

BLOOD AND TEARS

QUTUBUDDIN AZIZ

Eye-witness accounts of the atrocities committed on West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis in 55 towns of East Pakistan by Awami League militants and other rebels in March-April, 1971.

Reproduced By:

SANI H. PANIWAR

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Dedication

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THOSE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO WERE KILLED OR MAIMED IN THE AWAMI LEAGUE'S REBELLION AND GENOCIDE AND THE MUKTI BAHINI'S REIGN OF TERROR IN EAST PAKISTAN IN 1971.

170 eye-witness accounts of the atrocities committed on West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis and pro Pakistan Bengalis in 55 towns of East Pakistan by Awami League militants and other rebels in March-April, 1971.

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REVIEW

For the first time, the pathetic, grisly and untold story of the massacre of more than half a million non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis by the Awami League-led insurgents in East Pakistan (breakaway Bangladesh) in March-April, 1971, is bared in "BLOOD AND TEARS ". The details of the genocide waged by the rebels in those murderous months were concealed from the people of West Pakistan by the then federal government to prevent reprisals against the local Bengalis and also not to wreck the prospects of a negotiated settlement with the Awami League. The danger of such a reprisal has now been eliminated by the repatriation to Bangladesh from Pakistan of all the Bengalis who wished to go there. The 170 eye-witnesses, whose tragic accounts of their splintered and trauma-stricken lives are contained in this book, were picked from amongst nearly 5000 families repatriated to Pakistan from Bangladesh between the autumn of 1973 and the spring of 1974. Although they hail from 55 towns of East Pakistan, their narratives and the published dispatches of foreign newsmen quoted in this book, cover 110 places where the slaughter of the innocents took place. The majority of eyewitnesses consist of the parents who saw their children slam, the wives who were forced by the rebels to witness the murder of their husbands, the girls who were ravished and the rare escapees from the rebel-operated human slaughterhouses. While the focus in "Blood and Tears " is on the rebels' atrocities in the infernal March-April, 1971, period, the brutality of the Indian-trained Bengali guerrilla force, the Mukti Bahini, after India's armed grab of East Pakistan on December 17th 1971, is also recounted, though in less detail. The book highlights the courage and heroism of many Bengalis who saved their non-Bengali friends from the fire and fury of the bloodthirsty insurgents.

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INTRODUCTION

In the first week of March 1971, when the Awami League had fired the first salvo of revolt in East Pakistan and it triggered off a forest fire of lawlessness, arson, loot and wanton murder all over the province, a senior official of the federal Information Ministry instructed me that my news service should not put out any story about the atrocities that were being committed on non-Bengalis by the rebels in the eastern half of the country. All other press services and newspapers in West Pakistan were given similar instruction.

When I remonstrated with the Information Ministry official that it was unethical to damp a blackout on the news, he explained that press reporting of the killing of non-Bengalis in East Pakistan would unleash a serious repercussions in West Pakistan and provoke reprisals against the Bengalis residing in the western wing of the country. "It would exacerbate the current tension in the relations between the two Wings", he argued, "and it would also undermine the prospects of a negotiated settlement with the Awami League". The argument had an element of sound logic and a humanitarian veneer. Consequently, the news media in West Pakistan faithfully followed the federal government's instructions to suppress all news pertaining to the genocidal frenzy unloosed by the Awami League against the hapless West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis in rebellion-hit East Pakistan.

The Awami League militants had gained control over the telecommunications network in East Pakistan during the first few days of their uprising and they showed meticulous care in excising even the haziest mention of the massacre of non-Bengalis in press and private telegrams to West Pakistan and overseas world. Word of the mushrooming, organised violence against non-Bengalis in East Pakistan reached West Pakistan through the West Pakistanis who fled from the Awami League's terror regime in planes and ships. But no newspaper in the Western Wing of the country dared report it in print.

Early in the third week of March, a shipload of some 5,000 terror-stricken West Pakistanis and other non-Bengalis reached Karachi from Chittagong. Not a word of their plight filtered into the daily press in West Pakistan. In fact one of the local newspapers had the audacity to report that the arrivals from Chittagong said that the situation in the province was normal as if this broken mass of humanity had run away from an idyllic state of blissful normalcy.

For days on end all through the troubled month of March 1971, swarms of terrorised non-Bengalis lay at the Army-controlled Dacca Airport, awaiting their turn to be wafted to the safety of West Pakistan. But neither the world press nor the press in West Pakistan reported the gory carnage of the innocents which had made them fugitives from the Awami Leagues grisly terror. Caskets containing the mutilated dead bodies of West Pakistani military personnel and civilians reached Karachi with the planeloads of non-Bengali refugees from Dacca and their bereaved families milled and wailed at the Karachi Airport. But these heart-rending scenes went unreported in the West Pakistan news-papers because of the federal government's order to the Press not to mention the slaughter of the non-Bengalis in East Pakistan.

The Bengali Secretary, who headed the federal Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at Islamabad, threatened to punish those newspapers which at one time felt impelled to violate his Ministry's fiat. Responding to my plea, retired Justice Z. H. Lari, a Karachi leader of the Council Muslim League, who had migrated to Pakistan from India in the 1947 Partition and whose party was toying with the idea of a political alliance with the Awami League in the National Assembly, issued a mildly-worded press statement, in the second week of March 1971, in which he appealed to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to protect the non-Bengalis in East Pakistan.

Looking at the tragic events of March, 1971 in retrospect, I must confess that even I, although my press service commanded a sizeable network of district correspondents in the interior of East Pakistan, was not fully aware of the scale, ferocity and dimension of the province-wide massacre of the non-Bengalis. Dacca and Chittagong were the only two cities from where sketchy reports of the slayings of non-Bengalis had trickled to me in Karachi, mostly through the escapees I met at the Karachi Airport on their arrival from East Pakistan. I had practically no news of the mass butchery which was being conducted by the Awami League militants and their accomplices from the East Pakistan Rifles and the East Bengal Regiment in many scores of other cities and towns which were caught in the sweep of a cyclone of fire and death.

In my dispatch on the deepening East Pakistan crises published in the Daily Christian Science Monitor and reprinted in the Daily Milwaukee Journal of March 14, 1971, I wrote:

“Dacca reports say widespread mob violence, arson, looting and murders mushroomed in the wake of the Awami League's protest strike call. Destruction by Bengali militants of property owned by West Pakistanis in some East Pakistan towns has been heavy “

“...The telephone link between East and West Pakistan remains nearly unusable and only a skeleton air service is being operated between Karachi and Dacca “

Skimpy references to the blood-letting of untold proportions, undergone by the non-Bengalis during the Awami League’s March 1971 uprising in East Pakistan, percolated into the columns of some newspapers in Western Europe and India in the first week of April 1971. The Times of London reported on April 6th, 1971:

The Daily Statesman of New Delhi reported in its issue of April 4, 1971:

“The millions of non-Bengali Muslims now trapped in the Eastern Wing have always felt the repercussions of the East-West tensions, and it is now feared that the Bengalis have turned on this vast minority community to take their revenge.”

The hundreds of eye-witnesses from nearly three score towns and cities of East Pakistan, whose testimonies are documented in this book, are unanimous in reporting that the slaughter of West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis and of some pro-Pakistan Bengalis had begun in the early days of the murderous month of March 1971. There were some 35 foreign newsmen on the prowl in Dacca right up to March 26, 1971. But strangely their newspapers and news agencies reported barely a word or two about the spiralling pogrom against the non-Bengalis all over East Pakistan. Many of the American journalists in this motley crowd of foreign reporters (whose souls were saturated with compassion for the Bengali victims of the November 1970 cyclone tragedy) were so charmed by the public relations operatives of the Awami League that they were just not prepared to believe that their darlings in this fascist organization could commit or instigate the murder of the non-Bengalis.

Peggy Durdin, a writer for the Magazine Section of the New York Times and her husband, also a reporter for the NYT, were attached in the first week of March 1971 by Bengali demonstrators “with iron bars and long poles” in the heart of Dacca when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had just triggered the Awami League’s rebellion. But she wrote not a word about their manhandling by the Bengalis in any issue of her great newspaper either in March or April 1971. It was in her article of May 2, 1971, in the Magazine section of the New York Times, about the Pakistan Army’s alleged atrocities on the Bengali rebels that Peggy Durdin referred to the xenophobia unloosed by the Awami League’s agitation and admitted for the first time that she and her husband were attacked by Bengali demonstrators in Dacca in the first few days of March 1971.

Some Biharis in Dacca, whose relatives had been murdered in the city and at other places in the province, tried to contact foreign press reporters based at the Hotel Intercontinental. Awami League toughs who controlled all the access routes to the Hotel prevented their meeting. Conversation over the telephone had become a hazard for the non-Bengalis because of the Awami League's seizure of the Telephone Exchange and the tapping of telephone lines. A British press correspondent, who was in Dacca in March 1971, told me that a Bengali telephone operator cut off his long-distance conversation with his newspaper colleague in New Delhi in the third week of the month the moment he made mention of the blood-chilling massacre of non-Bengalis all over the province.

The Pakistan Government paid very dearly for its folly of banishing from Dacca some 35 foreign newsmen on March 26, 1971, a day after the federal Army had gone into action against the Awami League militants and other Bengali rebels. Amongst them were quite a few American journalists of eminence and influence. They bore a deep grouse against the military regime in Pakistan, and all through 1971, no good word about Pakistan flowed from their powerful pens. They inundated the American press with grisly, highly exaggerated accounts of the Army's toughness towards the rebels and ignored the virtual annihilation of a massive segment of the non-Bengali population by the Bengali rebels in March-April, 1971.

For millions of gullible Americans and West Europeans the printed word in the daily press is like gospel truth and they readily believed the many fibs about the Pakistan Army's conduct in East Pakistan which surged across the columns of their newspapers.

The forced exit of the foreign news corps from Dacca, the ire and anger of these articulate newsmen over their banishment from East Pakistan and the reluctance of the American and the British newspapers to give credence to the censored dispatches from Karachi on the military operations in the eastern half of the country prevented, to a great extent, the world-wide publication of the harrowing details of the bloodbath undergone by the non-Bengali population in the Awami League's March 1971 uprising. Thus one of the bloodiest slaughters of modern times went largely unreported in the international press.

Late in the first week of April 1971, the federal Information Ministry took a group of Pakistani press correspondents on a conducted tour of the rebel-devastated parts of East Pakistan. I was invited to go with the group but just then I was busy completing the Report of the Sind Government's Social Welfare Evaluation Committee (of which I was the Chairman). As I was keen to submit it to the provincial administration before the deadline of April, 12, 1971, I politely declined the invitation.

One of the Pakistani newsmen who went on this tour of East Pakistan was Anthony Mascarenhas, Assistant Editor of Karachi's English Daily Morning News and Pakistan Correspondent of the Sunday Times of London. On May 2, 1971, the Sunday Times published, though belatedly, his write-up on the Awami League's March-April, 1971 revolt and the trail of devastation it left behind. It shed at least a kink of light on the vast dimension of the widespread and sadistic massacre of some 100,000 non-Bengalis in East Pakistan by the Bengali rebels. But a month later, its impact was neutralized and its authenticity was eroded by his second article entitled "Why the Refugees Fled?", which was prominently displayed in the Sunday Times of June 13, 1971 and reproduced, through Indian manipulation, in many newspapers in the United States and Canada. Seduced and tempted by the Indians, Mascarenhas and his family arrived in London early in June from Karachi and the Sunday Times published in a score of columns his venomous blast at the Pakistan Army for its alleged genocide against the Hindus of East Pakistan.

In a bid to give his June 13 article the veneer of objectivity, Mascarenhas made this cursory reference to the slaughter of the non-Bengalis by the Bengali rebels:

"Thousands of families of unfortunate Muslims, many of them refugees from Bihar who chose Pakistan at the time of the partition riots in 1947, were mercilessly wiped out. Women were raped or had their breasts torn out with specially fashioned knives. Children did not escape the horror: the lucky ones were killed with their parents; but many thousands of others must go through what life remains for them with eyes gouged out and limbs roughly amputated. More than 20,000 bodies of the non-Bengalis have been found in the main towns such as Chittagong, Khulna and Jessore. The real toll, I was told every-where in East Bengal, may have been as high as 100,000; for thousands of non-Bengalis have vanished without a trace".

The reportage of the Pakistani newsmen, who toured East Pakistan in the first fortnight of April 1971, as published in the West Pakistan press, bared no details of the gruesome extermination of a large segment of the non-Bengali population in the Awami League's genocide. The reason was the federal Government's anxiety to prevent retributive reprisals against the Bengali populace in West Pakistan.

I was stupefied when I heard blood-chilling accounts of the butchery practised by the Awami League rebels on their non-Bengali victims in Chittagong from friends who escaped to Karachi in mid-April. I was shocked beyond words because I rather like the Bengalis for their gentle and artistic traits and it was

very hard for me to believe that any Bengali would indulge in the savagery which my informants from Chittagong attributed to the Awami League militants such as M. R. Siddiki, a high-ranking member of the party's hierarchy. I counted amongst my esteemed Bengali friends his illustrious father-in-law, Mr. Abul Kasem Khan, a former federal Minister and legislator, and was impressed by his sartorial perfection and his amiable manners. As I browsed last month in the heaps of harrowing eye-witness accounts from Chittagong of the rebels' savagery in March 1971, I became aware of the reasons which made the non-Bengali victims nickname M. R. Siddiki as the "Butcher of Chittagong". He gave a new dimension of cold-blooded violence to the Awami League's terror apparatus.

In the third week of April, the federal Information Ministry (whose Bengali head had been replaced by a West Pakistani) requested me to proceed post haste to the United States on deputation to the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington D. C. and to project before the American public the rationale for the federal military intervention in East Pakistan. India's well-organized propaganda machinery and the liberally-financed India Lobby in the United States were working in top gear to malign Pakistan and to smear the name of the Pakistan Army by purveying yarns of its alleged brutality in East Pakistan.

Pakistan's Public Relations difficulties in the United States were compounded by the unremitting hostility of the American press correspondent who were bundled out of Dacca on March 26. When I spoke to a friendly Senator at Capitol Hill about the massive burst of violence let loose all over East Pakistan by the Awami Leaguers on West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis during the murderous month of March 1971 and told him that more than 100,000 non-Bengalis had perished in this dreadful carnage, he looked at me in disbelief, "Why was not the massacre reported in the press in March?" was his logical query.

Late in April, 1971, the Pakistan Embassy in Washington published a booklet containing a chronology of the federal intervention in East Pakistan. It highlighted the Awami League's pogrom against West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis which was waged in March 1971. The immediate impact of its mass distribution in the United States was that many legislators and academicians sought information from the Embassy about the genesis of the word Bihari and the ethnic background of the Biharis.

On May 6, 1971, a group of six foreign correspondents representing the New York Times, Reuters, Associated Press of America, TIME Magazine, the Financial Times of London and the New China News Agency (Xinhua) flew to Dacca and made a fairly comprehensive tour of the rebellion-damaged areas of the province. Their uncensored despatches from East Pakistan spoke of the widespread killing

of the Biharis by the Bengali rebels in March-April 1971 and gave harrowing accounts of the rebels' brutality narrated by eye-witnesses and victims of the pogrom. The Embassy of Pakistan promptly published and widely distributed a booklet containing excerpts from "on-the-spot despatches" of the foreign newsmen who had toured East Pakistan in the second week of May, 1971.

American, Indian and Bengali protagonists of the secessionist cause cast aspersions on the integrity of these foreign newsmen by charging that they were duped into believing that the mass graves they were shown were of non-Bengalis although, according to the phony claim of the secessionists, they were of Bengalis liquidated by the Army. Indian propagandists dished out to foreign correspondents in New Delhi pictures of burnt houses and razed market places as evidence of the devastation caused by the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan although in reality most of the destruction was caused by the well-armed Bengali rebels when they went on the rampage against the non-Bengalis in a bloody and flaming spree of loot, arson and murder. Some pictures were claimed to be of the Bengali female victims of the Pakistan Army's alleged atrocity; a close look at the physical features and dresses of the pictured females disclosed that they were West Pakistanis, not Bengalis.

India's official propaganda outfit and its front organizations in the United States and Western Europe unleashed a spate of books and pamphlets in which the Pakistan Army was accused of the wanton slaughter of millions of Bengalis, of waging genocide against the Bengali Hindus and of ravishing 200,000 Bengali girls. West Pakistanis were branded in these Indian propaganda books as worse than the Huns and the Nazis. This miasma of lies and fibs, innovated by Indian publicists, was so ingeniously purveyed and sustained that the massive abridgement of the non-Bengali population by the Bengali rebels in March-April 1971 faded into the background and lay on the dust-heap of forgotten history.

The White Paper on the East Pakistan crisis, published by the Government of Pakistan in August 1971, failed to make any significant international impact. It was inordinately delayed and gave a disappointingly sketchy account of the massacres of the non-Bengalis by the Awami Leaguers and other rebels. Dozens of places where, it now appears, non-Bengalis were slaughtered by the thousands in March-April 1971 were not mentioned in the White Paper.

The Government failed to give this belated post mortem report of the Awami League's genocidal campaign against the Biharis adequate and effective international publicity. The White Paper -would have made more impact, in spite of its inadequacy of details, and its foreign readers would have reacted in horror over the Awami League's racist pogrom if it had been published before the end of April 1971.

In psychological warfare, the element of time is often of crucial importance, especially when one is pitted against an unscrupulous enemy with scant regard for truth and ethics. By August 1971, India had so virulently poisoned a large segment of public opinion in the West by blatantly magnifying the refugee influx and blaming the Pakistan Army for this exodus that our White Paper neither set the record straight nor did it counter the many scores of books and pamphlets with which India flooded the world to malign Pakistan and its Army.

The federal Information Ministry's film documentary on the restoration of normalcy in East Pakistan was a timely effort. Although shot in the second half of April 1971 and despatched to Pakistan's overseas missions in May, it was viewed by small audiences abroad. If adequate funds were available, it could have been shown on important television networks in the United States by buying time. It showed the rubble of homes and shopping blocks shot up or put to the torch by the rebels but it gave very little evidence of the infernal slaughterhouses and torture chambers set up by the rebels in March 1971 to liquidate many thousands of their non-Bengali victims. The blood-chilling savagery of the Awami League's genocide and the colossal wreckage of human lives it had left in its trail were not fully exposed.

"The Great Tragedy", written by Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party and published in September 1971, shed revealing light on the genesis of the East Pakistan crisis, the secessionist ambitions of the Awami League's leadership. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's obdurate and uncompromising stance in the constitutional talks in Dacca in the third week of March 1971 and the Pakistan People's Party's efforts for forging "a Grand Coalition of the majority parties of the two Wings" within the framework of a single, united Pakistan. Mr. Bhutto's vindication of the constitutional stand and role of his Party was forceful and logical. "The Great Tragedy" deserved global circulation on a mass scale which, to our loss, was then denied to it.

After my return to Pakistan from the United States late in November 1971, I spoke to one of the ruling Generals at Islamabad about the urgent need for the publication and mass distribution of a book based on eyewitness accounts of the survivors of the Awami League's holocaust of March-April 1971. I learnt that some reliable evidence had been collected from eye-witnesses but the Generals were then too busy with India's virtual invasion of East Pakistan and the preparations for a full-scale military showdown with India.

Early in 1972, I met a number of non-Bengali war-displaced persons from East Pakistan who had taken up abode in shacks in the shanty township of Orangi in Karachi. I was horrified by the accounts they narrated of their suffering in East

Pakistan during the Awami League's bloody rebellion and the gaping vacuum this genocide had caused in the non-Bengali population in the country's eastern half. Their testimony showed that the Awami Leaguers and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and the East Bengal Regiment were the first to massacre the non-Bengali innocents and that the tornado of violence and death which swept the province in March-April 1971 stemmed from the Awami League's lust for power. I thought of writing a book based on their testimony but I did not have eye-witnesses from all of the many scores of towns in East Pakistan where non-Bengali communities were wholly or partially exterminated.

In the meantime, I started work on "Mission to Washington" which was an expose of India's intrigues in the United States to bring about the dismemberment of Pakistan. On the basis of my personal knowledge and experiences, I detailed in this book the diabolic work of the India Lobby in the United States and its collaborators to turn American public opinion against Pakistan and to block American military supplies to Pakistan's Armed forces preparatory to India's armed grab of East Pakistan in December 1971. It was published in January 1973.

In "The East Pakistan Tragedy ", written by Prof. Rushbrook Williams, a well-known British journalist and author, and published in 1973, the political aspect of the East Pakistan crisis was lucidly discussed and Pakistan's case was cogently explained.

Major-General Fazal Muqem's book, "Leadership in Crisis", which also appeared in 1973, dealt at length with the politico-military aspect of the East Pakistan crisis, India's military and financial help to the Bengali secessionist rebels and the disastrous war with India in December 1971.

Pakistan's rejoinder to the flood of anti-Pakistan literature which has gushed from India's propaganda mills since the Ides of March 1971 has been tragically weak and inadequate. In the summer and autumn of 1973, when I travelled extensively in the Middle East, Western Europe and the United States, I saw a number of books derogatory to Pakistan and its fine army in bookshops, especially those which sell foreign publications. Two books which I read and which provoked my ire are Indian Major-General D.K. Palit's "The Lightning Campaign " in which he has heaped invectives and abuses on the Pakistan Army units stationed in East Pakistan, and Olga Olson's "Doktor " in which she has exaggerated the suffering of the Bengali population during the Army operations in 1971. I also glanced over two fat volumes of the Bangladesh documents, mass distributed by the Indian Government in the United States, in which India is projected as an angel of peace who showed Job-like patience in the face of Pakistan's alleged villainy and barbarity in East Pakistan. I did not see in these

overseas bookstalls a single book about the gruesome atrocities perpetrated by the Bengali rebels on the hapless Biharis and other non-Bengalis in East Pakistan in March 1971.

The general impression in the United States and Western Europe, at least until the autumn of 1973, was that the Biharis had joined hands with the Pakistan Army in its 1971 operations in East Pakistan and that after the defeat of the Pakistan Army in the third week of December 1971, the Bengalis had a lawful right to inflict retributive justice and violence on the Biharis.

In the Middle East, some politicians and journalists, although sincere in their friendship for Pakistan, asked me whether the stories they had read about the Pakistan Army's alleged brutality in East Pakistan were correct and whether ruthlessness was an ingrained quality in the Pakistani psyche and temperament. I was appalled by the doubts which India's smear campaign against Pakistan had created about us as a nation even in the minds of our brothers-in-faith and friends.

Late in September 1973, the exchange of Bengalis in Pakistan with Pakistanis in Bangladesh and the repatriation of the Pakistani prisoners of war and civilian internees from India was commenced under the previous month's New Delhi Agreement. As the Chairman of an official Committee for the relief and rehabilitation of war-displaced persons from East Pakistan in the Orangi township in Karachi, I met many hundreds of non-Bengali repatriates—men, women and children. Their evidence gave me the impression that the non-Bengali death toll in the murderous period of March-April 1971 was in the vicinity of 500,000. I was profoundly touched and moved by their heart-rending accounts of the terrible suffering they had undergone during the Awami League's insurrection in March 1971 and in the months after India's armed seizure of East Pakistan in December 1971. It was then that I decided that the full story of this horrifying pogrom and the atrocities committed on the hapless non-Bengalis and other patriotic Pakistanis in East Pakistan (breakaway Bangladesh) should be unravelled before the world. Hence this book.

The 170 eye-witnesses, whose testimonies or interviews are contained in this book in abridged form have been chosen from a universe of more than 5,000 repatriated non-Bengali families. I had identified, after some considerable research, 55 towns and cities in East Pakistan where the abridgement of the non-Bengali population in March and early April 1971 was conspicuously heavy. The collection and compilation of these eyewitness accounts was started in January 1974 and completed in twelve weeks. A team of four reporters, commissioned for interviewing the witnesses from all these 55 towns and cities of East Pakistan, worked with intense devotion to secure their testimony. Many of the interviews

were prolonged because the witnesses broke down in a flurry of sobs and tears as they related the agonising stories of their wrecked lives. I had issued in February 1974 an appeal in the newspapers for such eye-witness accounts, and I am grateful to the many hundreds of witnesses who promptly responded to my call.

The statements and interviews of the witnesses were recorded on a fairly comprehensive proforma, along with their signatures. In selecting a witness, I exercised utmost care in assessing his background, his reliability and his suitability for narrating faithfully the details of the massacre he had witnessed or the suffering he had borne in March-April 1971. I have also pored over mounds of records, documents and foreign and Pakistani press clippings of that period.

Although the eye-witness accounts contained in this book put the focus on the largely-unreported horror and bestiality of the murderous months of March and April 1971, I have, in many a case, incorporated the brutality suffered by the witnesses after India's occupation of East Pakistan and the unleashing of the Mukti Bahini's campaign of terror and death against the helpless non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis from the third week of December 1971 onwards. For their full exposure, another book is needed.

I regret that it was not possible for me to accommodate in this book the many hundreds of other testimonies that I received. Aside from the overriding consideration of space, another reason was my keenness that the witnesses, whose evidence is recorded in this book, should be the parents who saw their children slaughtered, the wives who were forced to see the ruthless slaying of their husbands, the girls who were kidnapped and raped by their captors and the escapees from the fiendish human slaughter-houses operated by the rebels. I was also anxious that the witnesses I select should have no relatives left in Bangladesh.

I have incorporated in this book the acts of heroism and courage of those brave and patriotic Bengalis who sheltered and protected, at great peril to themselves, their terror-stricken non-Bengali friends and neighbours. On the basis of the heaps of eye-witness accounts, which I have carefully read, sifted and analysed, I do make bold to say that the vast majority of Bengalis disapproved of and was not a party to the barbaric atrocities inflicted on the hapless non-Bengalis by the Awami League's terror machine and the Frankenstein's and vampires it unloosed. This silent majority, it seemed, was awed, immobilised and neutralised by the terrifying power, weapons and ruthlessness of a misguided minority hell bent on accomplishing the secession of East Pakistan.

I must stress, with all the force and sincerity at my command, that this book is not intended to be a racist indictment of the Bengalis as a nation. In writing and publishing this book, I am not motivated by any revanchist obsession or a wish to condemn my erstwhile Bengali compatriots as a nation. Even today there are vast numbers of them who are braving the pain and agony of endless incarceration in hundreds of jails in Bangladesh because of their loyalty to Pakistan – a country in whose creation their noble forebears played a leading role. Just as it is stupid to condemn the great German people for the sins of the Nazis, it would be foolish to blame the Bengali people as a whole for the dark deeds of the Awami League militants and their accomplices.

As a people, I hold the Bengalis in high esteem. In the winter of 1970-71, I had dedicatedly laboured for months, as the Secretary of the Sind Government's Relief Committee for the Cyclone sufferers of East Pakistan, to rush succour of more than ten million rupees, in cash and kind, to the victims of this cataclysmic tragedy.

Time is a great healer of wounds and I hope and pray that God, in his benign mercy, will reunite the Muslims of Pakistan and Bangladesh, if not physically, at least in mind and soul. Knowing a little of the Bengali Muslims' psyche and social milieu, I devoutly believe that no power on earth can snap permanently their Islamic moorings and that, in spite of the trauma of 1971 and its painful aftermath, they remain an inseparable part of the mainstream of the globe-girdling Muslim fraternity. "Blood and Tears " is being published at a time when all the Bengalis in Pakistan who opted for Bangladesh have been repatriated to that country and the danger of any reprisal against them has been totally eliminated.

The succour and rehabilitation of the multitudes of Biharis and other non-Bengalis, now repatriated to Pakistan, is our moral and social responsibility. They have suffered because they and their parents or children were devoted to the ideology of Pakistan and many shed their blood for it. Even as the victims of a catastrophe, not of their own making, they are entitled to the fullest measure of our sympathy, empathy and support in restoring the splintered planks of their tragedy-stricken lives. In projecting their suffering and of those who are sadly no more and in depicting the poignance and pain of their scarred memories in "Blood and Tears ", I have been motivated by humane considerations and by a humanitarian impulse. Theirs is, indeed, a very sad story, largely untold, and this book mirrors, in part, the agony and trauma they suffered in the not-too-distant past, and the raw wounds they still carry in their tormented hearts. "Blood and Tears" is the story of the rivers of blood that flowed in East Pakistan in the infernal month of March 1971, when the Awami League's genocide against the non-Bengalis was unleashed, and also of the tears that we shall shed for

many a year to come over the massacre of the innocents and India's amputation of our eastern wing.

*May 30, 1974 Qutubuddin Aziz
Karachi*

CHAPTER ONE

The Ides of March in Dacca

The Awami League held East Pakistan's capital city of Dacca in its ruthless grip from March 1 to 25, 1971. During this dark period of loot, arson and murder, more than 5,000 non-Bengalis were done to death by the Awami League militants and their supporters. For months, before the Ides of March 1971, the hardcore leadership of the Awami League had primed its terror machine for confrontation with the authority of the federal government. Fire-breathing demagogues of the Awami League had saturated the consciousness of their volatile followers with hatred for the West Pakistanis, the Biharis and other non-Bengalis. They propagated a racist and obscurantist brand of Bengali nationalism. Secession from the Pakistani nationhood was undoubtedly their camouflaged goal.

On March 1, 1971, within an hour of General Yahya Khan's forenoon announcement of the temporary postponement of the March 3 session of the Constitution-framing National Assembly, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman fired the first broadside of revolt against the federal government. At a hurriedly summoned press conference in Dacca, he ordered a general strike in the provincial capital to paralyse the administration and to usurp the authority of the lawfully-established Government in East Pakistan.

As he gave the "Go Ahead" signal to his party's storm troopers, the Awami League militants went on the rampage all over the city, looting, burning and killing. They looted arms and ammunition from the Rifle Club in the nearby industrial township of Narayanganj. They turned two dormitory blocks of the Dacca University, the Iqbal Hall and the Jagannath Hall, into operational bases for their regime of terror.

On March 2, armed Awami League jingoes looted guns and ammunition from arms shops in the New Market and Baitul Mukarram localities of central Dacca. They trucked the looted weapons to the Dacca University Campus where student storm troopers practised shooting on an improvised firing range.

Frenzied mobs, armed with guns, knives, iron rods and staves, roamed at will and looted business houses, shops and cinemas owned by non-Bengalis. The lawlessness and terror which the Awami League had unleashed in Dacca compelled the provincial administration to summon the help of the Army units garrisoned in the Dacca cantonment.

The Awami League's militants incited the Bengali populace to defy the dusk-to-dawn curfew. Six persons were killed when a riotous mob attacked an army unit in the Sadarghat locality of Dacca. A posse of troops saved the Dacca television station from being wrecked by a violent mob.

On March 3, the general strike ordered by the Awami League all over the province, paralysed life in Dacca. Rampaging mobs, led by gun brandishing Awami League militants, carried fire, terror and death into the homes of thousands of non-Bengalis in the populous localities of Dacca, such as Nawabpur, Islampur and Patuakhali Bazar. Many shops and stores in the posh Jinnah Avenue shopping centre, owned by non-Bengalis, were looted. Fifty non-Bengali huts in a shanty suburban locality were put to the torch and many of their inmates were roasted alive. Thugs started kidnapping prosperous non-Bengalis and extorted ransom money from their relatives.

Under the orders of the Awami League High Command, the Radio and Television stations in Dacca gave up playing Pakistan's National Anthem and replaced it by the "Bangladesh Anthem". Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced in Dacca the launching of a Civil Disobedience Movement, an euphemism for rebellion, throughout East Pakistan. Thus, in three days, the Awami League succeeded in establishing a full-blown terror regime whose principal goal was to liquidate the authority of the federal government and to abridge the population of the non-Bengalis, preparatory to the armed seizure of the entire province. The telecommunications and air links between East Pakistan and West Pakistan were snapped under the orders of the Awami League High Command.

From March 4 to 10, violent mobs, led by Awami League jingoists, looted and burnt many non-Bengali houses and shops and kidnapped rich West Pakistani businessmen for ransom. In a jail-break at the Central Prison in Dacca on March 6, some 341 prisoners escaped and joined hands with Awami League militants and student activists in parading the main streets of Dacca. Gun-swinging Awami League cadres and activists of the East Pakistan Students League stole explosive chemicals from Dacca's Government Science Laboratory and the Polytechnic Institute to make Molotov Cocktails and other incendiary bombs. Defiant students of the Salimullah Muslim Hall of the Dacca University tried to burn the British Council office in Dacca but the troops arrived in time and the jingoists escaped. Awami League militants and student activists took away at gunpoint jeeps, cars and minibuses owned by non-Bengalis. They erected "check posts" at nerve centres in the city and outside the Dacca Airport where they frisked the persons of non-Bengalis fleeing Dacca and seized their cash and jewellery, watches, radio sets and every other article of value.

On March 7, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced his long-range action programme against the federal government at a mass meeting on the Ramna Race Course ground. Unfurled on the speakers' platform was the new flag of Bangladesh—a map of the province set in a red circle against a dark green background. The crowd yelled 'Joi Bangla' (Long Live Bengal) and 'Bangladesh Shadheen' (Independent Bengal). Prompted by Awami League volunteers, the crowd shouted slogans against Pakistan, its President, the new Governor of East Pakistan, General Tikka Khan and the Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, Mr. Z. A. Bhutto. The multitude sang Tagore's old song: "Bengal, my Golden Bengal".

While ordering the continuance of indefinite strikes in Government offices, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman set up a parallel government directed by the Awami League. He instructed the people of East Pakistan not to pay Central Government taxes but to make payments to the provincial coffers. He asked his storm troopers to set up road blocks against military movements and to prevent the military from making use of railways and ports. The Awami League took over the radio and television stations, telecommunications, foreign trade and the banking system, including the control of money transfers from East to West Pakistan. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for the organization of Revolutionary Action Groups in labour unions, villages and urban neighbourhoods to buttress the Awami League's defiance of federal authority. In effect, the Awami League leadership had on that day chosen the path of secession and loosed forces whose goal was an independent, racist Bengali state. In a despatch from its correspondent, Kenneth Clarke, London's Daily Telegraph reported on March 9, 1971: "Reports said that Dacca collapsed into complete lawlessness on Sunday night (March 7) as Sheikh Mujib took the province to the edge of secession".

From March 11 to 15, the day on which General Yahya Khan flew into Dacca for constitutional talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Awami League consolidated the parallel administration it had set up in Dacca. More non-Bengali businessmen were shanghaied and their houses looted.

Non-Bengali passengers were intimidated and detained for questioning by Awami League militants at the Dacca Railway Station.

A Government office near Kakrail in Dacca was set on fire. Non-Bengalis fleeing Dacca by air were frisked by Awami League cadres at their "Search and Loot" check post close to the entrance to the Dacca airport. Bottles of acid, pilfered from the science laboratories in closed educational institutions in Dacca, were flung into Government offices where some conscientious employees dared

work. Armed thugs, claiming links with the Revolutionary Action Groups set up by the Awami League, extorted money from affluent non-Bengalis.

From March 16 to 23, while General Yahya and Sheikh Mujib engaged in ding-dong constitutional negotiations, the Awami League continued to operate its parallel administration and trained its cadres in the use of automatic weapons at a number of training centres in Dacca and its suburbs. The incidence of raids on the homes of non-Bengalis mounted sharply. A riotous mob ambushed an Army jeep in Dacca and hijacked the six soldiers riding in it. Guns were looted from the Police armoury in the town. Awami League gunmen clamped a ban on the supply of food grains to the Pakistani military in the Dacca cantonment.

March 23, Pakistan's national festival day, was designated as "Resistance Day" by the Awami League High Command. Instead of the Pakistan flag, the Awami League militants hoisted the new Bangladesh flag atop all public and private buildings in Dacca. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took the salute at an armed March Past at his residence on which the Bangladesh flag was ceremoniously unfurled. The Awami League held displays of its strength, and bellicose mobs, shouting 'Joi Bangla', went on the rampage in localities where non-Bengalis were concentrated.

More West Pakistani businessmen were kidnapped and their Bengali captors demanded huge sums of money from their relatives as ransom. Violent mobs, waving guns and other lethal weapons, brick-batted Karachi-bound passengers near Dacca Airport. Awami League demonstrators marched past the Presidential Mansion in Dacca where General Yahya was staying and shouted obscenities against him and the federal Army. Young thugs, enriched by the ransom money extorted in the Awami League's name from non-Bengali businessmen and showing off the cars they had hijacked from their West Pakistani and other non-Bengali owners, milled in the evenings outside the Dhanmandi residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and yelled "Shadheen Bangla" (Independent Bengal).

Awami League cadres tangled with the staff of the Chinese Consulate in Dacca on March 23 when they insisted on hoisting the Bangladesh flag atop the Consulate and the Chinese refused to allow them to do so. Awami League demonstrators, at many places, tore up Pakistan's national flag and trampled under their feet photographs of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan.

All through this week, the Awami League militants were beefing up their strength with the defectors from the East Pakistan Rifles and the paramilitary Ansar force. Gunrunning from India proceeded at a frenzied pace and many

Indian agents infiltrated into East Pakistan for sabotage. Hutments of non-Bengalis in Dacca's shanty townships were set ablaze by the hundreds.

The Dacca University Campus served as the operational base of the Awami League militants and its laboratories were used for manufacturing different varieties of explosives. A portion of the Jagannath Hall was used for torturing and murdering kidnapped non-Bengalis. Reports of a forest-fire of loot, arson and murder in almost every town of East Pakistan worried the federal government and the Army's Eastern Command in Dacca. Cyclostyled posters, issued by the Awami League student and labour groups in Dacca and other places in the province, seemed like military orders of the day. These posters incited the people to "resort to a bloody war of resistance" for the "national liberation of East Bengal".

Some 15,000 fully-loaded Rifles at the Dacca Police headquarters were seized by the Awami Leaguers and their supporters. More arms shops in Dacca were looted by the Awami League terrorists. In the morning of March 25, barricades and road blocks appeared all over Dacca city. Petrol bombs and other hand-made bombs, manufactured from chemicals stolen from the Science laboratories of educational institutions in the past few weeks, exploded at some places.

The federal Army's intelligence service had become privy to the Awami League's plan for an armed uprising all over the province in the early hours of March 26, 1971. Late in the night of March 25, hours before the zero hour set by the Awami League for its armed insurrection, the federal army units fanned out from the Dacca cantonment and conducted, with lightning speed, a series of pre-emptive strikes which squelched the Awami League's uprising, at least in the provincial capital, in a matter of hours. The federal Army's crackdown on the Bengali insurgents in Dacca showed that the Awami Leaguers, while engaged in talks with General Yahya, were collecting guns and ammunition and making explosives for the anticipated showdown with the federal army.

In their bargaining with General Yahya Khan, the Awami League leaders wanted him to agree to a constitutional arrangement that would make East and West Pakistan two separate sovereign states with a very loose, nebulous confederal link – a link so weak that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's virtually independent Bangladesh could have snapped it any time he wished to do so. A posse of federal troops arrested him at his residence in Dhanmandi in Dacca at about 1-30 a.m. on March 26. He was lodged for the night in the Dacca Cantonment under military guard and flown the next day to West Pakistan and interned.

The federal Army's operations against the rebels in Dacca were so swift and effective that by the dawn of March 26 it was in full control of the city. The

Army's strength in Dacca was adequate to enable it to scotch the Awami League's rebellion but in the rest of the province the federal troops were thinly spread out. It took them from three days to three weeks to rout the more than 176,000 Awami League-led rebels who conducted "Operation Loot, Kill and Burn" with savage ferocity against the non-Bengali element in the population. Even in some suburbs of Dacca, armed hotheads of the Awami League murdered non-Bengalis by the hundreds in the night of March 25/26, 1971.

There is evidence to warrant the belief that the Awami League rebels were using a transmitter in the Indian diplomatic Mission in Dacca for round-the-clock contact with the Indian authorities who were giving support to the rebels, especially in the border belt. The "Free Bengal Radio", which went on the air on March 26 and which broadcast news of the phantom victories of the rebels, was undoubtedly an Indian innovation, installed on Indian soil. The Niagara of lies, which surged across the columns of India's Press and the air-waves of All India Radio, (such as the cock-and-bull story of the imaginary slaying of General Tikka Khan by a Bengali rebel), originated from the fertile imagination of a group of Indian propagandists and Bengali rebels who operated a psychological warfare outfit in Calcutta.

Many of the rifles which the federal troops captured from the rebels were manufactured at the Rifle Factory in Ishapur in India while the ammunition stocks bore the marking of the ordinance factory at Kirkee in India. India threw some eight battalions of its Border Security Force in aid of the Awami League rebels in the last week of March 1971 in vital border areas. In the Nawabganj area in Dacca, the federal army seized a secret letter from an Awami League leader to an Indian agent, seeking a meeting across the border to discuss the "supply of heavy arms" from India to the Awami League-led rebels.

In Dacca, the rebels burnt a predominantly Bihari settlement of shacks in the Old city, but the Awami League informants of foreign newsmen told them in the morning of March 26 that the Army had set the shanty township on fire. In the twin industrial city of Narayanganj, non-Bengalis, who were kidnapped and murdered by the rebels, were thrown into the Buriganga river or incinerated in houses set ablaze.

Peggy Durdin, an American journalist, who, with her husband, also a journalist, had gone to Dacca to cover the National Assembly's session scheduled for March 3, gave this account of the mass hysteria whipped up by the Awami League leadership in the Bengali populace in the city since the beginning of the month in an article in the New York Times Magazine of May 2, 1971:

“Almost within minutes of the broadcast announcement (General Yahya’s March 1, postponement of the National Assembly session) and for weeks afterward, the volatile, bitter, angry Bengalis, from every walk of life, and including women, surged in enormous, shouting processions and demonstrations through the streets to show their resentment and assert their claim to self-determination .

“As Dacca erupted with angry demonstrators shouting slogans against the President and Mr. Bhutto and chanting ‘Joi Bangk’ (Hail Bengal) and ‘Sadhin Bangla’ (Independent Bengal), Sheikh Mujib, on March 2, proclaimed a five-day province-wide general strike; it stopped work everywhere, including all Government offices, closed every shop and halted all mechanical transport, including bicycles. Dacca became a city of eerie quiet except for the mass meetings held day after day in open places and the parades of chanting demonstrators. Since the only way to get around was on foot, my, husband and I daily walked 10 to 20 miles through the wide, trafficless streets, past the shuttered shops and empty markets.

“The high-pitched fervour sometimes turned xenophobic not only against West Pakistanis – who in some cases were killed on the streets and in their homes and often had their shops looted – but against Europeans. At the Intercontinental Hotel, Awami League gangs tore down all English signs, including the name of the hotel in electric lettering high up on one side of the building. A shot was fired through a lobby window and such hostility was shown for some days towards foreigners that the Swiss Manager of the Hotel closed the swimming pool and asked all guests to stay in their rooms except for meals. These, because the strike and transport difficulties had depleted staff, became self-service repasts consisting chiefly of rice and several kinds of curries. “

The xenophobic aspect of the agitation unleashed by the Awami League on March 1 was writ large in the manhandling of Peggy Durdin and her husband, also a Correspondent of the New York Times, in the heart of Dacca by a group of Bengali demonstrators. She wrote of it in the New York Times of May 2, 1972:

“On the first day of the general strike particularly, emotional groups of demonstrating, shouting teenagers near the great (Baitul) Mokarram Mosque started to attack my husband and me with iron bars and long poles. Miraculously, an Awami Youth patrol spotted us and in the nick of time, pushed in quickly between us and the assailants, beating them off with their own poles and deftly herding us down narrow alley ways to safety in a local Awami League headquarter.”

Malcolm Browne of the New York Times, who visited East Pakistan early in May, wrote in a Dacca despatch in the NYT on May 6, 1971:

“General Tikka Khan, the Military Governor of East Pakistan, said today that his staff estimated that 150 persons were killed in Dacca on the night of March 25 when the Army moved to re-assert control over this province.

“The sprawling city of Dacca, situated on a flood plain, criss-crossed by countless streams and rivers making up the Ganges River Delta, appeared peaceful.

“We are accused of massacring students”, he (General Tikka Khan) said, “but we did not attack students or any other single group. When we were fired on we fired back.”

“The University was closed and any one in there had no business being there “, the General continued. “We ordered those inside to come out and were met with fire. Naturally, we fired back “

Maurice Quaintance of the Reuters News Agency, who also toured East Pakistan early in May 1971, said in a May 6 despatch from Dacca:

“Lt. General Tikka Khan, the Military Governor, told newsmen at a reception that the military situation throughout East Pakistan was completely under control.

“The General said massacres had taken place in East Pakistan but they were not committed by the Army. After soldiers moved out of their cantonments on March 25, they discovered the widespread slaughter of innocent people. He cited one in stance in which he said 500 people were herded into a building which was then set on fire. There were no survivors. He said the West Pakistan people had not been told of such things for fear of reprisals. Tikka Khan said the Army did not attack anyone unless first fired on and even dissidents in two Dacca University strongpoints, who were armed with automatic weapons and crude bombs, were given the chance to leave the building. The General said that the entire Dacca action was over by the first light of day on March 26.

“Close to Dacca airport is a group of shattered homes, uninhabited and in some cases roofless. Official Pakistan sources say that the people who lived there were struck by the communal violence in the period before the Army restored law and order in the country’s eastern wing. “

About the Dacca University and its affiliated Colleges, whose total destruction by the Army was alleged by foreign information media hostile to Pakistan late in March 1971, Maurice Quaintance of the Reuters News Agency had this to say after visiting the University Campus on May 7, 1971:

“Journalists, Friday, were shown Dacca University where the Army fought a pitched battle with students and Awami League supporters on the night of March 25. The fighting centered on the two University dormitories, Iqbal and Jagannath, where the Army say crude home-made bombs and an arsenal of weapons boosted the defenders as the troops moved to take over the strongpoint. A large hole in the dormitory showed where the Army used rockets to flush out those they say rejected an offer to give themselves up. On the front lawn before the dormitories, a senior officer took newsmen over a training area of barbed wire entanglements and high stonewalls where he said students had trained for the clash that was to come. “

About the captured Indian soldiers whom foreign newsmen met in Dacca and the seized Indian arms and ammunition shown to them on May 7, 1971, Maurice Quaintance of Reuters cabled:

“In Dacca, three Khaki-clad soldiers on Friday confessed they were captured prisoners sent from India to Pakistan last month to help the dissident East Pakistan Rifle units supporting the secessionists. Speaking through an interpreter, one told six foreign correspondents at Dacca Army headquarters that he came into Pakistan territory at night after being told with others of his platoon, that they were moving to the border post.

“Army Headquarters in Dacca on Friday displayed a selection of captured weapons and ammunition said to be mainly of Indian origin. They included rifles, mortar bombs and hand grenades all of which, the Army said, bore markings proving they were manufactured in India. “

London’s Daily Telegraph, in its issue of April 7, 1971, carried a report from its staff correspondent in Dacca, quoting a native of Dundee:

“He describes how after President Yahya’s broadcast on March 26, a mob came to the factory. The goondas (thugs) went on the rampage. They looted the factory and offices, killed all the animals they could find and then started killing people. They went to the houses of my four directors, all West Pakistanis, set fire to the houses and burnt them alive, including families totalling 30. They killed the few who ran out. “

The Sunday Times of London, reported in its issue of May 2, 1971:

“Ten days of piecing together the details in East Pakistan have revealed a huge and almost successful mutiny in the Pakistan Army and the brutal massacre of thousands of non-Bengalis – men, women and children. More than 20,000 bodies have been found so far in Bengal’s main towns but the final count could top 100,000.

“Eye-witnesses in more than 80 interviews tell horrifying stories of rape, torture, eye-gouging, public flogging of men and women, women’s breasts being torn out and amputations before victims were shot or bayoneted to death. Punjabi Army personnel and civil servants and their families seem to have been singled out for special brutality. “

White with fear and with dazed, unbelieving eyes, I saw a Bengali student jingo behead a non-Bengali captive in a room in the Jagannath Hall of the Dacca University on March 24, 1971 because his relatives failed to send the demanded ransom of Rs. 3,000, said Mohammed Hanif, 23, who lived in Quarter No. 49 of “B” Block in the Lalmatia Colony in Dacca. Employed in the Tiger Wire Company in Dacca, Hanif said on his repatriation to Karachi in January 1974:

“In the afternoon of March 24, I engaged a motorised Rickshaw (three-wheeled taxi) and asked the driver to take me to my home in Lalmatia Colony. I had spoken to him in broken Bengali and he knew that I was a non-Bengali. All of a sudden and in spite of my shouts in anger, he drove the vehicle into the compound of the Jagannath Hall where six armed students grabbed me. They took me inside a shuttered room where they frisked me thoroughly and snatched my watch and Rs. 150 from my pocket. They told me that I should write a letter to my close relatives, asking them to hand over to the bearer Rs. 3000 as ransom money to save my life. I hesitated and asked for some time to make up my mind. They tied my hands with strong ropes and marched me to a large hall where many roped non-Bengali captives squatted on the ground.

“The student jingo who had asked me to write the ransom letter paced towards a hapless victim at the far end of the hall. He told his prey in Bengali that the ransom money had not materialised and the deadline given to his relatives had passed, so he must die. The terrified victim shouted, squirmed and tried to run. But six toughs grabbed him while the jingo in the lead slit his throat with a ‘Ramdao’ (a kind of dagger) and decapitated him

“I was horror-stricken by what I had seen. At midnight, I told my captors that I would write the ransom letter to my elder brother. I wrote it in the

morning of March 25 and asked my brother to arrange to give my captors Rs. 3,000 within 24 hours. The deadline set by the Bengali captors for the receipt of money was the morning of March 26. But God was merciful and late in the night of March 25, the Army went into action against the rebels in Dacca and they were routed in the Jagannath Hall encounter. We were rescued by the federal troops“ .

“I am the lone survivor of a group of ten Pathans who were employed as Security Guards by the Delta Construction Company in the Mohakhali locality in Dacca; all the others were slaughtered by the Bengali rebels in the night of March 25, 1971 “, said 40-year-old Bacha Khan. He said he escaped death by climbing a tree in the darkness of the night.

Repatriated to Karachi from Dacca in September 1973, Bacha Khan said:

“I was one of a group of ten Pathans employed by the Delta Construction Company in Dacca. We lived in the staff quarters in the Company’s premises. Since the first week of March, the Awami League militants and young thugs were intimidating non-Bengalis, particularly the West Pakistanis. So all of us were on the alert.

