to houses and property. They raped an estimated 20 women. As a typical example of their brutality to women, the house of one Bhanu Begum was set on fire. A number of Pak soldiers tried to take her inside a room and she protested. Then the soldiers moved to throw her one-year-old child in the fire. Then Bhanu Begum yielded to the beastly lust of the soldiers and she was raped repeatedly. Her torture did not end here - after the rapes she was pressed against the fire to have parts her body burnt. (Hasan, *op. cit.*, p 13)
- As a woman sweeper has described, in the Rajarbag Police Line in Dhaka the soldiers collected with the help of their local collaborators numerous young girls from school, colleges, universities and elite areas, confined them and made daily raids on them for inhuman torture. The soldiers used to enter the barracks licking their tongues like dogs and expressing savage delight. They used to strip naked every woman and girl and throw them on the floor by kicking them and then they would start their beastly rapes. After finishing the rapes they would bite the breasts and other flesh of the women and leave them bleeding. Those who would object would have their breasts torn away and vaginas and anuses ravaged and torn with gun-butts or bayonets. (*op.cit.* p 13)
- In the camp of the Pakistan army at Rajarbag army officers and soldiers used to hang young girls naked upside down and forced them to satisfy their sexual lust in that condition. As these girls cried out in unspeakable pain the soldiers used to rejoice the victory of Pakistan. When a girl thus tortured was pleading for water the soldiers pissed upon her. This torture continued upon each woman until the victim died. Innumerable women died with internal hemorrhage in this way. (*op. cit.* p 13)
- The cigarette factory in Laksham was used as a special killing and torture centre including torture of women. Hundreds of housewives and village girls were brought in this centre for daily torture and used to be lined up naked on the railingless roof and forced to march with their two hands raised up in full public view. (*op. cit.* p 385)

Dr. Hasan's study reports that the investigation of the War Crimes Fact finding Committee undertaken between July '99 and December 2000 gives a figure of raped Bengali women above 450,000. Among these women many were raped and killed at the same time. Many committed suicide to save their honour. Many have left the country and gone to India. Many have taken refuge in western countries with the help of NGOs. The

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- <sup>11</sup> An evidence by late Mrs. Anwara Begum, wife of late Md. Hafizur Rahman, a central Minister in Ayub Khan's cabinet and mother of the present writer, left with the family before her death in December 2000:  
*"after dusk we used to see unbearable sights from the fence (seperating her residence at Dhaka and an army camp in the adjacent building). A truck used to come full of men. the soldiers used to get these men down and a number of soldiers used to stand and trample upon their chests with boots in rapturous delight and used to laugh loudly until the moaning of these men would fade. The the bodies would be put back on the truck and the truck would be covered by a black cloth and driven away where I did not know. It was so painful to bear this sight - even today I startle if I recall this."* (Rahman 2001, p 110)

figure of 450,000 should be an underestimate, as many among the rape victims have disappeared in shame never to surface again before mankind, or have committed suicide before getting known as violated.

Many among those raped who became pregnant were brought to various clinics at Dhaka with the help of national and foreign NGOs for abortion. Among these clinics was the "Baby Home" directed by Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa had also one 250-room hospital opened in Natore to take care of such cases. At Dhaka a number of abortion and maternity clinics were opened at Dhanmondi and a few other places under the direction of Mr. T. Hossain, Mrs. Hossain, Dr. Nibisha and others. The International Planned Parenthood Forum of Sweden opened an abortion clinic in New Iskaton in Dhaka. Children born alive out of the rapes were kept in the "Baby Home", and with the assistance of CORR, ISS Agency New York, CARE, CARITAS and different European governments in particular of the Scandinavian countries many western families adopted such children.

### **Evidences of extreme perversion of Pakistan army officers and soldiers**

Dr. Hasan's study presents detailed analysis of the nature of the sexual assaults by Pakistani soldiers on Bengali women, and comments that these were so very perverted as to call for psycho-genetic analysis to discover the criminal traits of the regions the soldiers come from. Research by the War Crimes Fact Finding Committee reported in the study reveals other evidences of such perversion as a general characteristic of the nature of killing and torture of Bengalees by the Pakistani soldiers, very far from standard "military methods" of killing. Such perverted methods of killing have included:

