

The Gates of Hell Had Been Cast Open: The planning of Operation Searchlight and the Central Direction of Bangladesh genocide 1971

Shahid Kader Chowdhury

Professor, Department of History, Jagannath University

Abstract

In 1971, the genocidal campaign initiated by the Pakistani military against the people of the then East Pakistan (current Bangladesh) began with Operation Searchlight on 25 March. To characterize the events of 1971 as 'genocide' under international law, it is essential to determine both the 'intent' and the 'targeted groups', which, as this article argues, are embedded within the planning of Operation Searchlight. This article outlines the historical background and planning of Operation Searchlight and examines how it contains the elements that constitute the 'genocide'. Just as proving a targeted group is crucial to establishing genocide, demonstrating the fact of central directives as part of 'intention' is equally important. This article contends that both elements can be shown through Operation Searchlight.

Keywords: Genocide, Bangladesh War 1971, Liberation War, Operation Searchlight, Intention, Central Direction, Genocidal Intent

Introduction

The brutality and extent of the military operation, known as Operation Searchlight, launched by the Pakistani military in 1971 in East Pakistan has been acknowledged by both researchers and Pakistani military officials. This planned operation was intended to suppress Bengali nationalism and reinforce West Pakistan's dominance over East Pakistan.¹ Pakistani military officials themselves described it as akin to 'the gates of hell opening'² or even worse than the invasions of Hulegu Khan and Genghis Khan.³ The aftermath of this attack wreaked havoc on the population of East Pakistan for the following nine months, resulting in the deaths of nearly three million Bengalis, the rape of hundreds of thousands of women, and a massive refugee crisis, which was labeled as 'the greatest humanitarian disaster of our time.'⁴

Operation Searchlight was part of a broader context of military intervention in Pakistani politics over the previous twenty-five years, which had gradually transformed the state into a military authoritarian regime. The military had dominated Pakistan's governance through direct rule or other mechanisms since its inception. Prior to the imposition of martial law across the country in 1958, there were several instances of short-term martial law in various regions.⁵ Harassment, suppression, torture, and killing of political leaders and intellectuals through oppressive laws and acts became the common features of the authoritarian Pakistani state.

Before and after the military held power in central, tensions and complications emerged in civil-military relations between East and West Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's ruling elites maintained a close

relationship between the military and civilian bureaucracy. Disparities in recruitment between the two provinces into the Pakistan Army fueled a power struggle, which played a key role in the planning of Operation Searchlight in 1971. The ruling class used colonial stereotypes about the supposed physical incapacity and cowardice of Bengalis as an excuse for this discrimination.⁶

Civil-military relations reached a turning point when General Yahya Khan came to power in March 1969 after the fall of Ayub Khan through a mass uprising. Following the Awami League's landslide victory in the 1970 National Assembly elections, the military and civilian elite groups in West Pakistan devised a new strategy and plan. Operation Searchlight, launched on March 25, 1971, was a direct manifestation of this plan to suppress the democratic movement and mass uprising in East Pakistan. With the full backing of the West Pakistani elite, the military carried out a campaign of terror and oppression in East Pakistan during the post-election tensions of the 1970s.⁷

This chapter will explore the historical background, planning, and execution of Operation Searchlight, to demonstrate the genocidal intention of the Pakistani military's action that continued for nine long months. It will argue that Operation Searchlight itself proved the genocidal intention of the Pakistani military.

Historical Background

None of the West Pakistani elite anticipated that Yahya Khan's strategy in introducing the 'one person, one vote' principle, along with his intelligence reports on the likely election outcome, would be utterly inaccurate in the 1970 elections. Although Pakistan's civilian elite characterized the election as a 'revolutionary moment'⁸ in the country's political history, Yahya Khan, the military leader, believed no single party would secure a majority. He assumed that a significant number of people from East Pakistan would either align with West Pakistan or be influenced by financial incentives, thus preserving power in the West. It is assumed that Yahya Khan's primary motivation for allowing the election stemmed from his recognition of Ayub Khan's fall and his understanding that overt autocratic rule was unsustainable. Consequently, he aimed to maintain control of himself and the West under the guise of democracy. This perspective is supported by Anthony Mascarenhas in his 1971 book *The Rape of Bangladesh* :

There is no doubt whatsoever that from the start Gen. Yahya Khan did not intend to abdicate or, as he promised, to transfer power to the people. The question in April 1969 was how to do it without giving noticeable public offence. The lessons of Ayub Khan's downfall had been well taken. Dictatorship could not be flaunted. General elections, unpalatable as they were, must necessarily be swallowed. The country would not for long tolerate further denial. Nor would it accept a repetition of the farcical exercises that past elections had been. In this matter it was vital that justice must seem to be done to the people.⁹

