

*The Black Night of March 25*  
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25th March 1971. Universities were closed because of the non-cooperation movement; neither students nor teachers were attending classes. Even then one has to go back a little bit to speak about the events of 25th March. The elections had established the supremacy of the Bengali majority. Consequently, the power to rule the country should have been vested in the hands of their elected representatives, but the authoritarian ruling clique of the west were in no mood to accept the judgement of the people. That is why they cancelled promised sitting of the parliament on the third of March.

In the face of this insult, Bengalis became defiant. The Bangobondhu's thunderous declaration in a mammoth public meeting on the 7th of March - "ebArer shongrAm shAdhinatAr shongrAm: This struggle is the struggle for independence" - began to echo in the skies of Bangladesh. That struggle began with non-cooperation, court boycotts, tax revolt, meetings, processions and other mass actions. The Pakistani government became totally paralyzed.

The incapacitated totalitarian government was incensed and gave vent to its fury on the black night of 25th March.

Dhaka citizens were apprehensive that the aggressor army might take recourse to a blood-bath. Innumerable barricades were built across the streets and roads of Dhaka. But, they were futile. Soon after day-break, the barbaric attack commenced. Numerous tanks and armored carriers took to the streets. Doors and windows of houses began to reverberate with the sounds of firing cannons, shells and mortars. The deafening rolls of the weapons of death shattered the silence of dusk. And it appeared as if tongues of flame were dancing the dance of daemons on the stage of a blood red sky. Dhaka has been transformed into a bloody war field.

Just like the previous days, some of us had gathered at the University Teachers Meeting Room. Under the aegis of the teachers association we were busy through out the month of March in arranging protest meetings and processions and putting out joint statements. Everyday work always awaited us, and that day was no different. Doctor Khan Sarwar Murshed had prepared a statement that we were planning to present to the British high Commission. Just a few days ago, a news item was published where we learnt that the British Government had permitted the Pakistani Navy access to the port facilities of the then British protectorate of Maldives for repairs and refuelling. We were apprehensive that if at our hour of need the Indian Navy puts up a naval blockade along Pakistani shores, Pakistani ships might attempt to reach Chittagong by way of the Maldives. that is why we were appealing to the British; our statement professed our great concern at the purported action. for several days we attempted to collect signatures from well known citizens. Former Ambassador Kamruddin Ahmed signed, whereas former governor Sultanuddin refused to sign our statement.

On the morning of 25th March Doctor Murshed, Doctor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Doctor Belayet, Professor Ahsanul Haque, Professor Giasuddin Ahmed (later murdered by Al-Badr),

Professor Joynul Abedeen (deceased) amongst others presented our statement to the first secretary at the British Deputy High Commission. On our return to Campus we came across the leaders of Central Students Action Committee Tofael Ahmed and Sheikh Kamal. Sheikh Kamal had come to campus to pick up Tofael Ahmed. Tofael Ahmed told us that the meeting between Yah Yah and the Sheikh Shaheb had ended without agreement; no one knew what might happen.

In the afternoon I went to the University club. All the teachers there were pretty worked up. Some were berating the Awami League leadership for not having yet declared independence. In the evening, the Seven O'clock English news on TV we heard of the Bangobondhu's news conference earlier in the day. There he had said - If the Pakistani Army attacked the innocent and peace loving Bengalis then the gallant sons of Bengal will not let that pass unchallenged... etc.. On the way home from the club that night I met up with some known students from Iqbal Halls. Two students Feroze and Moin told me that they were leaving Iqbal Hall for safety. They advised me to take my family elsewhere to safety since my house was so near Iqbal Hall. But it was already 10 at night, where could we go? I had no premonitions of what was going to befall us two hours hence.

Behind Iqbal Hall were University quarters 23, 24 and 25. In total 24 teachers stayed in those buildings with their families. I was a resident of the second floor of building 24. Doctor Fazlur Rahman of the Botany Department lived in building 23. In the same building Professors Anwar Pasha and Rashidul Hassan resided with their families in the apartments on the fourth floor. Just across from building 25 was the Nilkhet railroad. On the other side of the rail-line there was a slum where several thousand homeless eked out a living. In front of our buildings and parallel to the Nilkhet Road was four residences of University Administrative Officers. From the night of 35th March through the morning of the 27th Iqbal Hall and the adjoining residences were the main target of the Pakistani Army attack.

Just after midnight on the night of 25th March, the Pakistani Army began their attack on the Student Halls and Staff Quarters of the University. Since Iqbal Hall was known as the headquarters of the Free Bengal Students Action Committee a major portion of the Pakistani Army fury was directed at Iqbal Hall. Just after midnight Iqbal Hall came under a barrage of heavy mortar and machine-gun attack from near the pond in front and the police barracks behind it. Immediately students and bearers from the Hall, and Bengali Policemen from the Nilkhet Barracks tried to escape and seek refuge in the adjoining teacher's and staff quarters. The Bengali soldiers of the EPR who were on duty at the President's House were disarmed and then to Ramna Race-Course where they were gunned down. Several EPR soldiers managed to flee and found refuge amongst our midsts. The Army set on fire the Nilkhet slum and in cold-blood machine gunned fleeing slumdweller from the Nilkhet Rail-Gate. Many managed to escape from the slum and also took shelter with us.