- cutting the throats of victims in the Islamic style of "jابه" ("holy sacrifice"), one after another in front of fearful public, and then cutting the bodies into pieces as if to distribute for a feast after the sacrifice;
- cutting in public view of different parts of the bodies of the victims when they are still alive;
- hanging victims completely naked by the legs with heads down, and then peeling off the bodies from feet down to head, like peeling off skin of a slaughtered animal;
- crushing heads to pieces with blunt weapons and smashing faces to kill victims;
- putting victims in sacs, closing the sacs and tying them, and then beating the victims to death or throwing them in sacs in the river;
- ripping off toenails and amputating toes;
- tying victims with rope and killing them by kicking, blowing or by other means of hitting;
- pressing different parts of the victims' body in pairs of bamboos or in rollers and thus killing them;
- piercing tummy from one side to the other with bayonet or other sharp weapons, sometimes bringing out all the intestines, or piercing open the chest and tearing out the heart;
- tying victims and burning them alive in fire;
- throwing victims in boilers to kill them;
- killing by lifting bodies and slamming repeatedly against the floor;

- etc.

### Some other reports

The Pakistani military had forcibly sent back home most foreign journalists prior to its crackdown seizing their cameras and films. Yet some courageous journalists were able to smuggle reports of the crackdown so that some first hand accounts by foreigners are available. Some of these, summarized in Dr. Hasan's book (pp 475-479), plus a letter written from Dhaka on 18 April by an American lady<sup>12</sup> fully confirm the thrust of the eye-witness accounts presented in the book. By the middle of April international outcry forced the military to open the doors to East Pakistan selectively to foreign journalists and delegations. A dispatch from the city of Comilla by New York Times correspondent Sydney Schanbero in mid-April 1971 reported on Pakistani soldiers burning villages with vultures descending on the bodies of dead peasants. John Stonehouse, British Labour M.P., after his return to London from a trip to Dhaka in April '71 told in a BBC interview that what had happened in East Bengal "makes Vietnam look like a tea-party" (*op. cit.*, p 491). Anthony Mascarenhas, Assistant Editor of the *Morning News*, Karachi at the time who was allowed entry into East Pakistan [when ? xx] and to whom the military confided their mind, "betrayed" and gave an account of the genocide as also the special hunt to exterminate the Hindu population in the region. As Mascarenhas summed up:

*"The mass killings in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1971 vie with the annihilation of the Soviet POWs, the holocaust against the Jews, and the genocide in Rwanda as the most concentrated act of genocide in the twentieth century"*<sup>13</sup>. And

*"the bone-crushing military operation has two distinctive features. One is what the authorities like to call the "cleansing process", a euphemism for massacre. The other is the "rehabilitation effort". This is a way of describing the moves to turn East Bengal into a docile colony of West Pakistan."* (Hasan, *op. cit.*, p 502).

The present writer was given a tape-letter by Dr. Gustav Papanek of the Faculty of Economics at Harvard University which had been sent to Dr. Papanek by Dr. John Rohde an American engineer at that time working as a consultant to the Water and Power Development Authority of East Pakistan. This tape-letter describes in vivid details evidences of the ravage of East Bengal by the Pakistan military as he saw in a tour by boat of Narayanganj, Khulna, Jessore and Barisal in May 1971<sup>14</sup>. One of the despatcher's most poignant descriptions was the plight of starting in May:

*"It was clear from my inquiries in the area that the operations have entered a new phase now. The towns and roads have been secured, and the army is now fanning out*

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<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Edward "Pat Sammel" to the *Denver Post* (partially reproduced in Hasan, pp 479-80)

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Mascarenhas. *Case Study: Genocide in Bangladesh, 1971*. Summary. ([www.gendercide.org/case\\_bangladesh.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_bangladesh.html))

<sup>14</sup> transcript of the tape is given in Rahman, *op. cit.*, pp 89-97.

*from the main centres into the villages on a literally house-to-house hunt for hindus. There will not be a hindu left in this country if they are left to their own designs – the hindus will either flee or be killed... In the town itself I saw evidences of anti-hindu operations in the form of gutted shops with the printed 15"/10" poster stating "under Martial Law authority"... I asked my guide what shops these were, and he said that they were all hindu shops. The operations have been going on in the Barisal area for 2 or 3 weeks now. To give you a brief rundown, there is near Barisal... quite a large number of hindu villages. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May village Kutubdia south of Barisal was burnt. I am told you could see the flames from Barisal. On 26<sup>th</sup> of April another hindu village Sikarpur north of Barisal was totally burnt. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of April village madhabpasha another hindu village was burnt. This was done in retaliation for the murder of the local maulana who told out on the Awami league and hindus in the area when the army came searching for them. On the 18<sup>th</sup> May the village of ... near Faridppur was totally burnt. On the 26th April village of tantali about 3 miles north of Barisal was badly shot up and burnt from the gunboats that were coming down the river to take Barisal. On 28<sup>th</sup> April the village of jalkathi which is on the way to Khulna was totally burnt up. This was a petroleum distribution depot, and I am told the flames could be seen in Barisal 15 miles away. On May 17 another hindu village called kalashkathi south of Barisal on the way to Patuakhali was burnt. On the route from Barisal to guarnadi which is 22 miles north of Barisal practically all the hindu houses along the way were burnt from the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. As a result there are now large numbers, almost columns of hindus in full flight in the area. They have nowhere to go – they cannot get across to the border to India, they flee in one direction, find that there are army blocking their way, and turn and flee in another. They are being hunted down like animals. Families in the villages in the area are each housing from 15 to 20 strangers per house. And they have barely enough food to feed their own families let alone the strangers.... "*

