

Pakistan's genocide

Uzay Bulut*



Dead bodies of Bangalee victims of Pakistan's brutality are seen in this undated photo of 1971. Not even an infant could escape this viciousness

Courtesy: Raghu Rai / Magnum Photos

- “The conflict resulted in the massacre of an estimated three million East Pakistani citizens, the ethnic cleansing of 10 million ethnic Bengalis who fled to India, and the rape of at least 200,000 women (some estimates put the number of rape victims at closer to 400,000).” — hinduamerican.org
- “Hindus were the special targets of this violence, as documented by official government correspondence and documents from the United States, Pakistan, and India.... The Pakistan military’s conflation of Hindu, Bengali, and Indian identities meant that all Bengalis (the majority of people in Bangladesh) were suspect.... In the eyes of the Pakistani military, Hindu, Bengali, and Indian identities were one and the same.” — hinduamerican.org
- “Bengali Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and other religious groups were also significantly affected. By the end of the first month in March 1971, 1.5 million Bengalis were displaced. By November 1971, 10 million Bengalis, the majority of whom were Hindu, had fled to India.” —hinduamerican.org
- “In the eyes of Western Pakistanis and their fundamentalist Muslim collaborators ‘the

Hindus among the Bengalis were as Jews to the Nazis: scum and vermin that should best be exterminated.” —Rudolph Joseph Rummel (1932–2014), leading American scholar of genocides, quoted by sociologist Massimo Introvigne, bitterwinter.org, November 2, 2021.

- The genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Pakistani military against millions of people due to their ethnicity, religion, language and political views urgently need to be called out and the perpetrators held accountable.

The genocide committed by Pakistan needs immediate recognition.

“According to Bangladesh Government estimates 3 million people were killed, over two-hundred thousand women were sexually and physically violated, and 10 million people were forced to cross the border into India, leaving behind their ancestral homes and worldly possessions just to save their lives and dignity of their women,” wrote Stichting BASUG (Bangladesh Support Group), a non-governmental organization, together with other Bangladeshi diaspora organizations to the United Nations Secretary General on May 29.

“Over 20 million citizens were internally displaced in search of safety. Newspapers, magazines and publications which are available in libraries and archives all around the world bear testimony to the fact.”

Although this genocide took place after the Turkish genocide of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks (1913-1923), and after the German genocide of the Jews (1938-1945), it was no less deadly. The letter to the UN stated:

“We must recall that the 1971 GENOCIDE in Bangladesh conceived by the Pakistani authorities, planned and perpetrated by the Pakistani military aided by their Bihari and Bengali collaborators is one

of the world's gravest mass atrocities witnessed after the Second World War."

The genocide committed against the Bengali nation by the Pakistani military, during the Bangladesh war of independence, began on March 25, 1971 with the launch of Operation Searchlight when the government of Pakistan (then West Pakistan) began a military crackdown on East Pakistan (Bangladesh) to suppress Bengali calls for self-determination.

On that day, the Pakistani military launched a campaign of genocide against the ethnic Bengali and Hindu religious communities in East Pakistan that would last for 10 months. This spurred the 10-month Bangladesh liberation war and later a 13-day India-Pakistan war. Both ended on December 16, 1971, with the surrender of Pakistan.

The recent letter from Stichting BASUG to the UN secretary general, demanded "the 'International Recognition of the 1971 GENOCIDE' committed against the Bengali nation by the Pakistani occupation army and their collaborators during Bangladesh War of Independence."

Dr. Rounaq Jahan, a Bangladeshi political scientist, details the grievances of the people in what was then East Pakistan that led them to demand independence from West Pakistan and the motives of Pakistani genocide perpetrators:

"The Bengalis had to defend not only the right to practice their own language, but other creative expressions of their culture such as literature, music, dance, and art. The Pakistani ruling elites looked upon Bengali language and culture as too 'Hindu leaning' and made repeated attempts to 'cleanse' it from Hindu influence. First, in the 1950s, attempts were made to force Bengalis to substitute Bengali words with Arabic and Urdu words. Then, in the 1960s, state-controlled

media such as television and radio banned songs written by Rabindra Nath Tagore, a Bengali Hindu, who won the Nobel Prize in 1913 and whose poetry and songs were equally beloved by Bengali Hindus and Muslims. The attacks on their language and culture as 'Hindu leaning' alienated the Bengalis from the state-sponsored Islamic ideology of Pakistan, and as a result the Bengalis started emphasizing a more secular ideology and outlook.