“On March 25, a killer gang of Bengali rebels raided our staff quarters. As it was a surprise attack, they succeeded in killing three Pathan guards. I and the other surviving Pathans decided to put up a fight with the three guns we had. We held the raiders at bay for some time but they had more ammunition than we had. Taking advantage of the darkness all around, I slipped away from the scene and climbed a tree. The next morning I saw the dead bodies of the six other Pathans whom the rebels had killed at night after their ammunition was exhausted. The rebels took away our guns. “

“The rebels burnt my hut and killed my nine-year-old son on March 17, 1971 “, said 36-year-old Chand Meah who was employed in the Bengal Rubber Industries in Dacca. He lived in a hut in the Nakhalpara locality in the Tejgaon suburb on the way to the Dacca Airport. Chand Meah was repatriated to Karachi from Dacca in January 1974. He said: “Nakhalpara was very near the factory where I worked. I had saved some money and bought a small plot of land in this locality. I had erected a hut because I could not just then afford to build a pucca house. My wife, my 9 year-old son and I lived in it. Our relations with our Bengali neighbours were friendly. Since the first week of March, an element of tension had crept in because of inflammatory harangues by Awami League demagogues and there were rumours that there would be a carnage of non-Bengalis.

“On March 17, when I was away from my hut on duty in the factory, a large killer gang of Awami League thugs attacked the non-Bengali huts in Nakhalpara, looted them and put them to the torch. They also burnt my hut and killed my son, who, in spite of his young age, tried to resist the attackers. When I returned to what once was my home I found the rubble still smouldering and my wife was lamenting over the dead body of our dear son “.

“I estimate that some 1,000 non-Bengalis were killed or wounded in barely three hours in the Adamjee Nagar New Colony in Dacca on March 19, 1971 “, said Mohammed Farid, 26, who was employed as Assistant Supervisor in the Spinning section of the Adamjee factory.

Farid, who witnessed the gruesome massacre and escaped it by dint of good luck, was repatriated to Karachi in January 1974. He said:

“Adamjee Nagar had in the past witnessed tension between the Bengali and non-Bengali employees and many non-Bengalis had suffered in clashes. The Awami League had built up a base of influence amongst the Bengali workers and since the first week of March 1971, party cadres were inciting the Bengali workers against the non-Bengalis.

“On March 19, a killer gang of Awami League militants, armed with guns, sickles, daggers and staves came into our factory. The Bengali security guards joined them and they rampaged through the mill and the houses of the non-Bengali millhands.

“The killer gang attacked the Weaving section and slayed scores of non-Bengali employees in barely half an hour of Operation Murder. I saw many dozens of wounded millhands running towards my Spinning section. I hid myself behind a big machine at the far end of the Hall. The killers swarmed into my unit and attacked the non-Bengal employees. Some of the victims ran out and the killers chased them, shooting with guns. The killing spree of the rebels continued for nearly three hours. At night, when I emerged from hiding, hundreds of dead bodies were littered all over the factory premises. The killer gang looted the houses of non-Bengalis and burnt many. They slaughtered hundreds of innocent men, women and children and threw many corpses into flaming houses

“Close to the water tank lay the dead bodies of many non-Bengali girls who, I learnt, were ravished by the killers and then murdered. It was a terrible scene. “

“A Bengali neighbour sheltered me and my aged mother from the terror and fury of the killer gang which had slaughtered my husband, my father and my two teenage brothers “, said 22-year-old Roshanara Begum who lived in a house in the Tong: suburb of Dacca. In the March 23 raid on her house, the killer gang set it on fire and also kidnapped her teenage sister.

Repatriated to Karachi in December 1973, she gave this pathetic account of her woes:

“My parents hailed from the Indian state of Bihar but my brothers, my sister and I were born in Dacca. My father was employed in the Postal Department and he had opted for service in East Pakistan in the 1947 Partition of the sub-continent. He bought a plot of land in Tongi in Dacca and built a modest little house on it. We lived in peace and we had excellent relations with our Bengali neighbours “Since the first week of March, Awami League militants were spreading hatred for non-Bengalis amongst the Bengali population.

The situation was tense and we had heard of attacks by killer gangs on non-Bengali homes in many localities of Dacca city. But our neighbours were decent people and they assured us that we were safe. All of us spoke excellent Bengali but our mother tongue was Urdu. So we were known as Biharis. At school, I studied through the medium of Bengali language.

“In the night of March 23, 1971, an armed gang of Awami League thugs raided our house. They looted it and set it ablaze. We had no guns. The raiders overpowered my father, my husband and my two young brothers and shot them. They kidnapped my teenage sister. In the encounter between my male relatives and the killers, my mother and I succeeded in escaping through the backyard into the house of a God-fearing and gentle Bengali neighbour who sympathised with us and hid us in his home. Aged 15, my sister was a student in the 9th class in school. After the federal troops routed the rebels on March 26, I did my best to trace her but we could not locate her. The Bengali rebels had kidnapped non-Bengali girls by the hundreds in Dacca and slaughtered them before the federal army crushed their rebellion. The souvenir I have of my loving husband is our two and half year old son who was born to me a few months after the slaying of Feroz Ahmed, my husband “.

“I heard the screams of an Urdu-speaking girl who was being ravished by her Bengali captors but I was so scared that I did not have the courage to emerge from hiding “, said 24 year-old Zahid Abdi, who was employed in

a trading firm in Dacca. He escaped the slaughter of non-Bengalis in the crowded New Market locality of Dacca on March 23, 1971 and was sheltered by a God-fearing Bengali in his shop. The killers raped their non-Bengali teenage victim at the back of the shop and later on slayed her.

Repatriated to Karachi in October 1973, Zahid Abdi said:

“On March 23, I took a bus to the New Market shopping locality in Dacca. As the bus neared my destination, I saw a crowd of Awami League thugs, armed with guns and daggers, on the rampage. Even before the bus could come to a halt, I jumped from it and ran towards a side lane. I had heard that some non-Bengali passengers had been molested or done to death by the Awami League hoodlums. On the way towards the side lane, I saw a few wounded men sprawled on the roadside. A Bengali shopkeeper, whom I had known in the past, took pity on me and hid me in his shop. When he saw some thugs coming towards it he locked it up, with me in hiding, and stood guard. When the killers came, he told them that he was a Bengali and that he had shut his shop for the day.

“Acting on his advice, I decided to spend the night in the shop because the road back home was unsafe. Late at night, I heard the screams and shouts for help in Urdu of a girl who was being ravished by her captors in a dark place close to the shop where I was hiding. Her four captors took turns to rape her. After they had accomplished their satanic acts, the killer gang shot the girl and melted away in the void of the night. The shop was locked, and in the forenoon, when my protector opened it, I told him of the fiendish happening of the previous night. We looked for the body of the girl; there was no trace of it but bloodstains and torn pieces of a woman’s clothing were visible at the spot where I thought that the girl was raped and murdered. My Bengali saviour, with tears in his eyes, told me that hundreds of non-Bengali girls had suffered a similar tragic fate and that the devil’s minions were on the loose all over the city. “

Zahid Abdi’s estimate is that some 2000 innocent, hapless non-Bengalis perished in the carnage in the New Market shopping locality and its neighbourhood.

“The thugs did not spare a single non-Bengali shop or business premises in the area and looted every article of value “, said Zahid Abdi.

“I wish the federal Army had crushed the Awami League militants with full force in Dacca in the very first week of March 1971 when they had defied the Government’s authority“, said Anisur Rahman, 26, who was employed in a

trading firm in Dacca. A graduate of the Dacca University, he lived in the Nawabpur locality and was repatriated to Karachi in February 1974. He said:

“On March 23, a huge mob of Awami League militants, many with blazing guns, went on the rampage in the Nawabpur locality. They looted the houses of non-Bengalis, machine gunned the inmates and burnt many houses. They looted every shop owned by a non-Bengali. Some of my relatives perished in the carnage in our locality. My escape was nothing short of a miracle.

“The Awami League militants had guns and plenty of ammunition. Amongst the killers were many Hindus who appeared to be well-trained in the use of firearms. On March 9, the Awami Leaguers had taken away, under the pain of dire punishment, weapons owned by non-Bengalis. We were rendered defenceless. In the period of the Awami League’s insurgency in Dacca, kidnapping non-Bengalis for ransom and then slaying them was the favourite modus operandi of the Awami League rebels. Hundreds of student bodies had sprouted all over the city and their hoodlums staged daring hold-ups on the roads and looted the houses of non-Bengalis. The Awami League High Command had frozen the bank accounts of non-Bengalis and restricted their withdrawal right. Awami League cadres used to reap huge cuts by getting sanctions for larger cash with drawals by the non-Bengalis. The kidnapers of many affluent West Pakistanis seized their cars as ransom. From March 1 to 25, Dacca had no government and no administration worth the name; it was Thug Rule. Some Bengali civil servants, who were loyal to the Government, wanted to go to their offices. The Awami League cadres warned them that they and their dear ones would be turned into mincemeat if they disobeyed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s strike order.”

“Dacca was a city of terror and fire in the third week of March 1971”, said Mohammad Taha, 55, who lived all through that nightmarish period in his house on Noor Jahan Road in Dacca. Repatriated to Karachi from Kathmandu, where he had escaped from the Mukti Bahini in East Pakistan, Taha said in March 1974:

“The crescendo of the Awami League’s violence rose sharply in the second week of March 1971 and life became a nightmare for tens of thousands of innocent non-Bengalis who had never even tinkered with politics”.

Taha added: “Arson, rape and murder had become the order of the day. Three of my very close relatives were killed in the carnage.

Killer gangs shanghaied non-Bengalis on the streets and from their homes and the Bengali police had gone into purdah. The non-Bengalis thanked God when the federal Army went into action against the ruthless rebels. But on December 17, 1971, when the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized Dacca, hell burst upon the non-Bengalis again and hundreds of thousands of innocent people were butchered by the Mukti Bahini victors and their trigger-happy supporters “.

Shah Imam, 30, who was engaged in business in Dacca and who lived in the Bikrampur locality, testified:

“In the third week of March 1971, a Bengali killer gang murdered my paternal uncle, my elder brother and his teenage son in a steamer on way from Barisal to Dacca.

“I learnt from the Bengali bargeman that, in midstream, about 50 armed thugs, shouting ‘Joi Bangla’, attacked the non-Bengali passengers. They forced the Sareng (captain) to anchor the steamer on a deserted bank of the river. The killer gang lined up the non-Bengali passengers on the bank of the river and gunned them to death. They pilfered every article of value from the bodies of the slain men, women and children and threw the dead into the river. After the federal troops routed the rebels, I tried to locate the dead bodies of my murdered relatives and visited the scene of the slaughter but there was no trace of them although there were bloodstains at many places along the bank. “

Shah Imam was repatriated to Karachi in March 1974.

“My only daughter has been insane since she was forced by her savage tormentors to watch the brutal murder of her husband “, said Mukhtar Ahmed Khan, 43, while giving an account of his suffering during the Ides of March 1971 in Dacca. Repatriated to Karachi in January 1974, he said:

“We lived in a rented house in Abdul Aziz Lane in Dacca. I was in business and we had prospered. I had married my daughter to a promising young man.

“In the third week of March 1971, a gang of armed Bengali rebels raided the house of my son-in-law and overpowered him. He was a courageous young man and he resisted the attackers. My daughter also resisted the attackers but they were far too many and they were well-armed. They tied up my son-in-law and my daughter with ropes and they forced her to watch as they slit the throat of her husband and ripped his stomach open

in the style of butchers. She fainted and lost consciousness. Since that dreadful day, she has been mentally ill. She trembles and she raves many a time as memory reminds her of that grisly event in her broken life. “

“We sought refuge, with our wounded father in the woods near Tongi, a suburb in Dacca, and lived there on water and wild fruits for three days “, said Ayesha Khatoon, 22, on her repatriation to Karachi from Dacca in February 1974. She testified:

“On March 25, 1971, a killer gang broke into our house and looted all the valuables we had. They trucked away all the loot. My father, Mr. Nooruddin, a local businessman who owned the house, resisted the raiders. The Bengali rebels stabbed him in the chest and escaped with their booty.

“As the killers had said that they would return, my brother and I helped our father walk some distance to the woods nearby. We spread a bed sheet and my wounded father lay on it. I bandaged his wounds but we had no food. My brother brought water from the pond and some wild fruits. We lived on this repast for three days. In the afternoon of March 28, we spotted some Pakistani troops and my brother ran towards them. The soldiers took us back to our home. I nursed back my father to full recovery.

“But more travail and misfortune lay in store for us. After less than 9 months, the Mukti Bahini went on the rampage against the non-Bengalis in Dacca. In the last week of December 1971, a gang of armed Bengalis came to my house and grabbed my husband, Zafar Alam. They asked us to give them all the cash and my ornaments. I had none left. They said that they would set free my husband if my father signed a bogus document of sale of our house to the leader of the killer gang. To save the life of my husband, my father readily agreed to do so. The killer gang promised to bring back my husband after some questioning. Full two years have passed and I have no news of him. I presume that the thugs killed him. I understand that the killer gangs practised this fraud on a lot of helpless non-Bengalis after the Indians and the Mukti Bahini occupied East Pakistan in December 1971. The killer gang drove us from our house and we lived in the Red Cross camp in Dacca. “

Aliya Bibi, 40, who lived in a flat with her son in the Mohammedpur locality in Dacca, reported after her arrival in Karachi in January 1974:

“On March 25, 1971, a gang of Awami League militants and some thugs raided my house and looted it. They did not spare anything of value. My

16-year-old son had climbed an umbrageous tree and the raiders did not detect him.

“But in the last week of December 1971, he was killed by the Mukti Bahini. Life has been a torment for me since then. “

Saira Khatoon, 35, who lived in Mirpur in Dacca, gave this account of the murder of her husband, Abdul Hamid, in the March 1971 carnage of non-Bengalis in Dacca:

“My husband left our home in Mirpur on March 25 to go to a meeting in the city. On the way the Bengali rebels waylaid and murdered him.

“As I did not see his dead body, I appealed to the federal Army to help me in locating my husband, dead or alive. The Army tried to trace him but the presumption was that he was ambushed and killed as was the fate of my other male relatives in Dacca and other places in East Pakistan “, said Saira Khatoon.

“I have no choice but to believe that my husband was killed by the rebels in March 1971 “, she added. “Hundreds of non-Bengali teenage girls were kidnapped, raped and murdered “, she further said.

Zaibunnissa, 33, lived in a flat on Noor Jahan Road in the Mohammadpur locality of Dacca. Her husband, Abdus Salam, was employed as a driver in the Dacca office of the Pakistan International Airlines. She gave this account of the raid on her house by the Bengali rebels and the death of her husband:

“On March 25, 1971, a gang of Awami League militants raided our house. My husband resisted the attackers and grappled with them. The raiders were armed and they overpowered him. They stabbed him and then looted our house. After the raiders had gone, I felt some sign of life in my husband. The next morning I took him to a local hospital. The rebels had been routed but the Bengali hospital staff was sullen. They did not pay much attention and my husband died.

“After December 16, 1971, my 10 year old son and I suffered again. The Mukti Bahini wanted to kidnap my son and I had to keep him in hiding for days on end until we were moved to a Red Cross Camp. Even there, the Mukti Bahini used to kidnap the non-Bengali men and teenage girls every now and then. “

Zaibunnissa and her son were repatriated to Pakistan from Dacca in December 1973.

Shamim Akhtar, 28, whose husband was employed as a clerk in the Railway office in Dacca, lived in a small house in the Mirpur locality there. They had escaped the March 1971 massacre because of the strong resistance put up by the Bihari young men of the locality against the rebels who attacked them. But after the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized East Pakistan in the third week of December 1971, life became an ordeal for Shamim, her husband, Fasihuddin and her three little children. She described her tragedy in these words:

“On December 17, 1971, the Mukti Bahini cut off the water supply to our homes. We used to get water from a nearby pond; it was polluted and had a bad odour. I was nine months pregnant. On December 23, 1971, I gave birth to a baby girl. No midwife was available and my husband helped me at child birth. Late at night, a gang of armed Bengalis raided our house, grabbed my husband and trucked him away. I begged them in the name of God to spare him as I could not even walk and my children were too small. The killers were heartless and I learnt that they murdered my husband. After five days, they returned and ordered me and my children to vacate the house as they claimed that it was now their property.

“Biharis”, said the gang leader, “have no right to live in Bangladesh.” At gunpoint, they drove me with my children to an open plot of land where we slept on the bare earth in the cold for three days. My children starved; I was too weak to get them even a morsel of food. A foreign Red Cross team took pity on us and moved us to a Relief Camp in Mohammadpur.”

Shamim and her children were repatriated to Pakistan from Dacca in January 1974.

Zaibunnissa Haq, 30, whose journalist husband, Izhar-ul Haque, worked as a columnist in the Daily Watan in Dacca, gave this account of her travail in 1971:

“We lived in our own house on Razia Sultana Road in Mohammedpur in Dacca. My husband had, in the past, worked in the Daily Pasban and was well-known as an Urdu writer and journalist.

“On March 25, 1971, a gang of armed Awami League storm troopers raided our locality and looted my house. My husband was not at home; otherwise the raiders would have kidnapped him.

“After the Indian Army and Mukti Bahini occupied Dacca on December 17, 1971, a reign of terror and death was unleashed on the non-Bengalis, especially those of us who lived in Mohammedpur and Mirpur. A dozen Bihari young men of our locality, including my husband, used to patrol the area at night to keep marauders at bay. On December 19, late at night, a gang of armed Bengalis raided the locality and machine-gunned my husband. My world was shattered when I saw his dead body. People in the entire neighbourhood cried because he was popular and had looked after the safety of the neighbours with immense courage.

“On December 21, a posse of Mukti Bahini soldiers and some thugs rode into our locality with blazing guns and ordered us to leave our house as, according to them, no Bihari could own a house in Bangladesh. For two days, we lived on bare earth in an open space and we had nothing to eat. Subsequently, we were taken to a Relief Camp by the Red Cross.

In January 1974, we were repatriated to Pakistan. Fatima Bibi, 40, whose husband was employed in a trading firm in Tongi, testified after her repatriation to Karachi from Dacca in February 1974:

“On March 25, 1971, armed Awami Leaguers had looted our house and beaten up my husband, Abdur Rahman, who had resisted them. My three young sons were away from the house when the raid took place. They were brave boys and they took an oath to punish the thugs. In April 1971, they joined the Razakar Force and taught a lesson to many of the Bengali thugs who had looted the homes of non-Bengalis in March.

“In the third week of December 1971, when the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini captured Dacca, my three sons were killed in action. On December 17, 1971, an armed gang of 30 Bengalis raided our home and brutally killed my husband. At gunpoint, they ordered me to leave the house with my three children. I headed for the woods nearby. We lived on water and wild fruits and we slept on leaves. The cries of my starving children caused me pain and agony. I thought of suicide and headed towards the railway line. God wanted to save us. A foreign Red Cross team was passing our way in a jeep and they motioned us to stop. When I told them of our plight, they took us to the Red Cross Relief Camp in Mohammedpur where we lived for more than two years“.

Noor Jahan, 33, whose husband, Mukhtar Ahmed, was employed in the Telegraph and Telephone Department in Dacca and who lived in the Government staff Quarters in Gulistan colony, said on her repatriation to Karachi in January 1974:

“We had escaped the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis in Dacca. But in the third week of December 1971, after the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini occupied Dacca, my husband was murdered by a gang of armed Bengalis. Some 20 armed men raided my house soon after his death, and looted every article of value. They turned us out of the house at gunpoint and we were on the streets. Another gang of armed Bengalis drove us to a large building where some 500 Bihari women and children, whose husbands had been kidnapped for murder, were lodged. We were told that any one found escaping would be shot. We prayed to God for the safety of our children. After five days of hunger and torture, a Red Cross team took us to a Relief Camp in Mohammedpur in Dacca. Life in the Relief Camp was an ordeal because the Mukti Bahini jingoos used to kidnap the Bihari young men and women by the scores every week. No one was sure that he would be alive the next morning. Many did not sleep for nights on end. At night, women whose husbands or sons had been slaughtered before them would shriek and wail as the memory of their dear ones haunted them”.

Anwari Begum, 30, whose husband, Syed Mustafa Hussain, was employed in the Telegraph and Telephone Department in Dacca, lived in their own house in the Mirpur locality. Repatriated to Karachi from Dacca with her children, in October 1973, Anwari said:

“In the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis in East Pakistan, every member of my family, including my parents, was slaughtered in Dinajpur where my father owned a house and some property. In the third week of March 1971, a gang of armed Bengali thugs looted my house in Mirpur but my husband escaped the massacre because he was away on duty in his office.

“In the third week of December 1971, my husband was murdered by a Mukti Bahini gang and his dead body was delivered at my house by a posse of Indian troops deployed in our locality. His neck was severed and some parts of his body were mutilated.

“Shortly afterwards, we were driven out of our house by the Mukti Bahini and lodged in a Red Cross Camp.”

Allah Rakhee, 45, whose husband, Mohammed Yusuf, was a 38 thriving businessman in Dacca and who lived in their own house in Block D in the Mirpur locality, had this poignant memory of the tragedy in her life in March and December 1971:

“In the third week of March 1971, a gang of Awami League volunteers had looted our house when I was all alone in it. They said that they would kidnap my husband and my two teenage sons but the federal army routed the rebels and we had peace for nine months.

“On December 17, after the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini had captured Dacca, a score of armed Bengalis raided my house. They shot my aged husband in the compound of our house. I had hidden my two sons in the lavatory. Just when the killer gang was about to leave, one of the raiders stepped into the lavatory and saw my two sons who cried to escape. He shouted for help and the whole gang rushed inside and overpowered my sons. They dragged the two boys to the compound and, before my dazed eyes, shot them dead. The killers slapped me, and, at the point of a bayonet, they drove me in their truck to the Red Cross Camp. My eldest son had joined the Pakistan Army. I have no news of him. I learnt that the Mukti Bahini threw the dead bodies of my husband and my two sons into the river.”

“I had a glimpse of the fiendish slaughter-house set up for murdering hapless non-Bengalis in Dacca”, said 25-year-old Salma Khatoon, after her repatriation to Karachi from Dacca in January 1974. Her slain husband, Nazar Alam Khan, was employed in the State Bank of Pakistan in Dacca. She testified:

“In the last week of March 1971, the Bengali rebels had murdered the parents and elder brother of my husband in Rangpur. In the third week of March, some armed Bengali thugs had looted my house in the Bashabo locality near Kamlapur station in Dacca. But my husband had escaped their murderous search.

“In the third week of December 1971, when the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini ruled Dacca, he went to his office and did not return home. In the night of December 18, a posse of Bengali gunmen looted my house and told me that I should leave it although we owned it. When my husband did not return even on the third day, I went to his office. The office was locked from outside. Through a window I saw a group of tough-looking men burning old records, bank notes and registers. I also peeped inside a dark store room which had large blood stains and torn clothes. This, I believe, was used as a kind of abattoir for killing non-Bengali Bank employees. I met the wife of a Bengali colleague of my husband in the adjacent staff quarters for Bank employees. She told me that a Mukti Bahini gang had raided the Bank on the day my husband disappeared and it murdered all the non-Bengali employees on duty.

They had dumped the bodies, she said, into a hastily dug pit at the back of the office building.

“My orphaned children and I lived for two years in the Red Cross Camp. The Mukti Bahini seized my house and told me that the Biharis would not be permitted to own even an inch of land in Bangladesh.”

“For two hours, my house in Mohammedpur was riddled and pocked with bullets by a gang of armed Bengali marauders late in March 1971”, said Qaiser Jahan, 22, who escaped to Nepal from East Pakistan in 1972 and was repatriated to Karachi in December 1973.

Qaiser Jahan and her husband, Aziz Hussain, a prosperous businessman, lived in their own house on Noor Jahan Road in the Mohammedpur locality in Dacca. They had escaped the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis and the gunmen who fired on her house did not loot it. But in the third week of December 1971, when the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized East Pakistan, her misfortunes began. Early in December 1971, her husband had gone on a business visit to Chittagong. Weeks passed and there was no news of him. Qaiser Jahan heard of the massacre of non-Bengalis in Chittagong on December 17, 1971. The next day, at midnight, a gang of armed Mukti Bahini soldiers attacked the Mohammedpur locality and they continued machine-gunning her house till the early hours of the morning. Panic-stricken, she decided to leave for Khulna where some relatives of hers lived. Qaiser Jahan said:

Kulsoom, 35, whose husband, Abdul Kareem, had his own small business firm in Dacca, lived in their own house on Jagannath Saha Road. She was widowed early in 1971. Her 24 year old son was employed in a trading firm in central Dacca. In the third week of March 1971, a gang of armed Awami Leaguers raided and looted her house. Her son was not at home when the raiders came. But in December 1971, Kulsoom’s little world was shattered:

“It was December 12. My son, Mohammad Yasin, had gone to his office. My son was a brave young man. He said he was not frightened by India’s bombing and would go to work. In the evening, I was stunned when some Civil Defence workers brought me his battered dead body. He was killed when Indian aircraft bombed the building where he worked.

“I was benumbed by the loss of my son. In the third week of December 1971, a Mukti Bahini gang raided and looted my house and threw me and my three small children on the streets. We lived for more than two years in a Red Cross Camp in Dacca. In February 1974, we were repatriated to Pakistan”.

Ayesha Begum, 40, who was repatriated to Karachi from Dacca, with her three orphaned children, in December 1973, testified:

“In the third week of March 1971, a gang of armed Awami Leaguers had fired on our house in Mirpur in Dacca but the appearance of an Army patrol made them run away.

“For nine months, my husband, Abdul Bari, a Bank employee, lived in peace in our house in Mirpur. But in the third week of December 1971, a posse of Mukti Bahini soldiers, led by some gangsters of our locality, came to my house and looted it. They ordered us to leave the house at once and go to the Red Cross Camp. Just then my husband returned home from work and in a matter of minutes the killer gang overpowered him and shot him in the chest. I was stunned and utterly speechless. One of them slapped me and threatened that if I did not vacate the house immediately I would be killed. I begged them to give me some time to bury my husband but they refused. I appealed to them in the name of God and two of them agreed to help me in burying my husband. We dug a grave in an open space nearby and laid him to eternal rest. My children and I walked to the Red Cross Camp where we lived for two years.”

Najmunnissa, 30, and her three orphaned children were repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in January 1974 after they had spent two years in the Red Cross Camp in Mohammedpur. Her husband was an employee of the East Pakistan Government and he owned a small house in Mirpur where he and his family lived. In the third week of March 1971, when he was away on duty, some armed thugs had looted his house. In the third week of December 1971, the Mukti Bahini murdered him while he was on his way to his office. A Mukti Bahini gang raided Najmunnissa’s house in the evening of December 18th and told her that her husband had been executed. They gave her no clues to the whereabouts of his dead body. Brandishing sten guns, the raiders ordered her to leave the house at once as the Bengalis returning from India had to be accommodated. Najmunnissa said:

“I was a widow; my children were orphans. My tormentors shoved a gun in my face to force me to quit the house where we had lived for years. We were on the streets. Subsequently, the thugs changed their mind and carted us away to a big building where many hundreds of hapless non-Bengali women and children were herded. The male members of their families had been liquidated by the Mukti Bahini in human abattoirs. Life in the captivity of the Mukti Bahini in this prison was a hell. A Red Cross team located us and took us to a Camp in Mohammedpur. They said our

Bengali captors were planning our murder in the building and we were saved in the nick of time.”

Some eye-witnesses from Dacca said that their relatives had been subjected to violence by the Awami league militants at a number of places not far from Dacca. Some of the towns named by these witnesses are: Keraniganj, Joydebpur, Munshiganj, Rupganj, Madaripur, Pubail, Tangibari, Chandpur, Matlab Bazar, Hajiganj and Baidya Bazar. Many non-Bengali families fled from these small towns to Dacca after the Awami League’s terrorisation campaign gained momentum in the third and fourth weeks of March 1971. Quite a few non-Bengali families, witnesses said, were killed by the Bengali rebels in the last week of March 1971. Their houses were looted. Money was extorted by thugs from some well-to-do non-Bengali businessmen engaged in trade at these places. In Joydebpur, 22 miles from Dacca, an armed mob, led by Awami League militants, put up barricades on the rail track and the main highway to block troop movement on March 19, 1971. A posse of Pakistani troops exchanged fire with the rebel gunmen in the mob. A rebel was killed and two soldiers were wounded. In the last week of March 1971, a killer gang looted many non-Bengali houses in Keraniganj and Munshiganj and murdered some non-Bengali men. In Chandpur, violence against the non-Bengalis spiralled in the third and fourth weeks of March 1971 but the death toll was not large. In Baidya Bazar, the rebel gangs wiped out a dozen non-Bengali families and looted their property. Thugs ambushed and held up some non-Bengali businessmen for ransom. In Pubail and Tangi-bari, the Awami League militants and their rebel confederates murdered dozens of affluent Biharis. Shops owned by the Biharis were a favourite target of attack. Kidnapping of teenage girls was also reported from these places. The Awami League militants and the rebels ravished the kidnapped non-Bengali girls and shot them before the federal army controlled the area. This was obviously with the intention of eliminating evidence and witnesses of their crimes. But in areas bordering on India, the retreating Bengali rebels carried away with them the non-Bengali girls whom they had kidnapped and ravished.

CHAPTER TWO

Terror in Narayanganj

“The killer gang had orders to murder every non-Bengali in our factory “, said Asghar Ali Khan, 38, who was employed as an Overseer in the Pakistan Fabric Company’s factory in Narayanganj, an industrial township close to Dacca.

He gave this pathetic account of the slaughter of non-Bengalis in March 1971 in Narayanganj:

“The non-Bengali population resident in Narayanganj was not large. Many non-Bengalis worked by day in Narayanganj and commuted in the evening to their homes in nearby Dacca.

“Since the first week of March, Awami League militants were at work in Narayanganj, inciting the Bengali mill workers against the non-Bengalis. They had marked the houses of non-Bengalis by the middle of the month.

“On March 21, a large, violent mob of yelling Awami Leaguers attacked the factory and the quarters where the non-Bengali employees and their families lived. They did not damage the factory but they butchered the non-Bengali employees and their families. I was the sole occupant of my quarter and I slipped into the house of a very dear Bengali friend when the Awami League’s raid began. He hid me in his house and I was saved.

“In the afternoon of March 26, after the Bengali rebels had been routed, the federal troops visited our factory and arranged the mass burial of the 160 dead bodies of non-Bengalis which lay stacked in their quarters.”

“The killer gang had looted the houses of the victims and every article of value had vanished “, said Asghar Ali Khan.

Witnesses said that the Awami League demagogues, in their harangues to the Bengali millhands, told them that the unemployed Bengalis would get factory jobs if the non-Bengali employees were liquidated. The non-Bengali employees were known by the generic name of Biharis.

“Four armed thugs dragged two captive non-Bengali teenage girls into an empty bus and violated their chastity before gunning them to death“, said Gulzar

Hussain, 38, who witnessed the massacre of 22 non-Bengali men, women and children on March 21, 1971, close to a bus stand in Narayanganj. Repatriated to Karachi in November 1973, Gulzar Hussain reported:

“I was engaged in the Jute Trade in Narayanganj and I lived in a rented house not far from the commercial hub of the town. Since the first week of March 1971, the Awami Leaguers were trying to stir up trouble in Narayanganj and their goal was to wipe out the non-Bengali population.

“On March 21, our Dacca-bound bus was stopped on the way, soon after it left the heart of the city. I was seated in the front portion of the bus and I saw that the killer gang had guns, scythes and daggers. The gunmen raised ‘Joi Bangla’ and anti-Pakistan slogans. The bus driver obeyed their signal to stop and the thugs motioned to the passengers to get down. A jingo barked out the order that Bengalis and non-Bengalis should fall into separate lines. As I spoke Bengali with a perfect Dacca accent and could easily pass for a Bengali, I joined the Bengali group of passengers. The killer gang asked us to utter a few sentences in Bengali which we did. I passed the test and our tormentors instructed the Bengalis to scatter. The thugs then gunned all the male non-Bengalis. It was a horrible scene. Four of the gunmen took for their loot two young non-Bengali women and raped them inside the empty bus. After they had ravished the girls, the killers shot them and half a dozen other women and children. Some shops, owned by non-Bengalis in Narayanganj, were looted by riotous mobs on that day”.

Nasima Khatoon, 25, lived in a rented house in the Pancho Boti locality in Narayanganj. Her husband, Mohammed Qamrul Hasan, was employed in a Vegetable Oil manufacturing factory. Repatriated to Karachi in January 1974, along with her 4 year old orphaned daughter, from a Red Cross Camp in Dacca, Nasima gave this hair-raising account of her travail in 1971:

“Since March 3, there was tension in Narayanganj. The Awami Leaguers were inciting the Bengali labourers to kill the non Bengalis. In the night of March 25, a Bengali mob, led by Awami League militants, tried to loot the houses of non-Bengalis in our locality but the cowards melted away when the news of the Army’s action against the rebels reached them.

“On December 16, when the surrender decision of the Pakistan Army in Dacca to the Indian Army was announced, violent crowds of Bengali militants went on the rampage against the non-Bengalis in Narayanganj. A killer gang attacked my house and stole all my ornaments, my clothes, crockery and the furniture. The thugs did not spare even the kitchenware

and house hold linen. My husband was away in Dacca when the killer gang came to my house.

“At gun-point, our captors made us leave our house and marched us to an open square where more than 500 non-Bengali old men, women and children were detained. Some 30 Bengali gunmen led us through swampy ground towards a deserted school building. On the way, the 3-year-old child of a hapless captive Woman died in her arms. She asked her captors to allow her to dig a small grave and bury the child. The tough man in the lead snorted a sharp ‘No’, snatched the body of the dead child from her wailing mother and tossed it into a river along whose bank we dragged our feet in physical exhaustion. The killers pushed all their captives into the school building. I wanted water to slake my parched throat; the gunman, who headed our group, slapped me, struck me in the arm with his rifle-butt and pushed me inside the jam-packed hall.

“For a week, we lived in what was virtually a hell. Every night, we heard threats and abuses from our captors. One of the captive women feigned acute stomach ache and begged her captors to let her go to a hospital in Dacca for treatment. She was old and looked a saintly woman. The Bengali captors allowed her to go to Dacca. A very intelligent woman, she raced to Mohammedpur where she told the Red Cross Officials about the plight of the 500 Bihari captive women and children. Two teams of officials of the International Red Cross came to our rescue and took us to their Camp in Mirpur. Twice our Camp was attacked by the Mukti Bahini gunmen, and some of the inmates, including two ailing young women, were killed by gunfire. By April, 1972, there was some improvement in the situation and the nocturnal kidnapping of its Bihari inmates by the Bengali marauders lessened. The Red Cross Officials tried their best to trace out my missing husband but he was not found. Like many thousands of other non-Bengalis, he was, it is presumed, done to death by rampaging killer gangs, inebriated with the victory of the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini”.

“I saw the rebels burning dozens of jute godowns in Narayanganj and throwing the dead bodies of murdered non-Bengalis into the flames “, said 52-year-old Allah Rakha, who worked as a jute broker in Narayanganj. He lived in a rented house in the Patuatoly locality of Dacca. Repatriated to Karachi in March 1974, he said:

“After the mid-1960’s, most of the non-Bengali traders in Narayanganj and Dacca were apprehensive that some day it would become difficult for them to do business in East Pakistan. The Awami League leaders were

spreading poison against West Pakistanis in the minds of the simple Bengali common folks of East Pakistan.

“After March 3, 1971, I found that the Awami League’s campaign to foster hatred for non-Bengalis amongst the Bengalis had made its impact and many of my Bengali friends in the jute trade were critical of us.

“On March 17, the volcano erupted, and a large killer gang, led by the Awami League militants, went on the rampage in the premises of the Ispahani Jute Company. They slaughtered many hundreds of non-Bengalis, including women and children, living in the Ispahani Colony, and flung the dead bodies into the Sitalakhya River. I was saved because I went into hiding inside a closed office building to which I had access.”

CHAPTER THREE

Human Abattoirs in Chittagong

The Awami League's rebellion of March 1971 took the heaviest toll of non-Bengali lives in the populous port city of Chittagong. Although the Government of Pakistan's White Paper of August 1971 on the East Pakistan crisis estimated the non-Bengali death toll in Chittagong and its neighbouring townships during the Awami League's insurrection to be a little under 15,000, the testimony of hundreds of eye-witnesses interviewed for this book gives the impression that more than 50,000 non-Bengalis perished in the March 1971 carnage. Thousands of dead bodies were flung into the Karnaphuli river and the Bay of Bengal. Many of those innocents who were tortured and killed in the seventeen slaughter-houses set up by the Bengali rebels in the city and its vicinity were incinerated in houses put to the torch.

The target of the Bengali rebels, it seemed, was to wipe out every non-Bengali male above 12 years of age. Along with the massacre of the non-Bengali menfolk, many of their women and children, spared in the first phase of the pogrom, were done to death by the Bengali rebels in the last days of March and the first week of April 1971. The element of savagery in the mass slaughter in Chittagong was perhaps far more vicious than at any other place in the province, possibly with the exception of Khulna, Jessore, Dinajpur and Mymensingh.

The volcano of fire and death erupted in this picturesque city of green hills, rivers and luxuriant tropical vegetation on March 3 soon after the Awami League's high command in Dacca took to the path of rebellion. Late at night, a violent mob, led by gun-totting Awami League storm troopers, invaded the non-Bengali settlements in the city and looted and burnt thousands of houses and hutments. The populous Wireless Colony and Ferozeshah Colony bore the brunt of the rebel attack. In the latter locality alone, 700 houses were set ablaze and most of their inmates – men, women and children – were burnt to death. Many, who escaped from their blazing houses, were shot in their tracks by the rebel gunmen.

Stray survivors of this wanton massacre described the gory spectacle of fire and destruction as "hell on earth". Affluent non-Bengalis were kidnapped for ransom and subsequently tortured and killed in slaughter-houses. Eye-witnesses said that a high-ranking member of the Awami League High Command, M. R. Siddiki, master-minded and supervised the grisly massacre of the non-Bengalis in Chittagong. After the March 3 nocturnal baptism of fire, the rebels felt

emboldened to attack other non-Bengali habitations in the city. Killer gangs looted and burnt hundreds of non-Bengali houses in Raufabad, Halishahar, Dotala, Kalurghat, Hamzabad, and Pahartali localities. Non-Bengali men, kidnapped from their houses, were taken by the rebels to slaughter-houses and done to death.

All through the first fortnight of March, the process of phased liquidation of the non-Bengali male population was continued in Chittagong and its neighbouring areas. The Awami League leadership trained its volunteers in the use of firearms, some looted from arms shops and the police armoury and many smuggled from India. The Army and Navy personnel had instructions not to shoot unless they were attacked; the local police had become ineffective. Thus the law and order machinery in Chittagong was totally paralysed. The civic fire fighting unit, manned mostly by Bengalis, had lapsed into a coma; fire engines which tried to reach the burning shanties were wrecked by the rebels.

In the third week of March, the terror regime of the rebels in Chittagong was so firmly established that they challenged even the military personnel in the area. Late in the night of March 18, armed killer gangs went on the rampage in every residential colony where non-Bengalis lived. For many thousands of non-Bengalis, it was “the night of long knives and blazing guns”. Killer gangs burst into homes, asked no questions and sprayed gunfire on the inmates. “Shoot anything that moves in the house of a non-Bengali” was the order to the killer gangs and they observed it with sadist devotion.

On March 23, Pakistan’s National Festival Day which the Awami League renamed as “Resistance Day”, the rebels held massive displays of their strength, tore up the Pakistan flag at a number of places and again went on the rampage against non-Bengalis at night. The Awami League storm troopers were reinforced by the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles, the para-military Ansars and the local police. The rebels were well-armed and appeared to have a surfeit of ammunition supply. On March 25, the rebels went on the warpath against Army and Navy personnel in Chittagong’s port area and tried to block all the access roads leading to the city. They erected huge barricades on the highway from the suburban locality of Agrabad to the Port area of Chittagong to prevent the transport of military personnel and arms to the Army cantonment. They dug trenches on the main road, and piled up burnt trucks and lorries and bitumen drums all along the highway to block vehicular traffic. Warehoused munition in the Port area was looted by the rebels. Bengali troops from the East Bengal Regiment mutinied and joined the rebel force. This was the zero-hour setting for the Awami League’s armed uprising and total seizure of the cantonments in Chittagong and Dacca planned for March 26.

In a pre-emptive strike late in the night of March 25 in Dacca and other important towns in East Pakistan, the federal troops went into action against the rebels. But the federal military force in the province was too inadequate to contain swiftly the challenge and revolt of the more than 176,000 armed Bengali rebels. At many places, it took from a week to a month for the federal army to retrieve the rebel-controlled areas. In Chittagong, the federal troops regained control over strategic parts of the city, such as the Port and the Airport, swiftly but a large number of residential localities remained under the terror rule of the rebel gunmen till April 9, 1971. In this period of hell and fire, many more thousands of non-Bengalis were butchered en masse. The operational headquarter of the rebels was located at the East Bengal Regimental Centre in Chittagong and the principal human abattoir was housed in the main town office of the Awami League. It had torture cells and a chamber of horror where blood was drained through syringes from the bodies of non-Bengali victims before they were killed by their inhuman captors.

The killing of the non-Bengali employees and their families in the Usmania Glass Works, Hafiz Jute Mill, Ispahani Jute Mill and other factories in Chittagong and the Amin Jute Mills at Bibirhat and the Karnaphuli Paper and Rayon Mills at Chandraghona and its neighbourhood surpassed the savagery of the Huns. Most of the massacres at these places were conducted by the rebels in the last five days of March and some early in April 1971. In many localities, there were hardly any non-Bengali survivors—so thorough and complete was the racist pogrom of the rebels.

In the notorious slaughter-house in the Government Rest House in Chittagong, about 4,000 non-Bengalis were done to death. Blood was taken out of their bodies and corneas were extracted from their eyes by Bengali doctors who had become the tools of the rebels. The corpses were dumped in hurriedly-dug, shallow pits. Any victim who showed signs of life was shot in the skull.

The Awami League militants had compelled some Bengali Imams (priests) in the Mosques to decree the killing of the Biharis as a religious duty of the Bengali Muslims. In a mosque, near the office of the Chittagong Fire Brigade, half a dozen non-Bengalis, who had been kidnapped from their homes by killer gangs, were murdered.

In the Kalurghat industrial area, some 5,000 non-Bengalis, including 300 women, were butchered by the Bengali rebels. Not more than a score of non-Bengalis survived the Kalurghat massacre. The non-Bengali women were raped by their captors — some on the roads in broad daylight — before being shot.

Savage killings also took place in the Haliashahar, Kalurghat and Pahartali localities where the Bengali rebel soldiers poured petrol and kerosene oil around entire blocks, igniting them with flame-throwers and petrol-soaked jute balls, then mowed down the non-Bengali innocents trying to escape the cordons of fire. In the wanton slaughter in the last week of March and early April, 1971, some 40,000 non-Bengalis perished in Chittagong and its neighbourhood. The exact death toll – which could possibly be much more – will never be known because of the practice of burning dead bodies or dumping them in the river and the sea. Many of the rampaging rebels were Hindus who desecrated Mosques and Muslim shrines and burnt copies of the Holy Quran.

Eye-witnesses, interviewed for this book, described M.R. Siddiki, a director of the genocide operation against non-Bengalis, as the “Butcher of Chittagong”. They charged that the slayings in the human abattoir in the Awami Leagued main town office were conducted under his personal command. “Kill the bastards” was his order of the day to his hatchetmen for murdering the non-Bengali innocents. As the rebel casualties mounted in engagements with the federal troops and the Bengali doctors asked for more blood for transfusion, M.R. Siddiki ordered his men to drain out blood from their non-Bengali victims in the slaughter-house before slaying them. He even suggested limb-grafting from non-Bengali victims to disabled Bengali rebels. Piled up dead bodies in the slaughter-houses, in the last days of March, 1971, were flung into pits and covered with mud, rubble and foliage.

As the rebels felt the crunch of the federal army and retreated, they massacred, with automatic weapons, many hundreds of helpless women and children who were herded and starved for days in mosques and school buildings. Aside from the wholesale abridgement of the male element in the non-Bengali population in Chittagong, several thousands of non Bengali girls and young women (14 to 30 years of age) were kidnapped by the rebels and ravished, some in mass sex assault chambers in guarded houses in the vicinity of the operational bases of the Bengali rebels. Sadists among the rebels took pleasure in forcing captive non-Bengali mothers to see the slaying of their sons or husbands.

After the federal army liberated Chittagong from the demonic rule of the rebels, the non-Bengali survivors resumed the broken threads of their lives and repaired their burnt out and devastated houses. But on December 17, 1971, their shattered world collapsed when the victorious Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized East Pakistan. Many thousands of non-Bengalis were killed, their families were driven out of their repaired homes and the survivors were herded in Relief Camps set up by the Red Cross.

The Washington Evening Star reported on May 12, 1971 the following story from Mort Resenblum who was one of the six foreign newsmen who toured East Pakistan early in May 1971:

“In the port city of Chittagong, a blood-spattered doll lies in a heap of clothing and excrement in a jute mill recreation club where Bengalis butchered 180 women and children Bengalis killed some West Pakistanis in flurries of chauvinism. Bengali civilians and liberation troops began mass slaughter of Mohajirs (Indian migrants) from the Indian State of Bihar and raced through market places and settlements, stabbing, shooting and burning, sometimes stopping to rape and loot.”

The Washington Evening Star, in its May 12, 1971 issue, also carried the following despatch of the Associated Press of America wire service:

“Newsmen visiting this key port yesterday said there was massive shell and fire damage and evidence of sweeping massacre of civilians by rebels.

“At the jute mills owned by the influential Ispahani family, newsmen saw the mass graves of 152 non-Bengali women and children reportedly executed last month by secessionist rebels in the Mills’ recreation club.

“Bloody clothing and toys were still on the floor of the bullet pocked Club. Responsible sources said thousands of West Pakistanis and Indian migrants (Muslims settled in East Pakistan since 1947) were put to death in Chittagong between March 25, when the East Pakistan rebellion began to seek independence from the Western Wing, and April 11 when the Army recaptured the city.

“Residents pointed to one burned out department building where they said Bengalis burned to death three hundred and fifty Pathans from West Pakistan”.

In a despatch from Chittagong, Malcolm Browne of the New York Times reported on May 10, 1971:

“But before the Army came, when Chittagong was still governed by the secessionist Awami League and its allies, Bengali workers, apparently resentful of the relative prosperity of Bihari immigrants from India, are said to have killed the Biharis in large numbers.”

The Sunday Times of London published in its issue of May 2, 1971 a dispatch from its Pakistan Correspondent, Anthony Mascarenhas, who had toured the rebellion-hit areas of East Pakistan in the first fortnight of April, 1971. He reported:

“In Chittagong, the colonel commanding the Military Academy was killed while his wife, eight months’ pregnant, was raped and bayoneted in the abdomen. In another part of Chittagong, an East Pakistan Rifles Officer was flayed alive. His two sons were beheaded and his wife was bayoneted in the abdomen and left to die with her son’s head placed on her naked body. The bodies of many young girls have been found with Bangladesh flagsticks protruding from their wombs
“The worst-affected towns were Chittagong and Khulna where the West Pakistanis were concentrated.”

The “Northern Echo” of Darlington in Durham, in its issue of April 7, 1971, said:
“Leon Lumsden, an American engineer on a U.S. aid project, said that for two weeks before the Army moved last week, Chittagong’s predominantly Bengali population had been but cheering West Pakistanis in the port.”

Some 5,000 non-Bengali refugees from the Awami League’s terror in Chittagong, who arrived in Karachi on board a ship in the third week of March 1971, related harrowing stories of the genocide launched against the non-Bengalis. The federal government prohibited their publication in the West Pakistan Press to prevent reprisals against the local Bengalis.

Mohammed Israil, 40, who lived in Quarter No. 28 in the Ispahani New Colony in the Pahartali locality in Chittagong, lost his sister, his brother-in-law and his infant nephew in the massacre of non-Bengalis on March 3, 1971. He thus spoke of the tragedy which almost wrecked his life:

“We had lived in Chittagong for the past many years and all of us spoke Bengali. I was engaged in business and I lived with my sister and her husband in their house in Pahartali.

“In the afternoon of March 3, about five thousand Bengali demonstrators, led by Awami League militants, attacked the Ispahani Colony where non-Bengalis lived in large numbers. The raiders bore blazing torches and some had guns. Without any provocation from our side, the killer mob went on the rampage. They poured kerosene oil and petrol on houses and set them ablaze. As the inmates rushed out, the killer gang mowed them with gunfire.

“A gang of ten armed rebels smashed the door of our house and burst in with blazing guns. They shot my brother-in-law who died on the spot. I was wounded and I feigned death. My sister, who grappled with the attackers, was bayoneted. The killers tore her suckling child from her arms and shot him just as she lay in her death agony. Later on, the killers looted our house and set it ablaze. I succeeded in crawling into the compound where I stayed in hiding for some

days. The killer gang burnt every house in this colony of about 2,000 non-Bengalis. They hurled many of the dead bodies into the blazing houses..... “

Mohammed Israil underwent fresh ordeals after December 17, 1971 when India seized East Pakistan. In December 1973, he was repatriated to Karachi.

“Some decent Bengalis were shocked at the heinous conduct of the Awami League gangs and their wanton murder of non-Bengalis but they were helpless. The killers had the guns,” said Mohammed Israil.

“The success of the Awami League gangs in their murderous spree of March 3 gave them encouragement and convinced them that they would not encounter any opposition from the police and the army in their plan to exterminate the non-Bengalis “, he added.

Noor Mohammed Siddiqui, 23, who lived with his parents in a rented house in the Ferozshah Colony in Chittagong, had this poignant recollection of the March 3, 1971 massacre there:

“In the forenoon of March 3, about 5,000 armed and yelling Awami League activists and their supporters raided the Ferozshah Colony. With them were some armed rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles. They wore their usual on-duty uniforms. Without any provocation from the non-Bengalis, the raiding mob went berserk. The Awami league militants looted hundreds of houses and burnt them by sprinkling a mixture of petrol and kerosene oil. As the inmates ran out, the killer gangs shot them at point blank range. It was God’s mercy that I escaped their murderous onslaught.

“I hid myself in a store room when the attackers came. When I emerged from hiding, I saw many hundreds of burnt houses in our locality. The stench of burning flesh pervaded the locality. Some of the victims, who were thought to be dead by the killers, writhed in agony and relief took long to come. The police had vanished. Killer gangs were again on the loose in our locality all through the next day. Many non-Bengalis who tried to escape from this blazing inferno of a colony were done to death on the roads outside. At night, the killers kidnapped many non-Bengali girls and raped them in houses whose inmates were murdered. Many children were tossed into houses aflame and their mothers were forced at gunpoint to watch the gruesome scene. In two days of terror and fire, Ferozshah Colony looked like an atom-bombed township.”