### **Report of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission**

The Hamnoodur Rahman Commission Report itself goes a long way in confirming the savagery of the crackdown and of subsequent genocidal operations by the Pakistani military on unarmed civilians in Bangladesh. Judging from the fact that this Commission got its evidence only from the West Pakistani military and civilian personnel most of them a party to the military action in East Bengal and, therefore, having obvious reason to cover their action, it was only natural for them to grossly understate the extent and intensity of the war crimes committed. Even such "soft confessions" as the Commission was able to gather from the perpetrators themselves have already established, as the Commission has recommended itself, that trials for human rights violations of the first order are in order. Below are some extracts from the Commission's report<sup>15</sup> :

- "Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi ... stated that "military action was based on use of force primarily, and at many places indiscriminate use of force was resorted to which alienated the public against the Army. Damage done during those early days of the military action could never be repaired, and earned for the military leaders names such as "Changez Khan" and "Butcher of East Pakistan."

<sup>15</sup> website version. See section on References.

- "on the assumption of command I was very much concerned with the discipline of troops, and on 15th of April, 1971, that is within four days of my command, I addressed a letter to all formations located in the area and insisted that loot, rape, arson, killing of people at random must stop and a high standard of discipline should be maintained.
- "When asked about the alleged killing of East Pakistani officers and men during the process of disarming, the General replied that he had heard something of the kind but all these things had happened in the initial stages of the military action before his time. ... He admitted that there were a few cases of rape, .... He also stated that "these things do happen when troops are spread over".
- "Another significant statement was made in this regard by Maj. Gen. Rao Farman Ali, Adviser to the Governor of East Pakistan, namely: "Harrowing tales of rape, loot, arson, harassment, and of insulting and degrading behaviour were narrated in general terms.... I wrote out an instruction to act as a guide for decent behaviour and recommended action required to be taken to win over the hearts of the people. This instruction under General Tikka Khan's signature was sent to Eastern Command. I found that General Tikka's position was also deliberately undermined and his instructions ignored...excesses were explained away by false and concocted stories and figures."
- "About the use of excessive force on the night between the 25th and 26th March 1971, we have a statement from Brigadier Shah Abdul Qasim ... to the effect that "no pitched battle was fought on the 25th of March in Dacca. Excessive force was used on that night. Army personnel acted under the influence of revenge and anger during the military operation." It has also been alleged that mortars were used to blast two Residence Halls, thus causing excessive casualties.
- "Still another significant statement came from Brigadier Mian Taskeenuddin ...: "Many junior and other officers took the law into their own hands to deal with the so-called miscreants. There have been cases of interrogation of miscreants which were far more severe in character than normal and in some cases blatantly in front of the public. The discipline of the Pakistani army as was generally understood had broken down. In a command area (Dhoom Ghat) between September and October miscreants were killed by firing squads.
- "Maj. Gen. Nazar Hussain Shah, GOC 16 Division, conceded that "there were rumours that Bengalis were disposed of without trial." Similarly, Brigadier Abdul Qadir Khan ... Commander 93 (A)... admitted that "a number of instances of picking up Bengalis did take place." Lt. Col. S. S. H. Bokhari, CO of 29 Cavalry, ..., stated that "In Rangpur two officers and 30 men were disposed of without trial. It may have happened in other stations as well." An admission was also made by Lt. Col. S. M. Naeem ... CO of 39 Baluch that "innocent people were killed by us during sweep operations and it created estrangement amongst the public."
- " Lt Col. Mansoorul Haq, GSO-I, Division, ... has made detailed and specific allegations as follows: "A Bengali, who was alleged to be a Mukti Bahini or Awami Leaguer, was being sent to Bangladesh - a code name for death without trial, without detailed investigations and without any written order by any authorised authority." Indiscriminate killing and looting could only serve the cause of the enemies of Pakistan. In the harshness, we lost the support of the silent majority of the people of East Pakistan.... The Comilla Cantt massacre (on 27th/28th of March, 1971) under the orders of CO 53 Field Regiment, Lt. Gen. Yakub Malik, in which 17 Bengali Officers and 915 men were just slain by a flick of one officer's fingers should suffice as an example.
- "There was a general feeling of hatred against Bengalis amongst the soldiers and officers including Generals. There were verbal instructions to eliminate Hindus. In Salda Nadi area about 500 persons were killed. When the army moved to clear the rural areas and small towns, it moved in a ruthless manner, destroying, burning and killing....
- "Several civilian officers have also deposed in a similar vein, and it would suffice to quote here the words of Mr. Mohammad Ashraf, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Dacca, ... He stated that "after the military action the Bengalis were made aliens in their own homeland. The life, property, and