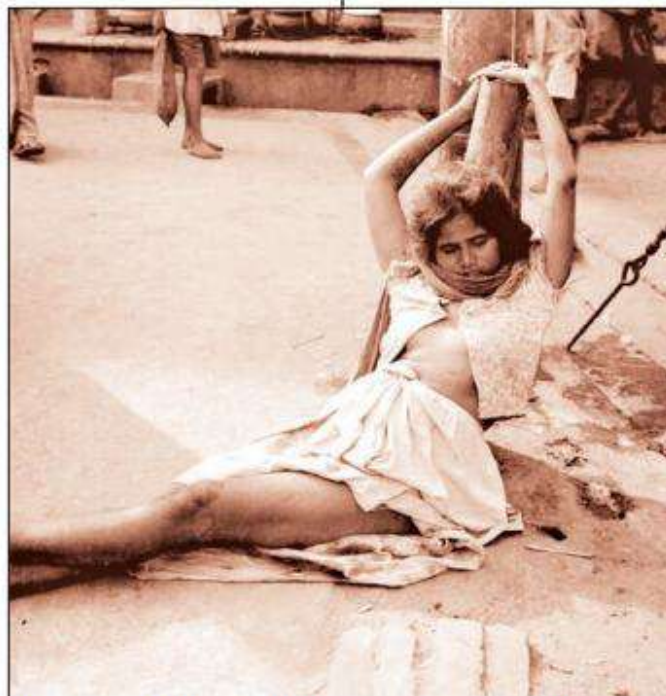
"The Bengali nationalist movement was also fueled by a sense of economic exploitation. Though jute, the major export-earning commodity, was produced in East Pakistan, most of the economic investments took place in West Pakistan. A systematic transfer of resources took place from East to West Pakistan, creating a growing economic disparity and a feeling among the Bengalis that they were being treated as a colony by Pakistan."

The Hindu American Foundation notes that Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971 was the culmination of several longstanding factors, including linguistic and cultural repression, economic marginalization, political disenfranchisement, and a quest for greater provincial autonomy.

"The West Pakistani military and civilian elite sought

to create a cohesive polity unified by Islam and the Urdu language. In the process, they suppressed the Bengali culture and language, which was viewed as closely linked to Hinduism and therefore, a threat to their conception of an Islamic nation.

"The Bangladeshi independence movement in 1971 was met with a brutal genocidal campaign of violence by the Pakistani army and local Islamist militias. The conflict resulted in the massacre of an estimated three million



An iceberg of brutal women repression by the Pakistani occupation forces, which became a regular phenomenon during nine months of Bangladesh Liberation War *File photo*

East Pakistani citizens, the ethnic cleansing of 10 million ethnic Bengalis who fled to India, and the rape of at least 200,000 women (some estimates put the number of rape victims at closer to 400,000). Hindus were the special targets of this violence, as documented by official government correspondence and documents from the United States, Pakistan, and India. However all Bengalis, regardless of religious identity were targeted. The Pakistan military's conflation of Hindu, Bengali, and Indian identities meant that all Bengalis (the majority of people in Bangladesh) were suspect.

"In the eyes of the Pakistani military, Hindu, Bengali, and Indian identities were one and the same. Although Hindus were a special target of the Pakistan military, Bengali Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and other religious groups were also significantly affected. By the end of the first month in March 1971, 1.5 million Bengalis were displaced. By November 1971, 10 million Bengalis, the majority of whom were Hindu, had fled to India."

In the Harvard International Review, Kimtee Kundu recently wrote about the motives of the perpetrators of this genocide:

"Started as a mission to maintain autocratic Pakistani governance over the self-determination driven Bangladeshis, the operation intended to capture activists, intellectuals, and troopers. However, they were not the only victims. Humanitarian crisis broke loose as millions of civilians endured the violent realities of displacement, financial instability, trauma, and death.

"Pakistan's leaders also aimed to enforce Islamic unification of the west and the east. Due to differences between Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, intolerance spread from a multitude of aspects. Pakistan was predominantly an Islamic, Urdu speaking region; meanwhile, Bangladesh was both a Hindu and Islamic, Bangla speaking region. As the Pakistani leaders, or the then Muslim League, determined, these apparent differences made Bangladeshis undesirable and inferior, especially given the Pakistani agenda to create an Islamic nation. Consequently, the Bangla language—which relates more to Hinduism and Sanskrit—was deemed undesirable, and those who were Hindu were the primary targets. Fearing the dangers of war, over 10 million Bangladeshis fled."

"One of the goals of the West Pakistanis and their collaborators in 1971 was to exterminate the Hindu community by killing all males," noted Massimo Introvigne, a prominent sociologist of religions:

"The roots of the ideology considering the Eastern Pakistanis 'inferior' or 'bad' Muslim was... the accusation that they were 'crypto-Hindus,' and had included in their religious practices Hindu elements that had tainted their faith.