Noor Mohammad lost most of his relatives in the March 1971 massacres in East Pakistan. In April, 1971, he left Chittagong and came to Karachi.

“The scenes of that dreadful month are scared in my memory. Whole groups of adult people, it seemed, had gone mad with the urge to kill, burn, loot and rape. All the victims of this bloodlust were non-Bengalis. Some pro-Pakistan Bengalis, who tried to save their non-Bengali friends, were severely punished and even done to death”, said Noor Mohammad.

Forty-year-old Sharifan, whose two adult sons and husband were slaughtered before her dazed eyes on March 3, 1971, had this painful memory:

“My husband, Shamsul Haque, who was employed in a trading firm in Chittagong, my two grown-up sons and I lived in a hut in the Latifabad locality in Chittagong. On March 3, a violent mob of Bengalis attacked the non-Bengali hutments and houses in our locality. They set hundreds of huts and houses ablaze. They either shot the non-Bengali men or took them away in trucks as captives. Some non-Bengalis, who tried to escape from their burning houses, were mowed with rifle-fire; many perished in the conflagration.”

“A killer gang looted my hut and then set it ablaze. As we ran out, one of the killers opened fire on us. My two sons were injured. My husband and I were utterly helpless; I tore my Sari to bandage their wounds but in about ten minutes’ time they were cold and dead. Wailing in anguish, we sought shelter in the mosque nearby. My husband, who was heart-broken, kneeled in prayer to the Almighty God. I washed the stains of my sons’ blood from my torn Sari. Just then there was a loud yelling and a killer mob swarmed into the mosque. They said they would kill all the non-Bengali men sheltered in the mosque. I fell on my knees and begged them to spare our menfolk as most of them were advanced in age. One of the attackers struck me with his boot. There was a rifle shot and, to my horror, I saw my loving husband falling to the ground as blood gushed from his chest. I fainted and remained unconscious for some hours.

“The women in the mosque, whose dear ones had been shot and killed, moved their dead bodies to a corner in the compound of the mosque, made sheets from their Saris and covered up the corpses. We had no axe or shovel with which we could dig graves for our dead. We lived in the mosque in tears, fear and terror for more than three weeks. Late in March, the federal troops lodged us in a Relief Camp in a school building. After the Indian occupation of East Pakistan in December 1971, the Mukti Bahini harassed us but the Red Cross saved and helped us. We were repatriated to Karachi in February 1974 “.

Syed Sami Ahmed, 37, the lone survivor of a family of eight members, gave this grisly description of the slaughter in the Haliashahar locality in Chittagong on March 23, 1971:

“About 4,000 Awami Leaguers, rebel soldiers and other miscreants attacked the non-Bengali houses in Haliashahar in the forenoon of March 23. I was away from my house on work in another part of the city. The killer gangs looted my house and killed, with machine gunfire, my wife, my four little children, my teenage sister-in-law and my 13-year-old brother. The raiders burnt a part of my house. Not more than 15 per cent of the non-Bengali population in this locality survived the massacres on March 23, 25 and 27, 1971. The slaughterers used to tell their victims that they would not leave any Bihari alive. By Bihari, they meant any non-Bengali Muslim. Amongst the killers were many Hindus. They had plenty of arms and ammunition.”

After the federal troops secured Chittagong, Sami Ahmed lived for some months in his partly burnt house in Block No. I-193 in the Haliashahar locality in Chittagong. After India’s seizure of East Pakistan in the third week of December 1971, the Mukti Bahini and the Awami Leaguers slaughtered more non-Bengalis. He was repatriated to Karachi in November 1973.

Mohammed Nabi Jan, 20, who witnessed the massacre of non-Bengalis in the populous Wireless Colony in Chittagong on March 26, 1971, and lay wounded for three days in a mound of dead bodies, narrated his weird, story in these words:

“Large clusters of non-Bengali houses had existed in the Wireless Colony for many years past. In the second week of March 1971, armed bands of Awami leaguers marked every non-Bengali house with a red sign. As they had set up a Peace Committee, in whose meetings they solemnly pledged that they would not harm the non-Bengalis, we were not unduly alarmed. From time to time, the Awami League volunteers extorted money from us. We had learnt of the Awami Leaguers’ attacks on non-Bengalis in some other parts of the city and we were getting worried. My father and my elder brother wanted us to leave Chittagong but all the escape routes were blocked by the rebels, so we were resigned to our fate. We had no guns with us; we were defenceless

“In the night of March 26, at about 9 o’clock, a huge mob of Bengalis, with blazing guns, attacked the houses of non-Bengalis in the Wireless Colony. They had no difficulty in identifying their houses as they were red-marked a few days earlier. The killer mob divided itself into groups and went on the rampage. Many of the killers were uniformed Bengali defectors from the East Bengal Regiment and the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles. They broke into houses, asked no questions and sprayed gunfire on the inmates. After they had killed everything that moved, they looted the houses and stole articles of value from even dead bodies.

“A killer gang stormed our house and broke in with blazing guns. In a jiffy, I saw my father and my elder brother fall to the ground in a pool of blood. A bullet hit me in the thigh and I collapsed with a groan. They kidnapped my sister-in-law at gun-point. I remained unconscious for nearly three days. When I awoke, I found that my father, though badly wounded, was alive. My brother was dead. In the afternoon, the federal troops arrived and we were treated in a hospital. ”

Nabi Jan, who lived in Quarter No. L-14, G in the Wireless Colony, believes that more than 75 per cent of the non-Bengali population in the Wireless Colony was exterminated by the rebels during the March 1971 killings. Many of the survivors were done to death after India’s seizure of East Pakistan in December 1971. Nabi Jan was repatriated to Pakistan in December 1973.

Osman Ghani, 50, was employed in the Chittagong Port Trust and lived in the Bibirhat Colony in the Hamzabad locality in Chittagong. He gave this account of the slaughter in his locality in the night of March 26, 1971 when his only son and his elder brother were gunned to death:

“A huge mob of Awami League storm troopers, rebel soldiers and other cutthroats—all armed with guns and some with machine guns— attacked the non-Bengali houses in the Bibirhat Colony at about 10 p.m. on March 26. We had lived in terror for many days but we had not expected such a ferocious attack and in such huge numbers. We had no weapons with us. The Awami Leaguers had red-marked our houses in the middle of the month. The raiders, firing their guns, smashed into the houses of non-Bengalis and riddled all the male inmates with bullets. A killer gang broke the door of my house and gunned my elder brother. My wife tried to shield our 11-year-old son and begged the killers for mercy but the brutes shot him with a sten gun. They struck my wife with a rifle-butt on the head as she leaned over the writhing body of our dear little son. That night I was held up in the Port area and escaped death by inches. My house was inaccessible for three days. On March 29, when I went to my house, I cried in horror over the extermination of my family by the Bengali rebels “.

Osman Ghani was repatriated to Pakistan in December 1973. In his view, the rebels had started piling up arms for the planned armed uprising from the first week of March and India was a source of arms supply.

Fahmida Begum, 36, whose husband, Ghulam Nabi, was employed in a trading firm in Chittagong, saw the horrifying slaughter of her husband, her three sons and a little daughter in their house in Haliashahar in Chittagong on March 23, 1971. In a flurry of sobs and a burst of tears, she said:

“The killer gang tore off the locked door of our house in the course of their full-scale raid on our colony in the night of March 23. They machine-gunned my husband who collapsed with blood streaming from his chest. When the butchers turned their attention to my three young sons I grappled with the killers and snatched one of their guns. I did not know how to operate it. Waspishly, a rebel hit me on the head with his rifle and I fell down. They trussed me up with ropes and said that they would slaughter my children before me. One by one, they beheaded my three sons and kicked their severed heads. The killers bayoneted my little daughter and I fainted in horror. Imprinted on my memory is that dreadful scene – the terrorised look in the innocent eyes of my pretty little child, her desperate attempt to run towards me as the sharp gleaming edge of the bayonet touched her throat and her stifled groan of “Ami Bachao “ (Mother, Save me). God will certainly punish those killers; they were not men but beasts. “

Fahmida lived in a Relief Camp in Chittagong and was repatriated to Karachi in February 1974.

Bashir Hussain, 47, who lived in a small house in Tajpara in the Haliashahar township in Chittagong, lost his two sons in the massacre of non-Bengalis in his locality on March 25, 1971. He was severely wounded and the killers left him as dead. But after two days he regained consciousness and has lived to tell the world of the tragedy in his life. He said in Karachi, after his repatriation from Chittagong, in February 1974:

“Between March 15 and 26, Haliashahar was a special target of attack by the rebels. They conducted their genocidal operations against the non-Bengalis in various localities of the township every day, all through this period of fire and death.

“On March 25, they attacked my house and machine-gunned me and my two grown-up sons. I lost consciousness as I saw my two loving sons fall to the ground in a pool of blood. I was hit in the back and the thighs. The federal troops rescued me on the fifth day and I was treated in a hospital. My two sons were dead.

“The rebels, to a great extent, succeeded in their goal of exterminating the male members of non-Bengali families in my locality. They kidnapped non-Bengali young women by the thousands; many were ravished and some brutally killed. “

Shahid Hussain Abdi, 24, whose father worked as a Stores Officer in the Ispahani Jute Mills in Chittagong, gave this harrowing account of the massacre of non-Bengalis in the Mill area and its neighbourhood and the fiendish human abattoir

set up by the rebels in the Workers' Recreation Club in the Mill premises in March 1971:

“We lived in the staff quarters of the Ispahani Jute Mills. As Stores Officer, my father was kind to all the Mill employees – non-Bengalis and Bengalis alike. The number of non-Bengali employees and their families, most of whom lived in the Mill area, was close to 3,000. Since the middle of March, the Awami League militants and their supporters amongst the Bengali millhands were belligerently hostile towards the non-Bengalis. Between March 23 and 28, they raided the houses of the non-Bengalis, hijacked the men at gunpoint and butchered them in the slaughter-house set up in the factory's Recreation Club. Tortures of unimaginable brutality were inflicted on the victims before they were beheaded. There were syringes for drawing blood from the veins of the victims and for their storage in containers. The rebels carried the blood to their hospitals for their wounded soldiers and other jingoes. The killer gangs, a couple of days before the Army occupied the area, slaughtered hundreds of women and children in this human abattoir. “

Shahid Hussain was repatriated to Karachi in the middle of 1973 from Nepal. He had escaped from Chittagong to Kathmandu in 1972. He thinks that nearly 75 per cent of the non-Bengali male population in the Ispahani Jute Mills perished in the March 1971 massacre. Many of the non-Bengalis slaughtered in the Mill area were buried in mass graves hours before the federal army drove out the rebels.

Mohammed Sharfuddin, 40, who lived in House No. 673 in A Block in Haliashahar, Chittagong, and worked as a motor mechanic, lost his two brothers in the massacre of non-Bengalis in March 1971. Repatriated to Karachi from Chittagong in February 1974, he said:

“A little more than half of the population of some 50,000 people in Haliashahar consisted of non-Bengalis. For the past 24 years, they had lived in these settlements. Their relations with the Bengalis were cordial. All of them spoke Bengali fluently but in their homes they spoke Urdu. Many of the inhabitants in this locality originally hailed from the Indian State of Bihar. But there were also many West Pakistani families, including Punjabis and Pathans. The Bengalis called them Biharis, too.

“In the night of March 18, a rampaging mob of Awami League militants, rebel Bengali soldiers and thugs attacked our part of the colony and looted our houses and slaughtered all the male members of non-Bengali families. In my house, they gunned my two brothers and kidnapped their young wives. After the federal army took over Chittagong, I searched every nook and corner of Chittagong to

locate my missing sisters-in-law but there was no trace of them. At least 75 per cent of the male non-Bengali population in Halishahar was wiped out by the rebels in March 1971. “

Mosharaf Hussain, 35, who owned a Jute Baling Press in Chittagong and lived in the Agrabad locality, gave this account of the grisly events in March 1971:

“I had migrated from India to East Pakistan in 1950. I had transferred all my assets worth a million rupees to Chittagong. I prospered in the Jute trade and I bought a Jute Baling Press whose market value was two million rupees. “On March 21, a violent mob, led by Awami League militants, attacked my Jute Baling Press and set it ablaze. They also burnt the jute stocks and my shop which was located in the commercial hub of Chittagong .

“For more than two years, I lived in abject poverty. With great difficulty, I succeeded in coming to Pakistan in December 1973 from Chittagong. It was sheer good luck and God s mercy that my family and I escaped the massacre of the non-Bengalis in March 1971. “

Yunus Ahmed, 28, who was employed in an Insurance Firm in Chittagong, lost his 22-year-old brother in the massacre of non-Bengalis in the Ferozeshah Colony on March 18, 1971. He said in Karachi after his repatriation in February 1974:

“I had come with my parents as a child from India to Chittagong in 1949. Chittagong was our home town; we loved it. After the death of my father, I brought up my two younger brothers who were students in 1971.

“In the night of March 18, a killer gang of Awami Leaguers and rebel soldiers, armed with rifles and sten guns, raided our locality and slaughtered non-Bengali men by the thousands. One of my two brothers was at home; the killers burst into our house and riddled him with bullets. My other brother was away at that time in another part of Chittagong. I was also not at home when the killers came and killed my brother. They burnt hundreds of houses. Our Colony had borne the brunt of their previous attack on March 3, but on March 18 the raiders came armed with automatic weapons and explosives and the slaughter was savage. They kidnapped hundreds of non-Bengali young women, especially teenage girls. Many of their dead bodies were found early in April in houses used for mass torture and as sex assault chambers “.

Twenty-five year old Rahima, the Bengali widow of Shahid Ali, who lived with her husband and her four children in a house in the Shersah Colony in Chittagong, said:

“I am a Bengali by birth, having been born in Faridpur. My husband, Shahid Ali, hailed from Lucknow in India and I liked him and we were married. He was a gentle person who loved Chittagong and respected our Bengali friends.

“In a raid on our house in the Shershah Colony in the third week of March 1971, the killer gang murdered my husband. I begged them to spare his life and even fell at their feet. But they were mad thugs who were out for a kill. Amongst the raiders were some Hindus whose hatred of the non-Bengalis was intense

“If the Government had swiftly crushed the violence and terror unleashed by the Awami League militants in the first week of March 1971, the trouble may have been nipped in the bud. By giving the long rope to the rebels, the Government emboldened them and they got ample time to plan and execute their Operation “Loot, Burn and Kill “ against the non-Bengalis in Chittagong .

“Amongst the thousands massacred in Chittagong in March, 1971, were many Bengalis who were loyal to Pakistan. Some Bengalis, who protected non-Bengalis, were also killed by the rebels.

“My four children are my late husband’s legacy to me. I am in Pakistan with them because they are born Pakistanis. “

Mrs. Rahima Abbasi, 40, who worked as a teacher in the Lions’ School in Chittagong, gave this account of the raid on her school on March 21, 1971:

“We lived in our own house on M. A. Jinnah Road. My husband was in business and I worked as a teacher in the Lions’ School which was an English medium school. We had students from Bengali and non-Bengali middle class families.

“On March 21, a violent mob of Bengalis, led by Awami League militants, raided our school. They injured the School’s Chowkidar (Watchman) who had closed the front gate. As a Bengali, he appealed to them not to cause a disturbance in the school. One of the attackers shot him in the leg and he collapsed. The vicious crowd then swarmed into our office and the classrooms. They molested the female teachers and students. When we realised that they had plans to kidnap our girls, we raised a hue and cry and our screams for help attracted the neighbours. About 50 of them, led by a prominent pro-Pakistan Bengali leader of our locality, came to our rescue and grappled with the raiders. In the fight that ensued, three of the raiders were killed and the others escaped. No one amongst the teachers and the students was injured. The school was closed for some days after this incident. “

Mrs. Abbasi, her husband and their children were repatriated to Karachi from Chittagong in March 1974.

Rahim Afindi, who was employed in a shipping firm in Chittagong and who had a miraculous escape from death when the Bengali insurgents murdered non-Bengalis in the Chittagong port area, gave this account of his hair-raising experience in March 1971:

“I was employed in the shipping firm of Messrs. Yaqub Ah and Sons in Chittagong. The owner of the firm, Mr. Yaqub Ali, was a God-fearing Muslim, devoted to Islam and the ideology of Pakistan. A Bengali, he was in the Pakistan Movement in pre-Independence Bengal and knew many prominent Muslim League Bengali leaders. He was closely related to a one-time Speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly, Mr. Fazlul Qader Chowdhury. He had many non-Bengali employees in his firm and he treated them as well as his Bengali employees.

“On March 20, Mr. Yaqub Ali took me to the Chittagong harbour where a ship whose unloading was to be done by his firm was docked. We went on board the ship and Mr. Yaqub Ali talked to the Captain. Suddenly, we heard yells for help and the echo of gunshots from down below. We rushed from the Captain’s cabin to the deck and saw that killer mobs, armed with guns, were slaughtering people on the wharf. Mr. Yaqub Ali asked me to stay on board the ship with the Captain and he rushed down the gangway to the quay. A very brave man, he ran into the crowd of the killers and appealed to them in the name of God not to slaughter the innocents. Some one in the killer gang shouted that Yaqub Ali was pro-Pakistan and a Muslim Leaguer. In a matter of minutes, the killer gang killed him and chopped up his dead body before flinging it into the sea. Subsequently, I learnt that Yaqub Ali Saheb shouted “Pakistan Zindabad “ (Long Live Pakistan) as the killer gang ordered him to shout “Joy Bangla “ (Long Live Bangla) before they killed him. “

Rahim Afindi was sheltered by the Captain of the ship for some days. He escaped the massacre of non-Bengalis. In March 1974, he was repatriated to Pakistan. He is certain that more than 50,000 non-Bengalis perished in the March 1971 carnage in Chittagong and its neighbouring localities.

Nasim Ahmed, 22, who lived with his father, a prominent Muslim League activist, in their own house in Pahartali area of Chittagong, gave this narrative of his father’s murder by the rebels:

“My father, Mr. Wasim Ahmed, was a well-known and thriving businessman in Chittagong. He was devoted to the ideology of Pakistan and was active in the local Muslim League. Bengalis and non-Bengalis alike respected him for his integrity and for his courage. He helped many charitable causes.

“On March 20, 1971, he was on his way to the main Community Centre of our area in connection with a meeting of prominent citizens which had been called to devise ways of maintaining peace in the town. On the way, a rampaging mob of rebels overpowered him and slaughtered him. Shortly afterwards, the killer mob went berserk and looted and burnt hundreds of non-Bengali homes. “

Nasim Ahmed and his widowed mother were sheltered by a Godfearing Bengali family and they survived the carnage. In September, 1973. they were repatriated to Pakistan. Nasim Ahmed thinks that more than 75,000 non-Bengalis were butchered in the March-April, 1971 carnage in Chittagong and its neighbourhood. Another 10,000 non-Bengalis, in his view, perished in the wake of India’s seizure of East Pakistan on December 17, 1971. The most savage killings, he said, were done by the Bengali rebel soldiers who had automatic weapons and the local Hindus who hated the non-Bengalis.

Jamdad Khan, 42, who worked as a Security Guard, in the Gul Ahmed Jute Mills in Agrabad in Chittagong, testified:

“I had joined the Gul Ahmed Jute Mills as a Security Guard in July 1971. Before that I lived in the N.W.F.P. In Chittagong, I lived in a quarter in the Nasirabad Housing area. I had heard from non-Bengalis about the mass slaughter which the Bengali rebels had conducted in March 1971 in Chittagong. One day, on my way to the Jute Mill, I spotted a small human skull lying outside a deserted house. Through a crack in a window, I looked inside. To my horror, the skulls and bones of many children lay in heaps inside the locked room. Some clothes were strewn on the floor and they looked to be the ones usually worn by non-Bengali children. With the help of some friends, I dug a grave and interred the remains of the innocents in it. Subsequently, I learnt that in March 1971, this house was used as a slaughter-house by the rebels and they had killed many women and children in it.

“After India’s seizure of East Pakistan on December 17, 1971, the Mukti Bahini and Awami League storm troopers again went on the rampage against non-Bengalis. Amongst those killed were many hundreds of Punjabis and Pathans who were doing business in Chittagong or were employed in the administration and firms. The non-Bengalis were sheltered in camps put up by the Red Cross but it was the daily practice of the Mukti Bahini and Awami league militants to kidnap non-Bengalis by the scores. They were tortured in jails and killed. Their dead bodies were thrown into the sea. To win the sympathy of the Indian military officers stationed in Chittagong, the local Awami Leaguers dug up the dead bodies of hundreds of non-Bengalis from shallow mass graves and showed them as the skeletons of Bengalis murdered by the Pakistan Army. The Awami

League politicians also showed these skeletons to foreign newsmen, especially Indian journalists. The Indian military, thereupon, gave a free hand to the Mukti Bahini to pick off as many non-Bengalis as they wished from the Red Cross camps. Living conditions in these camps were dreadful. We drank polluted water and we ate stinking bread “.

Thirty-year-old Zaibunnissa, whose husband, Mohammed Ahmed, was employed as a Postman in Chittagong, gave this account of his murder by the Bengali rebels on March 25, 1971:

“At about 10 a.m. on March 25, a dozen armed Bengali militants entered our house in Sholashahar in Chittagong. In the killer gang were two Hindus whose names I heard from their accomplices. Three gunmen overpowered my husband and shot him dead. The other raiders looted my house with the thoroughness of trained burglars. I grappled with one of the killers when he trained his gun at one of my small children. I snatched his gun but I did not know how to fire it. All the thugs grabbed me and slapped and kicked me. They dragged the dead body of my husband to a pit and dumped it there. Our Bengali neighbours watched the raid on our house in mute silence; they said they were too scared to come to our help. They helped me bury the body of my departed husband.

“On March 26, an armed rebel came to my house and told me that they had orders to kill every male non-Bengali in the locality. He said that I should not shelter any non-Bengali friends otherwise I and my children would be done to death. We were very scared. On March 27, we left our home through a back door, walked three miles to a place where some Burmese families lived and sought shelter with one of them. They looked after us like angels. On April 9, after the Pakistan Army had re-established its control over Chittagong and our locality, we returned to our home. After India’s armed grab of East Pakistan, the Mukti Bahini terrorised us, deprived us of our home and we lived in a Red Cross Camp. In January 1974, my four children and I were repatriated to Pakistan.

Fifty-year-old Mujeeba Khatoon, who lived in Quarter No. 78/K in the Sagoon Bagan locality in Chittagong, said that her eldest son died of a heart attack when a killer gang attacked their house and looted it on March 3, 1971. The raiders checked his body to ensure that he was dead. “They said they were sparing me because of my old age “, Mujeeba Khatoon said. Her other son, who saw the killings of non-Bengalis in Santahar, lost his mental balance because of the shock of it. All her other relatives in East Pakistan perished in the carnage. In January 1974, she was repatriated to Karachi from a Red Cross Camp in Chittagong.

Nabihun Bibi, 70, who lived in Quarter No. 100 in the Raufabad locality in Chittagong, gave this account of the brutal murder of her aged husband by the Bengali rebels in March 1971:

“A killer gang of rebels had raided our locality a number of times since their first murderous assault on March 3. On March 25, they made a full-blast attack on our colony. A gang of armed Bengalis broke into our house and killed my aged, sick husband, Abdul Majid. I begged them to spare an old, ailing man but they said they had instructions to kill every male non-Bengali. One of them said: “We are not killing you because one of these days you will come to work in our homes as a domestic servant.

“After the federal army secured Chittagong, we lived in peace for nine months. But after India’s capture of East Pakistan in December 1971, the Mukti Bahini and Awami League volunteers staged a second bloodbath of non-Bengalis. They drove me out of my house, saying that as a non-Bengali I had no claim to even an inch of Bengali soil. For some two years I lived in a Relief Camp in Chittagong and was repatriated to Pakistan in February 1974. “

Twenty-seven-year-old Tahmeena Khatoon, whose husband was employed in the Amin Jute Mills in Chittagong, lived in the Feroze-shah Colony. She gave this account of the murder of her husband by the Bengali rebels in March 1971:

“On March 15, a group of Bengalis knocked on our door and called out the name of my husband, Amanatullah. He met them and they said that he was urgently wanted at the Jute Mill. One of the callers was an employee of the Mill whom he knew. I urged him not to go because I had heard that the Bengali rebels were using all manner of ruses to kidnap non-Bengalis and they were subsequently murdered. My husband ignored my plea and went with them. After an hour, one of the callers returned and told me that my husband’s life would be spared if I paid him Rs. 500. I scraped up all the cash I had with me and gave it to him. I ran with him to see the place where my husband was held but the thug gave me the slip and vanished. When I returned home, two trucks, with armed Bengalis, arrived and they looted all the valuables in our house. They took away even the furniture and the crockery. The next day I learnt that the rebels had murdered my husband. I tried to go to my father’s place but his locality was under rebel control. Two days later, I heard that he was also killed by the rebels during a raid on his locality “.

Halima Bibi, 27, saw her husband, Mohammed Wakeel, butchered by the Bengali rebels on March 28, 1971 in a savage attack on non-Bengali homes in the Raufabad locality of Chittagong. She said: “More than a dozen of my relatives perished in the March 1971 massacres in East Pakistan “. She continued:

“On March 28, a killer mob raided our locality and ransacked the houses of non-Bengalis. They looted all the valuables in these homes and carted them away in trucks. They also looted my house and set it ablaze. As my husband and I ran from our burning home, two gunmen riddled my husband with bullets and he died on the spot. I begged the killers to finish me off too because I had no relatives left in Chittagong. “After a while we will have you as our domestic servant”, they replied. I buried my dead husband in a shallow pit and covered it with mud. I sought refuge in a mosque for a day and then I went back to my partially burnt out house. The federal troops arrived in the first week of April, 1971, and offered to shift me to a Relief Camp. I asked them to find out whether my father who lived in Santahar was alive. They made prompt inquiries and I was informed that the Bengali rebels had murdered him.

Halima was repatriated to Pakistan from the Red Cross Camp in Chittagong in February 1974.

Romaisha Khatoon, 35, whose husband, Anzarul Haq, was a Railway employee, lived in Quarter No. 763 in Block B in the Haliashahar Housing Estate in Chittagong. On March 25, a killer gang kidnapped him from his house and murdered him in the slaughterhouse set up by the rebels in the Government Rest House. Romaisha, who was repatriated to Pakistan from Chittagong along with her three children in December 1973, sobbed out her woeful story in these words: “The Bengali rebels had made a murderous attack on our locality on March 3. But they did not break into our house. On March 23, a killer gang raided our house and trucked away all the valuables we had, including our furniture and crockery. They warned us not to leave our house because all the escape routes were blocked. We were defenceless. They had carried away even the kitchen knives in our home.

“In the night of March 25, a killer gang attacked our locality again. They blasted the door of my house and grabbed my husband. I threw myself at the feet of the raiders and begged them to spare my husband. They kicked me in the head. I wailed; I screamed and I entreated but the killers forced him into a jeep and drove away. I heard them say in Bengali that they were heading for the Rest House. I knew that my husband was being dragged to the execution chamber because the Rest House had become notorious as a slaughter-house set up by the rebels. Hundreds of non-Bengali males, kidnapped from their homes in our locality, were taken to this human abattoir for slaughter. After the federal army captured Chittagong from the rebels, I approached the Pakistani military personnel for help in locating the dead body of my husband. They said that the dead bodies in the slaughter-house in the Rest House were mutilated beyond recognition and that there was no trace of my husband’s body. “

Salma Khatoon, 35, whose husband worked as a tailor in the Raufabad locality of Chittagong, testified that a killer gang of rebels attacked her house at night on March 25, 1971 and slaughtered her husband. Ali Raza, his younger brother and her nephew. The raiders looted every article of value in her house and set it ablaze. She said:

“The raiders were mad killers. They said they had orders to kill every male non-Bengali. We are sparing you, they said, so that in the near future we can employ you as a domestic servant in our homes. After two and a half years of miserable life, my children and I were repatriated to Pakistan in February 1974 “.

Fatema Begum, 40, who lived with her husband, Abdur Rahman, a businessman, in a house in Raufabad in Chittagong, reported that a gang of armed Bengali rebels raided her house on March 25, 1971, and killed her husband. They looted her house and trucked away all the loot. Fatema said:

“Murder and loot were the principal motives of the aimed rebels when they raided the homes of non-Bengalis. The killers followed a set pattern in their “Operation Loot, Burn and Kill “ in Chittagong. The vast majority of the adult male non-Bengalis was eliminated by the rebels in a month of ruthless killing..... “

Fatema and her children were repatriated to Karachi from Chittagong in February 1974. They had spent nearly two and a quarter years in a Red Cross Relief Camp in Chittagong. She said:

“Hundreds of teenage girls were kidnapped from our locality by the Bengali rebels. We found no trace of them after the rebels retreated. There were reports that the killers violated their chastity, murdered them and threw their bodies into the Karnaphuli river “.

Sayeeda Begum, 55, whose husband, Maqbool Ahmed Khan, was employed in the East Pakistan Railway at Chittagong, lived in an apartment in “C “ Building (Number 21) in the Ferozeshah Colony in Chittagong. After her repatriation to Pakistan in February 1974, Sayeeda testified:

“The Bengali rebels made their first raid on our colony on March 3. They burnt and looted a number of houses owned by non-Bengalis and kidnapped a number of non-Bengali menfolk . “

“On March 25, a gang of armed rebels smashed the front door of our flat and overpowered my husband. They fastened him with ropes and dragged him

outside the building. Our neighbours were helpless because their men were also being kidnapped in a similar manner. The Bengali rebels looted my house and carried away all the booty in a truck.

“On April 9, when the federal army came to our help, I scoured every nook and corner of Chittagong to trace out my husband but there was no sign of him. I learnt that the rebels had taken all their victims from our locality to a slaughterhouse where they were done to death and their dead bodies were thrown into the Karnaphuli river. The Mukti Bahini drove me out of my house after its occupation of Chittagong in December 1971. My only son and I lived in a camp set up by the Red Cross in Chittagong for two years. “

Sayeeda Khatoon, 34, whose husband, Bafati Hussain, was employed as a Watchman at the Chittagong Port Trust, lived in Quarter No. 594 on Road No. 1 in Block A in the Haliashahar locality in Chittagong. Repatriated to Karachi in January 1974, she said:

“On March 5, a killer gang stole into our house. At gunpoint, they tied my father and my elder brother with ropes and carted them away in a truck. They looted my house and carried all the loot with them.

“In the afternoon, a Bengali boy, who had known our family, brought me the shocking news that the rebels had murdered my father and my brother and thrown their bodies into the river. When the Pakistan Army re-occupied Chittagong, I brought my aged mother from her gutted house to our home. My husband had survived the slaughter in the Port area.

“After the Indian victory in December 1971, the Mukti Bahini went on the rampage against non-Bengalis, looting and killing. We survived the carnage. In November 1972, my husband died after a short illness. We had no money left for medicines, and proper medical treatment for the non-Bengalis in the hospitals was difficult to get. “

Zainab Bibi, 55, who lived with her two teenage sons in Quarter No. 111 in Raufabad in Chittagong, thus narrated the story of the murder of her dear ones by the Bengali rebels in March 1971:

“On March 3, when the first raid on the houses of non-Bengalis was conducted by the Bengali rebels in Chittagong, my two sons and I escaped into the nearby woods and we spent the night there.

“On March 25, a large killer gang again raided our Colony. They came so suddenly that we had no time to escape. I made my two sons slip under the cot

which had a mattress over it. The killers knew that I was a widow and that I had two sons. They had made inquiries about my household before the raid. They looted my house and took away even the rice in the kitchen. Just when they were leaving, they remembered the mattress on my cot and one of them rushed inside to pick it up. He spotted my two sons cowering in fear under the cot. He yelled and the killer gang rushed in again. One of them slapped and kicked me for hiding my two sons and said that they would be shot before me. I fell down on their feet and begged them to spare my beloved sons. But the killers had become savages. They lined up my two sons against the wall and shot them at point blank range. I rushed towards them and the killers bashed my head with a rifle butt. I lost consciousness.

“I woke up in a hospital. The federal Army had taken me there for treatment. I refused to go back to my house; I was mentally upset. The dreadful scene of the slaughter of my two sons haunted me day and night. I was lodged in a Relief Camp. After the Indians and the Mukti Bahini occupied Chittagong in December 1971, the non-Bengalis were subjected to a fresh bloodbath by the vicious victors. I have no relatives left in the world. In February 1974, I was repatriated to Karachi. I no longer live in constant fear of the brutes who killed my loving sons but I have lost the zest for life and I await a date with my Maker. “

Hasina Khatoon, 25, whose husband, Mohammed Yasin, was employed in the Amin Jute Mills in Chittagong, lived in a rented house in the Sholashahar locality in Chittagong. They had escaped the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis by running off into the forest in the nick of time. After the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini occupied Chittagong in the third week of December 1971, a killer gang raided their locality. They again tried to escape but her husband was hit in the leg by bullets. As Hasina leaned over to help her husband to rise and walk, her 4-month-old daughter slipped from her arm and hit the ground, head first. She massaged the child's head and heart but the baby died on the road. While her husband writhed in pain, she dug a shallow grave and buried her child. Repatriated to Karachi from Chittagong in February, 1974, she said:

“A God-fearing Bengali saw our plight and came to our rescue. He took my wounded husband to the main hospital and pleaded with the Bengali doctors to admit him for treatment. It seemed they were reluctant to do so because he was a Bihari. Medical treatment improved his condition. I took up employment in a home and gave him my earnings for the purchase of medicine. On February 6, 1972, when I went to see him in the Hospital I was told that he was dead. I learnt that some Bihari patients had died in the hospital for want of proper attention and care. “

Hasina lived in a Red Cross Camp in Chittagong for two years and was repatriated to Pakistan in February, 1974.

Batoolan, 40, whose husband was employed in the Amin Jute Mills in Chittagong and who lived in the Bibirhat locality, said:

“On March 25, a killer gang of Bengali rebels drove us out of our house at gunpoint. They looted it and then set it ablaze. The killers said that there was no place for us in East Pakistan. When our house was reduced to a rubble, my husband, Mohamed Mustafa, my little daughter and I sought refuge in a Mosque. Another gang of killers raided this House of God. When they were grappling with my husband in order to tie him up with ropes, I tried to snatch a gun from one of the killers. He struck me with a bayonet and my arm bled profusely. The killers dragged my husband to a waiting truck outside the mosque and sped away to what I learnt was a human abattoir set up by the Bengali rebels for murdering the non-Bengali men. My little daughter and I lived in the Mosque for a week; we starved for days. We were rescued by the Pakistan Army. We were later on lodged in a Relief Camp. “

Batoolan and her daughter were repatriated to Karachi in February 1974.

“March 25, 1971 was the horrible day on which I was widowed by the Bengali rebels “, said 30-year-old Zaibunnissa who lived in the Ferozeshah Colony in Chittagong. Her husband, Akhtar Hussain, was employed as a clerk in the Ispahani tea company in Chittagong. Repatriated to Karachi with her three children in February 1974, Zaibunnissa said:

“Our colony was raided intermittently by the Bengali rebels since March 3, 1971 but we had escaped the killers. On March 25, a large killer gang attacked our locality and looted hundreds of homes and burnt many. They looted my house and trucked away all the valuables which we had gathered over the years. They tied up my husband with ropes and took him away in a truck. I learnt that the Bengali rebels, in their March 25 raid, kidnapped non-Bengali men by the hundreds. Those who tried to escape were shot. The rebels, I was told, took my husband to a slaughter-house where he, along with the other non-Bengali captives, was butchered. After the Pakistani troops re-occupied Chittagong, I visited jails and the buildings where the rebels had set up the human abattoirs but I could find no trace of my husband. The rebels usually threw the dead bodies of their victims in the Karnaphuli river. “

“I lost consciousness as I saw, in utter helplessness, the throat of my husband being slit by a Bengali cutthroat on March 3, 1971 “, said 40- year old Mahila Khaton who was repatriated from Chittagong to Karachi with her two children

in February 1974. Mahila lived in a shack in the Wireless Colony in Chittagong. She reported:

“My husband, Sheikh Amanat, was employed in the Amin Jute Mills in Chittagong. On March 3, 1971, a huge mob of Bengali rebels, yelling “Joi Bangla”, invaded our predominantly non-Bengali locality. They looted hundreds of houses and burnt many of them. As the victims tried to escape from their blazing houses, the rebels gunned them. A killer squad stormed my house; they stole every article of value that we had. They overpowered my husband. I lunged at one of the killers who was brandishing a large knife, ready for the ‘kill’. He struck me on the head and I fell down. The next moment I saw him slashing the throat of my helpless husband. I lost my senses and was unconscious. For three months, I had frequent attacks of delirium. The Pakistan Army removed me and my children to a camp in the Sardar Bahadur School. In February 1974, we were repatriated to Karachi. “

“The Bengali rebels lined up all the non-Bengali men who had sought refuge in the main Mosque of our locality on March 24, 1971 and mowed them with machine gunfire. I fainted when I saw my husband, Nizamuddin, slump to the ground in a pool of blood “, said Hamida, 30, who lived in the vicinity of the Ferozeshah Colony in Chittagong. Her husband was employed in the East Pakistan Railway at Chittagong. She was repatriated to Karachi in January 1974. Hamida said:

“On March 23, 1971, a violent mob raided our locality. They looted and burnt hundreds of houses. My house was also looted and put to the torch by the rebels. My husband and I succeeded in escaping to a nearby Mosque. There were many other terrorised non-Bengali families sheltered in the Mosque. At night, we saw the flames leaping from what until yesterday was a populous, smiling settlement “
“On January 8, 1972, my husband was ill. He left the house in order to go to the Hospital for treatment. On the way, he was waylaid by a Mukti Bahini gang which gunned him to death. At night, I left my house in search of him. Some Bengalis who had known us told me that they had seen a dead body lying in a ditch a furlong away. I ran towards it. Inside the pit lay the bullet-riddled body of my husband. I felt like killing myself but the thought of my children made me live on. “

Sanjeeda Khaton, 35, whose husband worked in the Electric Supply office in Chittagong, lived in a small house in the Haliashahar locality in Chittagong. Repatriated to Karachi in January 1974, Sanjeeda gave this pathetic account of the murder of her husband by the Bengali rebels in March 1971:

“Panic-stricken by the gruesome slaughter conducted by the rebels in non-Bengali settlements in Chittagong since March 3, about 250 non-Bengali men, women and children of our locality took refuge in a large walled building. My husband and I and our three children were in this building. Our house was looted and burnt by the rebels in the course of raids on our locality in the past few weeks.

“On March 27, about 500 armed rebels, some brandishing machine guns, stormed our building. We were defenceless; we did not have even a kitchen knife. Resistance was out of question. The killers, aiming guns at us, told the menfolk that if they wanted their women and children to live they should line up in the compound of the building. The men kissed their children and said goodbye to their wives, mothers and sisters. They were lined up in the compound and in less than ten minutes the Bengali gunmen mowed them with bullets.

“The killer gang then led us to a godown which looked like a stinking dungeon. There was filth all over the floor. We were herded inside it. I had lost the urge to live because of the murder of my husband by the rebels in the building. My children were starving. In this dungeon, even water was denied to us. I heard one of the Bengali guards say that on the morrow they would burn us to death. The killers had brought kerosene oil tins to burn the godown. At night, I slipped my little son out of a window and asked him to unlock the main door of the godown, which was bolted in the middle and not locked. The Bengali guards, it seemed, had been drafted by the rebels to block the advance of the Pakistani troops who had gone into action against the rebels. Our escape bid was successful and we raced towards the main Hospital which had come under the Army’s control. Many of us were almost naked because our Saris were torn in the escape bid. The federal troops gave us clothes to wear. Some of us were lodged in a Relief Camp. Others went to live with their relatives who had survived the massacre. “

Eye-witnesses gave heart-rending accounts of the murder of non-Bengali employees in the Usmania Glass Works on March 27, and in the Hafiz Jute Mills and the Ispahani Jute Mills in Chittagong in March and April 1971. In the slaughter in the Amin Jute Mills at Bibirhat, some 2000 non-Bengalis – members of the staff and their families – were slaughtered. In the Usmania Glass Works, almost all the West Pakistani staff members were butchered. In the Hafiz Jute Mills, a killer mob looted and burnt the house of its non-Bengali Proprietor and killed 150 non-Bengali employees and their families. In the Ispahani Jute Mills, there were very few survivors of the slaughter of non-Bengalis. Stacks of mutilated dead bodies of the hapless victims, whose blood had been drained out before they were done to death, were found by the federal troops in the Recreation Club for Mill workers which the rebels used as a human abattoir.

Many other parts of the Chittagong Division were stricken by the Awami League-instigated civil strife in March and April 1971. Witnesses said that the slaying of non-Bengalis and the wanton looting of their property had taken place in Nazirhat, Anwara, Dohazari, Kumira and Hathazari. When tension was sparked off at these places in the middle of March, 1971, many non-Bengali families fled to Chittagong city. In their absence, vandals looted their houses. A few non-Bengali families in Cox's Bazar were also the victims of genocidal violence.

CHAPTER FOUR

Massacres in Chandraghona , Rangamati

Wajihunnissa, 35, whose husband was employed in the Central Excise Department and was posted at Chandraghona, gave this account of the March 1971 slaughter of non-Bengalis in her township:

“In the second week of March 1971, Awami League gangs visited the non-Bengalis in our locality and assured them that no harm would touch them if they surrendered their weapons. My husband, Maqsood Alam, who was an excellent marksman, complied with their instructions and gave up his gun.

“In the third week of March, roving bands of armed Awami Leaguers terrorised the non-Bengalis and extorted money from them. They had blocked all the escape routes.

“On March 26, an armed group of Awami Leaguers called at our house and ordered my husband to go with them to his office, I knew that it was a ruse and that they were after the blood of my husband....

“On March 27, another killer gang raided my house. They told me and the three brothers of my husband that the Deputy Commissioner of Rangamati had instructed that we should be taken to his office to protect us. As we prepared to go, the killers asked me at gunpoint to stay back. They roped my brothers-in-law together and put them in a truck.

“In the afternoon, a huge mob of Bengali rebels raided our locality and looted the houses of non-Bengalis. Our menfolk had been kidnapped. A killer gang ransacked my house and looted everything, except the ceiling fans and wardrobes. They drove the non-Bengali women and children, like cattle, to a large compound where we were ordered to stay. For fifteen days we were starved, and we prayed to God for help. On April 13, our captors learnt that the Pakistani troops were marching towards Chandraghona. The rebels ordered us to fall in line and we knew that they would open fire on us. Some of us tried to break loose and there was a melee. All of a sudden a shell fell and burst a few yards away from the compound where we were herded by our captors. We saw in the far distance a company of Pakistani soldiers, waving the Green and Crescent flag, racing towards us. Our cowardly captors took fright and scampered like mice running away from a cat. The Pakistani troops gave us

water and food. They freed 200 non-Bengali women and children who were held captive in another camp in Chandraghona. We learnt that all the non-Bengali men who had been kidnapped by the rebels from Chandraghona were slaughtered and dumped into the Karnaphuli river.

“The federal Army accommodated us in a Relief Camp in Chittagong. After the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini captured Chittagong in the third week of March 1971, they unleashed death and destruction on the non-Bengalis. My little daughter caught a chill in the wintry cold; no hospital was willing to treat the child of a Bihari. She died in my arms. I was moved to a Red Cross Camp after some days. In February 1974, was repatriated to Karachi. “

Witnesses from Chittagong said that in April 1971, the Bengali rebels looted the Karnaphuli Paper and Rayon Mills and slaughtered the non-Bengali staff and their families. Not many escaped the massacre. Hundreds of teenage girls, kidnapped after their fathers or husbands had been murdered, were ravished by their Bengali captors in houses used for mass slaughter and sex assault. It is estimated that more than 5,000 non-Bengalis perished in the massacre in Chandraghona in March-April 1971. This is far in excess of the initial figure of 3,000 dead given out by the Government in its August 1971 White Paper on the East Pakistan crisis. Rebel soldiers of the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles looted all the cash from the Karnaphuli Paper and Rayon Mills and spared the lives of some senior staff members after they paid them huge sums of money as ransom.

RANGAMATI

Rangamati is a picturesque town situated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Forty-five miles from Chittagong, it lies on the bank of the Karnaphuli River. In March-April 1971, the Awami League's rebellion engulfed it in the flames of conflict and the non-Bengalis were exterminated by the hundreds. In April 1971, all the non-Bengalis living in Rangamati were rounded up by armed gangs of rebels and slaughtered before the federal Army arrived. The Circuit House in Rangamati, which attracted tourists from far and wide, was used as the operational base by the rebels from where they directed the campaign to liquidate the non-Bengalis in Chandraghona and Rangamati.

Abid Hussain, 34, who was employed in the Karnaphuli Paper and Rayon Mills, lived in a small house in Rangamati because he could not get a staff quarter in the Mill premises. Repatriated to Karachi with his wife in February 1974, he testified:

“The first major incident in the Karnaphuli Paper and Rayon Mills occurred on March 18 when Awami League militants incited the Bengali millhands to kill the

non-Bengali staff and their families and occupy the Mill. Realising what lay in store for us, I rushed to my house and, along with my wife; we took shelter in the house of a God-fearing and trustworthy Bengali friend. “

“Roving bands of Awami Leaguers had terrorised the non-Bengalis in Rangamati all through March 1971 and kidnapped many of the non-Bengali men for slaughter. But in April 1971, the Bengali rebels rounded up all the non-Bengalis, herded them in school buildings and gunned them to death before the federal Army came “, he said.

“I had shifted to a friend’s house in Chittagong after the federal Army had beaten the rebels. When I visited Rangamati again, there was hardly any non-Bengali left “, he added.

Some escapees from the Awami League’s terror in Rangamati sought refuge in the shacks of Chakma tribesmen in April 1971 and they trekked back to Rangamati after the Pakistan Army had established control over it.

Witnesses said that the rebel gangs used to dump at night truck-loads of corpses into the Karnaphuli river. Many of these dead bodies floated into the Bay of Bengal and the crew and passengers on board foreign ships reported sighting many bloated human corpses in the sea.

CHAPTER FIVE

Fire and Death in Khulna

The Awami League's rebellion triggered a rash of disturbances and lawlessness in Khulna, the hub of East Pakistan's jute trade and industry, in the first week of March 1971.

On March 4, a riotous crowd, led by armed Awami Leaguers, raided the local Telephone Exchange, wrecked a part of the equipment and slayed a number of employees, mostly non-Bengalis. The next day, a large killer gang, brandishing rifles, sickles, spears and knives, looted four shops and burnt a hotel in the heart of the city. Another mob, armed with explosives, guns, spears and bamboo poles, attacked non-Bengali shops and homes in the neighbouring townships of Daulatpur and Khalispur and murdered 57 persons. Their mutilated dead bodies were found after some days.

On March 6, Bengali militants took out a big procession to frighten the non-Bengalis in Khulna. Some of the armed processionists tried to loot arms and ammunition shops and in the fracas there were quite a few casualties. The civic administration in the town was paralysed; the police became ineffective and the Awami League militants whipped up mass hysteria against the non-Bengalis and the federal government. Federal and provincial officials, who did not side with the rebels, were terrorised.

In the second week of March, the Awami League's rebellious movement gained momentum in Khulna and the non-Bengalis were singled out for terrorisation and abridgement. In the third week of the month, the Awami League's regime of violence and terror held Khulna and its neighbouring towns under its full sway. The Khulna-Jessore Road was blocked and barricaded by the rebels at various points. The survivors of the March 5 killing of the non-Bengalis in Khulna were subjected to fresh attacks and intimidatory pressure by the Awami League militants and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles.

On March 23, the Awami League-led rebels in Khulna launched a full-blast attack on the settlements of the non-Bengalis in the town and its neighbourhood and butchered at least five thousand innocent people. All through the last week of March, until the federal army moved in, the Bengali rebels staged the bloodbath of non-Bengalis. They had set-up ghoulish slaughter-houses where non-Bengali men women, children were done to death in a gruesome manner. The rebels flung many of the dead bodies into the rivers in Khulna and its

neighbouring townships. Before being guillotined, the non-Bengali and some pro-federal Bengali victims were tortured.

Eye-witnesses saw many dead bodies with slit throats and ripped stomachs floating in the rivers. The rebels looted and wrecked a number of jute mills and other industrial establishments in Khulna and its vicinity. Killer gangs tossed non-Bengali millhands into steaming boilers. In the non-Bengali residential areas in Khalispur and Daulatpur, killer gangs gunned the innocents with wanton savagery. Their houses and shanties were put to the torch. All through the last week of March, this dreadful pogrom against the non-Bengalis was conducted by the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles, the police, the Ansar Volunteer Force and the armed militants of the Awami League with ruthless ferocity.

The Awami League had established para-military training camps in Khulna in the second week of March where the party's volunteers trained with guns and ammunition for "Operation Loot, Burn and Kill ". In the industrial and commercial parts of Khulna city, scores of West Pakistani businessmen and factory executives and their families were kidnapped and held for ransom. Some of them were slaughtered by their captors even after their relatives had paid the ransom money.

Some Bengalis who sheltered their non-Bengali friends were also done to death by the rebel gangs. Survivors of the genocidal fury of March 1971 report that on March 29, a day before the federal army re-established its control over the city, Khulna looked like a wrecked town on the morrow of a nuclear attack. Estimates of the death toll in Khulna and its neighbouring townships during the Awami League's rebellion of March 1971 are at considerable variance. Foreign and Pakistani newsmen who visited Khulna in April-May 1971 were told by army officers that at least 9,000 persons were killed by the Awami League militants and their supporters. But eye-witnesses interviewed for this book believe that nearly 50,000 non-Bengalis perished in Khulna during the Ides of March 1971. Aside from the murder of tens of thousands of non-Bengalis resident in Khulna and its neighbourhood, they assert, many hundreds of non-Bengali families who fled from rebel terror in other towns of Khulna district were done to death on the access roads to the city which were under rebel control.

According to witnesses from Khulna, the non-Bengali death toll in the savage attack on the People's Jute Mill and the Crescent Jute Mill by a huge mob of armed Bengalis on March 28, 1971, exceeded 5,000, including women and children. In the pogrom in the Railway Colony in Khulna, most of its 6,000 non-Bengali residents were butchered by the Bengali rebels. Hundreds of non-Bengali young women were marched by their captors to neighbouring villages where they were assaulted and raped in cordoned off huts. Many were killed by their

captors. Some escaped to Barisal and were brought by the Pakistan Army to Dacca and lodged in Relief Camps in Mohammedpur and Mirpur.