honour of even the most highly placed among them were not safe. People were picked up from their homes on suspicion and dispatched to Bangladesh, a term used to describe summary executions. .... The victims included Army and Police Officers, businessmen, civilian officers etc....There was no Rule of Law in East Pakistan. A man had no remedy if he was on the wanted list of the Army.... Army Officers who were doing intelligence were raw hands, ignorant of the local language and callous of Bengali sensibilities."

- "About the attitude of senior officers in this behalf, Brigadier Iqbalur Rehman ..., has alleged that during his visit to formations in East Pakistan General Gul Hassan used to ask the soldiers "how many Bengalis have you shot?".
- "The statements appearing in the evidence of Lt. Col. Aziz Ahmed Khan ... who was Commanding Officer 8 Baluch and then CO 86 Mujahid Battalion are also directly relevant. "Brigadier Arbbab also told me to destroy all houses in Joydepur. To a great extent I executed this order. General Niazi visited my unit at Thakargaon and Bogra. He asked us how many Hindus we had killed. In May, there was an order in writing to kill Hindus. This order was from Brigadier Abdullah Malik of 23 Brigade.
- "The direct responsibility of the alleged excesses and atrocities must, of course, rest on those officers and men who physically perpetuated them or knowingly and deliberately allowed them to be so perpetuated. These officers and men not only showed lack of discipline... in disobeying the directives of the Eastern Command and Zonal Martial Law Administrator, but also indulged in criminal acts punishable under the Army Act as well as the ordinary law of the land.
- A new aggravating factor made its appearance in East Pakistan in the wake of the military action of the 25th of March 1971, when units of the Pakistan Army undertook "sweep operations" throughout the Province to deal with the Awami League insurgents. The Army had to go out into the countryside without adequate logistic arrangements, and was compelled, at least in the early stages of its operations to take its requirements of food grains and other essential supplies from civilian sources. Unfortunately, however, the practice appears to have persisted even when it became possible to make proper logistic arrangements. There is evidence to the effect that civilian shops and stores were broken into by the troops without preparing any record of what was taken and from where. The need for commandeering vehicles, foodstuffs, medicines and other essential supplies can certainly be appreciated, but this should have been done under a proper method of accounting so that compensation could be paid on return of normal conditions. As no such procedure was adopted, it led to a general feeling among the troops, including their officers that they were entitled to take whatever they wanted from wherever they liked. This appears to us to be the genesis of the looting alleged to have been indulged in by the Army in East Pakistan

With such evidences<sup>16</sup> the HRC concluded:

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<sup>16</sup> The following letter to the editor of *Dawn* on the Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report by an Air Commodore (ret'd) of Pakistan posted in East Pakistan in July 1971 confirms the "soft" confession:

To the Editor, *Dawn*,  
Karachi, 24 Aug, 2000

"In my opinion the Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report is 99 per cent correct. I arrived at Dhaka on July 1, 1971, on posting. What I saw, learnt and felt during the period till December is contained in this report. It is not an accusation, it is truth narrated by the commission.

For the last 28 years historical facts were kept in secrecy. But truth cannot be buried, it always comes up. It's time we purify and clean our morality and take stock of our past mistakes and sins we committed in the March '71 operation. It was disgraceful on the part of those who ordered the operation and shameful on the

- *"as recommended in Paragraph 7 of Chapter III of Part V of the Main Report and in Paragraph 39 of Chapter II of Part V of this Supplementary Report, a high-powered Court or Commission of Inquiry be set up to investigate into persistent allegations of atrocities said to have been committed by the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan during its operations from March to December, 1971, and to hold trials of those who indulged in these atrocities, brought a bad name to the Pakistan Army and alienated the sympathies of the local population by their acts of wanton cruelty and immorality against our own people. The composition of the Court of Inquiry, if not its proceedings, should be publicly announced so as to satisfy national conscience and international opinion. The Commission feels that sufficient evidence is now available in Pakistan for a fruitful inquiry to be undertaken in this regard. As the Government of Bangladesh has since been recognized by Pakistan, it may also be feasible to request the Dacca authorities to forward to this Court of Inquiry whatever evidence may be available with them.*