"Two third of the eight million refugees who escaped East Pakistan were Hindus. What the Western Pakistanis did not consider was that, faced with such an enormous influx of refugees, even the Indian politicians most reluctant to go to war would conclude that an armed conflict was an easier solution than accommodating in India the whole Hindu population of East Pakistan.

"A disproportionate number of Hindus, however, were killed in 1971. In [1971], Hindus were some 20% of the East Pakistan's population, yet it was estimated that they might have been 50% of those killed. American leading scholar of genocides Rudolph Joseph Rummel (1932–2014)... wrote that in the eyes of Western Pakistanis and their fundamentalist Muslim collaborators 'the Hindus among the Bengalis were as Jews to the Nazis: scum and vermin that should best be exterminated.'

"The parallel with the Nazi persecution of Jews is made even more appropriate by the fact that the Western Pakistani army compelled Hindus to have a yellow 'H' painted on their homes, thus designating those who lived there as targets for extermination.

"Hindu women, however, in most cases were not killed but massively raped, forced into prostitution, or forcibly married to Western Pakistani soldiers and local collaborator militiamen, just as it happened to their Muslim Bengali counterparts."

"Academic research and scholarship related to the study of genocide has largely recognized the historical event of 1971 as GENOCIDE," according the Stichting BASUG's letter to the UN.

"The recent issuance of a statement by the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) recognizes the Genocide and calls for action by world bodies....

"The world body of Genocide scholarship is fully convinced of the fact that documentation available on Bangladesh Genocide in 1971 is quite adequate for



On December 08, 2022, All European chapter of 'Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Trial of War Criminals of 1971' organized a human chain in front of the European Commission, Brussels, Belgium, demanding International Recognition of Bangladesh Genocide of 1971 and resisting ongoing Rohingya Genocide in Myanmar, Afghanistan and other parts of the world. Presided over by Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, President of the 'South Asian People's Conference against Fundamentalism and Communalism', the human chain was attended by former MEP Frank Schwalbe-Hoth from Germany; General Secretary of the World Sindhi Congress of the United Kingdom, Human Rights Defender Dr. Lakumal Luhana; Author Filmmaker Ferhat Atik, President of the 21st Century Forum for Humanity Turkey; Executive President of the Baloch Human Rights Council, UK human rights leader Writer Dr. Nasir Dashti; President of Poland's Never Again, Sociologist Dr. Rafael Pankowski; Member of Poland's Never Again, Human Rights Defender Natalia Sineeva-Pankowska; Afghan human rights activist Arya Sooriya exiled in Germany; Belgian Human Rights Defender Andy Vermaut; Uzbekistan's Human Rights Defender Bekjodjon Yulchiev; Uzbekistan's Human Rights Defender Fayzullo Nematov; Burundi's Social Worker Amissa Ntakirutimana; Rwandan Human Rights Defender Andrew Rubanzangabo; Human Rights Activist Asif Munier Tonmoy, President of Projonmo (Generation) '71, son of Professor Munier Chowdhury, Martyr of Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971; Professor Dr. Nuzhat Choudhury, daughter of Dr. Alim Choudhury, Martyr of Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971; Shilpi Chowdhury from Sweden, Granddaughter of Philanthropic Nutan Chandra Singha, Martyr of Bangladesh Liberation war of 1971; Writer Journalist Shahriar Kabir, President of the 'Forum for Secular Bangladesh' and Kazi Mukul, General Secretary of the 'Forum for Secular Bangladesh', along with more than 100 leaders of All European chapters and organizations of the Forum

recognition by the UN and countries across the globe...

"New generations across the world must know what happened in Bangladesh in 1971. We must learn from atrocities in the past to prevent future ones to achieve the universal goal of 'Never again', which was the prime goal while enacting the UN Genocide Convention. Early recognition of Bangladesh Genocide is crucial today to champion the cause of protecting human rights, practicing what we preach, and preventing more genocides to happen in the future while holding perpetrators accountable for the crime they committed.

"Therefore, we strongly demand that the 1971 GENOCIDE be recognized to give justice to the victims of the atrocities and bring the perpetrators to justice. We also call upon the United Nations General Assembly and other international entities to formally

recognize the Bangladesh GENOCIDE of 1971 – one of the darkest yet most overlooked chapters in the human history. We believe that only through confronting the past with sincerity and truth, rising above narrow political interests, we can acknowledge our shared humanity and join hands for a safer, peaceful world."

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Courtesy: Gatestone Institute, June 30, 2023

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