The New York Times, in a despatch from its correspondent, Malcolm W. Browne, who toured East Pakistan in the first week of May, reported in its issue of May 9, 1971:

“At Khulna, newsmen were shown facilities where frames were said to have been set up to hold prisoners for decapitation. Fragments of bloody clothing and tresses of women’s hair were strewn about. The place was said to have been used by the Bengali insurgents for the execution of thousands of non-Bengali residents.”

A more horrifying description of the slaughter of Khulna’s non-Bengalis appeared in the Washington Sunday Star on May 9, 1971:

“In Khulna, newsmen on an army-conducted tour yesterday saw what a non-Bengali resident described as a human slaughter-house. Sheds were said to have been used by East Pakistan’s dominant Bengalis in mass killings of Bihari immigrants from India, West Pakistanis and other non-Bengalis during March and early April at the height of the secessionist uprising....

“Reporters were shown a wooden frame with chains affixed on top where women and children reportedly were beheaded with knives.

“There was a form of a garrotte attached to a tree where the residents said victims were choked to death. Cords attached to one tree were described as hanging nooses. Bodies were said to have been thrown over a low wall into the river running alongside.

“Long rows of shops and homes in the non-Bengali sector of Khulna were badly burned, apparently by Bengalis.

“The evidence of eye-witnesses shows that after the federal troops drove out the insurgents from Khulna and its nearby townships, the rebels headed straight for India where the Indian authorities welcomed them as heroes and gave them sanctuary. Many amongst the killers in Khulna were Bengali Hindus who hated the non-Bengalis, especially the immigrants from Bihar in India. The majority of the Bengali population in Khulna was so terrorised by the hardcore Awami Leaguers that it dared not protest against the reign of terror unleashed on the non-Bengalis.

Nisar Ahmed Khan, 37, who was the headmaster of a high school in the Khalispur industrial township in Khulna, had this grim recollection of the Awami League's terror regime in March 1971:

“On March 23, armed bands of Awami League volunteers and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and the police desecrated the Pakistani flag in Khalispur and hoisted their Bangla Desh flag atop buildings and factories in our township. Since the middle of March, the Bengali rebels were on the warpath against the non-Bengalis and we heard rumours that elaborate preparations were being made for our slaughter.

“I lived in a rented house in the G-10 sector in the Satellite Town in Khalispur locality. My school was located in the vicinity of the People's Jute Mill. Close to it lived some 15,000 non-Bengalis, many in shanties. They were assured by the local Awami Leaguers early in the first week of March that they would not be disturbed or harmed. In fact, local Awami League leaders and some Bengali police officers met the representatives of the non-Bengalis in the main Mosque in this locality. In the presence of the non-Bengali Imam (Priest), they took an oath that no non-Bengali would be harmed. This assurance dissuaded the non-Bengalis from taking any self-defence measures or moving to Dacca for safety.

“In the night of March 23 and all through the next day, the Bengali rebels went on the rampage against the non-Bengalis in this locality. The rebels blocked all the access roads and sealed off the routes of escape for the non-Bengalis. Armed with rifles, sten guns, hand grenades, knives and spears, a huge killer mob fell upon the hapless non-Bengali men, women and children. The rebels burned and blasted the entire neighbourhood; they looted the homes of non-Bengalis and as the victims ran out of their houses, a hail of gunfire mowed them down. Many women and children sought refuge in the main Mosque and in my school building. The killers murdered the Imam (Priest) who begged them in the name of Allah to spare the innocents. The word mercy had become alien to the rebels.

“Teenage girls and young women, kidnapped by the Bengali rebels, were lodged in the school building. At night, they were raped by their captors. Those who resisted were immediately shot. Some hapless women jumped from the roof of the sex assault chambers to escape their violators.

“Some old men, women and children were marched by the rebels to the riverside human abattoir where they were slaughtered and dumped into the river. The killers trucked away many dead bodies from the town to the river bank where they were flung into the water.

“Near my school was the house of a dear friend, Saghir Ahmed Khan. The killer gang smashed into his house and machine gunned every inmate. His house was looted and partly burnt.

“I did not go to my school on March 24, the day of the massacre. The next day, a Bengali attendant came to my house in Satellite Town and gave me the grisly details of the killing. Hundreds of dead bodies, many of young women, he said, lay in heaps in the school building.

On March 30, when the federal troops entered Khulna and the rebels retreated, I went to my school. It was a horrifying spectacle. Bloated, decomposed dead bodies lay in hundreds and the stench of rotting dead was nauseating. It took me almost a whole month to bury the dead, to clean up the bloodstains and to eliminate the stink. “

In few hours, the entire colony was turned into an inferno of fire, blood and death. Many non-Bengalis were mowed down by the rebels’ gunfire when they tried to escape the slaughter in the locality. The killers had blocked all the escape routes and their gunmen did the sniping. My wife, my children and I hid ourselves on the roof of our house and we escaped the killing. After the federal troops secured Khulna on March 30, it took many days before the heaps of dead bodies of non-Bengalis killed by the rebels could be buried. “

A. S. Saifullah, 34, who witnessed the massacre of non-Bengalis in the Crescent Jute Mill in Khalispur in Khulna in March 1971, said:

B.

“The massacre of the non-Bengali employees of the jute mill and their families and of other non-Bengali residents of the locality was conducted from March 23 to 29. In the first two days of this period, there was a general slaughter of the non-Bengali population by armed Awami Leaguers and rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles and the police. Later on, groups of non-Bengalis, kidnapped by the rebels, were tortured in slaughter houses and done to death. In the compound of the Crescent Jute Mill was a block of three rooms. The rebels had turned it into a human abattoir. Hundreds of non-Bengali men, women and children were herded in this slaughter-house for two days without water and food and then done to death with unimaginable savagery. After the federal troops had regained control over Khulna, I saw this slaughter-house. The dead had been taken away for burial but there was blood all over the place. In a vessel I saw the corneas of human beings; these were the remnants of those unfortunate people whose eyes had been gouged out. I have often wondered what sadistic pleasure the rebels derived from eye-gouging. “

Saifullah escaped from Khulna after the Mukti Bahini gave it a second bloodbath late in December 1971 and early in January 1972. Through a tortuous route, he came to Pakistan in 1972.

Shahjahan Khan, 50, who was employed in the Star Jute Mill in Chandi Mahal in Khulna, had this pathetic recollection of the massacre of the non-Bengalis in March 1971:

“I had migrated to East Pakistan from Calcutta in 1970 and I settled in Khulna. I joined the Star Jute Mill when it was started and I rose to the position of Weaving Master in the Mill. On March 28, a large killer gang, armed with machine guns, rifles and spears attacked the non-Bengali employees of the Jute Mill and their families. The attackers overpowered some of the non-Bengali millhands and flung them alive into the steaming boilers in the Mill. Many of the non-Bengali workers who tried to escape were sprayed with machine gunfire.

“I escaped from the Mill and ran towards my home. A pursuer’s bullet hit me in the arm but I continued sprinting towards my house. Just on the doorstep, a sniper’s bullet hit me in the leg and I fell down. The killers had ransacked my house and killed my wife and my three children earlier in the day. I lost consciousness. After three days, I found myself in the Khulna hospital. The federal troops had entered the city and the injured persons were taken to hospital. The death toll of the non-Bengalis in my locality ran into thousands. The Bengali rebels kidnapped hundreds of non-Bengali young women and teenage girls and killed them by the riverside after ravishing them. Their usual practice was to dump the dead bodies into the river. I was repatriated to Pakistan in November 1973 “.

Shakoor Ahmed, 69, who lived in his son’s house on Khan Jahan Ali Road in Khulna, recalled the murder of his only offspring in the March 1971 massacre in these words:

“I had lived and worked in East Pakistan long before the Partition of the sub-continent. I hailed from Monghyr but most of my life was spent in East Pakistan. My son was born in Khulna. We spoke Bengali very well. But the local Bengalis called us Biharis.

“Since the first week of March 1971, armed gangs of Awami Leaguers used to parade in our locality to intimidate the non-Bengalis. In the second week of the month, violence against non-Bengalis openly erupted. On March 23, a killer gang attacked our house, slaughtered my son and his wife. They spared me and his two small sons. They are now my life, my hope. We were repatriated to Karachi in February 1974.

Shakoor Ahmed thinks that a typhoon of madness had gripped a large segment of the Bengali population in Khulna in March 1971. "Most Bengalis are a gentle people; a hardcore minority misled great numbers of Bengalis and incited them to commit violence on the Biharis ", he said.

Sixty-year-old Nabi Baksh, whose three sons were slaughtered by a killer gang in the compound of the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills, Khulna, in the last week of March 1971, testified:

"I was employed in the Jute Mill for the past ten years. My three grown up sons were also employed in it. We lived in a small house on Khan Jahan Ali Road in Khulna.

"On March 24, a killer gang of Bengali rebels attacked the non-Bengalis employed in the Jute Mill. I grappled with some of the killers when they started shooting in the direction of my three sons. The killers overpowered me and gunned my sons before my helpless eyes. I was hit on the head and I fainted. After the killers had gone, a Bengali co-worker dragged me to the store room where my wounds were bandaged and I stayed there until the federal Army freed Khulna from the terror rule of the Bengali rebels ".

Nabi Baksh was repatriated to Pakistan in the autumn of 1973 and he has settled in Karachi.

Twenty-eight year-old Rabia Begum, whose husband, Rustam Ali, was a federal government employee in Khulna, gave this account of the looting of her house and the killing of her husband in March 1971:

"Since the second week of March 1971, life had become a night mare for the non-Bengalis. Every day we heard rumours that the Bengali rebels would raid our colony and kill us.

"The dreaded time arrived on March 23 when a killer gang of armed rebels raided our locality. My husband was away on a Government errand in Darsana; my aged mother-in-law and I were the only two adults in my house. When I heard the echo of gunshots, I decided to leave the house by the backdoor and seek refuge in the house of a trusted Bengali woman in another locality. I tried to persuade my mother-in-law to go with me but she refused, saying that the raiders would spare her because of her old age. I slipped out of my house with my two children and reached my hideout safely. After the federal troops entered Khulna, I went back to my house. I was shocked; a part of it was burnt and every article of value was stolen. My mother-in-law was beaten and injured by the

rebels. I took her to the hospital where she was treated for her wounds. The raiders were angry that there were no ornaments in the house; they tortured my mother-in-law to get clues to our wealth. We had none left.

“After the federal Army took over Khulna, I took up a job and earned some money to feed myself, my children and my mother-in-law. I had no news of my husband. Subsequently, I learnt that the killers slayed him in Darsana.

“My ordeals began afresh after the Mukti Bahini captured Khulna in the third week of December, 1971. There was again a carnage of non-Bengalis in the city. Luckily, we escaped it. In January 1974 we were repatriated to Karachi from Dacca”.

Rabia’s view is that there were many God-fearing Bengalis who strongly condemned the killing of the non-Bengalis but they were utterly helpless. “The guns were with the Awami Leaguers and other rebels and not with these good-hearted Bengalis”, she said. She had also heard of the slaughter-houses set up by the Bengali rebels to torture and murder their non-Bengali victims.

PHOLTALA

Firdous Alam, 65, who lived in the Liaquatabad Colony in Pholtala town near Khulna, had this tearful recollection of the March 1971 killing of the non-Bengalis: “Pakistan’s first Prime Minister, Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, was the founder of the Liaquatabad colony in Pholtala. Four hundred Muslim refugee families from Bihar and West Bengal, who had sought refuge in East Pakistan, were sheltered in this colony in 1948. With the passage of years, more non-Bengali families converged here and its population reached 15,000.

“On March 23, a large procession of Awami Leaguers paraded our locality and raised slogans against Pakistan. The elders in our locality prevailed upon our young men not to be provoked by the Awami League militants and their anti-Pakistan slogans. In the evening, the Awami Leaguers returned with a horde of armed men, perhaps the rebels from the East Pakistan rifles. All of a sudden, the killer gang started setting the hutments of the non-Bengalis ablaze. The Bengali rebels spread the flames with dried coconut fronds which make excellent kindling. As the terrified non-Bengalis emerged from their burning huts, the killer gang mowed them with gunfire.

“Provoked by this wanton savagery, a score of our young men, who had guns, engaged the killer gang in combat for four hours. But when their ammunition was exhausted – the Bengali rebels got reinforcements and fresh supplies – these brave defenders of non-Bengali honour were done to death with indescribable savagery. All through the night and till the small hours of the

morning, the rebels continued their orgies of killing, torture and loot. The killers raped hundreds of non-Bengali women before slaughtering them in the compound of a large building in the locality. The killer gang murdered my family; I was hit by a gunman and I feigned death.

“At least half of the non-Bengali population in Liaquatabad Colony in Pholtala was wiped out in 24 hours of fiendish massacre. ”

Firdous Alam was repatriated to Karachi in December 1973.

BAGERHAT

Qazi Anwar Hussain, 35, who was a trader in the town of Bagerhat in the Khulna District, and who saw the killing of non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis in March 1971, said:

“The Awami Leaguers created tension in Bagerhat from the first week of March 1971. They spread canards about the killing of Bengalis in West Pakistan; they incited the local Bengalis to violence against the non-Bengalis.

“Along with the non-Bengalis, Bengali Muslim Leaguers were also the target of attack by the Awami Leaguers. Before the December 1970 general elections, the Awami League did not command much influence in Bagerhat sub-division. But in the 1970 polls, it emerged victorious and built up a base of strength in Bagerhat. One of its pet themes was to incite the Bengalis against West Pakistan.

“On March 20, a riotous mob led by Awami League militants ransacked the house of a prominent Bengali Muslim Leaguer, Mohammed Qasim. Luckily, he was not at home when the raiders came. But they looted all the valuables in his house and burnt it to ashes. Subsequently, the mob went on the rampage against the non-Bengalis and burnt their houses and killed many. Some non-Bengalis were given shelter and protection by God fearing Bengalis. The killer gangs punished such humane Bengalis and killed the non-Bengalis they had sheltered. I estimate that some 500 innocent people – many non-Bengalis and a few pro-Pakistan Bengalis – were done to death in Bagerhat on that dark day.

“Many of the survivors amongst the non-Bengalis went away to Khulna for shelter but quite a few were killed on the way by killer gangs which controlled the highways. ”

Qazi Anwar escaped the slaughter of non-Bengalis in Bagerhat with the help of a devout Bengali Muslim who sheltered him and protected him from the killer gangs. In February 1974, he was repatriated to Karachi by ship from Chittagong.

CHAPTER SIX

Satkhira Aflame

About the same time as Khulna was aflame with the genocidal fury of the Bengali rebels, the non-Bengali population in the town of Satkhira also became the victim of loot, arson and murder. It is estimated that more than 2,000 non-Bengalis perished in the massacres in Satkhira town and other places in the subdivision between the second half of March and the first fortnight of April 1971. Eye-witnesses reported that as Satkhira is close to the Indian border, the Bengali rebels received substantial military assistance from the Indian Border Security Force. The Sub-Divisional Officer of Satkhira, who was a West Pakistani, was taken prisoner by the Bengali rebels and was dragged through the streets of the town.

Thirty-two year-old Maula Bux, who worked as a Jute trader and lived in the Kazipara locality of Satkhira, gave this account of the horrifying events in what used to be his home town:

“I had lived for more than 10 years in Satkhira town and I spoke Bengali so well that I was often mistaken for a genuine Bengali. As Satkhira town is barely a couple of miles from the Indian border, it had served for years as the operational base of Indian agents. When the Awami League launched its rebellion in Dacca on March 1, 1971, its impact was immediately felt in Satkhira. The Awami Leaguers organized demonstrations and protest marches and imported arms and ammunition from India. Para-military Indian personnel infiltrated in mufti into Satkhira and guided the Awami Leaguers in their anti-Government operations.

“The civil administration collapsed; the Bengali rebels kidnapped a number of Government officials and set up their own regime of terror. The Police and the East Pakistan Rifles also revolted. The rebels had taken over control of all the access roads to Satkhira and blocked the exit of the terrorised non-Bengalis. By the middle of March, heavily armed Bengali rebel contingents were holding ominous displays of strength to frighten the non-Bengalis. Some shops and stores owned by non-Bengalis were looted and burnt. A number of West Pakistanis were “arrested “ on the charge of “spying “ for the federal government and were liquidated with rifle shots. On March 17 and 18, the rebels went on the rampage and slaughtered hundreds of non-Bengalis.

“In the morning of March 18, I was striking a business deal in the jute godown of a leading non-Bengali jute trader, Abdul Qayyum. All of a sudden, a killer mob attacked the jute god own, gunned Mr. Qayyum and his non-Bengali staff

and set the jute stock on fire. As huge tongues of fire leapt from the blazing jute godown, the killers tossed all the dead bodies into the fire, My command over the Bengali language enabled me to convince the killers that I was a genuine Bengali and they spared my life. But they belaboured me on the charge that I was a “West Pakistani agent “ and ordered me “never to do business with the non-Bengalis. “

“I walked swiftly in the direction of my house and did my best to avoid detection by the killer gangs which were on the loose in the town. On the way, I saw the rebels dragging through the streets the West Pakistani Sub-divisional Officer of Satkhira. Blood was oozing from his forehead and knees and his hands were tied with a rope. Some Bengalis spat on him and threw stones. I also saw the killers pushing, at the point of a bayonet, a hapless non-Bengali woman with two shrieking, small children who were clinging to her body. As she collapsed on the ground from sheer exhaustion, one of her captors kicked her head with his boot while the other throttled the older child.....

“When I reached my house, I found it ablaze. My younger brother, who was its only occupant at that time, had escaped the dragnet of the killers. I sought shelter in the house of a trusted Bengali friend. After the federal army re-established its control over Satkhira in April 1971, my brother rejoined me. I moved to Dacca, and in January 1974, I was repatriated to Karachi.

“The rebels kidnapped many non-Bengali young women from Satkhira. Some, who resisted the rapists, were killed; others were taken away to India by the retreating rebels and sold to brothels in West Bengal. “

Twenty-six year-old Nawab Ali, who lived in his father’s house in Bara Bazaar in Satkhira and was engaged in the jute trade, had this unhappy memory of the Ides of March 1971:

“My father had lived for many years in Calcutta. After Partition in 1947, we moved to Khulna where my father prospered in business. We spoke Bengali very well. Profits in the jute trade in Satkhira were far more attractive and we settled there. We bought a house and some other property. I assisted my father in his business.

“The massacre of non-Bengalis was started in the second week of March 1971 with stray incidents. Between March 17 and 20, the pogrom of the Bengali rebels against the non-Bengalis received impetus from the infiltration of trained Indian saboteurs into Satkhira. The rebels had machine guns, rifles, grenades and an endless supply of ammunition.

“On March 20, the rebels unleashed all over the town the campaign of terror and fire which they had initially conducted in a few selected localities against the non-Bengali residents. My parents were killed in the massacre; I went into hiding before they stormed my house and I escaped the noose of death. The killer gangs committed acts of unimaginable brutality; they tortured the non-Bengali men before shooting them. They chopped up the bodies of women and carved “Joi Bangla “ on their foreheads. They slaughtered children by the hundreds and tossed their bodies into blazing houses or dumped them in a nearby river. They kidnapped many scores of innocent girls and subjected them to multiple rape in deserted school buildings which were converted into ‘comfort lodgings’ for the sex-hungry rebel soldiers. The retreating rebels carried away many of these captive girls to India; some who tried to escape were shot. “

Nawab Ali was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in January 1974.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Hell in Dinajpur

The Awami League's terror machine had swung into action in Dinajpur from the first week of March 1971. Bengali mass militancy, whipped up by the Awami League's demagogues, manifested itself in protest rallies, street violence and terrorisation of non-Bengalis. The Awami League's storm troopers paralysed the local administration and set up their own regime of force and intimidation.

The crescendo of violence gained momentum in the second week of the month when the Awami League militants, beefed up by the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and encouraged by their initial success in grabbing civil authority, unleashed death and destruction on the hapless non-Bengalis.

All through the second fortnight of March and the first week of April 1971, the genocidal liquidation of the non-Bengali population was conducted with demonic fury. Estimates of the death toll of non-Bengalis in Dinajpur town in a month of the Awami League's hellish rule range from 15,000 to 30,000, while in the district of Dinajpur the non-Bengali death toll was about 100,000. Eyewitnesses claim that one of the main reasons for this disparity in figures is the fact that the bodies of thousands of non-Bengalis, slain by their captors in an open-air human abattoir on the bank of the Kanchan river, were dumped in its waters. Hundreds of corpses were incinerated in the houses of non-Bengalis which were put to the torch after their inmates had been decapitated.

On March 22, the Awami Leaguers, brandishing sten guns and rifles, led a violent procession through the heart of the town, inciting the Bengali populace to eliminate the non-Bengalis. On March 25, a killer mob burnt a passenger bus, which was owned by a non-Bengali, on the outskirts of Dinajpur. Its driver and seven non-Bengali passengers were done to death. The Bengali rebels, on the same day, burnt a postal service van on the Dinajpur-Saidpur Road, shot its conductor and wounded its driver. They also ambushed a Pakistan Army jeep and wounded the five soldiers who were riding in it. The treatment meted out to thousands of women and children was fiendish and debased. More than 400 non-Bengali young women were kidnapped to India by the retreating rebels.

In the last week of March 1971, the pogrom against the non Bengalis reached its peak. Violence mushroomed into the sacking and setting afire of all the stores, businesses and houses owned by non-Bengalis. Yelling, frenzied and roaming crowds – at times 10,000 strong – held marches and rallies all over the town, swearing death and destruction of the non-Bengalis and the federal government. Even at night, the town shook all through the week with bursts of gunfire by the

rebel soldiers and other armed Bengalis, the crashing of shop windows and doors, the crackling of flames which spiralled from non-Bengali houses set ablaze and the thunder of slogan shouting and looting mobs. The Awami League demagogues, with their fiery tongues, breathed hatred for the non-Bengalis and sanctified the looting and burning of non-Bengali shops and homes as acts of duty in the line of Bengali patriotism. The river-side slaughter-houses worked with fiendish thoroughness. Bengali officers from the rebel elements of the East Pakistan Rifles and the East Bengal Regiment supervised the hordes of thugs and hoodlums who worked as executioners and vampires in these human abattoirs for the liquidation of the non-Bengalis.

The abridgement of the non-Bengali population in Dinajpur by the Awami League militants in a month of their accursed rule was so colossal that when the Pakistan Army re-established its control in the town, stray non-Bengali survivors consisted mostly of old women and children. Heads of many victims were hung on tree-tops by the rebels to “teach a lesson to the non-Bengalis.”

Twenty-four-year-old Noor Jahan, whose husband, Abdur Rashid, was killed in the carnage of non-Bengalis in Dinajpur, underwent spasms of trepidation and sobbed frequently as she related the story of her woes:

“We lived in the Zulum Colony near the Tomb of Saint Sherghazi in Dinajpur town. Since the middle of March, we were hearing alarming rumours that the Bengali rebels would kill the non-Bengalis and that the houses of non-Bengalis were being marked by the Awami League volunteers.

“In the night of March 25, 1971, at about 9 o’clock, a huge mob of armed Bengalis went on the rampage in our locality and slaughtered men, women and children by the hundreds. They killed my husband and my brother in a murderous attack on our house. To the best of my memory, they did not spare a single non-Bengali male adult in our locality. They wiped out even male children. They lined up the wailing non-Bengali women and marched them at gunpoint to the village of Baraul, 8 miles from Dinajpur, near the Indian border. I was in this crowd of unfortunate, condemned women. The shame and torture which our satanic captors inflicted on us was so horrifying that I would hate to describe it.

“The most gruesome massacre in Dinajpur was of the 250-plus Pathans—men, women and children—in our locality. The Awami League hatchetmen and the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles tied up every Pathan with ropes; chopped off bits of flesh from the body of the victim and threw dust on him. As the victim writhed in pain, the sadist killers would laugh over his plight and lop off another bit of his body. The groans and cries of these sturdy Pathans and their appeals to

their captors for inflicting a swift death on them, instead of torturing them, still echo in my ears.

“Our Bengali captors dumped us in a cluster of huts in the village of Baraul. At night, they fell upon us like vultures. Some women who resisted their violators were shot “to teach a lesson to the others. “ Their bodies were mutilated; their breasts were slashed off and “Joi Bangla “ was carved with knives on their lifeless foreheads. On April 10, a unit of the Pakistan Army captured the village and rescued us. “

Noor Jahan was shifted to Dacca in mid-1971 and accommodated in a Relief Camp there. In January 1974, she was repatriated to Karachi.

Twenty-year-old Sakina Bibi, whose husband, Abdus Shakoor, was done to death by the Bengali rebels in a raid on her house in Neelmati in Dinajpur on March 22, 1971, gave this grisly account of her plight:

“The non-Bengalis in our locality lived in hutments. A killer mob of Bengali rebels attacked our locality at night; they burnt the shacks and looted every article of value in our homes. In less than half an hour, they gunned to death all the non-Bengali male adults in our locality. They wounded my husband with a scythe and then shot him. “

“After killing all the non-Bengali men, they lined up about four hundred sorrowing non-Bengali women and, at gunpoint, stripped off their Saris. I wanted to throttle myself when one of our tormentors, brandishing a scythe in my face, tore off my clothes. With guns ready to shoot, they forced us to parade in the nude. A few women, who tried to escape, were mowed down by the gunmen. In this march of the naked women, I spotted the wife of my brother. She said the killers had done him to death; they had also killed her little son. We walked five miles to Narkuldanga. By the time we reached this place, not more than 150 captive women were left. A few were shot; many were taken away by the other rebels on the way as their share of the loot. One of them was my sister-in-law; she was young and pretty. I never saw her again.

“Our Bengali captors detained us in six huts. For the first three days, we had not a morsel of food. We lived on water and wild fruits picked from the trees. All through the period of our captivity, the hapless captive women were subjected to multiple rapes. Six teenage girls who tried to escape were shot. On April 10, when the Pakistani troops routed the rebels, the retreating Bengalis tried to slaughter all of us but we were rescued in the nick of time. “

Sakina lived for two years in Dacca before being repatriated to Karachi in January 1974.

Abdul Majid, 26, who lived in Paharpur in Dinajpur and who escaped the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis by dint of good luck, had this recollection of the sorrowful events in his home town:

“On March 3, the Awami League militants went on the warpath in Dinajpur. They disrupted the Rail track and wrecked the train services. They looted the Railway godowns and burnt some trains. They belaboured those non-Bengalis who had refused to boycott work at the Railway station.

“In the first week of March, riotous mobs of Bengalis looted non-Bengali shops. They also wrecked the Iqbal High School where many non-Bengali boys studied. Some teachers, who tried to dissuade the Bengali miscreants from destroying the furniture of the school, were manhandled.

“In the third week of the month, a huge mob of armed Awami Leaguers and their supporters, many with sten guns and rifles, attacked the Balwadanga colony. I believe that more than 2,000 non-Bengalis perished in the slaughter in this locality. Some of the non-Bengalis sought refuge in the Iqbal High School. The next day, the Bengali rebels ransacked the school and killed all those sheltered in it.

“The Bengali rebels started mass slaughter of non-Bengalis all over Dinajpur from March 22 and it continued without a let-up until April 10 when the federal army retrieved the town. Thousands of non-Bengalis were taken by the rebels to open-air slaughter-houses along the bank of the Kanchan river and done to death. Their dead bodies were flung into the river. Leaders of the Awami League, such as Abdul Bari, a member of the East Pakistan Assembly, Dr. Khalilur Rahman, Riyazul Islam, an advocate, and a Major Usman were in the forefront of those Bengali militants who planned, instigated and organized the killing of the non-Bengalis in Dinajpur. Hundreds of non-Bengali women were marched in the nude by their Bengali captors through the town and driven to nearby villages where their tormentors ravished them in huts which were hurriedly turned into billets for sexual assault. “

After the Pakistan Army re-established its authority over Dinajpur, Majid emerged from hiding and helped the federal troops in burying the non-Bengali dead. He said:

“I led the federal troops to the Iqbal High School where I knew that the non-Bengalis had been slaughtered. Nearly 2,500 rotting dead bodies, with bullet

marks and knife wounds, were retrieved and given a mass burial. The wombs of some pregnant women had been slit open by their tormentors. The heads of some decapitated bodies were missing. I spotted many dead children whose limbs had been splintered. I saw the slaughter-houses operated by the Bengali rebels on the banks of the Kanchan River; it seemed river of blood had flowed there. I saw the fiendish implements with which the slaughterers tortured their victims before the actual kill. “

Abdul Majid was repatriated to Karachi from Dacca in November 1973.

Qamrunnissa Begum, 40, whose husband owned the Bengal Rice Mills in Dinajpur, gave this account of his murder in the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis:

“In 1947, we had migrated from Calcutta to East Pakistan. We lived for some years in Dacca and then we shifted to Rangpur. Subsequently, we settled in Dinajpur where my husband bought a rice mill. He had about a hundred employees and the Mill yielded substantial profits. He had a Bengali ‘sleeping’ partner who had made no investment in the mill. When our mill yielded large profits, this person tried to commit frauds on the mill and my husband terminated his services after paying him a fat sum of money as compensation.

“On March 25, when killer gangs were on the loose in Dinajpur and the non-Bengalis were being butchered by the thousands, this former Bengali partner led an armed band of cutthroats and attacked our mill. He and his gang shot dead my husband and looted all the rice and every other article of value in the Mill. After the death of my husband, the killers looted our houses. We took shelter in the home of an old Bengali friend of our family. “

Qamrunnissa, her two sons and a daughter lived in poverty in Dacca for a year. In 1974, they were repatriated to Karachi from Chittagong.

Twenty five-year-old Abdul Qadir, who was employed in the Dinajpur Rice Mill, had this nightmarish recollection of the slaughter of 69 non-Bengali employees of the Mill and of his miraculous escape from a steaming boiler in March 1971:

“The Dinajpur Rice Mill was one of the largest rice mills in the northern part of East Pakistan. It had 700 employees, mostly Bengalis. Its owner was Haji Karim, a God-fearing non-Bengali, who was kind and gentle and looked after the well-being of his employees. Although in the sixties, he was active and personally supervised the working of his Rice Mill. He had a Government contract for the milling of rice procured by it.

“On March 25, a killer mob led by armed Awami League storm-troopers and rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles raided our mill, looted all the cash and the rice stock and slaughtered the non-Bengali employees and their families. The attackers overpowered the non-Bengalis, tied them with ropes looted from the Mill store and flung their screaming victims into the steaming boiler. I saw with my own eyes the owner of the Mill Haji Karim, being tossed into this blazing cauldron of death. Even some non-Bengali women, employed in the Mill were done to death in this fiendish manner.

“The cord with which my hands were tied was weak and I slipped out of the Hall where the non-Bengalis were herded before being despatched to death. I hid myself in a store room where rice was stocked; I prayed all through the night. I emerged from hiding after the Pakistan Army regained control over Dinajpur. The killer gang liquidated the family of Haji Karim and looted his house. Except my aged mother, all my other relatives perished in the carnage.

“Many in the killer gang were local Hindu militants. I have no doubt that the infiltrators from West Bengal played a part in the massacre of non-Bengalis in Dinajpur. What amazed me was the fact that this avalanche of fire and death engulfed the non-Bengalis with calamitous suddenness. Before March 1971, we had never dreamed of such mass killing and our relations with the Bengalis were cordial. “

Sameeda Khatoon, 26, whose father, husband and elder brother were slaughtered in the massacre of non-Bengalis in March 1971 in Dinajpur, said:

“We lived in the Gharipara locality of Dinajpur. My husband, Mohammed Nazeer, was a bus driver. My father owned a shop in the heart of the town. On March 23, a riotous Bengali mob created a disturbance in our locality and looted the houses of some non-Bengalis. But on March 26, the rebels became more daring, and in the night they launched a campaign to liquidate all the non-Bengalis in our locality. They looted my father’s shop and brutally killed him and my husband who was with him at that time. They attacked our house and the house of my elder brother, which was close to ours. I saw from the doorstep of my house that a killer mob dragged my brother and his two adult sons from their house and butchered them with scythes and knives on the roadside. My brother’s wife fell on the feet of the killers and begged them to spare the lives of her husband and her two sons but they struck her with a stick and she collapsed. I was horror-stricken when I saw these brutes murdering my brother and his two sons. I started crying aloud. The killer mob looted my house and told me that the rebels would come back after a few days to slaughter me and my daughter.

“We were told that April 10 was the deadline set by the Bengali rebels for the murder of the surviving women and children in our locality. We cried and prayed to Allah for succour. We heard the echo of gunfire and thought that the killer mob was coming in our direction. But our prayers were answered when a unit of the Pakistan Army entered Dinajpur and re-established its authority. We were saved from the butchers knives. The army moved us to Dacca where we lived in a Relief Camp for widowed women and orphaned children. After the Indian Army seized East Pakistan on December 17, 1971, we underwent more suffering and many women were kidnapped by the Mukti Bahini. In March 1974, I was repatriated to Karachi along with my little daughter. ”

“I have not been able to comprehend the real reasons for the xenophobia against the non-Bengalis which gripped a segment of the Bengali populace in Dinajpur in March 1971 “, said 28-year-old Abdul Khaleque whose family had lived in that region long before the Partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

Khaleque’s Urdu-speaking grandfather had settled in Dinajpur in the 1920’s. His mother was a Bengali and he and the other members of his family spoke excellent Bengali. Yet, in the massacre of the non-Bengalis in March 1971 most of them were done to death. Khaleque, who lived in his ancestral house on Mission Road in Dinajpur, luckily escaped the killing by going into hiding in the house of a Bengali friend in another part of the town. In February 1974, Khaleque was repatriated to Pakistan. He said:

“There were many other families, such as ours, which had settled in Dinajpur long before Partition. They were bilingual i.e. they spoke Bengali as well as Urdu. They had endeavoured for merger with the local Bengali population by inter-marrying. Every member of my family was a born Bengali and spoke Bengali with the accent prevalent in Dinajpur. Yet in the madness of March 1971, all of us were considered Biharis although none of us had seen the face of Bihar after Partition. It had never occurred to me in my wildest fancy that any Bengali in Dinajpur would ever think of slaughtering any member of my family for being a non-Bengali. But after March 21, a fiendish insanity gripped a large portion of the Bengali population. Instigated by the Awami Leaguers, they exterminated nearly 90 per cent of the non-Bengali population in the towns of Dinajpur district.

“In some villages near Dinajpur, where small groups of non-Bengalis lived, the slaughter was so brutally complete that not a single non-Bengali survived. I became a nervous wreck after I saw the heaps of rotting dead bodies of non-Bengalis in the streets and houses in Dinajpur when I emerged from hiding and the federal troops had re-established their control. I heard about the infernal slaughter-houses which the killer gangs had set up on the banks of the Kanchan River. There the non-Bengalis were slain by the hundreds and their bodies were

thrown in the river. I believe that at least 30,000 non-Bengalis were done to death in Dinajpur town in March and April 1971.

“An example of the trickery and fraud used by the Bengali rebels to liquidate the non-Bengalis was the invitation from the Deputy Commissioner to 25 leading non-Bengali businessmen of Dinajpur to attend a meeting of the local Peace Committee in the Iqbal High School building. When they arrived at the school building for the meeting, each one of them was murdered by the Bengali rebels “ We were awaiting our execution in a slaughter-house on the bank of the river in Dinajpur when the Pakistan Army rescued us “, said 55-year old Hamida Khatoon. She had worked for years as a nurse in the Sadar Hospital in Dinajpur. Repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in February 1974, Hamida gave the following account of the unfortunate events of March 1971 in her home town:

“We had lived for the past many years in Dinajpur and it had never occurred to us that life would become a nightmare for the non-Bengalis as it did in March 1971 during the Awami League’s rebellion.

“On March 23, a group of Awami Leaguers ordered all the non-Bengali menfolk in our locality to attend a meeting of the Peace Committee of the area. While the non-Bengali men were gone for the meeting, armed gangs of Bengali rebels attacked their houses in the locality and looted every article of value with the thoroughness of seasoned thieves. At midnight, a non-Bengali neighbour, who had gone to the meeting, came running to us and informed us that all those who had gone to attend the so-called meeting had been butchered in the school compound by the rebels. The next day, the rebels rounded up all the non-Bengali women and children in our locality and took us to a camp on the bank of the river where we saw the horrifying massacre of the non-Bengali men. Their bodies were being flung into the river. We were told that in a couple of days we would also be done to death. There were very few young women left in our group; the killers had kidnapped the young ones for rape. I can never forget that hell-like, open-air slaughter-house run by the murderers on the river bank On April 10, when we had resigned ourselves to fate and death because of the physical and mental torture we had undergone, a posse of the federal troops rescued us from the jaws of death.

“We were shifted to a camp in Saidpur. In the last week of December 1971, the Mukti Bahini killers were after my blood because I had told the Pakistan Army about the gruesome killings done by the rebels in March 1971. I was jailed for 18 months in Saidpur and tortured for weeks. In the first week of February 1974, I was released from prison, and shortly afterwards I was repatriated to Pakistan. “

Forty-year-old Ladli Masroor, whose husband, Mobeen Alam, was employed in the Watch and Ward Department at Dinajpur Railway Station, gave this narrative of the grisly events of March 1971:

“On March 25, at about 9 p.m., a killer gang of Bengali rebels raided our locality in Dinajpur. They smashed the locked door of our house and overpowered my husband. They tied him with ropes, clobbered him with an iron rod and looted my house. As my children shrieked in terror, I begged the killers to spare my husband. The attackers laughed and took possession of every article of value in my house. “This transistor radio is mine “, said one of the raiders after grabbing it from the wardrobe. Another killer took my husband’s watch. Two of them frisked me for money and jewellery and stole all my ornaments. Behaving like thugs and cut throats, they even took away my Saris. After they had accomplished their errand of burglary, they dragged my husband to the street and belaboured him so hard that he bled. I again begged his captors to free him but they struck me with an iron rod and I fell down. They lined him up with some other non-Bengalis of our locality and marched their captives in the direction of the river. This was the last I saw of my husband. “Have faith in God and look after the kids “, he shouted as the killers marched him away to what I later learnt was the slaughter-house for liquidating the non-Bengalis.

“On April 10, a large mob of armed and yelling Bengalis stormed our locality. They gathered all the non-Bengali women and children and marched them at gunpoint to the bank of the river where the butchering of the non-Bengalis was being done. I cowered in mortal terror when I saw this open-air slaughterhouse and the faces of my innocent children. The women cried and screamed in terror; some of them had spotted their men relatives being murdered by the Bengali executioners. Dead bodies and blood littered the bank and the water of the river. All of a sudden, the Bengali killers started running in complete disarray. A posse of six Pakistan Army soldiers rushed towards us like angels on a rescue mission. We were saved from death. The federal army took us to a Relief Camp in Saidpur. In February 1974, we were repatriated to Pakistan. “

“The gory scene of the river-side slaughter-house haunts me. I saw the wooden frames on which the non-Bengalis were beheaded with scythes and large knives; I saw the boiling cauldrons in which the Bengali executioners dipped their captives to extract information about their money “. This is how 30-year-old Khatun Nisa, whose husband was employed in the police force in Dinajpur, described the implements of torture that were innovated by the Bengali rebels at the river-side, open-air human abattoir in Dinajpur. Khatun and her children and hundreds of other hapless non-Bengali women and children (whose husbands and fathers had been slaughtered in March 1971) were awaiting their turn to be butchered when the Pakistan Army rescued them from the Bengali hangmen.

Khatoon and her three children were repatriated to Pakistan in February 1974. Khatun said:

“Since March 2, 1971, the Awami League militants and their supporters in Dinajpur were on the warpath against the non-Bengalis. Some shops and houses belonging to non-Bengalis were looted. But from March 17, they started murdering the non-Bengali men and molesting their women. We became so panicky owing to the militancy of the Awami Leaguers that in the night of March 21, when it was rumoured that our locality would be raided, my husband, Abdul Ghaffar, my three children and I slipped out of our house by a back door and went into hiding in a large cluster of shady trees about a furlong from our dwelling. We found that a score of non-Bengali men, women and children were already ensconced in this hideout. After an hour, we heard the noise of gunfire from our locality, the yells of the Awami League attackers and the cries of the victims for mercy and help. We also saw tongues of fire leaping from the houses which had been set ablaze. The killers were tipped off about our escape and there was a burst of firing in our direction.

“Some of us were injured but we kept quiet. We crawled towards the graveyard where the graves could afford us protection from the volleys of bullets fired on us. Early in the morning, we moved into a deserted school building and stayed in it unobtrusively for three days. Most of us lived on water, brought at night from a nearby pond, and wild fruits and roots. In the afternoon of March 29, an armed band of Bengali rebel raided our hideout and rounded up all the non-Bengali men, including my husband. Some who resisted were ruthlessly beaten and tied up with ropes. The women begged the rebels to spare the lives of their menfolk but the killer gang was heartless. “We will spare you; you will make good maidservants in our homes “, the rebels said to us. Under a blazing sun and with lifted guns, the killer gang marched their non-Bengali captives to what we later on learnt was the execution ground on the bank of a river two miles away. The next morning the killer gang returned and ordered us to accompany them post haste.

“A shiver of fear ran down our spines when we neared the bank of the river and saw the human slaughter-house which the rebels had established for killing the helpless non-Bengalis. It was hell on earth. A wooden frame on which the victims were decapitated, hanging nooses attached to trees, metallic urns with boiling water for dipping victims to extract information and an assortment of gleaming daggers, knives, scythes and spears gave this patch of verdant land by the placid waters of the river a macabre setting of torture, fire and death. There was blood all over the place. Heaps of dead bodies, awaiting a watery grave, generated a nauseating stench. After a dozen men had been butchered before our glazed eyes, a Bengali soldier shouted an order: “Take these women and

children to the far end of the bank; there is too much of stink and bloody muck here “. The ogres, who were engaged in the butchery, responded with “Yes, Major “ and motioned us, with their knives, to run down the bank of the river. We had hardly any strength left in us and we dragged ourselves with difficulty towards the water. We had become so resigned to fate and we were so terribly weak that we had lost the zest for life and we begged our killers to finish us off quickly. Escape was impossible; there were at least 500 hatchet-men on the spot; many were armed with guns. Suddenly, pandemonium broke loose and our tormentors started running for their lives. On the far end of a ridge, silhouetted against the twilight sky, were a dozen Pakistani soldiers who were racing towards us like angels sent for our deliverance. Their yells of “Allah is Great “ rent the skies, and in a matter of minutes our beastly captors melted away in a nearby forest. The Pakistani troops took us to a Relief Camp; those who were injured were hospitalised and the dead were given a solemn burial. From the third week of December, 1971, after India’s occupation of East Pakistan, the Mukti Bahini and its supporters unleashed an avalanche of suffering on us. Now that we have come to Pakistan, we feel we have been given a fresh lease of life. “

Fifty-year-old Hasina Begum lived with her husband, Kabir Ahmed Khan, an affluent businessman, on the outskirts of Dinajpur town. She lost her husband in the March 1971 massacre but she saved the lives of two teenage daughters of their best friend, a lawyer. Her two sons had gone into hiding in a nearby forest. After the federal army re-established its authority over Dinajpur, Hasina encouraged her sons to join the Pakistan Army. In December 1971, they were taken prisoner in an encounter with the enemy on the border. In December 1973, Hasina was repatriated to Karachi from Dacca. “I am confident that Allah will bring my sons to Pakistan sooner than I expect “, she said hopefully. Hasina testified:

“Since the first week of March 1971, the Awami League militants had started terrorising the non-Bengalis. In the middle of the month, their animus for the non-Bengalis assumed a new dimension of cold-blooded violence, kidnapping and murder. We started experiencing the sharp edge of terror when a few non-Bengali men of our locality were shanghaied by killer gangs of Bengali rebels around March 17. I sent my two teenage sons to live in hiding with a trusted Bengali family in a nearby village. A lawyer friend of my husband, his two daughters and his brother came to stay with us. Their house was located in the main part of the town where violence against the non-Bengalis had mushroomed. We heard a rumour that on March 24 the Bengali rebels would attack the non-Bengalis in our locality. I was worried because of the reports that the Bengali rebels were kidnapping and molesting non-Bengali young women also. With the consent of my husband and his lawyer friend, I spread a mat on the floor of a dry, derelict water tank in the compound of my house, made the two girls lie on it

and covered them with a heap of banana leaves. I instructed them to lie still until they heard a code word from me. The camouflage was so perfect that even their father could not believe that the girls lay concealed under the pile of leaves.

“As we had expected, in the night of March 24, a yelling mob of armed Bengali rebels raided our locality. They broke into our house and overpowered my husband, our lawyer friend and his younger brother. I tried to go with my husband, but the raiders struck me with a stick and I writhed in pain. They rounded up some other non-Bengalis and drove them at gunpoint towards the river which, I learnt subsequently, was used as the butchery ground. I was nursing my swollen ankle when there was again an ominous knock on the front door. When I delayed opening it the raiders fired on it. I opened the door and four of them trooped in with menacing looks. “Where are the lawyer’s daughters?” barked one of them. I told the brutes that the girls were not in my house. They ransacked the entire house; looted all our valuables and even took away the tableware in our home. But, God be thanked, they did not eye the leaf-covered tank where the girls lay concealed. I locked the door tightly; I barricaded it with an almirah and two big tables to prevent swift intrusion from outside.

“At night, I crawled to the water tank and gave water and rice to the girls. They bore the suffering patiently and lay still under the camouflage for a whole week. On April 10, soldiers of the Pakistan Army, shouting “Allah is Great “ came to my house and rescued us. The girls looked like ghosts as they emerged from hiding. Just then my two sons also joined us. The Pakistani soldiers helped us in our frantic search all over the town for my husband and the father and the uncle of the two girls. But there was no trace of them. Obviously they were done to death in the slaughter-house on the bank of the river by the Bengali rebels. We gave the Pakistani troops the details of the hoodlums who had looted our house; all these criminals had fled from Dinajpur and gone to India. “

Zaibunnissa, 30, who lost her husband, Abdul Aziz, her son and her only brother in the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis in Dinajpur, has this recollection of that tragedy:

“On March 23, the Awami League militants, who were in power in the town, imposed a curfew in our locality and ordered all the non-Bengali men to attend a meeting of the so-called Peace Committee. A killer squad came to our house and forced my husband and my son to accompany the gang. We suspected that the Peace Committee was a ruse which the killers used for kidnapping non-Bengalis but the killer gang was well-armed and we were helpless. I never saw my husband and my son again.

“On March 26, the killers again raided my house in search of my brother. They caught him while he was trying to escape into the woods. Before my dazed eyes, one of the killers shot him in the chest at point blank range. As he fell down, he asked for water. I ran to him with a glass of water; the killers hurled the glass from my hand and plugged a second bullet into the skull of my brother. He was dead and a torrent of blood gushed out from his lifeless body. Two old non-Bengali women, who lived in our neighbourhood, helped me in digging a grave in which I buried my brother.

“On March 30, the killer gang again came to my house, ransacked it and asked me at gunpoint where I had hidden my ornaments. When I told them that I had none left, they forced me to go with a group of non-Bengali women and children to the bank of the river. One of the hapless women tucked a copy of the Holy Quran in her arm; a gunman snatched it from her and threw it on the ground. We reached the execution ground and saw hundreds of other non-Bengalis lined up for murder. The killings were conducted till late at night; it was like a scene from hell. It seemed that the river ran red with the blood of the innocents. The Bengali rebels had beheaded many of their victims; we saw their severed heads looking up from blood-soaked sods of earth. Hundreds of dead bodies lay on the bank of the river, awaiting disposal in the water. The next day, when all was set for the execution of our group, a posse of soldiers of the Pakistan Army suddenly appeared on the skyline and our executors scattered in fear. God had heard our prayers; we were saved. The Pakistani soldiers lodged us in a Relief Camp and we were looked after very well. But after December 16, 1971, when the Mukti Bahini ruled Dinajpur, we were again the victims of terror. Hundreds of widowed women, like me, walked to Saidpur where we were told that the Red Cross would set up a Relief Camp and protect us from the killer gangs. For two and a quarter years, we lived in abject poverty and many of the hapless women died. In January 1974, I was repatriated to Pakistan. “

Eye-witnesses of the killings in Dinajpur town reported that non-Bengalis were almost wiped out in the neighbouring towns of Bochaganj, Pirganj, Chorkoy, Ranisankail, Fulbaria, Kaharol, Birganj, Ponchagarh and Chirirbandar between the second week of March and the third week of April 1971. As the federal Army re-established its control over these towns, the Bengali militant, who conducted “Operation Loot, Burn and Kill “ against the non-Bengalis, escaped to the sanctuary of the neighbouring Indian State of West Bengal. There is considerable evidence to support the view that the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles, who spear-headed the pogrom against the non-Bengalis, received instructions and help from India. The Times of London, in its issue of April, 6, 1971, quoted a young British technician who had crossed the Indo-Pakistan frontier at Hilli:

“He said that hundreds of non-Bengali Muslims must have died in the north-western town of Dinajpur alone. After the soldiers left, the mobs set upon the non-Bengali Muslims from Bihar. I don’t know how many died but I could hear the screams throughout the night. In other parts of the region, he said. Biharis had been rounded up and were being held as hostages..... “

Some eye-witnesses said that a few God-fearing Bengali Muslims, who sheltered non-Bengalis and were detected, were jailed by the rebels in March 1971. After India’s seizure of East Pakistan in the third week of December 1971, thousands of Bengalis, who remained loyal to Pakistan, were clapped into prison and many were tortured by the Mukti Bahini and the police force it organized.

Hundreds of non-Bengalis were murdered by the Mukti Bahini and their supporters in Dinajpur between the second fortnight of December 1971 and the first half of 1972. The Correspondent of the largely-circulating West German Magazine, Stern of Hamburg, Herr Braumann, flew from Dacca to Dinajpur on February 29, 1972, and saw 80 to 100 corpses of Biharis scattered in a shallow pit. Although the Bengali deputy commissioner of Dinajpur claimed that they were the bodies of the Bengalis who had been killed by the Pakistan Army, Braumann doubted the claim because the corpses were almost fresh. In his despatch published in the Stern magazine on March 12, 1972, Braumann reported:

“...it did not seem possible—in view of the very slight decomposition—that the corpses in the mass grave were of Bengalis; they could only be of Biharis “.

Braumann described in his despatch how the Mukti Bahini commander of Dinajpur, Mohammed Khurshid, procured a dozen Biharis from the Bihari ghetto in Saidpur for being slaughtered to mark “the building of a monument in Dinajpur for a Mukti Bahini hero who was shot by the Pakistanis “.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Carnage in Parbatipur

“March 1971 was like a typhoon of fire and death for thousands of innocent non-Bengali men, women and children in Parbatipur, “ said 42- year-old Azizullah Ansari, a school teacher, who lost his wife and two children in the massacre.