The HRC refers also to accounts it had received of atrocities including killings and rapes of Beharis (Muslims who migrated into East Pakistan) from the Indian province of Behar in 1947), West Pakistanis and Bengali collaborators of the army, " in the weeks preceding the 25 March military crackdown", by what the Commission refers to as "Awami League miscreants"<sup>17</sup>. These are mentioned by the Commission *"not in justification of the atrocities or other crimes alleged to have been committed by the Pakistani Army during its operations in East Pakistan, but only to put the record straight and to enable the allegations to be judged in their correct perspective. The crimes ... were bound to arouse anger and bitterness in the minds of the troops..."*. The Commission has rightly presented allegations of mob atrocities against civilian supporters of the army seemingly sparked by postponement of the national assembly early in March 1971 which dashed hopes of Bengalees for a negotiated settlement of their demands, and the shootings by the Pakistan military on civilian demonstrators that had already been going on. But the "perspective" suggested by the HRC is unfortunate, insofar as it seemingly equates mob atrocities in a state of high emotions with *atrocities by the machinery of the state siding with one side in the riots,* and with the military government,

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part of those who inflicted atrocities on the innocent, looted the brethren and dishonoured women. We hang our heads in shame.

To wash away the dirt of 1971 events we must initiate accountability and bring the responsible to book, even in some cases posthumously. I fully endorse the views and recommendations of Air Marshal Nur Khan (R) (Dawn Aug 19). I believe that the sword of Allah is invisible but it is a symbol of justice."

IQTEDAR ALI KHAN

Air Cdre (Retd)

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<sup>17</sup> The term is a misnomer as these were mob violences, and insofar as self-determination of East Bengal was a demand of overwhelming majority of the people of the land as the December 1970 election results showed.

as suggested by the Commission itself, having had prior designs for a crackdown in preference to ceding West Pakistan's control over the eastern wing.

### **Failure to bring perpetrators to book**

After independence of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib had the opportunity of putting the prisoners of war into trials for human rights violations on his people. But, perhaps on considerations of political expediency - e.g. viewing the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan and the Arab countries, support by the United States of America ( which had been on the side of the Pakistan military when it committed the genocide on Bangladesh ) in reconstructing the country, and return of Bengalee repatriates from Pakistan as more important, he let go this opportunity. This was most unfortunate not merely because this denied justice to those who were violated, but more fundamentally because by condoning such crimes including savage violation of women this has destroyed the legitimacy of civilized human conduct including all norms of gender relations thereby inviting the continuation and ascent of criminal and uncivilized acts in the society, has worked against restoration of self-esteem and dignity of those who or whose loved ones had been violated, and has contributed to the internalization of crimes and violence as such in the country now completely devoid of minimum law and order for civilized progress. An International Crimes tribunal Act was passed in 1973 for trial of war criminals on the soil of Bangladesh, but the tribunal was never formed, for "lack of experience and competent lawyers, vacillation in deciding about trials of war criminals and most of all due to compulsions of the politics of the subcontinent"<sup>18</sup>. Instead, a tripartite pact was signed between India, Bangladesh and Pakistan in April 1974 in which the Government of Bangladesh agreed not to proceed with the trial of the war criminals and to the return to Pakistan of the 195 prisoners of war held in India. [internal collaborators were pardoned even without the guilts being admitted and pardon sought. ] Meanwhile a citizen's movement had started in 1990 for trial of collaborators of the Pakistani military in the genocide, led by Mrs. Jahanara Imam, mother of a victim of the Pakistan army. This movement was joined spontaneously by hundreds of thousands all over the country. A 'symbolic' people's trial was conducted under this movement at Dhaka in 1990 to which people came from remote areas all over the country to give evidence to harrowing acts of violence by the accused. But the then party in power, representing "Muslim nationalism" with political alliance with Islamic fundamentalists responded negatively to this event by arresting and jailing the jury of this trial. It is clear that unless taken up by the international community of conscience the genocide on Bangladesh with all its extreme perversions will stay condoned, only to encourage crimes of the first order against humanity to continue to be committed with impunity.

September 2001

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<sup>18</sup> (ex-Supreme Court chief Justice Habibur Rahman, quoted in Hasan, *op. ci.,t* p 711)

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