I don't have the words to express the bestiality and barbarity that was perpetrated on the Dhaka University area, especially Iqbal Hall, Jagannath Hall, and adjoining residential areas, for a period of 36 hours from the night of the 25th till the 26th night. What transpired around Iqbal Hall, I saw with my own eyes. Raging infernos everywhere; the slum was burning, the cars parked around the residences were burning. The heaped bodies of the dead from the slum were

also set on fire near the Nilkhet rail gate petrol pump. The sound of shells bursting and guns firing, the smoke and fire, the smell of gun-powder and the stench of the burning corpses all transformed the area into a fiery hell. Every so often our building was being peppered with bullets. In the midst of this, we, our families, the students and bearers from the Halls, the slum-dwellers, had given up all hope for life, and were waiting for the hour of death. For most of March, student leaders Nur-e-Alam Ziku and Shahjahan Siraj used to spend the night with us, but on that fateful night they weren't with us. Had they been with us we would have been very apprehensive about their safety.

The incessant firings from cannons, mortars, tanks, machine-guns and automatics continue throughout the night. On the morning of the 26th the Pakistani killers began to go through the hall rooms and residential apartments and began their orgy of murder and looting. Huge gaping holes appeared on Iqbal Hall and the adjoining residences of the bearers as a result of the shelling. Many bearers died as a result. Those unfortunate students and bearers of Iqbal Hall who had failed to flee were all killed by the Pakistanis. Some surviving students were taken to the Iqbal Hall kitchen where petrol was poured over them and then they were burnt alive. The university correspondent of the Daily Azad was shot near the auditorium. So was bearer Shamshu. The water pump workers of the Hall as well as the bearers were all brutally murdered by the Pakistani fiends.

Having finished their slaughter in Iqbal Hall, the Pakistani animals turned their attention to the residential buildings. The first began in flats of building 23. This here that they murdered Professor Fazlur Rahman of the Geology Department and two of his relatives. They also entered the flats of Professors Anwar Pasha and Rashidul Hassan. Everyone in those flats were hidden under the beds. After failing to see anyone in the torch light, the Pakistani soldiers were heard saying: "Bangali Kutta Bhag Gia - The Bengali dogs have flown." Even though Professors Pasha and Hassan miraculously survived from the Pakistani barbarians, death still met them on the 14th of December, on the eve of Victory, when the killers from Jamat-e-Islam, Islami Chhatro Shango, and the Al-Badr Muslim Bangla, murdered many intellectuals near Mirpur. Another resident of the building, Dhaka University Assistant Librarian Mridha miraculously survived. But about 30 women, men and children from the slum who took refuge on the roof did not live to see another day. Each of them were brutally murdered by the barbaric Pakistanis, and for night over a month their corpses fed the vultures and crows. After several months their skeletons were brought down from the roof; the same day the skeletons of 50 Rokeya Hall staff and their families were removed.

The Pakistani hyenas also entered the building we were in, no 24. On the third night two mothers from the slum had taken shelter. Their babies were with them. Both of them had been shot in the legs. On seeing the blood all over the entering Pakistani soldiers thought that some of their colleagues had already been through our buildings and so did not enter it. That is why we survived. We did our best to help those mothers and the day we left Nilkhet we had them admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

On that night the Pakistani beasts had also attacked Madhu's Canteen and Rokeya Hall. Madhu Da, and his family, bearers and ayahs of Rokeya Hall and their families, were all brutally murdered that night.

Jagannath Hall too faced the fury of the Pakistani Army. Incessant shellings and blood-letting continued their throughout the night of the 25th and the day of the 26th. After the shelling, the soldiers went from room to room and brought out all the students and bearers to the field in front of the hall. There they were forced to dig their own graves. Subsequently they were all shot and buried in the graves they had dug themselves. Amongst all the residential halls of the University, Jagannath hall paid most dearly in terms of lives lost. In the teacher's corner of Jagannath Hall's Assembly House used to live Applied Physics' professor Anuddoipayon Bhottacharjo. On that night the Pakistani animals entered his room and bayoneted him to death. His body was put out near the big tree close to the Hall auditorium for some time, and was then probably buried in the mass grave in the field. At the end of the night, the Pakistani beasts attacked the residence Dr. Gobindrochondro Deb opposite the hall. They first shot him in the head and then bayoneted him. They dragged his body outside, and in plain view drove a truck over him. His corpse was then taken to the Jagannath Hall field and was probably buried in a mass grave. Close to Dr. Deb's house, near the Shaheed Minar, used to reside Professor Muniruzzaman and Dr. Jyotirmoy Guho Thakurta. Around 3 in the morning the Pakistani entered their residences and shot Professor Munirazzaman, his son Akram, and Dr. Thakurta. They died instantly. In the same building, professor Abdur Razzak and Dr. Anisur Rahman survived miraculously. On the same night, the Pakistani soldiers also attacked the Fuller Road faculty residences. Their first target was building 11. There they entered the residence of University Laboratory School teacher Mohammed Sadek. The animals first bayoneted him and then shot him in cold-blood. His dead body remained in that building till December 27. On the 27th he was buried behind the flat. They barbarians had also attacked building 12. They had dragged out Professor Syed Ali Naki of the Social Sciences Department, and a gentlemen by the name of Syed Syedul Islam. For some inexplicable reason they were not killed, but Professor Abdul Mutkadir of the Geology Department. from the same building, was brutally murdered. They dragged his body somewhere; it was eventually found on the 27th inside Iqbal Hall. The Pakistani animals had also attacked Salimullah Hall and Dhaka Hall. They beat up Salimullah Hall house tutor Professor Munim, and murdered Professor A. R. Khadem at Dhaka Hall.

This is how we spent those 36 hours. When on the morning of the 27th, the so called curfew was lifted, we all left the area for wherever we could. During those 2 days I had thought that everything was over, and we were all condemned to perpetual slavery; but, the firm and strong voice from Chittagong's Shadheen Bangla Betar Kendra told us that we had not died yet, and I lived again. That is why I still live today.