Ansari, who taught in the Model High School in Parbatipur, said that before the March 1971 carnage in his town, it was utterly unthinkable for him that the non-Bengalis would be the victims of such brutality. He lived in Dacca for a year after this tragedy in his life and was repatriated to Karachi in December 1973. He testified:

“The Awami Leaguers had started terrorising the non-Bengalis in Parbatipur since the early days of March 1971. As many non-Bengalis were employed in the Railway establishment at Parbatipur, they and their families, who lived in the Railway Colony, were one of the main targets of harassment by the rebels. Non-Bengalis who lived in clusters of houses in other localities of the town were also terrorised by armed Bengali miscreants.

“In the last week of March 1971 – I think it was the 22nd of the month – armed Awami League volunteers and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles ran amok and unleashed an orgy of murder, arson, loot and rape on the non-Bengalis. We closed the school before the scheduled time and the children, mostly Bengalis, left for their homes. I heard from an attendant in the school that a killer mob had gone towards my locality and I ran in the direction of my house. There were a dozen non-Bengali houses in my vicinity. As I neared my house, I saw it aflame. Some other houses were also burning. Unmindful of the flames, I entered it. My world collapsed when I saw the burnt bodies of my wife and my two little children; they were lifeless. I pulled them outside, hoping to revive them. They were dead as scorched mutton. I cried over my loved ones all through the night; I was nearly insane. The fire had subsided and one of the two rooms was intact. I put the bodies of my wife and my two children under a partly burnt mattress in the room; their burial just then was out of the question; the killers would have got me. I lived inside this grave of a house for more than a week until the federal troops arrived and rescued me. A part of me is still in Parbatipur – my wife and children who lie buried in a graveyard there. “

Eye-witnesses of the carnage in Parbatipur estimate that about 3,000 non-Bengalis lost their lives in March-April, 1971.

Forty-six-year old Abdur Rashid, a Railway employee at Parbatipur who lived in Railway Quarter No. 153 (N), had a vivid but benumbing recollection of the slaughter of non-Bengalis in trains in March 1971:

“On March 12, the train from Ishurdi arrived ten hours late at Parbatipur. The reason was that a band of armed Awami League volunteers and other miscreants had stopped it at a wayside station and slaughtered many of the non-Bengali passengers. I was at the Railway station when the ill-fated train steamed in with 170 dead bodies of non-Bengali men, women and children. Most of the bodies were horribly mutilated. Also on the train were some 75 wounded non-Bengalis; many of them were in a critical condition. They were removed to the local hospital; only a few survived. Amongst the dead bodies on the train were those of suckling children who had been stabbed brutally along with their mothers. It was a horrifying scene and the memory of it gives me a shiver even now. After this episode, it became terribly dangerous for non-Bengalis to travel in trains. Similar incidents were reported from quite a few other places...”

Abdur Rashid and his wife and children escaped the massacre in Parbatipur. They suffered excruciating hardships after India’s conquest of East Pakistan. They came to Karachi via Nepal in April 1973.

Abbas Ali, 45, who worked as a school teacher in Parbatipur and lived in a house on New Road, testified:

“In the second week of March, 1971, the Awami League militants began terrorising the non-Bengalis. On March 19, a killer gang attacked a large number of non-Bengali houses in a locality close to where I lived. They had sten guns and rifles. They looted the non-Bengali houses and burnt some of them. They killed a few non Bengalis and kidnapped a number of teenage girls. I am convinced that most of the killers who raided our locality were Bengali Hindus and some of them spoke Bengali with an accent which resembled that of the West Bengalis in India. The Bengali rebels conducted the liquidation of the majority of the non-Bengali population in Parbatipur in stages. It reached its peak in the first week of April when wholesale slaughter of the non-Bengalis became the order of the day. I escaped the massacre with the help of a Bengali family which sheltered me”.

Abbas Ali was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in February 1974. He thinks that the Awami League militants had drugged a large segment of the Bengali population in Parbatipur with lies against Pakistan, the people of West Pakistan and the federal government. “What amazed me was the fact”, he added, “that the killer gangs even desecrated mosques. This was extraordinary and incredible because most of the Bengalis I had known were religious and God-fearing people”.

Another survivor of the March 1971 butchery in Parbatipur is Maimunnissa, 40, who said:

“My husband, Shajuddin, had retired from Railway service. He and I and our grown up son lived in our own house in a crowded locality in Parbatipur. In the last week of March 1971, a large gang of armed Bengali militants raided our house and looted it. My husband and my son were luckily out of town. The attackers asked me to leave the house and they burnt it. Utterly helpless, I watched my house burn. A neighbour sheltered me. After the federal army re-established its control over Parbatipur, my husband and my son returned to our burnt home. In the middle of April, we rebuilt our house and we again lived in it. My son, Mohammed Ali, joined the Pakistan Army and he was posted in a border area. We were very proud of him.

“On December 17, 1971, after the surrender of the Pakistani troops to India in Dacca, armed gangs of Bengali killers were again on the rampage in Parbatipur. We decided to escape to Saidpur where we had some relatives. My husband put me in a train bound for Saidpur in the evening of December 17. He said he would come the next day. A former Railway colleague of his, a Bengali, had promised to shelter him for the night in his house. The next day, I learnt from an old friend of his at Saidpur Railway station that a killer mob had caught my husband in the vicinity of the Parbatipur Railway Station and hacked him to death. I lived in Saidpur in abject poverty and suffering for two years. I wrote to the Red Cross about my son in the Army. To this day, I have no news of him. I was repatriated to Karachi in February 1974 “.

Fifty-year-old Sitara Bano, whose husband, Abdul Qadir, owned a provision store in Parbatipur, testified:

“In the March 1971 massacre in Parbatipur, my husband, my son, my teenage daughter and I escaped from the town just before a raid on our locality. My husband’s shop was looted; our house was burnt. We returned to the town after the federal army regained control over it. We rebuilt our shop and our house; my son got a clerical job in a firm. But on December 17, 1971 when the surrender of the Pakistan Army in Dacca to the Indian Army was announced, the Mukti Bahini supporters and other Awami Leaguers began the slaughter of the non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis. In the evening, I learnt that my husband and my son were butchered by a killer mob. My daughter and I left that very evening for Saidpur. We took up employment in a Bengali home. But we lived haunted lives because almost every week there were rumours that the Mukti Bahini would kill all the surviving non-Bengali women and children. My daughter was married in 1972 and is some where in East Pakistan. I was repatriated to Karachi from Saidpur via Dacca in January 1974.

CHAPTER NINE

Slaying in Thakurgaon, Hilli

The Awami League's rebellion cast its dark and ominous shadow on the lives of the non-Bengali populace in Thakurgaon, a town in the Dinajpur district, in the middle of March 1971. Before the outburst of genocidal frenzy against the non-Bengalis in the last week of the month, the belabouring of non-Bengali young men by groups of Bengalis on the streets and in alleys had become a frequent occurrence. The police had swung to the side of the Awami League rebels.

In the last week of March and the first fortnight of April 1971, armed Bengali rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles joined the Awami Leaguers and unleashed terror and death on the non-Bengalis. About 3,000 innocents were killed in this barbaric slaughter. More than two-third of the non-Bengali population in Thakurgaon was wiped out; their houses were looted and many were burnt. Dead bodies by the hundreds were deliberately incinerated in blazing houses by the killers. Non-Bengali teenage girls were kidnapped, ravished and tortured in sex assault chambers; most of them were murdered by the rebels before they quit the town. Some pregnant women were bayoneted; their still born babies were bludgeoned. The dead bodies of some prominent non-Bengalis were dragged through the streets and displayed in public from flagpoles. The Army regained control over Thakurgaon on April 15, 1971.

Mohammad Sohail Tanvir, 21, an articulate student who lived with his father in their own house in Rahmatganj in Thakurgaon town, described the murder of his father by the Bengali rebels in these words: "My father was a prominent Muslim Leaguer in Thakurgaon. He had served as a Basic Democrat for many years and was respected by the Bengali and non-Bengali residents alike. We had lived in Thakurgaon for more than 18 years and we spoke Bengali very well. My father had done well in business and bought some property. He helped many charitable institutions in the town.

"In the last week of March 1971, a pall of death and destruction enveloped the non-Bengalis in Thakurgaon and several thousands of them lost their lives. My father had gone to the main Mosque in our locality to offer his evening prayers. With him were two non-Bengali and a Bengali friend. As they stepped out of the Mosque, a killer gang of Bengali rebels brutally killed him and his three friends. They threw the dead bodies inside the Mosque and wiped out other non-Bengalis in the neighbourhood. I and some members of my family escaped the carnage with the help of a God-fearing Bengali friend of my father. After India's

conquest of East Pakistan in December 1971, we escaped to Nepal. Early in 1974, we were repatriated from Nepal to Karachi. "

Sohail's slain father, Mr. Tanvir Ahmed, as a member of the local Council in Rahmatganj locality, had devotedly worked for the social uplift of the Bengalis as well as the non-Bengalis. "My father advocated fraternisation between Bengalis and non-Bengalis ", said Sohail.

Sohail recalled that it took the federal troops some days before they could retrieve all the dead bodies of non-Bengalis and arrange their proper burial. Heaps of human skulls and bones were found in the gutted houses of non-Bengalis.

"The Awami League killers in Thakurgaon had instructions to kill all the non-Bengali male adults ", said Afzal Siddiqi, 50, who lost his two sons and a daughter in the carnage in Thakurgaon. He had migrated to East Pakistan from Calcutta in 1947 and settled in Thakurgaon in the mid 1960's. Repatriated from Dacca in January 1974, he reported that he escaped the massacre of non-Bengalis in the last week of March 1971 by hiding in a dry, derelict water tank, not far from his house in Rahmatganj. He said:

"I worked as a commission agent for the sale of household wares. My three children were born in East Pakistan My Bengali wife had died some years ago. In spite of our close links with East Pakistan, the Awami Leaguers called us Biharis "Since early March 1971, non-Bengalis were harassed and intimidated in Thakurgaon by the Awami League militants. But in the last week of the month, the killers went on the rampage and wiped out most of the non-Bengali population in Thakurgaon. I was away from my house when an assassination squad raided my house, looted it, murdered my two sons and kidnapped my teenage daughter. When I returned to my house I saw it aflame. The bodies of my sons lay on the doorstep. I knew that the killer gang was at work. Fearing that they would return for me, I went into hiding in a dry water tank which had a large hole in it. I slipped into it and covered it with leaves. It served as my hideout for a fortnight before the Army crushed the rebels. "

Witnesses from Thakurgaon estimated that out of the 9,000 non-Bengalis who lived in this town, barely 150 survived the March-April 1971 massacre. A non-Bengali army major held nearly 1,000 Bengali rebels at bay for more than 72 hours. When his ammunition was exhausted, he fought the raiders with a dagger and died a hero's death. The killer mob slayed his wife and his children and paraded their dead bodies as trophies of victory. The attacking mob was led by the local leaders of the Awami League, the sons of the head of the local administration and half a dozen police officers.

HILLI

Amongst the other towns of Dinajpur district where non-Bengalis were liquidated en masse by the Bengali rebels between the second fortnight of March 1971 and the third week of April were Hilli, Phulbari, Jamalganj, Ponchagarh and Chaur Kai. Estimates of the non-Bengali death toll in these four towns ranged from 3,000 to 4,000. The Times of London, in its issue of April 6, 1971, reported:

“Thousands of helpless Muslim refugees who had settled in Bengal at the time of partition are reported to have been massacred by angry Bengalis during the past week. The facts about the massacres were confirmed by Bihari Muslim refugees who crossed the border into India this week and by a young British technician who crossed the Indo-Pakistan frontier at Hilli today. He said that hundreds of non-Bengali Muslims have died in the north western town of Dinajpur alone”.

Most of the killing of the non-Bengalis, it was gathered from eyewitnesses, was conducted by the rebels of the East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles and armed volunteers of the Awami League. The pattern and mode of extermination of the non-Bengalis here was similar to “Operation loot, kill and burn” staged by the Bengali rebels in Dinajpur and Parbatipur. The rebels, as they retreated to the sanctuary of the Indian border in the face of the advancing Pakistani Army, carried away with them a number of teenage non-Bengali girls whom they had kidnapped from Dinajpur and other places in the district. The border town of Hilli remained for many days the principal escape chute of the Bengali rebels into India. Some of these unfortunate captive girls – amongst them were a few from Punjabi and Pathan families – made a brave and desperate bid to escape the clutches of their fleeing captors but they were mowed down with machine gunfire by the rebels in Hilli. The rebels, while they held Hilli, were aided by the Indian Border Security Force and received arms and ammunition from their Indian benefactors. In Phulbari, Ponchagarh, Jamalganj and Chaur Kai, the liquidation of non-Bengali families was wholesale and ruthless. Some non-Bengalis of Bihar origin, it is reported, escaped the rebels’ death noose and succeeded in crossing the border into India. The Indian police and military forces caught them and quite a few are believed to be languishing in jails in India.

Witnesses reported that not more than five per cent of the 5,000 non-Bengalis who lived in the town of Ponchagarh survived the March-April 1971 massacre. Awami League cadres, rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and infiltrators from India waged the massacre of the non-Bengalis in Ponchagarh.

The President of the East Pakistan Refugees Association, Diwan Wirasat Hussain, in a memorandum submitted to the British Parliamentary Delegation in Dacca on

June 20, 1971, estimated that out of the more than 50,000 Muslim refugees from India who had settled at the time of the 1947 Partition in Birganj, Manickpara, Shetabganj, Sahebganj, Deviganj and Sall Danga in Dinajpur district, barely 150 survived the March-April 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis. According to his figures, more than 100,000 non-Bengalis were killed in Dinajpur district.

CHAPTER TEN

Slaughter in Laksham, Rajbari,

Goalundo and Faridpur

“I am the lone survivor of a family of nine; all my dear ones were butchered in Laksham in March 1971 by the Bengali rebels “, said 59- year old Masoom Ali, who was repatriated to Karachi from Dacca in February 1974.

Masoom Ali’s 26-year-old son was employed as a ticket checker in the East Pakistan Railway at Laksham. He was killed in the carnage. Masoom Ali had this painful memory of the murder of his family:

“The non-Bengali element in Laksham’s population did not exceed 1,000. Amongst them were also some families of West Pakistan origin. The Bengalis referred to all of us by the generic name of Bihari. Since the first week of March 1971, because of the Awami League’s uprising, acute tension existed in Laksham and the non-Bengalis were apprehensive. The police force was immobilised as far as the safety of the non-Bengalis was concerned; no policeman was willing to rescue any non-Bengali from the thugs.

“In the night of March 19, 1971, about 500 Bengali rebels, many armed with guns, raided the Railway quarters wherein lived the non-Bengali employees and their families. The raid was conducted with such suddenness and ferocity that we had no time even to think of escape. A killer gang broke the door of our house and opened fire on all of us. In a matter of minutes our house was turned into a slaughter-house; they killed my son, his wife and their four small children and the teenage sister and brother of my daughter-in-law. One of the killers struck me on the head and I was unconscious for two days. The federal troops, who took over control of Laksham on April 16, 1971, arranged the burial of my dear ones. For months I was mentally disturbed; I had dreadful nightmares. I think that at least 800 non-Bengalis perished in the March 1971 massacre. I still remember those lurid bloodstains on the walls and floor of Railway Quarter No. 93/H in Laksham where my kith and kin were done to death before my stunned, helpless eyes. I wish I hadn’t survived “.

RAJBARI

“These broken glass bangles are my most cherished possessions; they are the only mementoes I have of my two pretty daughters who were kidnapped by the

Bengali rebels from our house in Rajbari in the March 1971 rebellion “, said sobbing Hafiza Begum, 46, in Karachi after her repatriation from Dacca in January 1974.

“The butchers slaughtered my 55-year-old husband before my eyes and dragged my brave, shrieking daughters at gunpoint to shame and death “, Hafiza tearfully added.

Hafiza broke down a number of times as she narrated the harrowing details of the gruesome tragedy in her life. She said:

“Rajbari had never experienced any tension between the Bengalis and the non-Bengalis before the March 1971 uprising of the Awami League. We lived in the Ganeshpur locality in a cluster of a dozen non-Bengali houses. Since early March, alarming rumours were afloat but our Bengali friends told us that there would be no violence in Rajbari against the non-Bengalis.

“In the night of March 19, 1971, I was sitting in the house of a neighbour when our locality was raided by a large gang of Bengali rebels. Yells of “Joi Bangla “ and the screams of the victims rent the skies. I rushed towards my house. On the way, I saw the killer gangs smashing the locked doors of the houses of non-Bengalis and attacking the inmates with daggers, staves, iron bars and scythes. As I entered my house, I saw the butchers attacking my husband who was resisting them. I heard the cries of my two unmarried daughters who were trying to beat back the attackers with frying pans and small sticks. I joined the fray in support of my family. One of the butchers struck me on the head and I collapsed on the floor. The next day, when I regained consciousness, my husband lay dead by my side. There were stab wounds all over his dead body. I had excruciating pain in the neck and the left side of the skull. There was no trace of my two daughters; I crawled into the room where my girls lived, I found these broken bangles; their abandoned Saris had bloodstains. Like a mad woman, I limped out of the house and shouted for them. I found no survivors in the houses of the non-Bengalis. A frightened Bengali woman who lived in my neighbourhood helped me hobble back to my house and advised me not to stir out otherwise the killers would get me. I placed my husband’s blood-soaked body on a cot inside a room because it was impossible to bury him just then

“After the Pakistan Army liberated Rajbari in the third week of April 1971, my husband was laid to eternal rest in a local graveyard along with the other slain non-Bengalis. For days, I roamed all over Rajbari town in search of my two kidnapped daughters but I could not find them. The killers, it seemed, had kidnapped scores of non-Bengali young women, ravished them and killed most of them just before the federal troops regained control over Rajbari. “

Hafiza was sent to Dacca and lodged in a Relief Camp for destitute women and children. In January 1974, she was repatriated to Karachi.

GOALUNDO, FARIDPUR

Two of the few survivors of the March 1971 killing of non-Bengalis in Rajbari were Zarina Khatoon, 35, and her husband, Tamizuddin, who was employed in the Power House in Rajbari. They lived in peace until December 17, 1971, when India accomplished the armed grab of East Pakistan and the Mukti Bahini went on the rampage against the non-Bengalis. Zarina and her husband, along with their eight month-old son, fled from Rajbari to Goalundo where, it was rumoured, the Red Cross would protect the non-Bengalis and accommodate them in relief camps. At Goalundo, a killer gang gunned to death Zarina's husband in the market place before her stunned eyes. The Mukti Bahini gunmen tossed Zarina and her suckling child into a jail in Faridpur town where hundreds of non-Bengali women and children were held captive. Zarina said:

“Life in this dungeon of a jail in Faridpur was worse than death; many scores of women died of hunger and disease. We ate barely a meal a day; the rice was full of stones. Any one who protested against the abominable conditions in the prison was given a beating by the prison guards. After six months, I was set free along with some other non-Bengali women. All of us looked like skeletons. I got a job as a maid-servant in the house of a Bengali businessman who had fattened on the wealth of a West Pakistani family which was liquidated by the Mukti Bahini after it captured Faridpur. He paid me no salary because, he said, he was protecting me from the Mukti Bahini.

“When the Red Cross invited applications from non-Bengalis wishing to go to Pakistan, I immediately applied for repatriation. In February 1974, the United Nations repatriated me to Karachi from Dacca by air. “

Six months of incarceration in Faridpur jail and the horrifying memory of the 1971 massacre of her husband and many of her relatives in Rajbari, Faridpur and Goalundo have made Zarina a nervous wreck. “I am continuing to live only for the sake of my little child “, said Zarina, with tears brimming in her eyes. “I can never forget the cold-blooded shooting of my husband in the market-place in Goalundo, “ she added. In 1969, Zarina's husband had worked for six months in the Power House in Faridpur. In 1972, during her captivity in prison and, later on, when she worked with a Bengali family as a maidservant, Zarina found no trace of the dozens of non-Bengalis she had known in Faridpur in 1969. She was told that most of them had been killed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Brutality in Kushtia

Awami League militants and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles unleashed their genocidal fury on the non-Bengali population in the town of Kushtia in the last week of March 1971 and it continued without a let-up right up to April 16 when the Pakistan Army liberated it. It is estimated that more than 2,000 non-Bengalis perished in the massacre in Kushtia town. Amongst the other towns in Kushtia district, where non-Bengalis were liquidated en masse, were Chuadanga, Meherpur and Zafarkandi. The death toll of non-Bengalis at these places was well over 2,500.

Dulari Begum, 35, whose husband, Mohammed Shafee, was a Railway employee and who lived in Quarter No. 13 in the Harding Bridge Colony in Kushtia, punctuated her pathetic story with sobs and tears. She said:

“On March 23, the Bengali rebels ordered all the non-Bengalis in our residential colony to congregate in the building of a school for safety. As they were the rulers of the town, we had no choice but to obey their order. Once we were inside the school building, the rebels cordoned it off. In the evening, a killer gang armed with guns, daggers, sickles and spears attacked all the non-Bengali men in this school-turned-abattoir. One of the killers stabbed my husband in the chest and he died on the spot. They piled up the dead bodies in trucks and dumped them in the river Ganges, if there was some life left in one of these bodies, he had no chance of survival in the watery grave. The executions continued all through the night and the killers took delight in torturing their victims.

“The next morning, the killer gang sprayed petrol on the doors and windows of the school building and set it ablaze. Hundreds of wailing widows and I broke through the locked gate of the building, rushed towards our houses and some of us were wounded on the way by the rebels’ firing. I locked myself inside my house; I found my eight year old son cowering under a table. My house was looted by the vandals. After a few days, a band of Bengali rebels again raided my house and tried to kidnap my son. But, miraculously, a posse of federal troops reached our colony just in time and the rebels bolted. The Pakistan Army moved me and my son to a camp in Ishurdi where widowed women and orphaned children were accommodated. Except for my son, all my relatives had perished in this cyclone of murder. My son and I underwent fresh suffering after India’s conquest of East Pakistan in December 1971. We were repatriated to Karachi in January 1974 “.

Raj Bibi, 30, whose husband, Noor Khan, was a car driver in the Mohni Mill in Kushtia, gave this sad account of his slaying by the Bengali rebels early in April 1971:

“On March 23, 1971, the Bengali rebels, who carried rifles and machine guns, raided non-Bengali houses in the Arwapara locality near the Mohni Mill in Kushtia. We lived in a rented house in this locality. The raiders ordered the non-Bengalis to surrender their firearms which many of them did. Some non-Bengalis, we learnt, were accused of storing firearms and they were clapped in a jail. Many reports of the belabouring of non-Bengalis on the roads were received by us.

“On March 30, 1971, a band of Bengali rebels broke into our house. My husband had slipped out of the backdoor into the paddy fields, but my brother, who was well-built, fought the six attackers with amazing courage. My aged mother, who ran to the rescue of my bleeding brother, was struck on the head by a rebel with his stave. She fell down and fainted. Blood gushed from her skull. In a burst of wailing, I ran to the side of my mother. In the mean time, my brother injured some of the attackers and escaped in the fields. For four days, my mother and I lived in fear in our looted house. On April 4, a killer gang raided our area and ordered sixty non-Bengalis to go with them to do forced labour. When they refused and resisted their tormentors, a dozen armed rebel soldiers liquidated them with machine guns. My husband and my brother returned to our house within hours of the arrival of the Pakistan Army on April 16. My brother’s wounds festered and despite medical treatment in hospital he died after a few days.”

Raj Bibi’s mother was killed in the Indian bombing of Kushtia in the second week of December 1971. The Mukti Bahini jailed her husband early in 1972 along with many other Biharis and they were liquidated by their Bengali captors. In February 1974, Raj Bibi was repatriated, along with her three-year-old daughter, to Karachi.

Rasoolan, 40, whose husband, Mohammed Shakoore, was jailed and killed by the rebels early in April 1971, said:

“In the last week of March 1971, armed bands of Awami Leaguers and rebel Bengali soldiers raided non-Bengali houses in our locality and drove away hundreds of non-Bengali men to the Kushtia jail. In a raid on my house, they grabbed my husband, who was employed in the Telegraph Department, and took him away. One of the raiders said he would be lodged in the jail. My aged mother, my two children and I begged the raiders to spare my husband’s life but they were brutes.

“We locked the door of our house, shuttered the windows and prayed to God. We had very little grain left. The grain shops had stopped selling food grains to the non-Bengalis. ‘Don’t sell food to the Biharis’ read signboards in Bengali owned shops. My mother and I lived on water for three days; my children – two small sons and a daughter – ate uncooked rice and stale vegetables. Our effort was to give the impression that no one lived in our house. We had also explored an escape route for an emergency.

“Early in April, a killer gang banged on our door. We slipped out of the backdoor and headed for the fields. In a barn, shielded by a large mound of earth, we spent many days of fear and terror. The crackle of gunfire echoed all the day long; the killers were busy killing. At night, I used to crawl to a pond to get water for my thirsty children and my mother. It was polluted but it slaked our parched throats. When the Pakistan Army regained control over Kushtia in mid-April and we heard yells of “Pakistan Zindabad “ (Long Live Pakistan), instead of the shouts of “Joi Bangla “, we moved out of our hideout. The federal troops were kind to us and did their best to locate my missing husband. They said the rebels had killed all the non-Bengalis they had put into the jail “.

Twenty-two-year-old Saida Khatoon, who lived with her husband, Zafar Alam Malik, in the Thanapara locality of Kushtia and escaped the massacre of non-Bengalis by seeking refuge in the house of a Bengali family, had this recollection of the gruesome happenings in March 1971:

“Tortures of unthinkable bestiality were inflicted on the non-Bengalis who were herded by the Bengali rebels in Kushtia jail in March 1971. I learnt from some God-fearing Bengalis, after the Pakistan Army had liberated Kushtia that the Bengali rebels had slaughtered all their non-Bengali captives held in this jail. They were starved and denied water for days on end; any one who protested was dragged into a dungeon-like room where he was bludgeoned to death. The tormentors took delight in stripping their human prey naked and then they singed their bare bodies with burning cigarettes.

“There was no trace left of almost all the non-Bengali women I knew before the March 1971 killing. They were also butchered. Some pregnant women were killed by the Bengali rebels with indescribable beastliness. Their wombs were ripped open with bayonets and their unborn babies were also killed.

“Some wounded Bengali rebels were treated in the Kushtia Hospital. The rebels marched quite a few of their captives to the Hospital where at gunpoint they were made to “donate “ blood for the wounded Bengalis. The “donors “ were

promised safety by their captors; invariably each one of them was gunned to death.”

Saida Khatoon lived for some months in Kushtia. Just before India’s armed grab of East Pakistan, she shifted to Dacca. In October 1973, she was repatriated to Karachi.

“I heard the screams and crying of a Sindhi girl from the house next door where she was being tortured and raped by her Bengali kidnapper”, said Mohammad Ali, 33, who was stranded in Kushtia in the last week of March 1971. Employed in the town of Pabna in a trading firm, he had gone to Kushtia on a business trip when violence against the non-Bengalis erupted. Born and brought up in East Pakistan, he spoke Bengali as well as a native of the land. Sheltered in the house of a Bengali friend, he posed as a Bengali and escaped the massacre of non-Bengalis in Kushtia. He was repatriated to Lahore in October 1973.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Butchery in Chuadanga

“Ninetyfive per cent of the non-Bengali population in Chuadanga in the Kushtia district was wiped out by ruthless killer gangs of Bengali rebels in the last week of March and first half of April 1971 “, said Mohammed Hanif, 38, who was employed at the local Railway Station.

Hanif, whose escape from the massacre was nothing short of a miracle, had lived for 22 years in East Pakistan. He had his house in the Murghi Patti locality of Chuadanga and he spoke Bengali fluently. In 1972, he escaped to Nepal from where he was repatriated to Karachi in July 1973. He gave this account of the carnage in Chuadanga:

“I adored East Pakistan; I liked the friendliness and gentleness of my Bengali friends. I knew every inch of Chuadanga. But in March 1971, life for the non-Bengalis, like me, became unsafe because of the Awami League’s rebellion. Stray incidents of manhandling and kidnapping of non-Bengalis were reported since early March from some parts of the town. On March 25, the Bengali militants, armed with lethal weapons, went on the rampage. They attacked the Chuadanga Railway Station and slaughtered all the non-Bengalis they could lay their hands on. They looted the shops owned by non-Bengalis near the Railway Station. Later in the evening, the killer gangs stormed the houses of the non-Bengali Railway staff and killed many-hundreds of innocent men, women and children. Some teenage girls were kidnappad and subjected to multiple rape before being strangled to death by their captors. The Bengali rebels raided the Hospital in this locality; they slaughtered the non-Bengali patients. In the first week of April 1971, the killers grabbed the West Pakistani doctor-in-charge of the Hospital, Dr. M. Rahman, and flung him from the balcony; his skull was smashed as he struck the ground below.

“The rebels looted every non-Bengali house with the thoroughness of vandals. They did not bury the hundreds of dead bodies which lay in my locality; they burnt some in blazing houses. I escaped from my house an hour before the pillage. Posing as a Bengali farmer, I stayed in a deserted shed in the fields for some days. “

Forty-year-old Abeda Khatoon, whose husband, Masaheb Ali, was killed in the carnage of non-Bengalis at the Chuadanga Railway Station in the last week of March 1971, thus narrated the story of her travail:

“On March 25, a yelling band of armed Bengalis raided our locality and blasted the door of our house. My husband, who worked as a porter at Chuadanga Railway station, was away from the house. The raiders slapped and kicked me when I said that my husband was away on duty. They looted my house like thieves and took away every article of value. They said they would come back the next day to get my husband. “

“At midnight, I was stunned when a neighbour brought me the dreadful news that my husband was killed in the slaughter of non-Bengalis at the Railway Station earlier in the day. He urged me not to go to the Railway Station otherwise the killers would kidnap me. I lived in my house in terror and fear, expecting the killers to call again in search of their quarry. But for some reason they spared me. In mid-April, the Pakistan Army recovered Chuadanga from the rebels and they melted away in the countryside or fled to India. The federal troops moved me to a camp for widows and orphans in Jessore. After two months, I returned to my old house in Chuadanga and stayed there until India’s armed grab of East Pakistan. Subsequently, I shifted to Ishurdi and earned a living. In February 1974, I was repatriated to Karachi “.

The eye-witnesses of the killings in Chuadanga reported that the rebels inflicted spine-chilling tortures on the West Pakistani Sub-Divisional Officer after they had usurped control over the town. His pregnant wife was beaten by the rebels and his house was looted. The rebels kidnapped scores of teenage girls from non-Bengali homes and used them for mass sex assault in a school building. Before the rebels fled to India, they killed these unfortunate girls. Any girl who resisted or screamed was immediately stripped naked and shot dead in order to teach a lesson to the other captive girls. Some sadist rebels, it seemed, drew pleasure from chopping up the breasts of teenage girls and planting the Bangladesh flagsticks on their ruptured wombs.

Fifty-year-old Pari Begum, whose family of six was slaughtered in the murderous attack by the Bengali rebels on the non-Bengali houses near the Chuadanga Railway Station in the last week of March, 1971, gave this account of that nightmare:

“My husband and my son-in-law were Railway employees. Owing to the prevailing tension in the town, both of them stayed at home instead of going to work at the Railway Station. We lived in a quarter given to us by the Railway. In the evening of March 25, 1971, shortly after I had offered my evening prayers, the roar of guns and the rat-rat of machine-guns was heard in our colony. This was immediately followed by cue screams and groans of men, women and children. We had locked the doors of our house. Suddenly, a killer gang of Bengali rebels

smashed it with iron bars and riddled my husband and my son-in-law with a volley of bullets from their sten guns. My daughter and I tried to shield her three little sons. "Kill these Bihari snakes ", yelled one of the killers and in the twinkling of an eye they were gunned to death. As my shrieking daughter leaned over the writhing bodies of her loved ones, a killer shot her in the head and she died with a groan. A bullet hit me in the leg and I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Killer Gangs in Meherpur,

Zafarkandi

Abdul Aziz, 33, clerk in the Jute Mill at Meherpur, gave this harrowing account of the massacre of non-Bengalis in his town in the last week of March 1971:

“Since the beginning of March 1971, Bengali militants conducted sporadic attacks on the houses of non-Bengalis. Some of them were belaboured on the streets and a few were injured.

“The Jute Mill at Meherpur had about 150 non-Bengali work men. They were a small minority in the overall labour force at the Mill. These non-Bengalis lived in shacks in a shanty colony not far from the Mill. In the night of March 25, the Awami League militants and rebel Bengali soldiers unleashed death and destruction on the houses of non-Bengalis in this locality and slaughtered them en masse. The death toll in this incident was nearly 750. I do not think that there were more than a dozen survivors of this dreadful massacre.

“As I was a bachelor, I lived in a small room in the Mill premises. The Mill was not damaged by the killer gang. For four days, I lived confined in this room. I am grateful to my Bengali colleagues who did not betray me to the rebels otherwise I would have been dead. I stirred out of my hideout after the Pakistan Army regained control over Meherpur. The rebels had offered strong resistance but they were eventually routed. When I toured the devastated non-Bengali hutments, I was appalled by the savagery with which the Bengali rebels had liquidated the innocent non-Bengalis. Hundreds of dead bodies lay on the roads, in tanks, inside burnt-out houses, in the fields and in deserted, spooky buildings. The Army arranged their mass burial in view of the decomposed state of most of the corpses. The inmates who rushed out of their blazing houses, it appeared, were fired upon ruthlessly by the killers.

“Hundreds of blood-stained Saris and other female garments testified to the tortures inflicted on kidnapped women by their captors. The soldiers said that not more than a dozen non-Bengalis survived this gory killing.

“Heaps of burnt human bones, found in the debris of the gutted shacks of the non-Bengali labourers of the Mill, gave tell-tale indications of the many human bodies which were tossed into this inferno for in Generation by their killers “.

The overall death toll of the non-Bengalis in the March 1971 massacre in Meherpur was estimated to be more than 1,000. About 200 young women were kidnapped and raped by the rebels; many of them were throttled or gunned to death before the rebels retreated from the town.

The federal troops transported Abdul Aziz to Saidpur where he was reunited with some of his relatives late in April 1971. In January 1974, he was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi.

ZAFARKANDI

About 600 non-Bengalis were butchered in March-April 1971 by the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles and the Awami league jingoists in the town of Zafarkandi in Kushtia district.

In the last week of March, killer gangs attacked three localities where the non-Bengalis had concentrated. Their houses were looted and some were burnt. Their inmates were marched to execution grounds in the open verdant fields. Some were tortured before being shot; many others were lined up and sprayed with machine-gunfire. Amongst them were men, women and children. There were no survivors of this carnage.

The rebels treated the kidnapped girls with bestiality. When the federal army recovered Zafarkandi from the control of the rebels, the troops found the dead bodies of many scores of young women whose breasts had been slashed off and their wombs were slit open. The federal troops pieced up a picture of the massacre by the rebels on the basis of evidence furnished by the Bengali witnesses who had seen the killing in sheer helplessness and horror. Massive rubbles were reminders of the existence of populous residential colonies before the holocaust was unloosed by the Awami League rebellion.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Mass Murder in Ishurdi

Eruptions of violence against the non-Bengalis, sparked off by the Awami League's rebellion in the first week of March 1971, gained in intensity and frequency in the second week of the month in the town of Ishurdi. The Awami League militants and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and the Ansars ruled the town and usurped the authority of the civil administration. They had marked the houses of non-Bengalis in various localities of the town and trained their jingoists in the use of firearms and for the massacre of the non-Bengalis. About 2,000 non-Bengalis perished in the carnage.

Forty-two-year old Shamsuzzoha, who lived in a rented house in the Fateh Mohammedpur locality of Ishurdi and was a thriving trader before the massacre, gave this account of the harrowing March 1971 tragedy:

“In the morning of March 25, an armed band of Awami Leaguers and some rebel soldiers attacked four non-Bengali families on the Orankhola Road and executed them publicly in the market place. Their dead bodies – men, women and children – were stacked in a pile on the wayside with a placard in Bengali which read: “This is the fate of those who dislike the Bengalis “. Similar slogans were inscribed on the walls of houses in the localities where the non-Bengalis lived.

“The next day, about 5,000 armed Bengali militants, some with sten guns and rifles, stormed the houses of non-Bengalis in the Pachchum Tengri Colony. Amongst the victims was my first cousin. He and his family of four were gunned to death “.

Shamsuzzoha, his wife and his 10-year-old son had shifted from their house and sought refuge in the house of a Bengali friend a day before their locality was stormed by the rebel gunmen. Subsequently, after the Pakistan Army re-established its control over Ishurdi on April 11, 1971, they moved to Dacca from where they were repatriated to Karachi in October 1973.

Twentyseven year old Ainul Haque, who lived in a small house in the Pachchum Tengri locality of Ishurdi and whose family of six was slaughtered in the March 26 massacre of non-Bengalis, had this harrowing recollection of that traumatic day in his life:

“I had lived in Ishurdi for many years; I had a small shop. I liked Ishurdi; it was a pleasant and quiet town. Our relations with the Bengalis were friendly. I spoke Bengali well.

“On March 26, about 3,000 Bengali militants, many armed with rifles and sten guns, made a pre-dawn attack on our locality. Although there had been some tension in the town for the past three weeks, we had not expected such a massive attack. We had no weapons to defend ourselves with. The killers broke into the homes of non-Bengalis and without uttering a word, sprayed them with bullets. The front door of my house was locked; they smashed it and entered, blazing their guns at us. My aged mother, who was saying her morning prayer, was the first one to be gunned in our house; she collapsed on the prayer rug and gave up the ghost. Before I could even step out of my room, the killers machine-gunned me, my wife and my two little children who had just woken up. I groaned in agony and writhed in a pool of blood. Before I passed out, I saw the killers shooting my two grown up brothers. “For two days, I lay in a state of coma. In the morning of the third day, I regained consciousness. It was a ghastly sight; on the floor were sprawled the blood-bathed dead bodies of all my kith and kin. I thought I was in a delirium; I had high fever and I was terribly weak. I could only crawl; I kissed the lifeless, cold faces of my two little children. I wish I was also dead. The tragedy was insufferable and I again fainted. On April 11, 1971, troops of the Pakistan Army came to my house, removed the dead bodies for burial and took me to the Ishurdi hospital where I was treated for weeks for my wounds. There were a few other wounded survivors of the massacre. Almost 90 per cent of the non-Bengali population in Ishurdi was exterminated by the Awami League militants and the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles and the Ansars. When I went back to my locality, it was a ghost colony. Every non-Bengali house was looted by the vandals; many were burnt. Almost all my friends were dead. Re-visiting my ransacked house was a torture; the memory of the slaughter of my family was unbearable. I moved to Dacca and in January 1974. I was repatriated to Karachi “.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Persecution in Paksey

About one thousand non-Bengali families lived in Paksey, an important Railway centre, before the Awami League's rebellion in March 1971. Since the beginning of the month, the Awami League militants had taken over virtual control of the town. The police and the para-military East Pakistan Rifles and Ansars had also revolted against the authority of the federal government. Not a day passed without demonstrations of strength by the Awami Leaguers in the form of large processions and meetings where firearms were brandished. Quite a few non-Bengali young men were manhandled and the shops owned by non-Bengalis were looted.

In the last week of March and early in April, the xenophobia against the non-Bengalis reached a fever-heat pitch. The non-Bengali residents of the Railway Colony became a target of terrorisation. Almost all of them were Railway employees and their families. The all-out massacre of the non-Bengalis in this residential colony took place on April 9, 1971; more than 2,000 of them were done to death. This was just before the federal troops regained control over Paksey on April 10.

Abu Mohammed, 52, a Railway employee who lived in the Railway Colony and whose family of seven was butchered in the carnage, related this account of the macabre tragedy in his life:

“A killer mob of Awami League militants and Bengali rebels, blazing sten guns and rifles, attacked the Paksey Railway Station and the residential colony of the Railway employees in the last week of March. They lined up all the non-Bengali railway employees in the Paksey Railway Yard and gunned them to death. I was on duty at that time and I was injured in my left arm by a bullet. I fell down and I feigned death. I bled profusely and was in acute pain. The killers withdrew from the Railway Station in the afternoon and raided the residential colony on “Operation Loot, Burn and Kill “. I heard prolonged bursts of machine-gunfire.

“My quarter was at some distance but a mosque, where I often prayed, was nearby. Shortly after midnight, I succeeded in crawling to the mosque. There was not a flicker of light anywhere. As I limped into the mosque, I saw in the darkness the forms of women huddled on the floor. Many of them were almost naked. “We had enough of hell; please kill us now “, said one of them, thinking that I was one of the Bengali rapists. When I disclosed my identity in a whisper,

they sighed and sobbed out the details of the slaughter of their menfolk, of their own kidnapping and of their rape by the Bengali rebels.

“Before being dumped in the mosque”, one of them said, “our clothes were stripped and we were marched in the nude to a school building where our captors ravished us. Late at night we were left in this mosque. The dead bodies of two teenage girls who made a daring escape bid on the way here are lying in the compound”. In this melee of weeping, ravished women were the innocent daughters and wives of many of my colleagues in the Railway.

“The next morning, the rebels retreated and a unit of the Pakistan Army liberated Paksey. They rescued us; I was treated in hospital. All my family members had perished in the killing. The women and children, who survived the slaughter of the non-Bengalis, were taken to a Relief Camp in Dacca”.

Subsequently, Abu Mohammad was transferred to Dacca. He was repatriated to Karachi in February 1974.

Shamsuzzoha, who had witnessed the killings in Ishurdi in March 1971, also spoke of the massacre of non-Bengalis in Paksey, eight miles from where he lived: “My first cousin, Jamal Malik, was employed as a Guard in the East Pakistan Railway at Paksey. His family of 12 lived in a quarter in the Railway colony. Jamal and all his relatives were killed in the third week of March, 1971. Some of the men were gunned to death in the quarter itself; others, including some aged men, young women and children, were marched to a school building with the promise that they would be lodged there and their lives spared. On the fateful day, the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles riddled them with machine-gunfire in the compound of the school. An hour before the massacre, the captive young women were taken at gunpoint to another school building where they were ravished by the rebels. Before the rebels retreated, they herded many of these raped women in a mosque. They were freed by the federal Army”.

Fifteen years old, Mohammed Qayum, whose parents and elder sister were brutally killed in the massacre of non-Bengalis in Paksey on April 9, 1971, thus related the story of that ghastly episode in these words: “Early in the morning, a killer mob, yelling ‘Joi Bangla’ attacked the Railway colony where we lived. They looted our houses and at gunpoint they marched us to an old school building at some distance from our colony. Herded in this school were hundreds of other men, women and children from the Railway colony. Our captors had given us the false promise that our lives would be spared.

“Late in the afternoon, our captors, brandishing guns, daggers and spears, lined up all their adult male captives. They were driven in two’s to a corner of the

compound where, before our dazed eyes, these hapless men were stabbed with daggers (Ramdaos) and then shot. My mother and my elder sister could not restrain themselves when our captors dragged my father towards the executioners. Seated in my memory is that deathly scene when two gunmen opened fire on my mother and my elder sister and chopped up the chest of my father before snuffing out the life in him with a rifle shot. With me stood my 8-year-old sister. Just then there was a stampede when some of the men prisoners attacked the captors with their bare hands.

“In front of me was a deserted house; a part of it was burnt. I picked up my crying sister in my arms and rushed into this house. With bated breath, we hid ourselves under a burnt mattress in a room full of debris. We stayed in this spookish house for 24 hours. When my little sister started crying because of thirst and hunger, we tiptoed into a nearby field, drank some water, and sought refuge at night in the bushy woods on the far end of the paddy field. We ate wild fruits and slept on a bed of leaves. The next day, we were rescued by the Pakistan Army soldiers. They took us to Ishurdi where we lived with other orphaned children in a house. I worked as a day labourer and earned enough to feed myself and my sister. We underwent fresh travail when Ishurdi was occupied by the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini late in December 1971. We were repatriated to Karachi in January 1974.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Terror Rule in Noakhali

Although the population of non-Bengalis in Noakhali did not exceed 2,500, they commanded respect in the town and their relations with the Bengalis were friendly. Most of them were employed in trading firms; some owned shops and small businesses. Since the middle of March 1971 tension was felt in Noakhali and the non-Bengalis felt unsafe. On March 21-23, 1971, armed bands of Awami Leaguers and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and Ansars conducted the extermination of the non-Bengali ethnic minority in Noakhali. It is estimated that some 2,000 non-Bengali men, women and children were butchered in this carnage. The rebels kidnapped many non-Bengali teenage girls, raped them and killed most of them before the Pakistan Army routed them in the last week of April, 1971.

An eye-witness of the March killing in Noakhali was Fazlul Haque, 37, who worked in the Noakhali branch of the Eastern Federal Insurance Company. Before his posting in Noakhali in 1969, he lived in Chittagong. He was all by himself in Noakhali; his parents and other relatives were in Chittagong. His testimony reads:

“All the nine inmates, two others, like me, were forewarned and had stayed away. Almost three-fourth of the non-Bengali population in Noakhali perished in this pogrom. Even women and children were slaughtered by the hundreds “.

Witnesses from Noakhali said that they had received reports of violence against non-Bengali families in Maijdi, Begumganj, Chaumohni, Hatia and Lakshmipur. The population of non-Bengalis at these places was not large and they were scattered. Some non-Bengali traders, it seems, were held for ransom and their retail shops were looted. At Maijdi Railway station, some non-Bengali Railway employees were manhandled and killed during the March 1971 disturbances. Between the last week of March and the last week of April 1971, a few non-Bengalis were killed by the Awami League militants in some of the off-shore islands, including Sandwip, South Hatia, and Dakhin Shahbazpur.

“A dozen Urdu-speaking employees of the Eastern Federal Insurance Company had rented an apartment on New Road in Noakhali. It was like a Mess. I lived in this apartment. My co-residents and I had good relations with our Bengali neighbours.

“In the second week of March 1971, some non-Bengalis were roughed up, without the slightest provocation, by Awami League militants. On March 20, 1971, when I went to my office, some Bengali colleagues warned me that the Awami League militants would attack the houses of non-Bengalis. They urged me not to go back to my apartment. In the afternoon, armed bands of Awami Leaguers went on the rampage against non-Bengalis, looting their houses and gunning the men to death. I hid myself for three days in the bathroom of my office building. Subsequently, I sought refuge in the home of a Bengali colleague. The killers had raided the communal apartment where I used to live and they had murdered.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Sorrows of Sylhet

The intensity of the Awami League's rebellion in most parts of the Sylhet district was not as severe as in many other districts of the province. One of the reasons was that the population of non-Bengalis in Sylhet was not large. Another reason was that the indigenous inhabitants of Sylhet (of Assamese origin) were opposed to the Awami League's plans for establishing an independent Bengali state. In the 1947 British-supervised referendum on the issue whether Sylhet should stay in India or join Pakistan, the people of the district gave a massive vote in favour of Pakistan. The proposal for a province of North Bengal drew immense support from the indigenous Assamese inhabitants of Sylhet district.

The Awami League's terror machine wrecked the peace in Sylhet in March 1971 and some non-Bengalis were slaughtered by murderous gangs of Awami League militants who received arms smuggled from neighbouring India. In the tea gardens in Sylhet district, Awami League activists incited the Bengali labour to violence against the non-Bengali executives and other staff members and some families were slaughtered. The exact number of the non-Bengalis in Sylhet who were killed in March 1971 is difficult to ascertain but it is believed to be in the neighbourhood of 500.

"The killer gang broke into our house in Sylhet and gunned my only son and his wife to death", said 50-year-old Mrs. Wahida Khatoon in Karachi. Her son, Zafar Ahmed Siddiqi, employed as an Accountant in the Sylhet office of the Pakistan International Airlines, and his wife, Siddiqa, were shot dead on April 4, 1971, by a posse of rebel gunmen in their home in the heart of the town. When Wahida Khatoon tried to save her son, a killer shot at her and the bullet scraped her skull, leaving a gash in it. She still bears the scar of that wound. But far worse is the scar on her heart caused by the slaughter of her son and his wife. Wahida Begum said in her testimony:

"The killers said they were shooting us because we did not belong to Bengal and because Urdu was our mother tongue. They looted our house.

"I was wounded and I bled profusely. My son, Zafar's six children were orphaned. In this horrifying tragedy, our 18-year-old Bengali maidservant, Hajera, was a tower of strength. She shielded my grand-children from the fire and fury of the rebels who had killed my son and his wife. The Bengali land lord of our house, moved by our plight, sheltered us in his own home and arranged

for my medical treatment. Our maid servant, Hajera, looked after me and my grand-children with utmost devotion and at a peril to her life. Of Bengali origin, she was born in Sylhet and had worked in our home for some years.

“My eldest son, Nasim Ahmed Siddiqi, was employed as an Executive Engineer in Serajganj. In March 1971, his house was looted by the rebels and he was tortured in the local jail. His life was saved by his Bengali assistant.

“When the killer gang ransacked our house, Hajera begged them not to kill us. She was hit by a gunman’s bullet in the leg as she leaned over Zafar’s little daughter to protect her.

“On May 4, we left Sylhet and came to Pakistan through a long and arduous route. Hajera came with us and cheerfully bore the tribulations of this hazardous journey.

“I can never forget that grisly night of April 4, 1971, when the killer gang had murdered, before my stunned eyes, my son and his wife and I was injured. All through the night, Hajera and the children cried over the blood-spattered bodies of Zafar and his wife. The next day some Sylheti neighbours and our Bengali landlord came and buried the dead bodies in the grave yard and I was hospitalised with their help. “

Reports of violence against non-Bengali families were received in March-April 1971 from Lalabazar, Fenchuganj, Gopalganj, Gobinda-ganj, Balaganj and Jagannathpur. The federal Army secured Sylhet on April, 10, 1971.

Mohammed Jalaluddin Khan, 22, whose father was the Station Master at the Mantala Railway Station near Sylhet, testified after his patriation to Lahore from Dacca in September 1973:

“I was a Third Year student in the Shah Jalal College at Mantala. In the 1947 Partition, my parents had migrated from Uttar Pradesh in India to East Pakistan. On March 2, 1971, a gang of Awami League hoodlums raided our house in Mantala and took away all the valuables in our home. But they spared our lives. My father had built a house in Ghorasal near Dacca because he intended to live there after his retirement from the Railway service. Soon after our house in Mantala was looted, we proceeded by train to Ghorasal. At the Railway Station, a Bengali member of the Jamaat-e-Islami told us that Ghorasal had become unsafe for non-Bengalis and that we should go to Dacca (where my brother-in-law lived in the Mohammedpur locality). In Dacca, the Awami League’s terror regime held the city in its grip and life was a nightmare for the non-Bengalis. We lived in Mohammedpur which was an oasis of safety for the non-Bengalis. For days, we

held at bay killer gangs led by the Awami League militants. Some of the non-Bengalis from Mohammedpur, who committed the folly of stirring out of the locality at night, were never seen again; they were shanghaied and liquidated by killer gangs. The Pakistan Army's intervention on March 25, 1971, was a life-saver for us “.

After the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized Dacca in the third week of December 1971, Jalaluddin and his elder brother were kidnapped from Mohammedpur by a killer gang and taken to a human slaughter-house in a riverside area called Bandh in Dacca. Jalaluddin was almost petrified when he saw these cut-throats butchering his elder brother. “I prayed to God “, said Jalaluddin, “and all of a sudden I felt the surge of strength in my body. I broke through the cordon of the slaughterers and ran towards the Bihari Camp in the Girls' College on Nurjehan Road. The Bengali officer-in-charge of the Camp gave me asylum and I lived in it until my repatriation to Pakistan in September 1973. “

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Shootings in Molvi Bazar, Bheramara, Narkuldanga

“The Bengali insurgents made their non-Bengali captives dig their own graves before gunning them to death “ reported 34-year-old Qamruddin Khan, who owned a tailoring shop in the Tulsitala locality of Molvi Bazar.

“There were very few survivors of the March-April, 1971 massacre of the non-Bengalis in Molvi Bazar “, he added.

Qamruddin Khan, who was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in October 1973, had this recollection of that heart-chilling pogrom:

“I had migrated in 1950 from Bihar to East Pakistan. I liked Molvi Bazar and I set up my business of tailoring. I spoke Bengali very well and I had Bengali and non-Bengali customers.

“There had never before been any tension between the Bengalis and the non-Bengalis. Since early March 1971, the Awami League militants were fanning hatred for the non-Bengalis by spreading all manner of false rumours.

“On March 19-20, the lava burst and the Awami Leaguers and the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles and the police conducted the wholesale slaughter of the non-Bengalis – men, women and children. Non-Bengali men who resisted the Bengali attackers in their homes were gunned to death right inside their homes; others were dragged to paddy fields or the banks of rivers where they were lined up and machine-gunned. Many dead bodies were thrown in heaps in shallow graves; others were tossed into the river. The killers showed no mercy to children, particularly boys. Good-looking teenage girls were kidnapped for sexual assault by the insurgents; most of them were shot or throttled to death before their violators fled from the town after the Pakistan Army liberated it on April 28, 1971. “

Qamruddin had a miraculous escape; he sought refuge in a small Mosque where he lived as a dumb mendicant for a month.

He added: “Some Bengalis tried to protect their non-Bengali neighbours. This was at a grave risk to their own lives. The police had ceased to function; the policemen had joined the rebels in plunder and murder. Anyone who challenged the Bengali rebels was swiftly liquidated. My estimate is that some 2,000 non-Bengalis perished in the March-April, 1971 massacre in Molvi Bazar. “

BHERAMARA

“I wish my captors had killed me just as they had slaughtered my loving husband in Bheramara on March 22, 1971 “, said 21-year-old Nasim Jahan, who was abducted and ravished by a Bengali rebel during the Awami League’s uprising in East Pakistan.

Nasim, who was repatriated to Karachi in November 1973, sobbed out the story of her woes and suffering in these words:

“We lived in the Taltala locality of Bheramara; our neighbours were mostly non-Bengalis. My husband, Qudratullah, was employed in a local trading firm. He had a double-barrel gun in the house.

“Since the first week of March 1971, the non-Bengalis were subjected to threats and intimidation by the Awami League militants. In the middle of the month, when the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles and the Ansars joined the Awami Leaguers, some non-Bengalis were savaged on the streets.

“On March 22, a huge mob of armed insurgents went berserk and soaked our locality in blood. Many of the attackers had rifles and machine-guns. When they raided our house, my brave husband tried to hold them at bay by firing his gun on them. They riddled our house with bullets. When our ammunition was exhausted, the gunmen ripped open our front door and killed my husband brutally. As he writhed in the agony of death, they brained his skull with a bayonet. The memory of that heart-rending scene haunts me constantly. I tried to kill myself with a kitchen knife to escape their clutches; one of them overpowered me and dragged me to a deserted building where many captive young women like me were held under heavy guard. Late at night, a killer gang arrived to feast on us; we were their booty, their slavegirls. It was the night of insufferable torture, shame and sin for the captive non-Bengali women.

“The next morning, one of our captors claimed me as his share of the loot. A bachelor, he said he needed a cook in his house. At gunpoint and wearing a torn Sari, I walked in shame and tears to his mudhouse. He warned me that I would be caught and killed if I tried to escape. For a fortnight, I lived in his bouse and cooked food for him and he raped me. A day before the federal troops captured Bheramara, he said he would quit the town and that as an act of mercy he would spare my life. The captors of the other non-Bengali girls had instructions from the rebel commander to kill them before withdrawing from the town. “

After Bheramara was liberated by a contingent of the Pakistan Army, Nasim Jahan was moved to a Relief Camp in Dacca. Along with some relatives, she escaped to Nepal and lived in Kathmandu for some months.

NARKULDANGA

Maqsood Ahmed, 22, who was a student in Bheramara, lost his two brothers and his paternal uncle in the carnage of non-Bengalis in Narkuldanga on March 22-23, 1971. He escaped to Nepal and was repatriated from there to Karachi in January 1974. He gave this account of the March massacre:

“The Bengalis and non-Bengalis had lived like brothers in Bheramara and Narkuldanga. We lived in the Ferozepur Colony in Narkuldanga; most of its residents were non-Bengalis. Some years ago, a non-Bengali religious divine died; Bengalis and non-Bengalis jointly contributed to the construction of a tomb for him. Every year, on the occasion of his death anniversary, there used to be large congregations of Bengalis and non-Bengalis at Feroze Baba’s tomb. The Mosque in our locality always drew a large crowd of Muslims at prayer-time.

“Since the first week of March 1971, Awami Leaguers sowed discord between Bengalis and non-Bengalis by spreading false rumours. We learnt that some armed Bengalis from India had surreptitiously come to Bheramara and Narkuldanga and that they were training the local Awami Leaguers in the use of firearms.

“On March 23, about 500 Awami Leaguers and rebel soldiers, armed with sten guns, rifles and daggers (Ramdaos) attacked our locality and slaughtered the non-Bengali menfolk by the hundreds. Some families who sought refuge in the premises of this tomb were mowed down with gunfire. The rebels looted every house after its non-Bengali occupants had been liquidated. They murdered even children. The killers kidnapped many young women and teenage girls. They were raped and quite a few were shot dead before the rebels retreated from the town. I had slipped out of my house just when the slayers entered our locality; I hid myself in a grain store for some days. My uncle and my two elder brothers were killed by the rebels.”

The death toll in the massacre of the non-Bengalis in Bheramara and Narkuldanga in March-April 1971 was estimated at more than 2,000. An accurate figure was difficult to reach because the rebels burnt many dead bodies in blazing houses.

Zamir Ali, 52, who lived in the Ferozepur Colony in Narkuldanga, spent the last two weeks of March 1971 in Raita with his cousin who was married to a Bengali

woman. His cousin was a contractor and did business with the Railway staff at Raita. According to Zamir Ali, six non-Bengali families were murdered in the last week of March 1971 by the Bengali rebels in Raita town and their dead bodies were flung into the Padma River. The house of his cousin was attacked in mid-March by a killer squad but the plaintive urgings of his Bengali wife, whose father wielded influence in Raita, saved the family from the cut-throats, Zamir Ali was repatriated to Pakistan in December 1973.

While he was away in Raita, Zamir Ali's one-room house in Narkuldanga was looted by the rebels. He did not have a family; his wife and his son had died in 1967 in a smallpox epidemic. According to Zamir Ali, the Bengali rebels escaped en masse to India from Raita and many other towns in the Kushtia district. The fleeing Bengali rebels from Bheramara and Narkuldanga, he said, brought with them many teenage non-Bengali captive girls to Raita en route to West Bengal where the Indian authorities gave them sanctuary. Some non-Bengali girls, who tried to escape, were brutally killed by their captors, he added.

Razzaq Ali, who lived and worked in Bheramara, was in the town of Kumarkhali in the last week of March 1971. Aged 44, Razzaq was employed as a clerk in a small trading firm in Bheramara. He claimed that almost all the 100 or more non-Bengalis in Kumarkhali were massacred in the last week of March by the Bengali rebels. He was repatriated to Pakistan in January 1974. He testified:

“I was born in Calcutta, and, although my father hailed from Bihar, I spoke Bengali like a native. After Partition in 1947, I settled in the Kushtia district. The Awami Leaguers and their supporters massacred most of the non-Bengali male adults in Bheramara. I was a bachelor and I lived with a Bengali family whom I had known from Calcutta. I had to go to Kumarkhali on urgent business. I was not detected by the Bengali rebels because of my excellent command of the Bengali language. On March 28, I saw dozens of dead bodies of non-Bengali men on the pavements in Kumarkhali; their houses were looted and burnt. “

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Death Stalks Rangpur

Militants of the Awami League and the Bengali rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles went on the warpath against the non-Bengalis in Rangpur town in the second week of March 1971. Non-Bengalis who lived in Bengali-inhabited localities were terrorised and driven from their homes. Some were kidnapped and hacked to death in nearby paddy fields. The police force had joined the rebels. The Bengali rebels declared total war on the non-Bengalis in the last week of March 1971 when armed mobs attacked the predominantly non-Bengali localities in the town and stayed more than 5,000 innocent men, women and children.

The flames of strife and bloodshed engulfed almost every town in the Rangpur district. The loss of non-Bengali lives was particularly heavy in the towns of Saidpur, Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat. Estimates of the death toll of non-Bengalis in these three towns range from 6,000 to 10,000. An impediment in the way of arriving at a correct estimate was the fact that the murderers floated the bodies of many of their victims in the rivers or incinerated them in blazing houses.

Twenty-five-year old Mohammed Yusuf, who worked as a Motor Mechanic in Rangpur and lived in the Alamnagar colony in a thatched hut, was the lone survivor in a family of twelve. His parents, his five brothers and four other close relatives were liquidated by a killer gang in the last week of March 1971. Yusuf, who was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in February 1974, had this recollection of the carnage of non-Bengalis in Rangpur town:

“In the night of March 27, 1971, about 500 armed Awami Leaguers and soldiers from the East Pakistan Rifles encircled our Bihari-inhabited locality, looted and burnt many huts and opened a barrage of gunfire as their victims tried to escape from the conflagration. The killers smashed into our little house and sprayed us with bullets from their blazing guns. All of us writhed in a stream of blood which spouted from our bullet-riddled bodies. I was hit in the left thigh and I lost consciousness. When I woke up the next morning, I was the only one alive in our family of twelve. An abandoned barn was my hideout for a week until the federal troops arrived and the rebels fled on April 26, 1971.”

The destruction brought by the rebels in Rangpur, added Mohammed Yusuf, was premeditated and wanton. The scale and ferocity of it was beyond the wildest imagination of the non-Bengalis.

“I learnt from a few other survivors of the massacre “, continued Mohammed Yusuf, “that after the killer gang had slaughtered the non-Bengali menfolk and most of their male children; the women were herded in the building of the Iqbal High School. The young ones were stripped of their clothes at gunpoint and marched off to a nearby building where they were assaulted and raped by the rebels. Before the insurgents retreated from Rangpur, they murdered these unfortunate girls and scattered their naked bodies either in the river or in the lush green fields “.

Junaid Ahmed, 21, who was a College student in Rangpur and lived with his parents and two brothers in a rented house on Satgumbad Road, was injured in the massacre of non-Bengalis in his locality on March 23, 1971. Junaid, who was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in January 1974, had this recollection of that horrifying scene:

“My father, Aqil Ahmed, was a clerk in the Patna High Court. In August 1947, after Pakistan was established, my parents migrated to East Pakistan and made Rangpur their home. I was born in Rangpur. Although we spoke excellent Bengali, we were considered Biharis. We had no relatives left in Bihar. Rangpur was our home.

“On March 10, peace in Rangpur was disturbed when a band of Awami Leaguers, armed with guns, spears and daggers, attacked a cluster of non-Bengali houses and shops. Some Biharis were killed or maimed. After this event, the non-Bengalis lived in terror and almost every day one or two incidents of the manhandling of non-Bengalis by thugs of the Awami League were reported. There were widespread round-ups of non-Bengalis by the rebels.

“On March 23, about six hundred armed Awami Leaguers and rebel soldiers of the East Pakistan Rifles stormed our locality and spread fire and death in non-Bengali homes. We had no weapons to resist these gun-blazing cut-throats. They machine gunned me and the other members of my family. I miraculously survived.

“I estimate that the death toll in my locality was in the neighbourhood of 5,000. The killers murdered 2,000 men, 700 women and 2,300 children. They kidnapped at least 500 teenage girls; many were raped and killed and some were taken away by the rebels to India..... “

“Almost all the non-Bengalis in Kishoreganj were liquidated by the Bengali rebels in the last week of March 1971 “, said Jamal Ahmed, 48, who lived in the Alamnagar colony in Rangpur town. Employed in a retail store in Rangpur, he often visited neighbouring towns on business errands. Very fluent in Bengali, Ahmed had many Bengali and non-Bengali friends in Kishoreganj. On March 23-24, he was in Kishoreganj when the militants in an Awami League-sponsored procession went berserk and looted the shops and houses owned by non-Bengalis. Over the next few days, he said, the avalanche of the Awami League’s terror hit the non-Bengalis with catastrophic suddenness and there was a wholesale slaughter of the non-Bengali population. The killer gangs, he added, asked no questions from their victims; they just sprayed them with bullets. Jamal Ahmed’s Bengali business friend in Kishoreganj protected him in his house for more than a week. When he returned to Rangpur in the third week of April, he found, to his utter dismay, that his house in Alamnagar had been looted and his wife and sister-in-law were kidnapped. For months, he frantically searched for them but they remained untraced. He was repatriated to Karachi in November 1973.

Jamal Ahmed reported that small groups of non-Bengalis, who lived in Badarganj, Mahiganj, Pirgacha and Kaunia, were wiped out by the Bengali rebels in the last week of March and the first fortnight of April 1971. Most of the Awami Leaguers and their supporters, who had masterminded and executed the grisly killings in Rangpur, he said, fled to West Bengal in India after the Pakistan Army regained control over the area late in April 1971. He claimed that he had seen Bengali Hindus from the Cooch Behar district of West Bengal in Kishoreganj and they were well-armed. According to Jamal Ahmed, many non-Bengali passengers were murdered by Awami League cadres in launches in the Tista river and he came to know of it from a Bengali friend who was related to a Serang (Captain of the boat).

CHAPTER TWENTY: Gunfire Ravages Nilphamari, Saidpur

Some 5,000 non-Bengalis lived in Nilphamari town in Rangpur district before the March 1971 disturbances. In the last week of the month— March 23 to 30— almost half of them were decimated. The instigators of the carnage and the executioners were the armed Awami League volunteers, aided by the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles.

Jamila Khatoon, 55, whose three sons, two daughters and a son-in-law perished in the slaughter in her locality, Kopilmoni, in the night of March 24-25, 1971, thus related her story:

“We had lived for many years in Nilphamari. All of us spoke Bengali very well. After the death of my husband, my sons looked after me.

“Stray incidents in which non-Bengalis were the victims had taken place in some parts of Nilphamari since the third of March 1971. We had heard rumours that the Awami Leaguers and the rebel policemen were secretly planning the massacre of the non-Bengalis but we had no way of escape.

“In the morning of March 24, the flames of organized violence engulfed our locality. A large mob of armed miscreants raided non-Bengali homes and brutally killed their inmates; their houses were looted and some were burnt. In the night, a killer gang smashed the front door of our house and, without uttering a word, machinegunned the inmates. My three sons, my two daughters, my son-in-law and I were hit and we slumped to the ground in a pool of blood. The raiders hurriedly looted out valuables and trooped out for the next kill. I was injured in the leg and I lost consciousness. The next morning when I awoke I found that all my dear ones were dead. It was a ghastly scene in the house. The dead bodies were buried after the Pakistan Army regained control over Nilphamari. I went to live with a relative in Chittagong late in 1971 after I had lost my eye-sight. The tragedy in my life had made me blind. I was repatriated to Karachi in February 1974.”

Jamila recalled that the murderous gangs had kidnapped many non-Bengali teenage girls whose dead bodies were found in derelict tanks after the rebels retreated from the town.

SAIDPUR

“At least 5,000 non-Bengalis perished in the massacre in Saidpur, an important Railway Centre, in the last week of March 1971”, said Nuruddin Ahmed, 42, an employee of the East Pakistan Railway at that time.

Nuruddin Ahmed lived in Railway Quarter No. 59/A in Saidpur. Amongst those killed was his son-in-law. His daughter was kidnapped by the rebels. His account of the gory events in Saidpur reads:

“In 1947, I had opted for service in Pakistan and was transferred from the Howrah Railway Station to Chittagong. Later on, I was posted to Saidpur where I lived for 11 years. I had married my daughter, Shahla to a young Railway employee and they lived in a separate Railway Quarter.

“On March 25, a large mob of armed Awami League volunteers and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles attacked the non-Bengali residential areas in Saidpur, including those in the Railway Colony. They killed my son-in-law and his brothers and kidnapped my daughter and her sister-in-law. When the Pakistan Army re-established its control, I did my best to locate them but to this day I am unaware of their fate.”

Nuruddin was not in his house on the fateful day when the non-Bengali homes were attacked and he escaped the massacre. He added:

“After the Pakistan Army re-occupied Saidpur early in April, 1971, the local Administration set up a Peace Committee to maintain peace and to dissuade the non-Bengalis from seeking revenge for the massacre conducted by the Bengali rebels. After India’s military victory in East Pakistan in December 1971, we underwent woeful suffering and many non-Bengalis were killed by the Mukti Bahini and their supporters. With great difficulty I succeeded in escaping to Nepal from where I was repatriated to Karachi in July 1973.”

Another eye-witness from Saidpur, Hasina Begum, whose son was a Railway employee at Kamapur Railway Station, reported that on March 25, 1971, her house was looted by the Bengali rebels when they went on the rampage against non-Bengalis. Her son escaped the March 1971 killing but late in December 1971, he was kidnapped by the Mukti Bahini and remained untraced. Hasina, 42, came to Karachi in December 1973.

Other eye-witnesses reported that a mob of at least 8,000 armed Bengalis staged the bloodbath of non-Bengalis in Saidpur on March 24-25, 1971. Before starting the pogrom, the killer mob had blueprinted the plan of slaughter and the houses of non-Bengalis in Saidpur were marked. Prior to the raid on their homes, every

shop owned by a non-Bengali was looted and burnt. A jeep of the Pakistan Army, which was moving on the highway on the fringes of the town, was ambushed by an unruly mob. The five West Pakistani soldiers riding in it were overwhelmed and done to death. The jeep was grabbed and used by a group of insurgents from the East Pakistan Rifles for their lawless and destructive operations in Saidpur. Witnesses from Saidpur said that by the third week of March 1971, the entire local administration had joined the Awami League's insurrection. On March 19, the Deputy Commissioner of Rangpur presided over a meeting of Awami League leaders and district officials where specially-summoned leaders of the non-Bengalis were told that they would be wiped out if they did not support the rebellion actively.

Late in the night of March 23, 1971, more than 1,00,000 armed Bengali rebels attacked the non-Bengali settlements in Saidpur and Golahat and the Pakistan Army's garrison in Saidpur Cantonment. The siege continued for some 36 hours during which the Bengali rebels put to the torch 94 houses and shops belonging to non-Bengalis in Saidpur town. In the Cantonment, the Bengali troops of the East Bengal Regiment rebelled and attacked the West Pakistani officers and soldiers. Swiftly recovering from the initial surprise, the West Pakistani troops overpowered the Bengali mutineers and the Awami League raiders from the town and its neighbourhood. A daring Army officer from West Pakistan, Captain Fateh Mohammed Shah, struck out from the Cantonment with a company of soldiers and rescued the beleaguered non-Bengalis in Saidpur town and the Railway Station. By the forenoon of March 29, 1971, Saidpur town and Golahat were firmly under the control of the Pakistan Army and the Bengali rebels retreated in disarray. For days, before the Bengali rebels attacked the Saidpur Cantonment on March 23-25, the Awami League insurrectionists had blocked the despatch of supplies from the Saidpur Railway Station to the Army garrison. But as the Army was under instruction from Islamabad to show the utmost restraint, the West Pakistani troops in Saidpur cantonment took no punitive action against the Awami League militants. It was only after the insurrectionists, abortive attempt to seize the cantonment that the West Pakistani troops went into action on March 25, 1971.

The Government of Pakistan's White Paper of August 1971 on the East Pakistan crisis contained this account of the grisly events in Saidpur on March 25, 1971:

"In Saidpur, four violent mobs, armed with rifles, shot guns and daggers, who had come from neighbouring villages, converged on Saidpur town and attacked Golahat, an adjacent locality, killing three persons and injuring 17.

"Among the wounded, two had sustained bullet injuries while another seven were hurt from shot-gun fire. The remaining persons were injured by poles and clubs. Fifty houses were also burnt. The troops had to open fire and three

persons were injured. Later, another violent mob attacked Saidpur Cantonment. They fired at troops with shot-guns. The soldiers had to open fire, injuring five persons. “

Witnesses said that a violent mob, which went on the rampage in Saidpur against non-Bengalis on March 25, was led by Awami League militants who incited the mob to loot and burn non-Bengali houses and kill their inmates. The killer mob indulged in orgies of violence in neighbouring Golahat also where most of the non-Bengalis were killed or maimed. Holding up trains and picking off the non-Bengali passengers had become a favourite pastime of the Bengali killer gangs.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Killings in Lalmonirhat

Lalmonirhat, an important Railway Centre in the Rangpur district, felt the repercussions of the Awami League's rebellion from the first week of March 1971. The local Awami Leaguers and their supporters staged frequent shows of strength to frighten the non-Bengalis. Armed with staves, daggers and shotguns, they led large processions through those localities where the non-Bengalis were concentrated. On March 9, 1971, a blood-thirsty mob of armed Awami league volunteers and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles attacked the houses of non-Bengalis not far from the Railway Station and caused heavy casualties. They looted and burnt many houses and killed about 200 non-Bengalis. In the last week of March, their genocidal campaign reached its pitch and killer gangs liquidated another 800 non-Bengalis in the town. About 500 young non-Bengali women were kidnapped and many were ravished by their captors.

Thirty-year-old Zohra, whose husband, Mohammed Israel, owned a provision store and house near the Railway Station, gave this account of the gory happenings in Lalmonirhat in March 1971:

“Although our relations with our Bengali neighbours were cordial, Awami League volunteers from other parts of the town had held out alarming threats to the non-Bengalis in our locality. My husband and I wanted to shift, with our children, to Chittagong where also we owned a small house. But travel from Lalmonirhat was hazardous because of the slaying of non-Bengalis in trains and on the highways.

“A major flare-up occurred on March 9 when about 200 armed Bengali militants raided our locality, looted non-Bengali homes and set many houses ablaze. They looted and burnt our shop; they burst into my house and stole every article of value, including my ornaments. My husband was away; they turned me and my two children out of the house and set it on fire. Some Bengali neighbours pleaded for our lives and the killers spared us. We watched our house burn and we wrung our hands in despair; my ears were deafened by the rat-rat of machine-guns and the screams and groans of the victims. The killer gang retired from this locality late at night.

“We sat on the pavement all through the night; in the early hours of the morning, the intensity of the fire which burnt three-fourth of our house subsided. We slipped inside and lived a haunted life for 20 days until the federal army liberated Lalmonirhat. The fact that most of our house was burnt saved our lives from a killer gang which was again on the loose in our locality in the last week of

March. My husband had joined us but we had to hide him because the rebels were murdering all the non-Bengali men.

“On March 29, when we had no water and food left in the house, the federal troops entered Lalmonirhat and rescued us. They arranged our shifting to Chittagong but our house there was reduced to rubble. The Awami League terrorists had burnt it in mid-March. We lived in a rented house and my husband hawked merchandise and earned enough to feed us.

“On December 17, 1971, when East Pakistan was seized by India and the Mukti Bahini, our misfortunes began afresh. The Mukti Bahini looted our home and threw us on the streets. We sought refuge in a camp for non-Bengalis in the Sirdar Bahadur School building in Chittagong. On the night of December 18/19, 1971, a killer gang, led by the killers of the Mukti Bahini, raided this school building and “arrested “ all the non-Bengali men and teenage boys. My husband was one of them. I fell down at the feet of one of these gunmen; but he kicked me in the face and my forehead bled. I was utterly helpless. My children and I lived in this camp for two years. I made frantic efforts to get news of my husband. There were rumours that the Mukti Bahini had murdered all the non-Bengali men they had hijacked from our camp. In January 1974, my children and I were repatriated to Karachi from Chittagong. My constant prayer to God is to re-unite us with my husband. “

Thirty-year-old Zahida Khatoon, whose husband, Mohammed Ismail, was employed at Lalmonirhat in the East Pakistan Railway.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Inferno in Jessore

Jessore, a cantonment town of strategic importance near the Indian border, witnessed a bloodbath of thousands of non-Bengalis and some pro-Pakistan Bengalis between the first week of March and the early days of April 1971. The killers were the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and police, armed Awami League volunteers and Hindu Bengali infiltrators from India.

The strength of the beleaguered West Pakistani troops in the Jessore cantonment was too inadequate to contain the xenophobic fury and homicidal frenzy of the rebel soldiers and their Awami League supporters. The first gruesome incident during this period of gunfire and gore occurred on March 4, 1971 when a train coming from Khulna was derailed by a gang of saboteurs at Jessore. Scores of non-Bengali passengers—men, women and children—were pulled out of the train compartments by armed Bengali militants, looted and done to death. Their dead bodies were strewn on the rail track. Estimates of the death toll of non-Bengalis in Jessore in a month of the Awami League's rule of terror range from 12,000 to 20,000.

In the Jhumjhampur Colony in Jessore, rebel soldiers of the East Pakistan Rifles killed, maimed or kidnapped more than 5,000 non-Bengalis between March 25 and April 4. Some 500 non-Bengali young women were abducted to India where many of them were sold to brothel-operators. On March 29 and 30, a cluster of non-Bengali hutments in the Ramnagar colony was burnt to ashes by the rebel Bengali soldiers and Awami League hoodlums. More than 150 non-Bengalis, including some escapees from the neighbouring Jhumjhampur locality, perished in the conflagration.

There were very few survivors amongst the 4,500 non-Bengali who lived in the Taraganj colony after the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and the Awami League storm troopers had made it the target of their genocide on March 30. At least a thousand non-Bengalis were slaughtered by the Bengali rebels between March 26 and April 5 in the Hamidpur, Ambagaon, Bachachar and Puratan Qasba localities of Jessore town.

In the neighbouring shanty townships of Mobarakganj, Kaliganj, Kotchandpur and Tasfidanga, non-Bengali houses were marked for attack in the first fortnight of March by Awami League militants and the carnage of non-Bengalis were

conducted in the last days of the month. The death toll in these localities exceeded 1,500.

Two British newsmen, Alan Hart of the BBC and Nicholas Tomalin of the Sunday Times, London, visited Jessore early in April 1971 when the town was under the control of the Awami League gunmen and the Bengali rebel soldiers. With them was a Bengali photographer, Mohammed Amin. Escorted by the armed volunteers of the Awami League, the two British newsmen accidentally witnessed the slaying of the hapless non-Bengalis by their blood-thirsty captors in the vicinity of the Area Headquarters of the Bengali rebels in Jessore. In a Jessore despatch published in the Sunday Times, of April 4, 1971, Nicholas Tomalin reported:

“I was there with Alan Hart of BBC Panorama and a Bengali speaking photographer, Mohammed Amin. We thought the troops and local citizens were about to attack but they then got other ideas. Among each contingent arriving at the HQ were tall, usually bearded Punjabis. Their hands were tied and they were being brutally pushed along by rifle-butts.

“We thought the West Pakistan soldiers were attacking and we scattered similarly, only to discover, on a grass patch beside the road, men freshly stabbed and bludgeoned, lying in still flowing pools of blood. Four of them were still just alive, rolling over and waving their legs and arms. But none of them made any noise. At this moment our Awami League guide became hysterical and tried to rush us back. He said it was not safe, the West Pakistanis were attacking. He tugged us away from the bodies. But suddenly, Alan Hart, myself and Mohammed (Amin) realised who these dead and dying men were. They were not Bengalis; they were, we are convinced, the Punjabi prisoners we had seen, bound and under guard, an hour before.

“The victims could not have been killed by anyone but local Bengali irregulars as these were the only people in Central Jessore that day. The terror and behaviour of the Awami (League) politicians and the crowd is circumstantial evidence, and our photographer, Amin, who knows his Pakistani types, is certain the victims were Punjabis.

“Even as the locals began to threaten us and we were forced to drive away, we saw another 40 Punjabi ‘spies’ being marched towards that same grass plot with their hands above their heads.”

Another British newspaper, the Daily Mail of London, published the following write-up from Brian Rimmer in its issue of April 3, 1971 on the slaying of the Punjabi traders:

“The merchants—pictured here by a BBC Panorama team which reached Jessore—were rounded up, roped together and marched off by Militia men. Shortly after, Western reporters came across their bodies. They had been battered and stabbed. One man still writhed in his death agony.

Malcom Browne of the New York Times, who visited Jessore a month after the Pakistan Army had regained control over it, said in a despatch published on May 9, 1971:

“The night of special horror for Jessore was April 4, four days after the local East Bengal Regiment had revolted against the national army.

“Jessore and Khulna are among the most heavily damaged towns in East Pakistan. Many market areas and buildings are burned out; the streets deserted
“Throughout the tour, Government authorities and persons produced for interview have told of thousands of non-Bengali residents, including women and children, having been slain by the separatists, often after having been tortured. “

Mohammed Zubair, 57, a trader, who lived in Block N in the Satellite town in Jessore, had this sad recollection of the dreadful Ides of March, 1971:

“All through March 1971, the non-Bengalis lived in panic and fear in Jessore. The explosion came in the last days of the month when the Awami League killers and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and the police went on the rampage in the Bihari-inhabited localities of the town. The rebels had barricaded the access road from the town to the military cantonment to prevent food supplies to the West Pakistani soldiers. They had also blown up the main water pipeline from the town to the cantonment.

“Some non-Bengali young men, who had friends amongst the West Pakistani soldiers in the cantonment, stuffed food inside a truck and headed for the cantonment. Armed with shot guns, they tried to blast their way through the barricades and the gunfire of the Bengali rebels. But the numerically-superior rebels wiped out the non-Bengali relief squad on the fringes of the cantonment. A dozen non-Bengali young men perished in this desperate bid to break the Bengali blockade of the cantonment. Their dead bodies were dumped in a nearby stream.

“As some of these non-Bengali boys hailed from middle class families who lived in the Satellite town of Jessore, hundreds of insurgents raided this locality on March 28-29 and committed acts of unimaginable savagery. They looted and

burnt the houses of non-Bengalis and killed them by the thousands. Hundreds of teenage girls were molested and kidnapped.

“They looted my house; they slaughtered my three grown up sons and they kidnapped my two young daughters. One of the raiders stabbed me in the shoulder and I collapsed in a pool of blood. The murderer thought I was dead. A part of my house was burnt; I hid myself for almost a week in the backyard. After the Pakistan Army freed Jessore from rebel control, I buried my dead sons. I scoured every inch of Jessore in search of my young daughters. There was no trace of them. ”

Mohammed Zubair was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in January, 1974.

Twenty-one year-old Tahera Begum who was widowed in Jessore when a posse of the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles bludgeoned her husband to death on March 29, 1971, sobbed out her story of woe as follows:

“We lived in the Ramnagar colony of Jessore. We hailed from Calcutta. Although Urdu was our mother tongue, my husband and I spoke Bengali very well. Almost all the residents in the Ramnagar colony were non-Bengalis. My husband, Amjad Ali was a well-to do businessman and an active social worker. Since the beginning of March, when tension gripped Jessore, my husband used to appeal to Bengalis and non-Bengalis to live in amity and accord.

“In the evening of March 29, he told me that he was going to attend a meeting of the Peace Committee wherein representatives of Bengalis and non-Bengalis will take an oath to protect one another like true Muslim brethren. Although I was apprehensive, I encouraged him to go to the Union Committee Hall for the Peace Committee’s meeting. When he arrived there, he found that the Bengali members of the Committee were absent. He and his non-Bengali associates waited in vain for an hour and then walked back to our house. He apprehended an attack by the Bengali insurgents on our locality but we had no weapons. A sincere and kind-hearted Bengali friend, Mohammed Mahmood, suggested that we shift to his house for safety but my husband preferred to stay in our own house.

“Late in the night of March 29, about 500 Bengali insurgents and Awami Leaguers, many blazing their automatic weapons and tossing hand grenades on houses, raided the Ramnagar Colony on a “loot, kill and burn “ mission. They encircled our locality and murdered every adult male. My husband appealed to the killer gang to spare the lives of innocent people; a rebel Bengali soldier gunned him to death. His dead body was carted away in a truck by the killer gang and flung into a ditch which was turned into a mass grave. I lived for some days with a Bengali family in our neighbourhood; in mid April, I went to live

with my parents in Dacca. In January 1974, the United Nations repatriated me to Pakistan. “

Tahera Begum said that hundreds of teenage girls were kidnapped from non-Bengali homes by the rebels; many were raped and some were taken away to India by their retreating Bengali captors.

Twenty-two-year-old Anjuman Begum who, along with her husband, Qaiser Hussain, miraculously escaped the massacre of non-Bengalis on March 28, 1971, in the Tafsidanga colony in Jessore, had this bitter memory of that nightmarish period:

“We lived in a hut in Paikgacha in Tafsidanga. It was nick named as ‘Bihari Para’. Most of the inhabitants in this shanty township were of the low-income group. My husband peddled merchandise. Our relations with the Bengalis in our neighbourhood were friendly. We never had a riot in our colony.

“Late in March 1971, a mob of Awami Leaguers and some hoodlums raided our locality and set fire to our thatched huts. In a few minutes the entire locality was aflame. As the inmates rushed out of their burning huts, a barrage of gunfire mowed hundreds of innocent men, women and children. The killer gang also burnt the only mosque in our colony.

“My husband and I escaped from our burning hut into a nearby paddy field. We lay still there all through the night. We heard the crackle of gunfire, the groans of dying men and the shrieks of women assaulted by their kidnappers. Just before sunrise we crawled to a hut where an aged Bengali farmer lived. We had known him as a kind soul. He gave us shelter and we lived with him until the Pakistan Army freed Jessore.

“When we returned to our old locality, we saw the rubble and the decomposed bodies of slain non-Bengalis. The Army arranged their mass burial. “

Anjuman Begum and her husband went to Dacca in the autumn of 1971. In January 1974, they were airlifted to Karachi.

Qurban Ali, 51, who lived in Ramnagar colony of Jessore and owned a provision store, said:

“Non-Bengalis in Jessore felt insecure after the Awami League’s victory in the December 1970 elections. Many were subjected to taunts and insults by the Awami Leaguers. In March 1971, the Awami Leaguers and some Hindu Bengali infiltrators from India incited the local Bengalis against the non-Bengalis. The

Bengalis in the East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles, the Ansars (a police force) and the Awami Leaguers drew up plans for liquidating the non-Bengalis in Jessore. They blockaded the cantonment and some West Pakistani officers and men were ambushed and killed in mid-March. Shooting incidents took place in the localities where the non-Bengalis lived.

“On March 29, hundreds of armed miscreants raided the Ramnagar colony and slaughtered thousands of non-Bengali men and male children. Hundreds of non-Bengali women were assaulted, killed or kidnapped. For two days, the Bengali insurgents staged the bloodbath of non-Bengalis in Ramnagar. I was injured and I lay in a heap of slain men. I wriggled out of it at night and hid in a deserted school building. My daughter was killed but my son-in-law escaped and he is still in East Pakistan.”

In February 1974, Qurban Ali was repatriated by the United Nations from Chittagong to Karachi.

A hundred non-Bengali families lived in Mobarakganj. On March 29, 1971, the Bengali insurgents invaded the township and exterminated almost all the non-Bengali male adults. The pogrom continued for eight days. More than 200 non-Bengalis were killed. Nearly a hundred young women were kidnapped; many were raped. Those who resisted the attempts of their kidnappers to take them to India were liquidated.

The male non-Bengali population in the Kaliganj, according to the witnesses from Jessore, was wiped out by the insurgents in the last week of March and the first week of April 1971 before the killers fled to India. Even small children were done to death and their young mothers were kidnapped; many were raped. After the rebels fled to India, some dead bodies of teenage girls whose breasts had been slashed off were found in deserted houses. The insurgents had set up chambers where mass sex assaults on young, non-Bengali women captives were conducted. At least 300 non-Bengalis died in the massacre in Kaliganj.

In Kotchandpur, killer gangs of rebel soldiers and Awami Leaguers slaughtered more than 850 non-Bengali men, women and children. There were very few survivors. In Tafsidanga, the non-Bengali death toll was in the neighbourhood of 300. In the middle of March 1971, Awami League militants and jingoes of a Bengali front organization, ‘Sangram Parishad’, started terrorising the residents of this colony. They marked the non-Bengali houses. The “kill “ was accomplished in two days of loot, arson and murder on March 30 and 31. There were not more than two score survivors.

One of the witnesses recalled the gory murder of a Punjabi lieutenant of the Pakistan Army on March 14. He had come to town from the cantonment to visit an ailing friend. On the way back, a group of Awami League thugs ambushed him and shot him dead. In the last week of March, many West Pakistani soldiers were shanghaied by the Bengali mutineers near the cantonment. In the first week of April, scores of Punjabis, who were detained by the insurgents in prisons and police lockups, were killed by firing squads in paddy fields which were used as execution grounds.

KOTCHANDPUR

Ghulam Warsi, 35, who lived in the Bara Bazar in Kotchandpur in Jessore district and whose wife was killed and teenage daughter was kidnapped by a gang of armed Awami Leaguers in March 1971, said:

“I have become prematurely old because of the woes and misfortunes which ruined my life in March 1971. I was a cloth merchant and we lived in some measure of affluence. I had many Bengali friends. We had lived in Kotchandpur for many years and I spoke Bengali very well. About a thousand non-Bengalis lived in this small town. Many were immigrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India; some hailed from West Pakistan.

“The non-Bengalis were aware of the fact that some ultranationalistic Bengalis amongst the Awami Leaguers were inciting the local population against the non-Bengalis. On March 28, when I was in my cloth shop, I got the frightening news that a large mob of armed Awami Leaguers had attacked the residential locality where my house and those of hundreds of other non-Bengalis were located. I closed my shop and I ran towards my house. It was with great difficulty that I reached it through a back lane to avoid the killer mob. My house was amongst the score of houses that were set ablaze. Unmindful of the lurid tongues of fire, I rushed inside and retrieved my three little sons. My wife had been shot and lay in a pool of blood. There was no trace of my teenage daughter. My children told me that the killers had shot dead my wife because she courageously resisted them when they grabbed my daughter. After the Pakistan Army re-established its control over Kotchandpur, I travelled all over Jessore district in search of my kidnapped daughter; I could not find her. The killers wiped out a smiling colony of more than 1,000 non-Bengalis in two days. They kidnapped some 80 teenage girls.”

Ghulam Warsi moved to Dacca with his three small children in mid-1971 and was repatriated to Karachi in February 1974. In his prayers, he entreats the Almighty to reunite him with his missing daughter. “I am sure my prayer will be answered someday”, he said hopefully.

On April 4, rebel troops from the East Bengal Regiment killed Italian Priest, Reverend Mario Veronesi, in the Christian Fatima Catholic Hospital in Jessore. Indian propagandists and their Awami League proteges blamed the Pakistan Army for his slaying.

When the Italian Ambassador in Pakistan visited the Roman Catholic Mission in Jessore to investigate the circumstances of Father Veronesi's death, the military authorities explained and offered evidence to prove that the Italian Priest was killed by the Bengali rebels and not by the federal Army.

Facts show that Jessore was under the control of the Bengali rebels from the East Bengal Regiment on April 4 when two insurgent soldiers, toting stcn guns, broke into the premises of the Roman Catholic Hospital and gunned him to death. He was not wearing a cassock at the time of his slaying. Having lived in East Pakistan for some 18 years, his face was slightly bronzed and he could have passed for a Pathan from the North West Frontier of Pakistan. The Bengali rebel soldiers obviously mistook him for a West Pakistani –he had no robes of priesthood on– and shot him dead, just as they had been gunning to death West Pakistanis and other non-Bengalis by the thousands in Jessore late in March and early in April 1971.

Eye-witnesses of the March-April 1971 killings of non-Bengalis in Jessore, who were interviewed for this book in Karachi, maintained that their information was that the Bengali rebel soldiers had killed Father Veronesi and four others in the Roman Catholic Hospital. The 56-year-old Italian priest was buried in the Hospital ground.

It was also revealed by these eye-witnesses that a large number of infiltrators from India had seeped into the Jessore district to assist the Bengali rebels in sabotage and terrorisation. Maurice Quaintance of the Reuters News Agency who visited Jessore on May 8, 1971, along with five other foreign newsmen, quoted the Area Commander as having said that “in the battle for the town, the secessionists were helped by two companies of the Indian Border Security troops sent into the Jessore area. “ Logistically, this was easy enough because of Jessore's proximity to the Indian border. Indian deployment of troops along the India-East Pakistan border at that time was in excess of 100,000 men.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Suffering in Narail

Narail is a small town in the Jessore district. All through March 1971 it was rocked by the tremors of the Awami League's uprising. Not more than a thousand non-Bengalis lived in this town. Between March 25 and April 6, some 800 of them were liquidated by the armed Awami leaguers and the Bengali rebel soldiers. The most gruesome massacre was of nearly seventy Pathans – men, women and children.

Thirty-five-year-old Ghafoor Ahmed, who was employed in a trading firm in Narail, and his wife and two children luckily, escaped the slaughter of non-Bengalis in the town and its neighbourhood. They owed their lives to a courageous Bengali friend who sheltered them in his house at great risk to himself and arranged their escape to Dacca. Early in January 1974, the United Nations airlift brought them to Karachi. Ghafoor Ahmed said:

“I had lived in Narail for 15 years. I had bought a plot of land in Molvipara and erected a mud house on it. I liked the Bengali Muslims and I had many friends amongst them. Close to our locality was a Hindu temple. Many Hindus lived in its vicinity. Our relations with them were not too happy. They disliked the non-Bengali Muslim immigrants from India.

“In the last week of March 1971, local Awami Leaguers, Hindu militants and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles ganged up against the non-Bengalis and went on a genocidal spree. On March 29-31, a killer gang attacked non-Bengali houses and killed men, women and children by the hundreds.

“Two days before the massacre started, a religious Bengali Muslim friend persuaded me to leave my house and stay in his home. He said that the rebels were planning the slaughter of the non-Bengalis. He hid me and my wife and my children in his house in the outskirts of Narail. On the day of the carnage—March 29—in our locality, the Bengali rebels looted and burnt my house. They also killed a number of Islam-loving Bengalis who had sided with the Muslim League and the Jamaat-e-Islami in the 1970 general elections. The killer gang inflicted heinous tortures on a respected local leader, Mohammed Imamuddin before murdering him and his family of ten. “

After the Pakistan Army recovered Narail from the Bengali insurgents, added Ghafoor Ahmed, the rebels and many of the local Hindus, who had participated in the slaughter of non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengali Muslims, fled to India.

It took many days before all the rotting dead bodies were interred in mass graves. The rebels had thrown many scores of wounded men into blazing houses; their charred skeletons were discovered after the federal troops cleared the rubble.

Bashir Ahmed, 31, who owned a shop in the Mujgunni locality of Narail and who escaped death because of his excellent command of Bengali language, gave this account of the March 1971 tragedy after he was repatriated to Karachi in January, 1974:

“I had lived for many years in Jessore. After the death of my father, my wife and my in-laws persuaded me to shift to Narail. I spoke Bengali so well that I easily passed for a genuine Bengali. I owned a small shop in the Mujgunni locality. I had friendly relations with my non-Bengali as well as Bengali neighbours. In the third week of March, Narail came under the grip of tension and the non-Bengalis felt panicky. On March 26, I went to the main Bazar and consulted a Bengali friend who owned a bicycle shop. He told me that the Awami leaguers and some Bengali Hindus were spreading rumours against the non-Bengalis and were inciting the Bengalis to kill them. He suspected that Indian agents had infiltrated into Narail from West Bengal in India. He advised me to shift my family for a few days to the house of a common Bengali friend on the outworks of Narail. I acted on his advice.

“On March 29, on the way to my house, I saw a frenzied Bengali mob lynching two non-Bengali young men. They clouted their victims with spears and iron bars and hacked them to death. Another mob of heavily armed Bengalis, some blazing away their guns to strike fear, attacked the houses of the non-Bengalis en masse. They mistook me for a Bengali and I escaped to the hideout in my Bengali friend’s home. That night, the bulk of the population of non-Bengalis in my locality was wiped out and their houses were looted and burnt. “

Abdul Sattar, 26, who, along with his wife and two children, survived the March 1971 butchery in Narail was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi in January 1974. He gave the following account of his dramatic escape and of the killings in Narail: “I was employed in a commercial firm in Narail. We lived in the Sonadanga locality of the town. In the middle of March 1971, my wife and my two children went to participate in the wedding of a relative in neighbouring Jessore. In the absence of my family, I used to eat at the house of a very dear Bengali friend.

“Around March 28, my Bengali friend rushed to my house at night and implored me to shift to his home at once because the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and the armed Awami League militants had decided to murder all the non-Bengalis. I accompanied him to his house and lived with him until the federal army liberated Narail. When I went back to my house, it was a burnt out

rubble. Dead bodies lay in heaps in many houses; a few dogs and cats sniffed the dead and licked the dried blood on their bodies. I saw a few decrepit old men and women and knee-high children rummaging in the rubble for their deceased dear ones. There were hardly any adult survivors of this genocidal fury. “

Sattar retrieved his wife and children from Jessore in the middle of April 1971, soon after the federal army re-established its control. A Bengali friend of Sattar had sheltered them in his house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Decimation in Bejerdanga, Jhenidah

The Railway Station at Bejerdanga, a small town in the Jessore district, saw the massacre of the non-Bengali employees by a roving band of armed Awami Leaguers and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles on March 20-21, 1971.

Twenty-year-old Muzaffar Ali, whose father, Masroor Ali, worked as the Assistant Station Master at Bejerdanga, gave this account of the murder of his father:

“Since the second week of March 1971, the non-Bengali Railway employees at Bejerdanga were subjected to threats and insults by Awami League activists. They continued working at the Railway Station despite these threats. As their number was small, they had sent away their families to their relatives in Jessore and Khulna. My mother and I went to live with an uncle in Jessore. My father was very conscientious and refused to be absent from his duty.

“On March 20, a gang of 40 armed Awami Leaguers and rebel soldiers attacked the Bejerdanga Railway Station. They dismantled a part of the rail track; they ransacked the Station. They lined up the non-Bengali staff and gunned them to death.

“We got the news of his murder after the Pakistan Army recovered Jessore and Bejerdanga. There was no trace of his dead body. Our own escape from the rebels’ butchery in Jessore was an act of God. “

Muzaffar Ali and his mother were repatriated to Karachi from Dacca in mid-January 1974.

JHENIDAH

Awami League gunmen and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles carried death and destruction to non-Bengali homes in many parts of the Jhenidah sub-division of the Jessore district.

The killings in Jhenidah and its neighbourhood started on March 24 and continued with unabated fury till April 14, 1971 when a column of the Pakistan Army routed the rebels. The mode of butchery in Jhenidah was similar to the practice of savagery followed in Jessore and Narail for liquidating the non-Bengalis. The non-Bengali death toll in Jhenidah sub-division was estimated at

well over 550. More than 50 non-Bengali young women were kidnapped. Some were raped in the open in paddy fields and strangled to death.

“On March 7, 1971, more than ten thousand Bengali demonstrators forced their way into the Jhenidah Cadet College, shouting slogans against the Pakistan Government and non-Bengalis and demanding independence for East Pakistan”, said 19-year-old Syed Hasan Javed, who was a student at the Jhenidah Cadet College. Repatriated to Karachi with his parents late in 1971, Javed is currently a B.A. (Honours) student at the Karachi University. In his testimony, Javed said:

“Tension gripped the Cadet College and its hostels soon after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s broadcast speech on March 3, 1971, in which he hurled defiance at the federal government. Out of 251 students who lived in the three hostels of the Cadet College, Urdu-speaking students numbered 25. The Bengalis called them Biharis. On March 7, 1971, the Awami League-led demonstrators, many armed with guns, broke into the College premises and shouted slogans against Pakistan and the Biharis. The Principal, sensing trouble, asked all the students to join the processionists and not to tangle with the demonstrators. The processionists marched to the “Shaheed Minar” (Memorial for those killed in the Bengali language movement in the early 1950’s) where they took the oath that they would establish independent Bengal. The next day the situation became more tense and the non-Bengalis in the town felt scared because of the threats of violence from the Awami League militants. On March 9, the Principal ordered the closure of the Cadet College and asked the hostel inmates to return to their homes. My parents lived in Khulna, 68 miles away. I set out for Khulna; the roads were deserted and echoes of rifle shots were sometimes heard. With great difficulty, I reached my home in Khalispur in Khulna. My mother, who had cried for days and lost hope of seeing me alive, embraced me and said thanksgiving prayers to Almighty God.”

Javed, in his testimony, reported that on March 10, 1971, he saw in Khalispur the tortures inflicted on a Pathan watchman by an armed group of pro-Awami league students on the roadside. The victim died on the spot. On March 17, 1971, according to Javed, a group of pro-Awami League hoodlums raided the house of his Punjabi neighbour, killed him and kidnapped his two teenage daughters. Three days later, he spotted their dead bodies floating in a nearby water tank. Javed recalled the attack of the Bengali rebels, particularly the defectors from the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles, on March 28, 1971, on Khalispur and the defence put up by bands of armed non-Bengalis who had not surrendered their weapons in response to the Awami League-propped administration’s call in mid-March for the surrender of arms. Subsequently, the federal troops routed the rebels.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Bloodbath in Noapara, Darsona

Noapara, a little town in the Jcssore district, felt the repercussions of the Awami League's rebellion in the second week of March 1971. It had a small population of non-Bengalis; many were employed in the local jute mill or did business with it. As the owner of the jute mill was a non-Bengali, it became a target of the homicidal frenzy of the Bengali rebels.

Twenty-nine-year-old Sheikh Aziz, who was employed as a Security Guard in the Jute Mill, witnessed the massacre of the non-Bengali staff and their families in the Mill area on March 21, 1971. His uncle was butchered but his wife and children were spared. He made a dramatic escape with them to Dacca from where he brought them to Karachi via Nepal in March 1973. His narrative runs as follows:

"I was one of the six non-Bengali Security Guards in the Carpeting Jute Mill in Noapara. The other 13 Security Guards were Bengalis. The Chief Security Officer was a gentle-hearted and God-fearing non-Bengali, Mr. Farid Ahmed. His wife was a Bengali. He had given employment in the mill to a number of Bengali young men.

"On March 21, a gang of armed Awami League militants stormed the Jute mill. They enlisted the support of some of the Bengali millhands who had a propensity for agitation and strikes. The first victim of their insane fury was the Security Officer, Farid Ahmed. They belaboured him in his office; they dragged him to the lawn in the Mill. They clubbed him with staves; they hit him with iron bars. A Bengali security guard, whom he had employed some years ago, shot him dead. As the killers had seized control of the Mill and locked up the main gate, there was no escape for the non-Bengali staff which was in imminent danger of liquidation. The homicidal gang murdered almost all the non-Bengalis in the mill premises. I hid myself in a store room for two days. My uncle was amongst those who were slaughtered.

"The killer gang then turned on the families of the non-Bengali staff of the mill who lived in mud-houses and huts nearby. All the male adults were butchered; young women were raped and many were kidnapped. My slain uncle's wife and two children were miraculously saved and I brought them to Pakistan. "

Twenty-year-old Husna Begum, highly articulate for her age whose father, Taher Hussain, was engaged in the Jute trade in Noapara, owed her life to a Bengali friend of her maternal uncle. He sheltered her and her mother all through the period of turmoil in the town and helped them in moving to Chittagong after the Pakistan Army routed the rebels. Husna, a student, and her mother were repatriated to Karachi from Chittagong by the United Nations by sea early in February 1974. She sobbed out the story of her father's murder:

“My father hailed from the Indian State of Bihar and he had settled in Narail late in the 1950's. I was born in Narail. Although we spoke Urdu at home, I went to a school where Bengali was the medium of instruction. I spoke Bengali like my Bengali classmates. I was not taught Urdu at school and I don't know how to read or write in Urdu.

“On March 22, 1971, a killer gang of Awami League thugs raided my father's jute godown and set it on fire. They tossed him inside this blazing oven. They raided our house and ran sacked it like ruthless vandals. They looked for me and my mother but we were sheltered safely in our Bengali friend's house. The news of my father's tragic death reached us the next day.

“The house of a non-Bengali businessman in the vicinity of our hideout was attacked by a killer gang. I heard the echo of gunshots and the screams of men and women for mercy. The attackers killed the businessman and his wife and raped his three daughters. They marched the three girls almost in the nude through the main Bazar of Noapara and hacked them to death in a paddy field. A Bengali friend of my protector, who had witnessed this horrifying scene, burst into tears as he related to him the harrowing detail. “

DARSANA

The non-Bengalis in the town of Darsana were terrorised by the Awami League militants since the first week of March 1971. The population of non-Bengalis in Darsana was not large but all of them were fairly affluent. Many worked in the East Pakistan Railway. Between the 20th of March and the 19th of April 1971, the Awami Leaguers and the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles liquidated almost three-fourth of the non-Bengali population in this town. Killer gangs raided non-Bengali houses, looted them and killed all the menfolk. Non-Bengali teenage girls were kidnapped by the rebels by the hundred; almost all of them were raped in buildings occupied by the rebels as their operational headquarters. Before the rebels escaped to neighbouring India, they killed many of the non-Bengali girls they had raped; some were taken away to India.

Fifty-year-old Madina Khatoon, whose husband, Abdul Hamid was a Railway employee in Darsana, said in Karachi after her repatriation from a Bihari Camp in Chittagong in February 1974:

“On March 25, the Bengali rebels went on the rampage against the non-Bengalis in Darsana. A killer gang came to my house, smashed the front door and forcibly took away my husband and my brother. I begged them to spare my dear ones; one of them shouted back: “The Biharis have no place in Bengal; they must be slaughtered. “ The killer gang looted every article of value—even the rice I had kept for our meals. I learnt that the killers murdered my husband and my brother in the slaughter-house set up by the rebels.

“The killer gangs burnt almost half the number of non-Bengali houses in Darsana. They did not spare even disabled non-Bengali men. The rebels extorted money from the non-Bengali businessmen by promising to get their lives spared. They played many other frauds on the non-Bengalis. In planning the butchery they conducted, an interesting element was the manner in which they kept track of every non-Bengali male. The rebel command used to get very prompt information about successful or unsuccessful escape bids by the non-Bengalis in Darsana Between March 15 and the second week of April, the rebels staged frequent bloodbaths of innocent non-Bengalis, and their dead bodies lay in heaps in Mosques, school buildings and the local hospital..... “

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Destruction in Barisal

The Awami League's rebellion had injected a severe strain in the relations between Bengalis and non-Bengalis in many parts of the Barisal District from the second week of March 1971. The proliferation of baseless rumours that the Bengalis in West Pakistan were being killed and that the Pakistan Army had massacred Bengalis in Dacca was one of the weapons used by the Awami League activists for inciting the Bengali population to violence against the West Pakistanis and other non-Bengalis. In the beginning, there were stray incidents of violence against the non-Bengalis but in the fourth week of March there was a forest-fire of arson, loot and murder in Barisal town and in other parts of the district. The death toll in this genocidal epidemic was in excess of 15,000.

Ahmed Alam, 23, who was repatriated to Karachi in October 1973 from Dacca, lived in Barisal all through the period of turmoil. He gave a vivid account of the extermination of some sixty non-Bengali families in the vicinity of the Barisal Steamer Jetty in the night of March 25, 1971:

“The Awami League militants of the area invited the non-Bengali residents of this locality to attend a meeting of the local Peace Committee and assured them that their families would be protected. The meeting was held at about 9 o'clock in the night. All of a sudden, the Awami League militants, who carried weapons, pounced on the non-Bengalis in the meeting and killed many on the spot. Some non-Bengali; escaped the dragnet and ran to their huts to take their families to safety.

“Just before midnight, a frenzied mob of Awami Leaguers, police rebels and hoodlums attacked the non-Bengali colony and burnt dozens of houses. They murdered almost all the adult males, kidnapped some fifty women and raped many of them. The federal troops, who reached the site after some days, recovered 112 dead bodies from the rubble of the burnt out non-Bengali colony. Many bodies of strangled women were discovered in a pond. No trace of other kidnapped non-Bengali women could be found. The survivors of this pogrom numbered barely a dozen.”

Twenty-seven-year-old Farzana Khatoon, whose husband was employed in the Postal Department in the Ferozepur sub-division of Barisal district, narrated the

murder of her husband by an Awami League killer gang in a motor launch in the third week of March 1971:

“We had lived for six years in the Ferozepur sub-division. Our relations with our Bengali neighbours were cordial but after the December 1970 general elections a little strain had crept in. From the beginning of March 1971, the non-Bengalis in our town were apprehensive and uneasy. Some non-Bengali boys were roughed up by Awami League militants.

“On March 20, my husband and I decided to leave Ferozepur and we boarded a Khulna-bound passenger launch at night. It was jam-packed. Amongst the passengers were some sixty non-Bengalis— men, women and children—who were leaving the town because of insecurity and fear. We knew some of them.

After two hours, when the launch anchored at a small jetty, a gang of fifty armed miscreants, shouting ‘Joi Bangla’ and ‘Long Live Awami League’, greeted our launch. A dozen of them, armed with guns and daggers, boarded our launch. They roughed up some non-Bengalis; they pulled the Saris of young women. The killers barked out the order that all the Bengalis should leave the launch; it became easy for them to make mincemeat of the non-Bengalis. They slaughtered all the non-Bengali men on board the launch; they tossed children into the river. As their desperate mothers jumped into the water to rescue them, the killers opened fire on these drowning women and children. The thugs kidnapped some teenage non-Bengali girls. My husband was amongst the dead. The Serang (Captain) of the launch, a gentle Bengali who had known my husband, took pity on me and my little son and hid us under a bundle of mats in his cabin. He dropped us at Khulna where I stayed with some relatives for a few months and escaped the carnage there. I sold my ornaments and raised some cash which enabled me and my son to travel to Nepal. It was a perilous and tortuous journey. In July 1973, we were flown to Karachi. “

Abdul Shakoor, 50, whose Bengali wife and two sons were murdered by an Awami League gang in Kurmitala in Jhalokathi in the Barisal district in March 1971, testified:

“I had migrated from Bihar to East Pakistan shortly after the birth of Pakistan in 1947. I had attended meetings addressed by Molvi Fazlul Haq, Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, Khwaja Nazimuddin, Mr. Nurul Amin and Maulana Tamizuddin in pre-Partition Bengal, I believed in the ideology of Pakistan. Shortly after I came to East Pakistan, I married a Bengali girl. I started a small business and I prospered. I had excellent relations with the Bengalis and I spoke their language nearly as well as my Bengali wife. We had two sons and a daughter who were Bengalis by birth; their mother tongue was Bengali.

“Since the first week of March 1971, our town was affected by the Awami League’s rebellion and relations between the Bengalis and the non-Bengalis were tense. On March 24, a mob of Awami League activists and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and Ansars (a para-military force) went on the rampage in the localities where non-Bengali families resided. They dragged my two sons from our home, tied them with ropes to a lamp post and gunned them to death. They kidnapped my daughter and I scoured the district for months in a fruitless search for her. They clouted me and my wife with their rifle butts but some kind Bengali neighbours persuaded the killers to spare us. My wife could not bear the loss of our teenage sons and daughter and she died in April, 1971, At least 250 non-Bengalis were massacred in March, 1971 and scores of teenage girls were kidnapped. What madness gripped our tormentors is beyond my comprehension. I had never seen such insanity before. I shifted to Chittagong from where the United Nations repatriated me to Karachi in February 1974. “

Nasrin, the 24-year-old widow of Allah Rakha, had this recollection of the massacre of non-Bengalis in Jhalokathi in the Barisal district in March 1971.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Genocide in Mymensingh

Mymensingh witnessed a horrifying massacre of non-Bengalis by the Awami League militants and the mutineers of the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles between the third week of March and the third week of April 1971 when the Pakistan Army freed it from the control of the insurgents. Evidence now available shows that more than 20,000 non-Bengalis were done to death. In the Mymensingh Cantonment, Bengali soldiers of the East Bengal Regiment of the Pakistan Army and the para-military East Pakistan Rifles revolted on March 26-27, 1971 and slaughtered hundreds of West Pakistani officers and men in a midnight surprise attack on their Barracks and residential quarters for married military personnel. They made even women and children the victims of their bloodlust.

On April 16, a posse of the rebels from the East Bengal Regiment raided the Mymensingh district jail and gunned to death seventeen prominent non-Bengali citizens who were detained there by the insurgents. Violent mobs, led by Awami League storm-troopers and the rebel Bengali soldiers, killed almost all the non-Bengali menfolk in Shankipara and nine other residential localities of Mymensingh town. More than 1,500 women and some children, who were herded like cattle in a mosque and in a school building and were to be butchered by their Bengali captors, were saved in the nick of time by a column of the Pakistan Army which re-occupied Mymensingh town on April 31, 1971. The rebels killed many anti-Awami League Bengalis.

A Correspondent of the Reuters News Agency, Maurice Quaintance, who visited Mymensingh early in May, said in a despatch published in the Ceylon Daily News of Colombo of May 15, 1971:

“There is evidence that non-Bengalis, largely immigrants from India who sought refuge after the 1947 Partition, were attacked, hacked to death and burnt in their homes by mobs.

“Eye-witnesses told stories of 1,500 widows and orphans fleeing to a mosque at Mymensingh, in the north, as armed men identified as secessionists slaughtered their husbands and fathers.”

The New York Times reporting a Mymensingh despatch from its Pakistan Correspondent, Malcolm Browne, said in its issue of May 7, 1971:

“Officials also said that before the Government soldiers took the city (Mymensingh), the Bengalis had killed at least 1,000 Bihari or non-Bengali residents. Army officials introduced correspondents to people who said there had been a slaughter of Bihari residents by the dominant Bengali group led by members of the Awami League, the political party that was outlawed by the Central Government soon after the military action began in East Pakistan on March 25.

“There were so many bodies here, one officer said, it was impossible to identify them or bury them. He said that they had to be thrown into the Brahmaputra river, a tributary of the Ganges.

“The main loss of life here apparently occurred in the fields and fruit groves outside Mymensingh and in clusters of huts that had been burned to the ground.”

A Correspondent of the American news Service, Associated Press, who also visited Mymensingh early in May 1971, quoted in his despatch the Assistant Postmaster of the town as having said:

“There were 5,000 non-Bengalis where I lived and now there are 25 survivors.”

Maurice Quaintance of the Reuters News Agency said in his Mymensingh despatch of May 7, 1971:

“Reporters flown here on the second day of a conducted tour of trouble spots interviewed a man identified as the Assistant Postmaster of Mymensingh who showed scars on his neck and what he said was a bayonet mark on his body. The man said he lived in a colony of 5,000 non-Bengalis of whom only 25 survived the massacre on April 17. The interview ended abruptly when the Assistant Postmaster mentioned the killing and mutilation of his family and burst into tears.

“The General commanding Mymensingh district said that the killing began in the latter half of March and was carried out by Awami League volunteers, the armed wing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s secessionist Awami Party, plus East Bengal Rifles and East Bengal Regiment troops who defected to secessionist cause.”

Eye-witnesses of the carnage of non-Bengalis in Mymensingh in March-April 1971, who were interviewed in Karachi for this book have bared a macabre story of horror and bloodshed.

Mujibur Rahman, 55, who lived in Quarter No. 8 of Block 12 in the Shankipara colony in Mymensingh town and owned a cloth shop, said:

“It was the last week of March 1971. I was saying my afternoon prayers in the Mosque in our locality. All of a sudden, about 200 Bengali soldiers from the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles and Awami League militants attacked the Shankipara colony. They machine-gunned the praying non-Bengalis in the Mosque and at least 80 of them died in the shooting. Many were injured. I fainted, and the killers, who were heading for the houses of the non-Bengalis, thought that I was dead. Late in the night, I regained consciousness and slipped back to my house. The Bengali raiders had looted it; there was no trace of my son and my daughter-in-law. Some houses were ablaze. On way to my house, I saw scores of dead bodies on the road. Some old women were bemoaning their dead. In the far distance, echoes of gunfire and rifle-shot frequently rent the stillness of the night. The killers had murdered all the non-Bengali male residents of the colony. They had marched the crying women, some with suckling children, to a large, nearby Mosque. These women were rescued by the Pakistan Army after it re-occupied Mymensingh in the third week of April. At least 5,000 non-Bengalis lived in my locality; not more than 25 survived the killing. I was one of the survivors. I had lost all my relatives. In November 1971, I left Mymensingh for good and came to Karachi.”

Nasima Khatoon, 38, whose husband, Syed Tahir Hussain Akhter, was employed as a clerk at the Mymensingh Railway Station had this pathetic recollection of that terrible day when she was widowed by the Bengali insurgents:

“We owned a small house in the Shankipara Colony’s C Block. The entire population consisted of non-Bengalis. Since the middle of March 1971, a pall of fear and foreboding shrouded the locality. Late in March, killer gangs, armed with rifles and machine-guns, attacked a number of houses in our locality, killed the men and abducted their women and children. On April 17, about 15,000 blood-thirsty insurgents and miscreants, many armed with machine guns, stormed our colony. They set fire to hundreds of houses; they dragged men and boys from their homes and killed them on the spot. My husband and my teenage son had locked the front door of our house. We had no way to escape. Some 50 armed miscreants smashed the door and rushed in. In the name of God, in the name of the Holy Quran, I begged them to spare my husband and my son. A thug hit me on the head with the butt of his rifle and I fell down. The butchers dragged my husband and my son outside the house and shot them dead. I wanted to wail over their dead bodies but the slaughterers, prodding me with their bayonets, marched me to a school building where hundreds of lamenting widows and mothers like me were lodged. Life in this inferno was a torture. I

was delirious; I raved day and night. The women wailed and the children cried with hunger and thirst. Some women and children died; there were hardly any teenage girls left; the thugs had kidnapped them for lust. On the fourth day of our incarceration, a contingent of the Pakistan Army rescued us. I was taken to a Relief Camp in Dacca from where I was taken by my father to his home in Chittagong. I was repatriated from Chittagong to Karachi in February 1971. “

Sixty-year-old Sheikh Habibullah, who owned and drove an auto-rickshaw (pedicab) and lived in House No. 14 on Daulatmunshi Road in the Kishtopur locality in Shankipara in Mymensingh, broke down in sobs when he narrated in Karachi, in February 1974, the slaughter of his four grown-up sons by the Awami League militants late in March 1971. He said he and his sons spoke Bengali exceedingly well but they were dubbed as Biharis because he had migrated from the Indian State of Bihar to East Pakistan shortly after Partition in August 1947, (He had forgotten the Urdu script and he signed his testimony for this book in Bengali). Nervous and haggard, Habibullah said:

“Tension gripped Mymensingh town in mid-March, 1971. The non-Bengali population was subjected to intimidation and insults and there were rumours that the Awami League militants would attack them with the arms they had looted from the police armoury and also smuggled from India. The first raid by the Awami League hoodlums on the Bihari-inhabited Shankipara colony took place on March 23. All through the last week of March and the first half of April, armed gangs of Awami Leaguers and rebel Bengali soldiers looted and burnt the homes of non-Bengalis and murdered them by the thousands. Early in April, a yelling mob of 50 armed rebels broke into my house. My grown-up sons, Sanaullah, Shafi Ahmed, Ali Ahmed and Ali Akhter, resisted the attackers but they had no weapons to defend themselves. I lunged at one of the gunmen who had raised his gun to kill my eldest son. He struck me on the head and I collapsed. Just before I lost consciousness, there was a burst of machine gunfire and my four sons fell down in a pool of blood. I saw the crying wives of Sanaullah and Shafi Ahmed rushing into the room where their husbands were being butchered. I passed out and the killers thought I was dead. The next morning when I regained consciousness, I saw the dead bodies of my four sons; I was nearly mad. I kissed their blood-spattered faces; I looked for their heartbeats; they were lifeless. There was no trace of my two daughters-in-law. My house was looted and every valuable was gone. I was too scared to take the dead bodies of my sons to the graveyard. There was not a soul in the houses in my neighbourhood; in the distance I heard occasionally the echo of rifle shots and gunfire. The whine and whimper of dogs was the only sign of life in this ghost colony; dead bodies littered the rough road near my house.

“Some unfortunate Biharis sought refuge in a Mosque in the neighbourhood which was given the nickname of “TheBihari Mosque “ by the Bengalis. A large gang of armed killers smashed the doors of the Mosque and killed 175 non-Bengalis right inside this House of God. About 300 non-Bengalis had left their homes in Shankipara and they took refuge in the building of a primary school. They had no weapons with them. Early in April, they were liquidated by the rebels. After the Pakistan Army captured Mymensingh, I buried my four sons in the graveyard. I visited the nearby Bihari residential localities of Chalisbari, Chattisbari, Islamabad and Ikya. Except for a few aged stragglers like myself, all traces of human habitation had vanished from these once populous colonies. The stench of rotting dead pervaded the entire neighbourhood. Scores of houses had been burnt and reduced to a shambles. I was told that the insurgents had kidnapped and raped more than 1,500 Bihari young women from the Shankipara Colony during the period of their accursed control over Mymensingh. Some Bihari women had jumped into wells to escape the clutches of their rapists.

“An angel was the Bengali Pesh Imam (Muslim Priest) of the big Mosque near the Police Station who gave shelter to more than 500 Bihari survivors of the carnage in Shankipara. He pleaded for their lives with the Bengali mutineers who were after their blood. With the help of a Bengali Moazzin (the man who calls Muslims to prayers), the Pesh Imam collected boiled rice from God-fearing Bengalis in other localities and fed the terror-stricken non-Bengali men, women and children in the Mosque. The Awami League hoodlums were planning his murder but the timely arrival of the Pakistan Army on April 21 saved him and the Biharis sheltered in the Mosque. As a rickshaw driver, I knew the Cantonment very well and had some Punjabi and Pathan friends amongst the soldiers stationed there, before the March killing of non-Bengalis. When I visited it three days after it had been re-occupied by the Pakistan Army, I learnt of the terrible massacre of the non-Bengali military personnel and their families by the rebels of the East Bengal Regiment in a midnight swoop on the Cantonment on March 26/27. There was no trace of my West Pakistani soldier friends. I came to Karachi in February 1974. “

Anwar Hussain, 31, who was employed in a trading firm in Mymensingh, and whose life was saved by a Bengali friend, said:

“On March 24, 1971, the Awami League took out a large procession in Mymensingh. They yelled slogans against the non-Bengalis. Many of the processionists were armed with rifles, spears, axes, daggers and staves. My local Bengali friends told me that quite a few amongst the processionists were not the inhabitants of Mymensingh. The procession passed through my locality and shouted slogans against the Biharis. The Awami League militants, who were leading the procession, announced through a megaphone that all the non-

Bengalis should surrender their weapons voluntarily, otherwise a search would be conducted and those found with weapons would be shot dead. The Bihari residents of our locality surrendered their weapons which included a few guns, knives and spears. The non-Bengalis, who went to surrender their weapons to the Bengali processionists were ordered to march to an open ground some distance away. There they were massacred. After a few hours the processionists returned to our locality and looted and burnt scores of non-Bengali houses. Most of the menfolk in these unfortunate homes were slaughtered, and the wailing women, many with babies in their arms, were marched at gunpoint to a school building. Right from the middle of March, I had a premonition that the Bengali crackdown of the Biharis was in the offing. I had sought the help of a good-natured, Islam-loving Bengali friend. A few hours before the Awami League killers went on the rampage in our locality, I moved my family to his house and I escaped the massacre just in the nick of time. In the third week of April, when the Pakistan Army re-occupied Mymensingh, we went back to our house. A part of it was burnt and it had been looted. I saw very few non-Bengali survivors in what was before the carnage a populous, smiling township. “

Anwar Hussain and his family moved to Dacca in the autumn of 1971. After India's occupation of East Pakistan in December 1971, they lived a terrorised life in Mohammedpur in Dacca. In January 1974, the United Nations airlift wafted them to Pakistan.

Fahim Siddiqi, 35, who was employed in a commercial firm in Mymensingh and lived in a rented house in the Sitarampur locality with his two brothers, said in Karachi in March, 1971:

“When I left Chittagong on board a Russian ship late in February 1974 for Karachi, I had made up my mind that I would forget the nightmare of the past two and a quarter years. I had spent the best part of my life in Mymensingh; I loved the town and I had very good friends, Bengalis as well as non-Bengalis. I spoke excellent Bengali. Late in March, 1971, a riotous mob of Awami League-led Bengalis, armed with guns and scythes, stormed the houses of non-Bengalis in my locality. “Loot, burn and kill the menfolk “ was their mode of savagery. The killer gangs looted my house and butchered my two grown-up brothers in a nearby field which was the execution ground. I slipped away from my house minutes after the gunmen forayed into our locality. I sought refuge in a dilapidated, abandoned building and lived in it until the Pakistan Army freed Mymensingh from the rebels' control in the third week of April. I saw very few survivors of the massacre of non-Bengalis in my locality. “

Anweri Begum, 35, who lived in Quarter No. T/56 in the Railway Colony in Mymensingh and who saw her husband slaughtered by a Bengali killer gang, gave the following account of her misfortune:

“In the second week of April, when the town was under the control of the Bengali insurgents, half a dozen Bengalis came to our house and told my husband that our lives would be spared if we gave them all the cash and ornaments we had. I readily parted with all my jewellery; we scraped some cash and handed it to the Bengali visitors. We passed the night in fear. I suggested to my husband that we should leave the house and seek refuge in the home of a Bengali friend in another part of the town. He disagreed with my suggestion because of the assurance of safety which had been given to him by the miscreants who had taken away our cash and ornaments. In the evening of the next day, a dozen armed rebels broke into our house. Three of them had visited us on the previous day. Some of them wore red caps and appeared to be Hindus. When my husband remonstrated with them, they shot him in the chest and he was bathed in blood. A non-Bengali friend of my husband and his teenage son, who tried to rescue him, were riddled with bullets.

The killers looked for my 16-year-old son; I had concealed him under a pile of mats on the roof. The rebels had imposed a post-sunset blackout in Mymensingh. There was no light in my house. I heard the groan of my husband in the veranda and I tiptoed to him. I gave him some water; I washed his bleeding wounds. Speaking very faintly – he was fearful of the Bengali killers who prowled in the locality – he asked me not to lose heart. “Have faith in God; He will look after you “, my husband said. He kissed our ten-month-old son; he spoke to our second son, aged 9, who had hid himself beneath a cot during the murderous visit of the killers. My husband was in the agony of death; blood seeped from his wounds but he was courageous. He asked me to feel the pulse of his friend and of his son; they were cold and dead. In the early hours of the morning, he breathed his last. I could not control myself; I cried aloud. The killers rushed into my house; they aimed their guns at me and asked me to go with them. They said they would bury my dead husband. I covered my husband’s dead body with a blanket and followed my captors. With me were my two sons; the eldest lay hidden on the roof.

“Hundreds of dead bodies littered our path and the sidewalks. Many houses were burnt. Roving bands of armed insurgents searched houses for survivors who were immediately liquidated. They poked some dead bodies with burning cigarettes; the slightest reaction evoked a burst of gunshots. We were; taken to the big Mosque in the city. On the way, our captors told us that our lives were being spared because after a few days they would make us their domestic servants. Inside the Mosque, it was a terrifying scene. There were hundreds of

wailing women and crying children. There was no water, no food. I tore a part of my sari and my suckling son lay on it. I begged a Bengali attendant in the Mosque to get us some water; he obliged. For two days we had no food. On the third day, the Imam (priest) of the Mosque gave us some food to eat. Although a Bengali he was an angel to us. I was harried day and night by the fear that the killers had perhaps killed my eldest son. On the fourth day, my prayers for his safety were answered when he joined us in the Mosque. A Bengali neighbour, he said, had taken pity on him and smuggled him into the Mosque. On April 21, the Pakistan.

Army occupied Mymensingh and rescued us. It took many days to bury the rotting dead bodies of slain non-Bengalis. I went back to my house to look for the dead body of my husband; there was no trace of it. Deep and large bloodstains on the floor were reminders of his gruesome murder. The Pakistan Army moved us to a Relief Camp in Dacca where we lived in peace. On December 17, 1971 our travail began afresh when the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized East Pakistan. We had become so inured to torture and misery that we were prepared for the worst; we had only our bare bodies to lose. In March, 1974, my three children and I were flown to Karachi from Dacca “.

Fifty-year-old Qamrunnissa, whose husband, Mohammed Qasim and her eldest son, were killed by the insurgents late in March 1971, in Shankipara in Mymensingh, broke down in sobs as she gave an account of her woes:

“It was the last week of March 1971. Our hearts were chilled by rumours that the Awami Leaguers and the rebel soldiers were planning the massacre of all the Urdu-speaking people in Mymensingh. In some localities, killings of non-Bengalis had taken place. Every day, processionists, shouting “Joi Bangla “ and armed with lethal weapons, used to parade in the non-Bengali localities. In the evening, some Bengali boys knocked at our door and asked to see my husband. He opened the door and a group of armed men burst in. At the point of a gun, they ordered my husband and my grown-up son to go with them. I appealed to them for mercy and to spare the lives of my dear ones but they were heartless brutes. I never saw my husband and my son again; the killers murdered them. Poking a bayonet in my arm, they double-marched me to a nearby school where hundreds of crying women and children were held in captivity. On the way, we had seen the blood-soaked dead bodies of their unfortunate husbands and fathers, lying on the roads and the wayside. I saw one of our captors touching with a burning cigarette a dead body which he thought showed signs of life. He was dead as a doornail. The next day, the women and children, who were lodged in the school for the night, were marched to a big mosque where hundreds of other widows and orphans, bemoaning the recent loss of their male kith and kin, were interned. The Bengali imam (priest) of the Mosque was kind and helpful,

and he brought us some water and food. He did his best to dissuade our captors from killing us. On April 21, we were saved from the jaws of death by the timely arrival of the Pakistan Army. They rescued us and transported us to a Relief Camp in Dacca. After the Indian troops and the Mukti Bahini captured Dacca on December 17, 1971, I underwent more physical and mental suffering. In January 1974, I was repatriated from Dacca to Karachi. “

Sixty-year-old Ghaffurunnissa’s account of her woes and suffering in March-April 1971 in a suburban locality of Mymensingh, which had a sprinkling of non-Bengalis, was heart-rending;

“In the last week of March 1971, killer gangs of Awami Leaguers and rebel soldiers of the East Bengal Regiment went on the rampage in our locality. Initially, their victims were the Punjabi residents of our locality. All the young and middle-aged men of the nearly 70 Punjabi families in our neighbourhood were taken at gunpoint to a far away place which, we learnt, was the rebels’ slaughter-house for the non-Bengalis. Early in the second fortnight of April, these killer gangs attacked all the other non-Bengalis in our locality – looting, burning and killing. They broke into our house and dragged my husband and my married son to an open field half a furlong away.

“I spotted in this crowd of hostages my brother and his teenage son. Their captors lined up their non-Bengali captives and asked them to salute a flag which they said was of Bangladesh. Many of the non-Bengalis ignored the guns pointed at them and refused to salute this flag. A fusillade of bullets burst forth from the cruel guns of the rebels and hundreds of innocent men were killed. After the killers had made sure that there were no men survivors – they pumped bullets into the hearts of those who took time to give up the ghost – they returned to the non-Bengali houses where the sorrowing women rent the skies with their wailing. I heard the leader of a killer gang tell his accomplices that the non-Bengali women should be spared so that they could be made domestic servants. With me was my widowed daughter-in-law and her one-year-old son. We were marched to a school; the next day we were taken to a big Mosque. For six days we lived inside this House of God in agony and suffering; most of us prayed most of the time for our husbands and our sons and for our deliverance. On April 21, the Pakistan Army entered Mymensingh and rescued us. We were moved to a Relief Camp in Dacca. After the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized East Pakistan on December 17, 1971, we lived in terror in a Camp for Biharis in Mohammedpur in Dacca. Our travail ended in December 1973 when the United Nations repatriated me and my daughter-in-law and her little son to Karachi. “

Thirty-year-old Zaibunnissa, whose husband, Mohammed Ibraheem, was a Railway employee in Mymensingh, narrated the pathetic story of her widowhood in these words:

“We had lived in peace with our Bengali neighbours for years. My husband was a quiet and hardworking man who had no interest in politics. In the last week of March 1971, a score of yelling and armed Bengalis, whom I had never seen before in our locality, broke the door of our house and overpowered my husband. I begged them to spare my husband and my three little children. They slapped me and kicked my crying children and pushed my husband outside the house. Another mob of angry Bengalis lynched him and dragged him to the execution ground. The killer gang looted my home and marched me and my little children at gunpoint to a small building which, I learnt, was an old jail. We lived in that hell for more than three weeks. The suffering had become so acute and unbearable that I prayed for death. On April 21, the Pakistan Army delivered us from this inferno. For three days, I wandered all over Mymensingh in search of my husband but there was no trace of him. Our soldiers consoled me. I and my orphaned children were moved to Dacca in mid-1971. The nightmare ended for us in February 1974 when the United Nations transported us to safety and freedom in Karachi. “

Shahzadi Begum, 24, whose husband, Akhter Hussain, worked as a postman in Mymensingh, gave a harrowing description of the carnage in which her husband, her father-in-law and her brother-in-law were executed by a gang of rebels in the first half of April 1971:

“We owned a small house in a suburban colony in Mymensingh. Since the middle of March 1971, we lived in terror because of alarming reports that the Awami League militants were planning to kill all the Punjabis. On March 23, my husband returned home in panic and said that a lot of his Punjabi friends had been butchered by Awami League militants, rebel soldiers and policemen. In the second week of April, a mob of Bengalis, many armed with guns, forayed into our house and dragged away my husband, my father-in-law and my teenage brother-in-law. At gunpoint, they ordered the women to stay indoors. The non-Bengali men, including my husband and my in-laws, were marched to an open field where they were shot dead.

“Our tormentors forced me and my two little daughters to go with them. We passed through a green field and we saw a ghastly scene. Scattered on the ground were the dead bodies of hundreds of non-Bengalis who had been executed by firing squads. Some, it seemed, had been killed with daggers and butcher’s knives. One of our Bengali captors, who saw a body move, promptly stilled it with a gunshot. I closed my eyes in sheer horror and fright; my two little

daughters shrieked in fear. The angry looks of our captors and a gleaming bayonet left us no choice but to continue marching under the scorching sun. As we moved on to a road, we saw scores of bleeding dead bodies sprawled all over the roadside. Some were being dumped in a truck. Subsequently, I learnt that many of the non-Bengali dead were tossed into the nearby Brahmaputra river. On the way, we saw hundreds of burnt houses and mat huts.

“We stayed for an hour in a school building, a part of which had been apparently used as a slaughter-house for non-Bengalis. Dead bodies lay in heaps. We were marched to another school building where hundreds of grieving women and children were herded. I saw one of the women holding in her hands the Holy Quran. In the name of the Holy Book, she appealed to her incarcerators to allow her to go home to look after her orphaned, little children. A youthful captor flung the Holy Book from her hands and struck her in the face. We were tormented in this improvised prison for a week; many children died of thirst and hunger. On April 21, we were rescued and freed by the Pakistan Army. Most of the women and children were moved to Dacca. I preferred to stay back in Mymensingh. For eight months we had peace. But after the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini occupied Mymensingh in the third week of December 1971, life again became a horror for us. There was some relief when we were moved to a Red Cross Camp for Biharis in Mymensingh early in 1972. My two small daughters and I were repatriated to Karachi in February 1974. I am convinced that many of those who killed the non-Bengalis in Mymensingh in March-April, 1971, were Hindu Bengali infiltrators from India. “

Amina Khatoon, 45, whose husband, Zainul Abedin, a carpenter, was slain by a killer gang in the middle of April 1971 in a locality near Shankipara in Mymensingh, thus spoke of the tragedy in her life:

“A group of armed rebels stormed our locality on April 15th. They looted my house and drove me and my husband to a nearby field. The men were lined up at some distance from the women. All the captives were non-Bengalis. All of a sudden, a young, toughlooking Bengali gave the order to shoot and, in a jiffy, volleys of bullets smothered more than a hundred non-Bengalis. Seared in my memory is that gory scene. I saw my husband fall to the ground as blood spurted from his chest; I rushed to be with him in his death agony. Before I could reach him, a gunman bashed my head with the butt of his gun. I slumped and fainted. Bayonet prods, a kick and abuses greeted me when I regained my senses; my tormentors marched me to a Mosque where hundreds of widowed women and orphaned children were jailed. It was a ghoulish life. Out of the six days of our incarceration, for four days we lived on water; we had no food to eat. Many children died of hunger. A couple of kind hearted Bengali attendants in the Mosque took pity on us and got us some boiled rice which was eaten by the

starving children. We were told that our rebel tormentors were planning our massacre. But Gcd willed otherwise, and on April 21, in the forenoon, the Pakistan Army rescued us. Earlier in the morning, our captors had vanished from the Mosque. All the destitute women and children, whose male relatives had been slaughtered by the Bengali insurgents, were taken to a Relief Camp in Dacca. I was repatriated to Karachi in January, 1974. "

Thirty-two-year-old Saira, whose husband, Abdul Hamid Khan, was employed as a driver in the Mymensingh police force and who saw him slain by a killer gang in the second week of April 1971, had the following recollection of that dreadful scene:

"As my husband was a non-Bengali and a Pathan, the rebel soldiers and policemen were after his blood right from the middle of March 1971. A group of them broke into our house in the first week of April, overpowered my husband and dragged him to a nearby paddy field. Unmindful of the crying of my three little children who were shocked by the plight of their father, I ran to the killer gang in the rice field and entreated them, in the name of Allah, to spare the life of my husband. But these ruthless men were out for a kill, and one of them slit my husband's throat with a large knife. I was horrified; I was speechless. As I rushed towards him, the killers grabbed me and hurled me to the ground. I heard the groans of my dying husband as they stabbed him in the chest and in the stomach to hasten his end. In the mean time, four gunmen arrived on the scene and pulled me back to my house. It had been looted. My terror-stricken children stood at the doorstep. Our gun-toting captors marched us to a big Mosque. On the way, we saw hundreds of dead bodies on the road and the sidewalks. Many houses had been burnt. Life inside the Mosque was an infernal torture; more than a thousand women and children wailed and groaned. I saw very few teenage girls in this terrified mass of humanity. The Bengali attendants in the Mosque got us some water from a nearby pond which enabled us to survive. The Pakistan Army freed us from this hellish captivity on April 21, 1971. My orphaned children and I were transported by the Army to Dacca where we lived in a Relief Camp. In November 1973, we were flown to Karachi. "

Nasima, 27, a Bengali, whose husband, Abdul Jalil, a Bihari, owned a retail shop in Mymensingh, gave this account of the slaying of her husband late in March 1971:

"Some of my Bengali compatriots hated me and my family because I had married a Bihari. On March 26, 1971, a riotous crowd of miscreants went on the rampage, looted our shop and hacked my husband to death. When the shocking news of his murder reached me in my house, I ran to the shop to retrieve his dead body. There was no trace of it, but fresh bloodstains were visible. I was told

that the killers had carted it away in a truck in the direction of the river which was at some distance. Early in April 1971, the rebel soldiers drove me out of my house and I went to live with my Bengali parents who were very religious-minded and strongly condemned the killing of the non-Bengalis. After the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini seized East Pakistan on December 17, 1971, there was a carnage of Biharis and also of Bengalis who were considered loyal to Pakistan. On December 18, a killer gang attacked our house and killed my father and my two grown up brothers. My third brother, aged 5, and I were in the house of a neighbour when our house was attacked. He helped us in escaping to a nearby village where we lived and worked in the paddy fields for more than two years. When the United Nations started the repatriation of non-Bengalis to Pakistan, I made a frantic effort to come to Pakistan. I had no place in Bangladesh; every moment of my life there was a torment. On February 11, 1974, I was flown to Karachi by the United Nations. “

The evidence of eye-witnesses indicates that Awami League militants and rebel soldiers, who killed non-Bengalis in Mymensingh by the thousands, retreated and fled to India in the face of the advancing Pakistan Army in the third week of April, 1971. After the federal troops entered Mymensingh, they arranged the mass burial of the slaughtered non-Bengalis. In his despatch of May 8, 1971, from Mymensingh, Malcolm Browne of the New York Times, reported:

“At intervals, along streets lined with ramshackle houses, bodies have been buried in shallow graves and covered with piles of red bricks. Bodies covered with bricks are found even on the porches of houses which themselves are unoccupied and closed. “

Interred in these graves were the non-Bengalis slain by the insurgents but India's propaganda machinery and the Awami League publicists drummed the lie that these graves were of Bengalis killed by the Pakistan Army. Witnesses from Mymensingh said that many non-Bengali families underwent terrible hardships and agony in the towns of Kishoreganj, Narsingdi, Bhairab Bazar, Begunbari, and Sarasabari. Hundreds of Bihari handloom weavers in Narsingdi were done to death in March, 1971 by riotous mobs. In Bhairab Bazar, where many non-Bengalis were engaged in the jute trade, a few rich businessmen were held for ransom and their houses were looted. Awami League militants prevented many non-Bengali families from escaping to Dacca and killed their men. A dozen non-Bengali families were done to death in Sarasabari in the last week of March 1971.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Pogrom in Rajshahi, Natore

The murderous frenzy of the Awami League militants and the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles against the non-Bengalis in Rajshahi erupted in the last week of March 1971. Across the three-mile-wide river Padma lies the Indian border. The Bengali mutineers, who were in control of the city during the Awami League's rebellion, were supplied with military equipment from India. Armed infiltrators from India also moved into Rajshahi and its neighbouring towns for sabotage and for aiding the Bengali rebels. They abetted in the mass murder of thousands of innocent non-Bengali men, women and children. In their resistance to the advancing Pakistan Army, the rebels used Indian-supplied bazookas and rocket launchers. Indian artillery shelled the outworks of Rajshahi as the federal troops closed in and the Bengali rebels fled in disarray to the sanctuary of the Indian border across the river. The federal troops regained control over Rajshahi on April 15, 1971. Three weeks later, a group of six foreign newsmen visited Rajshahi.

Maurice Quaintance of the Reuters News Agency, in a despatch from Rajshahi, dated May 9, 1971, reported:

“An eye-witness said the man defending this section included deserters from the East Pakistan Rifles, reinforced by what he described as ‘Indian Military’. Another claimed that Bangla Desh (Land of Bengal) dissidents burned and looted stores in the market which are largely-owned by non-Bengalis. Villagers close by showed the journalists a well where bodies were seen rotting below. They said the bodies were thrown there in a massacre before the Army took over the area and claimed that 700 were killed by secessionist Bengalis in the villages of non-Bengalis.”

Malcolm Browne of the New York Times reported in a despatch from Rajshahi, dated May 9, 1971:

“The impression based on the testimony of hundreds of witnesses is that when it seemed that the Awami League was about to come to power, Bengalis in some communities looted and burnt Bihari houses and slaughtered their occupants.”

Mohammed Amin, 24, who lived near the Jinnah Hall in the Campus of the Rajshahi University, reported that on March 2, 1971, a mob of more than 3,000 Awami League-led secessionists stormed the offices of the Deputy Commissioner and the District Judge and ceremoniously burnt the Pakistan flag and destroyed the office records. The mob, which yelled "Joi Bangla", shouted threats at the non-Bengalis and looted some shops owned by them. At night, Mohammed Amin saw lurid tongues of fire lightning the sky as killer gangs went on the rampage, burning, looting and killing the non-Bengalis. On March 3, when the Awami League ordered a general strike, killer gangs ignored the curfew and roamed at will in the city, preventing Government employees from going to their offices and forcing traders to close down their shops. The conscientious Bengali District Judge succeeded in reaching his office; a killer gang yelled death at him and burnt his office after sprinkling petrol on the woodwork. A bloodthirsty mob prevented the Bengali Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Rashidul Hassan, from going to his office. On March 26, the police force in Rajshahi revolted and threatened to slaughter all the non-Bengalis in the city. On March 29, the small Pakistan Army contingent in Rajshahi attacked the rebel policemen in their Police Lines stronghold after a West Pakistani soldier was shot at and wounded by a rebel sniper. In barely an hour, the rebel policemen were routed and they fled in disarray to neighbouring India. Indian-supplied machine-guns and bazookas were found in the police stronghold. Some policemen who surrendered said that Indian military personnel had sneaked across the border to help the rebels.

Amin said that on March 31, a posse of Bengali rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles kidnapped the Deputy Commissioner to Nawabganj, 30 miles from Rajshahi and lodged him in the local jail. In the night of April 15, a gang of 20 armed rebels slaughtered some 175 non-Bengalis, including women and children, who were detained in the jail. Their dead bodies were dumped at the human abattoir by the riverside. As the federal troops reoccupied Nawabganj, the fleeing rebels kidnapped the Bengali Deputy Commissioner of Rajshahi to their sanctuary of Maldah in India where the Indian Border Security Force welcomed them and jailed the Deputy Commissioner. On May 6, he made a daring escape bid and reached East Pakistan by swimming across the Padma river. The non-Bengali teachers of the Rajshahi University were terrorised by the armed rebels and their houses were ransacked but their Bengali colleagues, at great risk to themselves, shielded them in the Campus all through the insurgency period. Very fluent in Bengali, Amin dodged the killer gangs by posing as a Bengali.

Afsar Ali, 35, whose brother was employed in the Rajshahi Unit of Radio Pakistan, said that the Broadcasting House was shelled and wrecked by the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles in the first week of April, 1971. "I learnt from my brother", said Afsar Ali, "that on April 7, armed personnel from the East Pakistan Rifles caught hold of the Bengali Regional Director of Radio Pakistan

and asked him to begin transmissions in the name of 'Joi Bangla Radio'. He said the broadcasting equipment was damaged in the shelling and a new crystal was needed. The next day, an engineer of All India Radio from Calcutta arrived with the crystal but it did not fit and the transmitter could not be operated. The Indian engineer took back with him details of the transmitter and promised to send a set of crystals from Calcutta. But the crystal did not arrive and the Pakistan Army gained full control over Rajshahi on April 14, 1971. "

Afsar Ali, who lived in the neighbourhood of Sahib Bazar in Rajshahi and was sheltered by a Bengali friend, claimed that during the period of the rebels' rule in April 1971, he saw a number of Indian Army personnel in the town. They spoke Hindi and they carried sten guns. Two of them directed the firing squad which shot dead hundreds of non-Bengalis and some pro-Pakistan Bengalis, including the local Superintendent of Police. Working with the rebels of the East Pakistan Rifles, they gave instructions to the Indian Border Security Force, operating from across the Padma river, to shell the Pakistan Army positions in the area. The armed Awami League militants, according to Afsar Ali, looted all the shops and houses owned by non-Bengalis and butchered the non-Bengali menfolk by the hundreds along the riverside slaughter-houses. The Awami League cadres used to pay Rs. 20 to any informant who disclosed the whereabouts of a non-Bengali in hiding. Many pro-Pakistan Bengalis, who sheltered their non-Bengali friends, were abused and beaten up by the rebels. The wife of the Bengali Deputy Commissioner was threatened with death because she sheltered a dozen non-Bengali families whose menfolk were murdered by Awami League-led killer gangs.

Afsar Ali said that in Natore, the Bengali Sub-Divisional Officer joined the rebels and organized the mass slaughter of non-Bengalis. "Kill all the Biharis ", were his orders. Another organizer of the butchery in Natore was a local Hindu, Gommasa Choudhry, who hated the non-Bengali Muslims, especially the Biharis. He and his men murdered scores of Biharis in the Natore Jail and in the Allahpur Jamia Mosque. Some 500 Bihari survivors, mostly women and children, who were about to be killed by the rebels, were rescued in the nick of time by the Pakistan Army in Natore.

The pogrom against the non-Bengalis was conducted with savagery by the insurgents and their Awami League instigators in other towns of Rajshahi district such as Sarda and Nawabganj. Estimates of the number of non-Bengalis who lost their lives in the Rajshahi district in March-April 1971, before it was liberated by the Pakistan Army, range from 5,000 to 10,000. The Bengali mutineers floated many hundreds of corpses into the Padma river which laps Rajshahi; many were dumped into derelict wells and tanks.

Thirty-year-old Abdul Bari, who was employed in a trading firm in Natore, lost six members of his family, including his young wife and his aged father, in the carnage of non-Bengalis late in March 1971. His story of woe is as follows:

“In 1950, my father left Patna in Bihar state with all his family and migrated to East Pakistan. I was very young. We lived for four years in Jessore and then we shifted to Natore. We built our own house in the Birganj locality where many non-Bengalis resided. We had cordial relations with the Bengalis in the neighbourhood of our colony. On March 25, the Awami Leaguers held a public meeting in our colony, abused the non-Bengalis and incited the Bengalis to exterminate us. Some sober Bengalis appealed to these jingoes not to incite people to violence but their plaintive words had no effect on these cut-throats. The Awami League militants, many of whom were armed, blared out over a megaphone a long list of the names of non-Bengalis who, they said, would be punished for exploiting and maltreating the Bengalis. In this list were many highly-respected and God-fearing Biharis. Some of them showed great courage by walking up to the Bengali crowd and they offered their defence. The killer gang had no time for arguments; the vampires were out to kill. In a matter of minute, Bengali gunmen slayed all the non-Bengalis who had appeared before this kangaroo court.

“After half an hour, the blood-thirsty mob went on the rampage and slaughtered more than a thousand non-Bengalis. In my house, they killed my 57-year-old father, my wife, my two brothers, my brother-in-law and my aged aunt. They tortured my father before gunning him to death because he had appealed to them, in the name of Allah, to spare women and children. The slayers kidnapped most of the teenage girls in our locality; many of them were strangled after they had been raped by groups of rebels. I was severely wounded in the back by the killer gang and the rebels thought I was dead. I hid myself for some days in a nearby dilapidated house. I buried the dead bodies of my kith and kin after the Pakistan Army had re-occupied Natore in mid-April 1971. I was shifted to Dacca in mid-1971, and I was flown to Karachi in February, 1974. “

The massacre of non-Bengalis in Sarada took place late in March and the first week of April, 1971. More than five hundred innocent persons perished in this blood-bath. In Nawabganj, Awami League jingoes, rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and Indian infiltrators stormed the local jail in the third week of March and enrolled the freed criminals in their ranks. One of their torture methods was to overpower non-Bengali young men on the streets and make them shout “Joi Bangla “. Those who refused were lynched. A non-Bengali accounts clerk who refused to yell out the Awami League slogan was buried up to his waist in a ditch and was brained to death with sticks. More than a thousand non-Bengalis were, murdered in March-April, 1971, in Nawabganj.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Bloodshed in Pabna, Serajganj

Although the non-Bengali population in Pabna town was not large, the Awami League militants made life insecure for non-Bengalis since the first week of March 1971. Street manifestations of the Awami League's power – rallies, meetings and demonstrations – were organized almost everyday all through the month. The houses of the non-Bengalis were marked for the impending pogrom. Non-Bengali young men were manhandled on the streets and retailers were urged by the Bengali militants not to sell food to the Biharis and other non-Bengalis.

The momentum of the Awami League's anti-Pakistan agitation in Pabna reached its fever-heat pitch on March 23 when killer gangs, observing the "Resistance Day" ordered by the Awami League High Command, went on the rampage and looted and burnt many non-Bengali houses and shops. They burnt the Pakistan flag and hoisted the Bangladesh flag atop all the Government and private buildings. Those who refused to fly the flag of the rebels were shot or maimed with daggers. In the last days of March and the first week of April, when the Awami League rebels ruled the town, fire and death were carried to many more non-Bengali homes by killer gangs. The telephone exchange and the public telegraph were controlled by the rebels between the third week of March and the first week of April. Witnesses estimate the death toll of non-Bengalis in Pabna town at 2,000.

A number of non-Bengali young women were kidnapped by the rebels and ravished before being murdered. When Pabna town was freed by the Army from rebel control on April 10, dead bodies of non-Bengalis were found in many ransacked houses. The rebels had herded many women and children in deserted buildings and put them to the torch before the Army came. The rebels blocked escape routes for the terrorised non-Bengalis. Some non-Bengali dead bodies, it is reported, were stacked in trucks and dumped into the nearby Padma river. Some God-fearing non-Bengalis, who tried to persuade the killer gangs not to kill the non-Bengali innocents, were intimidated and manhandled.

Violence against non-Bengalis also occurred in Dulai, Sujanagar, Santhia, Kismat, Dera and Shahzadpur.

SERAJGANJ

In the first week of March 1971, the Awami League militants terrorised the non-Bengali populace and ordered them to hand over their firearms. A few affluent West Pakistani and Bihari traders were kidnapped for ransom. The Awami League storm troopers stole guns from the police armoury. In the second week of the month, the Awami League militants became more daring and bellicose, and committed sporadic acts of violence against the non-Bengalis whose houses and shops were red-marked in the preceding week. In the third week of March, the Bengali rebels launched a full-blast campaign of terror and violence against the small non-Bengali population. In the night of March 23, which was observed by the Awami League as 'Resistance Day' to hurl defiance at the federal Government, killer mobs, led by the armed Awami League militants, ransacked non-Bengali houses and indulged in wanton slaughter of the non-Bengali men. The pogrom continued with savage ferocity all through the last week of March and right up to April 27, 1971, when the Army recovered Serajganj from the insurgents.

The most gruesome orgy of violence against the non-Bengalis was the burning of 350 hapless old man, women and children who were herded in a school building by the rebels late in March 1971. Killer gangs, blazing guns, broke into the houses of non-Bengalis and gunned all the male inmates to death. The bereaved women and children were marched at gunpoint to this improvised prison house. Before the Army re-occupied Serajganj on April 27, the rebels set fire to this building and all the non-Bengalis trapped in it were burnt to death. No survivors remained to tell the full story of this beastly act.

The exact death toll of the non-Bengalis in Serajganj in the March-April 1971 massacre will never be known because their dead bodies were tossed by the hundreds into the Brahmaputra River. Many of the non-Bengali victims were executed by their captors on the bank of the river and their bodies were thrown into the water. After the federal troops re captured Serajganj, heaps of mutilated and burnt dead bodies of the non-Bengali victims of the Awami Leagues terror were found in houses which had been looted and burnt. Many destitute and orphaned non-Bengali children and their widowed mothers were taken to Dacca and lodged in camps. Some were sent to Khulna where the non-Bengalis had made arrangements to rehabilitate them.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Woes of Comilla

In the middle of March 1971, tension between the Bengalis and the non-Bengalis in Comilla reached an alarming pitch. Fibs and yarns invented by the Awami League activists and the hostile broadcasts of All India Radio were a major factor in the creation of tension. Mutineers from the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles worked in concert with the Awami League cadres. Roving bands of armed Awami League militants had marked the houses occupied by non-Bengalis. In the third week of March, the insurgents went on the rampage, looting the homes of non-Bengalis and slaying those who resisted. Eye-witnesses said that at least 4,000 non-Bengalis were butchered by the insurrectionists and their supporters before the Pakistan Army regained control over Comilla early in April.

Abu Saeed, 29, who lived with his brother, Qamruddin, in his well-furnished house on Kazi Nazrul Islam Road in Comilla, gave the following heart-rending account of the murder of five members of his family in the third week of March 1971:

“My elder brother, Qamruddin, was a well-to-do businessman. We had migrated to East Pakistan from India early in 1948. All of us had learnt the Bengali language and we were fluent in it. Our relations with our Bengali neighbours were excellent. Political developments in Dacca had their impact on Comilla, and the non-Bengalis felt uneasy. Qamruddin’s family consisted of his wife, his two College-going sons and his teenage daughter. Our aged mother also lived with us. On March 23, we were startled by the sound of gunfire. We saw in the distance a group of armed men advancing towards our house. Some houses and shops were on fire. The Bengali gunmen yelled outside our house. My brother, Qamruddin, spoke to them in Bengali and appealed for mercy. A burst of bullets was their response. They broke the front door and again opened fire. My brother collapsed in a pool of blood. My two nephews grappled with the intruders and lost their lives. As their wailing mother leaned over their lifeless, blood-splashed bodies, a bullet from a gunman’s rifle killed her. While the Bengali raiders were busy in looting the house, I escaped into the backyard through a window and lay still in the bushes. I heard the shrieks of my young niece who was still in the house but I was too scared to go to her help. I heard the report of gunshots. Around midnight I tiptoed into the house; it was a ghastly sight. The only survivor was my aged mother who had fainted. In the early hours of the morning she regained consciousness. In my brother’s bedroom lay the dead body of my niece; her hands were tied with a rope and her clothes were torn. I learnt

from my mother that the girl had resisted her violaters who had taken turns to rape her. Before leaving, the killers had strangled her to death.

“Comilla experienced a reign of terror all through March 1971. Non-Bengalis were liquidated by the thousands; many pro-Pakistan Bengalis, who were known to have voted against the Awami League in the December 1970 general election, were singled out for torture by the insurgents. Peace and order returned to Comilla after the Pakistan Army re-established its audiority early in April. But in December, after the victory of the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini, many of the non-Bengali survivors of the March, 1971 slaughter were murdered. Late in 1972, I escaped to Nepal after bribing the Mukti Bahini. In April 1973, I succeeded in reaching Karachi. “

Equally harrowing was the account which 23-year-old Akhter Rashid gave of the March 1971 killing of non-Bengalis in Comilla:

“My father, Abdur Rashid, had a contract for the supply of food to the Pakistan Army garrison in Comilla. We lived in New Market and I was a student. Most of our neighbours were non-Bengalis. Our relations with the Bengalis were friendly. Tension in Comilla exploded on March 22 when a blood-thirsty mob of yelling Awami Leaguers and insurgents of the East Pakistan Rifles went on a killing spree shortly after sunset. They ransacked all the houses occupied by non-Bengalis in our locality and killed the menfolk, almost without exception. My father was out of town on the day of the massacre. I did not go home and hid myself for the evening in a dilapidated house. Around midnight when I reached my home, I was shocked to find that my teenage sister, Shirin, had disappeared and our house had been looted. There was not a soul in the neighbourhood. I saw dead bodies lying in pools of blood at some places. I was terrified. My father returned to Comilla after our troops had regained control over it. The kidnapping of my sister, Shirin, was a severe blow to him. We scoured the whole of Comilla district in April and May, 1971 in search of Shirin. Late in 1972, I decided to leave East Pakistan and persuaded my father to accompany me. But he refused and said that he would continue the search for his missing daughter until his last breath. I escaped to Nepal, and in June 1973, I came to Karachi. In Kathmandu, I was told that the Bengali insurgents, who had kidnapped non-Bengali girls in Comilla district, had taken them to India where most of them were sold to brothels for prostitution. The fear that this might have been Shirin’s tragic fate is gnawing my soul. “

The two eye-witnesses from Comilla reported that a sizable element among the Awami League militants was of Bengali Hindus. As soon as Pakistan Army reinforcements reached Comilla early in April, the Awami League activists and the para-military Bengali insurgents fled to neighbouring India. They carried

with them the loot which they had collected from the homes of non-Bengalis and the Government Treasury. The federal troops conducted the mass burial of hundreds of rotting dead bodies of non-Bengalis who were murdered by the Bengali insurgents in March 1971. Indian propagandists and Awami League fibsters, who were ensconced in India, duped the world by fabricating the yarn that these graves were of Bengalis killed by the federal troops. Comilla was the headquarters of the 9th Division of the Pakistan Army; its officers and men were disciplined soldiers who had instructions not to shoot unless they were shot at. Many of the Bengali rebels, who had plundered and killed the non-Bengalis in Comilla, retreated to Feni. An Army brigade, sent from Comilla, mopped up the insurgents at Feni. Some escaped with their weapons, across the border, to India. Witnesses from Comilla said that the Awami League rebels had occupied the Comilla Telephone Exchange on March 3, 1971 and snapped Comilla telephone links with the rest of the province. The same day, a train from Bhairab to Laksham was stopped by a mob at Comilla and the rebels tried to burn it but the presence of mind and courage of the Railway staff on duty saved it from disaster. Some 300 prisoners lodged in the Jail in Comilla town tried to escape on March 12 and loyal prison guards opened fire on them to prevent the jail-break. An armed mob raided a field unit of the Pakistan Army at Feni, near Comilla, but the troops repulsed the attack.

In the middle of March 1971, rioting spread to a number of tea gardens in the Comilla district. Incited by the Awami League militants, many Bengali labourers in the tea gardens attacked the West Pakistani, Bihari and other non-Bengali staff and their families.

An Awami League gang burnt Pakistan's national flag at Shamsheernagar on March 13. A section of the police, which was loyal until then, arrested the culprits. The Awami League leaders tried to smash their way into the prison to free the detained men.

AKHAURA

Heavy loss of non-Bengali lives was reported from Akhaura, an important railway station. In the last week of March 1971, a killer gang raided the Railway station and the quarters of the non-Bengali employees and slaughtered a number of non-Bengali men. One of the non-Bengalis killed by the Awami League militants and rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles was the Station Master of Akhaura, Mr. Laiq Akhtar who had kept the Railway station functioning all through the troubled month of March 1971. Witnesses said they had heard that the Station Master had courageously resisted the attackers and put up a brave fight. The Awami League rebels also murdered a number of well-to-do non-Bengali businessmen in Akhaura. The rebels kidnapped many non-Bengali girls

and ravished them. As Akhaura is close to the Indian border, the Bengali rebels and their Awami League confederates escaped to India after the federal Army re-established its authority over it. The non-Bengali population in Akhaura was so heavily abridged in March 1971 that there were not many non-Bengalis left to tell the full story of the massacre there.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Grief in Brahmanbaria

The population of non-Bengalis in the town of Brahmanbaria was small. Most of them had come from the Indian State of Bihar at the time of Partition in 1947. They had learnt the Bengali language. They were mostly traders; some were employed in commercial firms.

In the third week of March 1971, the Awami League militants and the rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles and the East Bengal Regiment began intimidating the non-Bengalis. On March 23, some shops of non-Bengalis were looted and burnt by riotous mobs. The local police gave no protection to the non-Bengalis. On March 26, the Bengali insurgents launched a full-scale attack on the non-Bengalis. Their houses were ransacked by armed gangs. Many non-Bengalis who resisted the hoodlums were shot dead. The attackers included the rebel soldiers from the East Bengal Regiment who were armed with machine guns and bazookas. They indulged in wanton destruction of property owned by the non-Bengalis.

At gunpoint, some 500 Biharis — aged men, women and children — were driven out of their homes by the insurgents and herded in the dingy jail in Brahmanbaria. The insurgents had killed most of the Bihari young men. Inside the prison, the Bihari hostages were the victims of inhuman brutality. Many hungry children who cried for food and water were slain by the trigger-happy prison guards. Dozens of Bihari girls were spirited away at night by the secessionist gunmen and their protesting relatives were beaten up with rifle butts and truncheons. For days on end, the Bihari hostages had no food to eat. Quite a few died of hunger and thirst inside this veritable inferno.

On April 17, 1971, as a column of the Pakistan Army closed in on Brahmanbaria and the Bengali insurgents retreated, the jail was turned into a slaughter-house by the mutineers. The rebel company commander of the East Bengal Regiment ordered the execution of all the non-Bengalis lodged in the jail. Just before sunset, a dozen Bengali machine-gunners wiped out every non-Bengali inside the prison. After accomplishing the massacre of the innocents, the hatchet-men made a bee-line for the Indian border. "We had never even dreamt of such butchery", said the Pakistani soldiers who buried the murdered Biharis the next day.

The Sunday Times of London, in its issue of May 2, 1971, reported the gory killing of the non-Bengalis in Brahmanbaria after its Pakistan Correspondent,

Anthony Mascarenhas, had visited the battle-scarred town in the preceding month:

“At Brahmanbaria, across the border from the Indian State of Tripura, I found the bodies of 82 children who had been lined up and shot. About 300 other non-Bengali bodies were scattered around the jail where they had been housed after the Bengali convicts had been freed. They had been shot dead by the rebels before the rebels fled in front of the West Pakistani advance “.

“I saw Indians from Agartala in India carrying arms and ammunition to the Awami League rebels in Brahmanbaria “, said Kalu Meah, 45, who worked as a porter at the Brahmanbaria railway station. Repatriated to Karachi in November 1973, Kalu Meah said that he escaped the massacre of non-Bengalis by hiding in an abandoned goods wagon at the Brahmanbaria Railway station for a week early in April 1971.

Kalu Meah said that all his relatives in Brahmanbaria, Comilla, and Bhairab Bazar were slaughtered late in March and early in April 1971. A widower, he had a son who was butchered in Comilla while his younger brother was killed in Bhairab Bazar. Kalu Meah testified:

“The Awami Leaguers had close contact with the Indian military people in Agartala which was not far away. All through the period of their insurgency, they used to get arms and ammunition from Agartala. I saw many Indians, carrying weapons, moving about freely in Brahmanbaria in the company of the Awami League insurgents. The killer gangs wiped out most of the non-Bengali Railway employees and their families. All through March, non-Bengalis travelling in trains were victimised; many were killed and thrown from running trains. “

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Turmoil in Bogra, Naogaon

The Awami League militants and the mutineers of the East Pakistan Rifles had seized control of Bogra town in the second week of March 1971. They looted the shops owned by non-Bengalis and extorted money from the owners at gunpoint. One of their many acts of lawlessness and violence was the storming of the jail. They let loose all the prisoners and inducted many of the notorious jailbirds into the rebel ranks. The crescendo of the Awami League's violence and xenophobia gained in intensity after the freed prisoners swung to their side.

Some non-Bengali young men were lynched in the streets. Their parents were manhandled. On March 26, willer gangs of Awami Leaguers and rebel soldiers, fired by a gencidal frenzy, exterminated vast multitudes of non-Bengalis – men, women and children. Their houses were burnt after being looted; teenage girls were kidnapped by the hundreds; many were savaged and raped. Some 700 non-Bengali men, women and children, driven out of their homes by Awami League gunmen, were herded early in April, 1971, in the Bogra Jail. The Bengali rebels who were routed in battle by the advancing federal Army planned to blow up the jail with dynamite before abandoning the town. But the timely arrival of the Pakistan Army saved this tortured mass of humanity from being blown to smithereens.

Hakim Ashrafullah, 59, who practised the Eastern system of Medicine in Bogra since 1951 and whose only son was butchered by a killer gang late in March 1971, said:

“My ancestral home was in Lucknow where my father, Hakim Barkatullah, was respected for his deep knowledge of Eastern Medicine. I spent a part of my youth in Calcutta. After Partition in 1947, I migrated to Dacca, and in 1951, Bogra became my home. I liked the town and its people. I attained considerable success in my practice of Eastern Medicine. I was popularly known as “Chacha “ (Uncle) and I had hundreds of Bengali and non-Bengali friends. During the presidency of Ayub Khan I was elected a Basic Democrat and the Bengali vote for me was massive.

“In the last week of March, Bogra became a welter of fire and gore for many thousands of non-Bengalis. The killings continued all through the first half of April. My son was employed in a local soap factory; he and all the other non-Bengalis were brutally killed. I never found his dead body; I learnt that it was flung into a burning house. This was a common practice followed by the killer

gangs for getting rid of the heaps of dead bodies of non-Bengalis. Pregnant women were bayoneted to death; teenage girls were assaulted and those who resisted their captors were strangled or tossed into derelict wells. I was sheltered and saved by a Bengali neighbour whom I had treated in past years. He cried over the madness that had overtaken many of his compatriots. But he was powerless before the fury and ruthlessness of the killer mobs which were after the blood of the non-Bengalis. Similar was the plight and helplessness of a vast number of decent Bengalis who were shocked and grieved by the carnage of non-Bengalis. I escaped to Nepal in 1972, soon after the Indian Army grabbed East Pakistan. In June 1973, I reached Karachi. The death toll of non-Bengalis in the March-April 1971 butchery in Bogra town was in the neighbourhood of 3,000.

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In Naogaon, a small town near the Bogra district, most of the non-Bengali community of 4,000 were liquidated between March 25 and April 20, 1971. Awami League militants and rebel soldiers barricaded the roads leading to the localities where the non-Bengalis were concentrated. On March 26, the killer gangs looted and burnt the houses of non-Bengalis and mowed them with gunfire. The only survivors of this massacre were some fifty young women who were paraded in the Bazar almost in the nude. They were lodged in well-guarded houses where the rebel Bengali soldiers took turns to rape them. Just before their retreat in the face of the advancing federal Army, the rebels killed these unfortunate girls. It took the Pakistan Army many days to bury the dead bodies which were strewn all over the town. A few injured survivors, who literally rose from heaps of dead bodies, said that some of the killers were definitely Bengali infiltrators from India.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Horror in Santahar

The Railway junction town of Santahar in Bogra district felt the tremors of the Awami League's uprising in Dacca since the early days of March, 1971. The Awami League militants fabricated and spread rumours that Pakistan Army contingents and West Pakistanis had killed Bengalis in Dacca and other towns. These rumours were designed to incite Bengalis against the non-Bengali community in Santahar. The volcano of tension exploded on March 25 when armed Awami Leaguers and the mutineers of the East Pakistan Rifles and the East Bengal Regiment let loose a reign of terror on the non-Bengalis. Out of nearly 22,000 non-Bengalis resident in Santahar, it is estimated that more than 15,000 were slaughtered by the rebels before a column of the Pakistan Army re-occupied the town on April 27, 1971. At the Santahar Railway Station, many hundreds of non-Bengali employees and their families were done to death by the rebels. A killer gang gunned 65 non-Bengalis who were praying in a Mosque on March 26, 1971. In another Mosque, some 70 non-Bengali women, whose fathers or husbands had been slaughtered, were assaulted by rapists who were said to be Bengali Hindu infiltrators from India. In the second week of April, 1971, a rebel gang paraded 60 non-Bengali girls almost in the nude. Some of these unfortunate girls were whisked away to India by their retreating captors. Those lucky non-Bengalis who survived the March-April, 1971, killings were butchered by the Mukti Bahini after December 17, 1971.

Thirty-year-old Nafisa Khatoon, whose husband, Mohammed Zaheeruddin, owned a cloth shop in Santahar and was killed by the insurgents, described the tragedy that made her a sorrowing widow in these poignant words:

"It was the forenoon of March 25. Scared by the tension which prevailed in Santahar, my husband did not go to the cloth shop which was located in the commercial hub of the town. Word reached us that miscreants had looted his shop. All of a sudden, a dozen armed Bengalis broke into our house. My husband tried to plead with them and uttered to give them all the cash and jewellery in our home. I cried aloud and begged them for mercy. My two little children, white with fear, slipped under a table. The killers dragged my husband into the compound and shot him dead. It was the end of the world for me when I saw him slump to the ground and a stream of blood spurted from his head and chest. I fainted. When I woke up, I found my orphaned children wailing over the cold-blooded murder of their father. They had seen his dead body.

“The killers ransacked my house; all the cash and every valuable was gone. They stole even my wedding ring. Late at night, I wrapped my husband’s dead body with white bedsheets and a neighbour earned it to the graveyard for burial. Dressed as a rustic Bengali woman, I slipped out of my house with my two children the next morning. I headed for Parbatipur where some relatives of my husband lived. The trek was an ordeal; we had painful blisters on our feet; the children were hungry. We saw dead bodies on the wayside and in the streams. Roving bands of Awami League murderers were at large. They were after the blood of non-Bengalis. We reached Parbatipur, almost dead with hunger and fatigue. We could not locate our relatives; the massacre of non-Bengalis had taken place in Parbatipur also. But a life-saver for us was the news that a contingent of the Pakistan Army had entered the outworks of the town. The Awami League insurgents fled. Our troops looked after us for two days and then sent us to Dacca where we lived in a Relief Camp in the Mohamrnedpur locality.
“

After December 17, 1971, when the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahmi entered Dacca, life again became a nightmare for Nafisa Khatoon and her children. The conditions in the Relief Camp in Mohammedpur in Dacca were miserable. The handouts of food to Nafisa and her children were skimpy. On February 2, 1974, they were repatriated to Karachi in a United Nations aircraft. “God answered our prayers; we are safe in Pakistan “, said Nafisa. More than three years of horror and misery had aged Nafisa and her hair had turned grey.

Fifteen-year-old Mohammed Shakoor, whose father, Mohammed Shafeeq, was brutally killed by a gang of Awami League militants on March 25, 1971, had this grim recollection:

“My father was employed as a truck driver in Santahar. He spoke Bengali very well and he had put me in a school where the medium of instruction was Bengali. We had no quarrel with our Bengali neighbours. Our house was on the outskirts of the town and nearby was a graveyard. In the morning of March 25, I went to school and attended my classes. Some of my Bengali schoolmates called me a Bihari although I spoke Bengali as well as they did. At 2 p.m. I left the school and walked towards my home. As I reached the graveyard, I saw a group of miscreants, armed with guns and knives, storming my mudhouse. I was scared and I hid behind the walls of a grave. After a few minutes I heard the shrieks of my father. I peered through a hole in the wall and saw the killers dragging him out of the house. He was bleeding profusely. They tied him with ropes to the trunk of a tree and stabbed him in the chest and the belly. He was dead. These accursed men looted our house. At the point of a gun, they forced my mother and my little sister to follow them in the direction of a nearby village. This was the last I saw of them. For a month, I lived in the graveyard in horror and terror.

I saw the spectre of death all over the place. I ate wild fruits and slaked my thirst at night with muddy water from a nearby stream. I was sick. I often heard the roar of guns and the whining of bullets. Late in April, troops of the Pakistan Army entered Santahar. They buried the dead body of my father in the graveyard and sent me to Dacca where I stayed in the Relief Camp at Mohammedpur. They searched the entire neighbourhood to retrieve my mother and sister but there was no trace of them. After the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini captured Dacca on December 17, 1971, life again became a torture for me. I was penniless and I had no relatives and friends. God was my only anchor of hope and I prayed every night. On January 29, 1974, the United Nations airlift brought me to Pakistan – to safety and freedom. “

The agony of the past three years was writ large on the face of Shakoor. His knees trembled as he spoke of the impaling of his father by his killers and the traumatic days and nights he spent in the graveyard before the Pakistan Army rescued him.

Twenty-seven-year-old Qamrunnissa, whose husband, Abdul Majid, was killed by the Bengali insurgents in Santahar in the last week of March 1971, gave the following account of her agony and suffering:

“In the third week of March, the Awami League activists and their supporters had set up a so-called Peace Committee in Santahar. In the name of the Peace Committee, they called upon the non-Bengalis to surrender their firearms and other weapons. Believing the Awami Leaguers’ assurances of protection, the non-Bengalis handed over to them whatever weapons they had. On March 25, a big mob of armed rebels raided our locality. They set fire to some houses; they fired their guns indiscriminately to frighten us. Some fifty cut-throats, armed with rifles, daggers, spears and staves, rushed into my house and brutally killed my husband, my three brothers-in laws, my father-in-law and my teenage nephew. We begged the killers to spare the lives of our dear ones. I clasped the dead body of my husband and wailed over it. The brutes hit me with the butt of a rifle and almost broke my arm. They pulled me by the hair and dragged me outside the house. My legs were singed and I could hardly walk. At the point of their blazing guns, they marched me and many other wailing Bihari and Punjabi women to the Railway Station. They forced us to hand over to them the ornaments some of us wore. Many of the girls were raped by their inhuman captors.

“In the last week of April, I and a few other women escaped from the captivity of these brutes. My feet were blistered but we succeeded in reaching a cluster of shady trees on the bank of a river. Our captors launched a search for us but a squall hit the area and these human hounds could not trace us. The next day our

prayers were answered by the Almighty and the Pakistan Army entered Santahar. The federal troops rescued us. They took us to Naogaon where my wounds were treated and, later on, I was taken to Dacca and lodged in a Relief Camp “.

Qamrunnissa was shifted to Chittagong in mid-1971 and lived with her parents. In February 1974, she was repatriated to Karachi. “Even now I am harried by dreadful dreams; I see those thugs killing my dear husband; I see them chasing me with their blazing guns “, she moaned.

Amanullah Khan, 26, who lived in Quarter No. 195 in the Railway (Loco) Colony in Santahar, had this harrowing recollection of the massacre of non-Bengalis in March, 1971:

“In the evening of March 26, a large gang of armed Awami Leaguers attacked our residential colony in which non-Bengalis were in the majority. Some of the non-Bengalis had weapons, and we exchanged gunfire with the attackers all through the night. Early the next morning, the non-Bengalis moved to the Railway Station, and some old men, women and children sought refuge in the Mosque which was only 200 yard away. Those of us who had weapons had no ammunition left. So we were defenceless. In the forenoon, a hundred Bengali rebels from the East Pakistan Rifles came to the Railway station and forcibly took away whatever weapons we had. At noon, we learnt that the rebels had looted the Ranipur Police Station and had killed all the non-Bengalis there. We were panicky. In the afternoon of March 27, about seven hundred armed Awami Leaguers and rebel soldiers stormed the Mosque near the Railway Station and gunned to death all the non-Bengalis sheltered in it. After the Pakistan Army re-occupied Santhar, 53 dead bodies of non-Bengali men, women and children were found strewn all over the Mosque. The houses of non-Bengalis had been looted and burnt; there were very few survivors. I had witnessed the gruesome massacre of the non-Bengalis in the Mosque from the window of a store room in the Railway Station. I escaped to Nepal after India’s seizure of East Pakistan. In September 1973, I came to Karachi. I am convinced that many of the rebel soldiers, who mowed down the non-Bengalis in the Mosque, were, in reality, armed infiltrators from India. “

“Six Bengali hoodlums, claiming to be soldiers of the Mukti Bahini, grabbed me when I was giving a woollen sweater to an ill-clad Pakistani prisoner-of-war in Santahar in the third week of December 1971 “, said 55- year-old Ghulam Rasool, a Railway employee based at Parbatipur, who was on duty on that day in Santahar. Ghulam Rasool had escaped the March 1971 massacre of non-Bengalis at Parbatipur but suffering was in store for him late in December 1971 at the

hands of the Mukti Bahini. Repatriated to Karachi from Dacca in February 1974, he said:

“The Mukti Bahini, after the fall of Dacca to the Indian Army on December 17, 1971, had ordered its followers in Santahar to slaughter every adult male non-Bengali. Some Sikh soldiers of the Indian Army tried to persuade the Mukti Bahini not to indulge in wanton killing. I was in mortal agony when I saw the Pakistani soldiers, who had surrendered to the Indian Army, being marched to the POWs camp on route to India. It was winter and, sadly, the Pakistani soldiers were being marched barefooted. Some of them did not have warm clothes. A few Biharis broke the cordon and gave woollen sweaters to our soldiers. Realising that it would endanger the lives of the givers, the Pakistani soldiers motioned them not to do so. I had also given a sweater to a soldier. The next minute, six Bengali hoodlums grabbed me and threw me into a dungeon where dead bodies, chopped limbs of human victims and filth were littered on the floor. It was a slaughter house used by the Mukti Bahini for murdering their victims. There were many other non-Bengali captives in this stinking black hole. The Mukti Bahini guards slapped and kicked me and threatened that I would be shot. In the evening, a posse of Indian soldiers visited this dungeon and freed the non-Bengali captives. As I had no home or place to live in Santahar, I requested that I should be allowed to stay for the night in the local Jail which, although full of Biharis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis, was less unsafe. The next day, I left for Parbatipnr and reached it after a perilous and trying journey “.

EPILOGUE

The sheaves of eyewitness accounts, documented in this book, prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the massacre of West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis in East Pakistan had begun long before the Pakistan Army took punitive action against the rebels late in the night of March 25, 1971. It is also crystal clear that the Awami League's terror machine was the initiator and executor of the genocide against the non-Bengalis which exterminated at least half a million of them in less than two months of horror and trauma. Many witnesses have opined that the federal Government acted a bit too late against the insurgents. The initial success of the federal military action is proved by the fact that in barely 30 days, the Pakistan Army, with a combat strength of 38,717 officers and men in East Pakistan, had squelched the Awami League's March-April, 1971, rebellion all over the province.

The rebellion was master-minded, by the hardcore, pro-India leadership of the Awami League, a regional political party which initially campaigned for provincial autonomy but subsequently espoused the secession of the eastern province from the federal union. The Awami League had won the majority of seats reserved for the province of East Pakistan in the constitution-making National Assembly and the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly in the countrywide December, 1970, general elections. But it had no legislative support in the four provinces of West Pakistan. In wooing the electorate in East Pakistan before the polls, the Awami League committed itself to the concept of a single Pakistani nationhood by proclaiming in its election manifesto "Pakistan shall be a federation, granting full autonomy to each of the federating units ". Having secured the confidence of the majority of the voters in East Pakistan on the platform of autonomy within the framework of a united Pakistan, the militant ruling caucus in the Awami League took to the path of rebellion and secession of East Pakistan from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. It unloosed terrible orgies of killing and destruction of the non-Bengali ethnic minority to which the generic name of Biharis was given by their tormentors. After the federal Army crushed the Awami League's revolt, most of its hardcore leaders and followers sought sanctuary in India's protective lap and invoked its massive military and financial support for their secessionist campaign.

Seizing it as the golden opportunity of the century to undo Pakistan, India used the Bengali rebels; it had trained and armed, for the war of attrition against Pakistan in its eastern wing for some nine months. After the Bengali guerrillas had been used by India as cannon fodder to soften the Pakistani defences in East Pakistan, Indian tanks, guns and troops rolled over the border on November 22,

1971, to accomplish India's armed grab of East Pakistan and the establishment of its client state of Bangladesh. India's Bengali surrogates, who operated the Indian-propped, Calcutta-based Government of Bangladesh, were installed in Dacca as the new rulers of Bangladesh on December 17, 1971 by the victorious Indian Army. On January 8, 1972, President Bhutto of Pakistan freed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and sent him from Rawalpindi in a PIA Boeing to London en route to Dacca where he took over the leadership of the new Bengali state. He made a public declaration, soon after his return to Dacca, that for the past quarter of a century he had been working for the separation and independence of Pakistan's eastern wing.

The Government of Pakistan had issued, belatedly, in August 1971, a White Paper on the East Pakistan crisis which gave a chronological synopsis of the macabre happenings in East Pakistan during the murderous months of March and April, 1971. It gave the following rationale for the federal military action in East Pakistan against the Awami League secessionists and their rebel cohorts:

“On the night of March 25/26, a few hours before the Awami League plan for an armed uprising and launching of the independent Republic of Bangladesh was to be put into effect, the President of Pakistan called upon the Armed forces to do their duty and fully restore the authority of the Government in East Pakistan.

“The federal army took the initiative and thwarted the Awami League plan for the armed takeover of East Pakistan through armed infiltrators from India and subverted elements in the East Bengal Regiment, East Pakistan Rifles, the police and Para-military forces. “

The White Paper bared these highlights of the Awami League's operational plan for the armed revolt in East Pakistan which was due to be triggered full-blast in the small hours of March 26, 1971:

- a) Troops of the East Bengal Regiment would occupy Dacca and Chittagong to prevent the landing of Pakistan Army units by air or sea;
- b) The remaining troops of the East Bengal Regiment, with the help of the East Pakistan Rifles, the police and the armed Razakaars (Volunteer Corps) would swiftly move to eliminate the federal armed forces in various cantonments and stations;
- c) The East Pakistan Rifles would occupy all the key posts of the border and keep them open for aid from outside;
- d) Requirements of more arms and ammunition would be met with supplies from India, and
- e) Indian troops would come to the assistance of the Awami League rebel force once it succeeded in the first phase of occupying key centres and paralysing the Pakistan Army.

What Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his pro-India caucus in the Awami League failed to achieve in March because of the daring, pre-emptive strike by the federal Army was accomplished for them by their Indian benefactors in the third week of December, 1971. The secession plan was in fact conceived in June, 1964, when the Sheikh and his associates, according to the prosecution's charge-sheet in the secessionist Agartala conspiracy trial of 1968, held their first major conspiratorial conclave in Dacca in the house of Tajuddin Ahmed – the hardliner whom India made, in April, 1971, the Prime Minister of the Indian sponsored and Indian-financed Government of Bangladesh in Calcutta. According to the prosecution's charge-sheet, it was in this meeting of the conspirators that the name of Bangladesh was coined for the independent Bengali state that was to be established in East Pakistan with Indian funds and arms. It was also in this meeting that the design of the flag of Bangladesh, which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman saw ceremoniously, unfurled at a Dacca rally on March 23, 1971, was presented for approval. The Sheikh was not exonerated of the charges of secession levelled against him in the Agartala conspiracy case; the trial was abandoned in February 1969, by the Ayub regime under political pressure from opposition parties. In the election year of 1970, India's clandestine financial support to the Awami League was a major factor in the party's affluence and its well-lubricated, highly efficient organizational apparatus.

The Awami League employed fascist techniques in its operations for power grab. Its leaders and their followers used strong-arm methods to terrorise their rival parties. All through the election year of 1970, scores of attacks by the Awami Leaguers on their political adversaries were reported in the press. The Awami League had won over a section of the Bengali bureaucracy in East Pakistan with lavish promises of speedy promotions and other fringe benefits once it came to power. Unlike its political rivals, the Awami League suffered from no shortage of funds. Money flowed into its coffers from generous India. It also enjoyed a rich harvest of protection money from the West Pakistani industrialists who owned factories in East Pakistan and who thought that bribing the Awami League was an insurance against labour tantrums. An excellent organizer, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had no difficulty in recruiting into his militant outfit tough young men specially trained in breaking up meetings, manhandling opponents and in other cloak-and-dagger tactics of political combat. The Awami League's leadership showed a fascist intolerance for the Opposition and had no qualms of conscience in ruthlessly liquidating its rivals. The ouster of Mrs. Amena Begum, a one-time President of the Awami League, from the party at the behest of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is one of the many examples of the Nazi-style manner in which he ran the Awami League. Even the organizational set-up of the Awami League, during nearly two decades of its operation, did not substantiate the party's pretensions to democracy. The Awami League's public meetings were organized as massive

displays of its political strength in Dacca. The party cadres used to hire hundreds of trucks and even charter train services for transporting villagers to Dacca to pack the audience ranks in the public meetings and rallies of the Awami League. The theme song of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his firebrands was invariably the charge of exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan. Typical of the highly emotive and inflammatory speeches with which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman injected animus against West Pakistan in the minds of his Bengali supporters was his speech at Hazaribagh Park on March 11, 1970 when he accused West Pakistan of looting the wealth of East Pakistan. Aside from preaching hymns of hate against West Pakistan, the leaders of the Awami League mis-represented to the people in East Pakistan every action of the federal authorities and distorted facts and figures to buttress their arguments for autonomy bordering on virtual independence. After the cyclone tragedy of November 1970 in the coastal belt of East Pakistan, the Awami League leaders and their newspaper mouthpieces invented countless false charges of callousness and misappropriation of aid for the cyclone sufferers against the federal officials posted in the province.

The charge against the Awami League leaders that while they wooed the electorate in 1970 on the platform of autonomy, after their electoral success in East Pakistan, they shifted their position and demanded a virtually independent Bangladesh has substance in it. The first point of the Awami League's six-point programme of autonomy categorically said that "the character of the Government shall be federal and parliamentary", implying that Pakistan would be a federation and not a confederation, In his election speeches in 1970, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assured the voters that he wanted only provincial autonomy and not the disintegration of Pakistan or any dilution of its Islamic character. On September 21, 1970, in a public address at Narayanganj, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said:

"The six-point programme would be realised and at the same time neither the integrity of Pakistan nor Islam would be jeopardised."

After the Awami League's electoral victory in East Pakistan in December 1970, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speeches betrayed signs of a shift in his autonomy stance. He declared bluntly that his six points were not negotiable. It appeared that he had started toying with the idea of making his Bangladesh an independent state. The draft constitution, which his constitutional experts wrote early in 1971 with the object of railroading it through the National Assembly soon after its convocation, sought to whittle down the powers of the federal government to such an extent that Pakistan would then have been a confederation of virtually independent states and not a federation. Two of its well-known provisions, which militated against all canons of federalism, were that (a) the federal government would handle foreign affairs minus foreign trade

and aid, and (b) all federal taxes would be collected by the provincial governments and not by the federal government. Such provisions are alien to the concept of federalism and do not exist in the constitution of any truly federal state. The Awami League's proposal for two separate constituent conventions "for the purpose of framing constitutions for the state of Bangladesh and for the states of West Pakistan " was undoubtedly a constitutional formula for the eventual secession of East Pakistan from the fold of the federation. Under this constitutional formula, the Awami League demanded for Bangladesh the power to sign treaties and agreements of foreign trade and aid in total disregard of the federal government and to maintain trade representatives overseas. This was the platform of independence, not of provincial autonomy. The rigid stand of the Awami League leaders and their refusal to budge even an inch from their demand for virtual independence for Bangladesh wrecked the constitutional talks in Dacca in the third week of March 1971.

General Yahya Khan's postponement of the National Assembly's inaugural session, scheduled for March 3, 1971, was a temporary measure. It was intended to give more time to the political leaders to devise a consensus on the form and shape of the proposed constitution instead of openly wrangling in the forum of the National Assembly. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman over-reacted to the temporary postponement of the National Assembly's session and hastily took to the path of rebellion against the federal government and usurped the authority of the lawfully-established government in East Pakistan. It is a tragedy of the grimmest dimension that because of the Awami League's chauvinism and power lust, millions of innocent people in East Pakistan suffered the most dreadful trauma in sub continental history.

India's support to the Awami League encouraged Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his bid to wrest the reins of power in East Pakistan from the federal government through the majesty of force and terror. India's rulers have not reconciled themselves to the reality of Pakistan as a separate, sovereign state. Muslim-majority Pakistan has been a constant eyesore for Hindu-majority India. One of the reasons for India's all-out support to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his secessionist movement was spelled out in mid-1971 by the Chairman of India's Institute of Public Affairs, Mr. R. R. Kapur, a retired senior officer of the Indian Civil Service, in these words:

"Our support to Mujibur Rahman is based; let us be candid enough, on our sub-conscious hate complex of Pakistan. Platonically, we may plead all virtue but the harsh reality is that Pakistan was wrested from us, and its basis – the two nations' theory – has never been palatable to us. If something ever happens which proves the unsoundness of that theory, it will be a matter of psychological satisfaction to us. That is, by and large, our national psyche and it is in that

context that we have reacted to a happening which, we think, may well disrupt Pakistan. “

There is ample evidence to prove that India was sending weapons and ammunition and armed infiltrators into East Pakistan to help the Awami League cadres long before the federal military intervention of March 25, 1971. India's rulers had massed more than 100,000 crack troops in West Bengal since early March under the pretext of maintaining law and order during the elections in that state. In mid-March, more Indian army formations were moved to West Bengal and deployed on the borders of East Pakistan to boost the morale of the Awami League insurrectionists. Late in March, 1971, at least eight battalions of the Indian Border Security Force gave active support to the Awami League rebels in the border belt. It was India which organised the burlesque of installing the government of Bangladesh in exile in the first week of April in an Indian border village. To provide an operational base to its protégé Bangladesh Government, the Indian authorities manipulated the seizure of Pakistan's diplomatic and consular mission in Calcutta by a handful of defectors and handed it over to the secessionist fugitives from East Pakistan.

India would have attacked East Pakistan in April 1971, to establish Bangladesh by force but the Indian Army generals counselled their Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, against what then was to them a hazardous and precipitate action. They preferred the winter for a blitz attack on East Pakistan because Pakistan's access routes to China would then be snowed up. They also wanted time to mobilise their armed forces for a full-scale war with Pakistan and to train the Bengali defectors in guerrilla warfare to soften the Pakistani defences in East Pakistan before the actual Indian invasion. The Indian Generals, according to the “Lightning Campaign “ by Major-General D. K. Palit, also urged the Indian Prime Minister to eliminate the possibility of Chinese or American intervention in support of Pakistan. In eight months of frenzied preparations, India's rulers succeeded in priming their war machine for the blitz attack on East Pakistan. They signed the Indo-Soviet alliance in August 1971 to neutralise the danger of Chinese intervention in a sub-continental war. They bamboozled American public opinion with exaggerated accounts of the refugee influx and turned it against Pakistan to ensure that no American weapons would flow into Pakistan.

India trained nearly 100,000 East Pakistan Bengalis in guerrilla warfare. Their harassing raids, sabotage and a virtual war of attrition bled Pakistan economically and weakened it under the strain of a costly anti-insurgency operation. In spite of Pakistan's repeated offers to take back all the refugees who had gone to India, India's rulers deliberately did not permit them to return to East Pakistan because that would have deprived India of a deceptively

humanitarian excuse, initially, to milk the world for hundreds of millions of dollars in compassionate aid, and subsequently, to invade East Pakistan.

The refugees gave India its most powerful weapon in psychological warfare. By inflating their number from a million in May to more than nine million in November 1971, India deceived world opinion and gave Pakistan a bad name all over the world. India was allergic to Pakistan's demand for a count of the refugees in India by an impartial agency, such as the United Nations. It did not accept Pakistan's claim that only 2.02 million people had left East Pakistan due to the civil strife.

The Indian authorities deliberately encouraged the vast hordes of unemployed Bengalis, who swarm Calcutta and its neighbourhood, to move into the refugee camps as inmates so that the population of these camps could be magnified to impress and mislead foreign visitors and United Nations officials. If the Indian Government was so overburdened with tile refugees from East Pakistan, it could have promptly negotiated with the Pakistan Government their speedy return to their hearths and homes in East Pakistan, especially when the Pakistan authorities were anxious to take them back and a general amnesty had been granted to those who looted and killed during the Awami League's March 1971 uprising. India's rulers uttered haughty words to tell the world that they would allow the Bengali refugees to return to East Pakistan only when the province was turned over to the Awami League secessionists. A Goebbels-style propaganda machinery, which drugged the Indian people for weeks with the fiction of Pakistani General Tikka Khan's imaginary death in the last days of March 1971, had no qualms of conscience in inflating the number of refugees to earn more money and sympathy from gullible nations and individuals and to malign its arch enemy, Pakistan.

Pakistan agreed to the United Nations Secretary-General's proposal in the autumn of 1971 for the stationing of monitors on the India-East Pakistan border but the Indian Government contemptuously rejected it. The UN observers would have bared the fact of India's military patronage, sanctuary and logistic support to the Bengali guerrillas and India's massive preparations for the invasion of East Pakistan.

India's claim that it had maintained a complete record of the incoming refugees was a mere fiction. After the federal army went into action against the Bengali rebels on March 25, 1971, India opened its borders to provide sanctuary to the hordes of fleeing rebels from East Pakistan. They were the killers who had enacted one of the bloodiest pogroms of modern times. Subsequently India encouraged more Bengalis in East Pakistan, especially the Hindus, to cross over to India. In June 1971, when United Nations officials wanted to check on the

veracity of the Indian figures on refugees, the Indian authorities hurriedly fabricated some records and registers. When these fictitious documents did not fully substantiate the Indian claim of the millions of refugees India said had come over from East Pakistan, Indian officials blandly said that a few million refugees had gone to live with their friends all over India. India's rulers found it to their immense advantage to magnify the extent of human displacement to attract international sympathy, attention and funds and to discredit Pakistan and its army.

In the months just before and after India and Pakistan attained independence in August 1947, some eight million Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan and six million Hindus migrated from Pakistan to India owing to Hindu-Muslim religious rioting in the two countries. Involving some 14 million people, this was the biggest trans-border migration of peoples in human history. India and Pakistan accomplished their rehabilitation and resettlement in their respective territories without any outside assistance. In 1971, India invented the excuse of its refugee burden to invade and grab East Pakistan. It defies human comprehension how all the nine million refugees India claimed it was hosting vanished in less than a month's time. Indian propagandists claimed that all the Bengali refugees lodged in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura had returned and were resettled in their hearths and homes in East Pakistan (breakaway Bangladesh) in less than a month after India's military seizure of the province on December 17, 1971. The movement of nine million human beings from the neighbouring states of India to Bangladesh, across mine-infested border tracts, shell-scarred roads, polluted wells and rotting dead bodies in barely three weeks, is beyond the pail of human achievement. But this is precisely what India's propagandists want the world to believe in order to justify their bloated figures of the refugee influx.

Since his advent to power in Dacca, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has drummed the phoney charge that the Pakistan Army had killed three million of his countrymen in 1971. In civil strife, there is undoubtedly some loss of life on both sides. But it is unbelievable that all through the nine months of strife in East Pakistan, the Pakistan Army's barely three divisions, thinly spread out along more than 1800 miles of explosive, often flaming, border with India, did no other work except engage in the gory pastime of slaughtering 13,000-plus Bengalis every day. A correspondent of the Daily Los Angeles Times, William J. Drummond, who toured Bangladesh in the first quarter of 1972, exposed the absurdity of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's charge. Similarly, the falsity of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman oft-repeated allegation that the Pakistani troops had raped 200,000 Bengali girls in 1971 was borne out when the abortion team he commissioned from Britain early in 1972 found that its workload involved the termination of only a hundred or more pregnancies.

THE END

In the months just before and after India and Pakistan attained independence in August 1947, some eight million Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan and six million Hindus migrated from Pakistan to India.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Member, Standing Committee, Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors, and ex-Vice-President, Karachi Union of Journalists. Co-author, "Foreign Policy of Pakistan- An Analysis ", published by Karachi University. Has authored many pamphlets and articles on foreign policy aspects. Authored "Mission to Washington ", an expose of India's intrigues in the U.S.A. in 1971 to dismember Pakistan. Started writing weekly column at the age of 15 in Hyderabad Bulletin, an English Daily of Hyderabad State, where his father, Mr. Abdul Hafiz, was Bureau Manager of an Indian News Agency, United Press of India, and his mother was a member of the State Legislature. Born in Lucknow in 1929, where his maternal grandfather, Nawab Abdullah Khan, owned and edited Urdu Daily Hamdam, Aziz was educated in New Delhi, Simla and Hyderabad Deccan. Was Vice-President, St. George's Grammar School Students Society and Nizam College Students' Union, Hyderabad (Dn.).

Participated in international Youth Conference in London in 1948. Covered many international conferences, including U.N. General Assembly sessions in Paris and New York, Bandung Conference of 1955, Indonesian General Elections, Lebanese Civil War in 1958, Civil War in Congo in 1964, Indonesia's 20th Independence Anniversary, Islamic Foreign Ministers' and Summit Conferences. Interviewed many world famous personalities, including ex-President Truman, Premier Chou en Lai, Japan's ex-Premiers Yoshida and Hatoyama, ex-President Garcia of Philippines. Had internationally-published cable interview with Soviet Premier Bulganin in February 1956.

Has travelled in 60 countries, including China in 1956 as member of an Editors' Delegation, and U.S.A. in 1957 under U.S. Government's Leader Exchange Programme. Had lectured in past years to PAF Staff College, Army Staff College at Quetta, University of Karachi, U.S. Embassy in Karachi and learned bodies and Press Clubs in U.S.A. and many ether countries. Was on a Government assignment with Pakistan Embassy in U.S., April-November 1971. Was Awarded Tamgha-i-Pakistan by Pakistan Government in 1971 for meritorious services to

Pakistan. Testified before 1971 War Inquiry Commission on February 9, 1972. Member, National Council of Social Welfare. Government of Pakistan, Sindh Social Welfare Council, Sindh Government and office bearer in many social welfare agencies. Has authored books, pamphlets and articles on social welfare. Was an elected member of Karachi Municipal Corporation in 1958.

This book details or refers to the atrocities committed on West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis by the Awami League militants and their supporters in the following 110 cities and towns of East Pakistan in 1971:

1. Dacca
2. Narayanganj
3. Chittagong
4. Chandraghona
5. Rangamati
6. Khulna
7. Daulatpur
8. Khalispur
9. Pholtala
10. Bagerhat
11. Satkhira
12. Dinajpur
13. Bochaganj
14. Pirganj
15. Ranisankhail
16. Kaharol
17. Biraganj
18. Chirirbandar
19. Parbatipur
20. Thakurgaon
21. Hilli
22. Laksham
23. Rajbari
24. Goalundo
25. Faridpur
26. Kushtia
27. Chuadanga
28. Meherpur
29. Zafarkandi
30. Ishurdi

31. Paksey
32. Noakhali Sylhet
33. Lalabazar
34. Fenchuganj
35. Gopalganj
36. Gobindganj
37. Balaganj
38. Jagannathpur
39. Molvi Bazar
40. Bheramara
41. Rargpur
42. Nilphamari
43. Saidpur
44. Lalmonirhat
45. Jessore
46. Mobarakganj
47. Kaliganj
48. Kotchandpur
49. Narail
50. Bejerdanga
51. Jhenidah
52. Noapara
53. Darsana
54. Barisal
55. Ferozepur
56. Jhalakati
57. Mymensingh
58. Rajshahi
59. Natore
60. Sarda
61. Nawabganj
62. Pabna
63. Serajganj Dulai
64. Sujanagar
65. Santhia
66. Kismat
67. Bera
68. Shahzadpur
69. Comilla
70. Feni
71. Brahmanbaria
72. Bogra
73. Naogaon

74. Santahar
75. Maijdi
76. Begumganj
77. Chaumohani
78. Hatia
79. Begunbari
80. Sandwip
81. South Hatia
82. Dakhin Shahbazpur
83. Akhaura
84. Narsingdi
85. Bhairab Bazar
86. Sarasabari
87. Munshigaij
88. Chandpur
89. Hajiganj
90. Baidya Bazar
91. Matlab Bazar
92. Pubail
93. Keraniganj
94. Pubail
95. Keraniganj
96. Tangibari
97. Joydebpur
98. Rupganj
99. Kishoreganj
100. Jamalganj
101. Narkuldanga
102. Raita
103. Badarganj
104. Mahiganj
105. Pirgacha
106. Kaunia
107. Kumira
108. Nazirhat
109. Dohazari
110. Anwara

Puffing the cigarette to rod-hot glow, Mukti Bahini killer, donning fur-trimmed forage cap, kneels and grabs forehead of Bihari victim to burn his eye. Other rebels, toting Indian guns and crowd watch macabre scene expectantly.

Having singed the eyes of the Bihari victim, Mukti Bahini killers bayonet their captives to death. The gory drama in the human abattoir was continued for hours. Dacca was under the Indian Army's occupation when the Mukti Bahini slaughtered the innocents.

Killer presses victim's eye-socket to singe it. Another Mukti Bahini gunman grabs head of another Bihari victim for burning his eyes before the kill.

As the victim did not die in a single bayonet strike, another Mukti Bahini killer plunged his bayonet into the writhing Bihari's chest. Dead bodies of Bihari and Bengali victims lie strewn over the execution ground as Mukti Bahini killers and their accomplices watch the butchery with sadist pleasure.