It was not part of their plan to hand over power to people, which became clear from an interview given by Professor G.W. Chowdhury on September 10, 1970, in which he stated, 'No single party from West or East Pakistan is likely to emerge as a majority. There is no question of the members of East Pakistan joining a single party and confronting. If that happens, the result will be the dissolution of Pakistan.'¹⁰ However, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared that the new constitution would be drafted based on the Six Points after the victory of the 1970 elections, according to Anthony Mascarenhas, Yahya Khan was left with two options: either transfer power through a democratic process or block the devolution of power by going against the people's will.¹¹ The military authorities, in collaboration with the West Pakistani elite, began plotting a new political drama. While Yahya Khan was saying that until the

Awami League submitted its draft constitution, the session of the National Assembly would not be convened, he urged the Awami League to agree with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's People's Party.

During this time, the central question within the Dhaka Cantonment was, if the leader with the majority wanted to proceed independently, could he be stopped? Would the military authorities, like passive observers, simply hand over power to democratically elected representatives and return to their barracks? In December, during his visit to Dhaka, General Yahya Khan, in a private conversation, provided the answers: 'Don't worry... we will not allow these black bastards to rule over us.'¹²

On the other hand, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party found himself in a vulnerable position. If the Awami League secured its victory, he would have no role at the center or in the National Assembly. This interest plays a crucial role in aligning him with the military's interests.

On January 12, Yahya Khan came to Dhaka and met with Sheikh Mujib in an attempt to negotiate, but he left Dhaka on the 14th without reaching any agreement. When asked if Sheikh Mujib would be the future Prime Minister, he responded, 'Ask him(Mujib), he is the future prime minister of Pakistan.'¹³ Subsequently, Bhutto announced that the constitution should be framed through mutual understanding rather than by a majority decision.¹⁴

Yahya Khan returned from Dhaka and visited Bhutto's residence in Larkana under the pretext of going on a 'hunting' trip, accompanied by Army Chief General Hamid. The details of their discussions during this visit are revealed in Bhutto's statements :

'On his return from Dacca, President Yahya Khan and some of his advisers came to Larkana, my home town, on 17 January. The President informed us of his discussions at Dacca, in which he told Mujibur Rehman that three alternatives were open to the Awami League, namely to try and go it alone, to co-operate with the People's Party or to co-operate with the small and defeated parties of the West Wing, and that in his opinion, the best course would be for the two majority parties to arrive at an arrangement. For our part, we discussed with the President the implications of the Six Points and expressed our serious misgivings about them. We, nevertheless, assured him that we were determined to make every effort for a viable compromise, and said we were to visit Dacca in the near future to hold discussions with Awami League leaders.'¹⁵

General Officer Commanding (GOC) Major General Khadim Hussain Raja commented on the Larkana meeting, saying, 'One thing appears to be reasonably certain: the trio seemed to have reached an understanding on various issues. Certain events and attitudes provide sufficiently credible clues for that.'

¹⁶ The meeting also highlighted the evolving relationship between Yahya Khan and Bhutto, along with the military and civilian elites. The contrast between the strict state protocol observed in Dhaka and the lavish hospitality enjoyed by Bhutto, a rival leader, caused considerable backlash. During that 'friendly' meeting, strategies to thwart Bengali efforts were discussed. Bhutto was recognized as the sole spokesman for West Pakistan against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and he adopted a tougher stance on the Six Points.¹⁷ According to Siddik Salik, 'Bhutto left for Dhaka on January 27, armed with the President's speech and his own ideas.'¹⁸ He departed from Dhaka on January 30 without achieving any satisfactory results.

Anthony Mascarenhas noted that the discussion was primarily a tactic to deceive both the people and the Awami League by maintaining the appearance of ongoing negotiations. While Bhutto did not outright reject the Six Points during his stay in Dhaka, he made it clear after returning to Karachi that he had no interest in the Six Points at all.¹⁹

In a meeting on February 11, Bhutto persuaded Yahya Khan to delay convening the National Assembly,

arguing that his party needed more time. However, as the situation in East Pakistan grew increasingly complicated, Yahya Khan announced on February 13 that the National Assembly session would be held in Dhaka on March 3. This decision was welcomed by most of the smaller parties in West Pakistan and the Awami League, who saw it as a positive step toward resolving the political deadlock. However, in line with his plan to create confusion, Bhutto issued a provocative statement on February 15, threatening that no one from West Pakistan would attend the session on March 3. He warned, 'If necessary, rivers of blood will flow from Khyber to Karachi.'

On February 22, Yahya Khan dissolved the civilian cabinet, marking what Pakistani military officials described as the 'end of civilian involvement in his regime and a reversion to pure martial law rule.'²⁰ Although Yahya framed this as a measure to reassert control over the political process, it became evident that no Bengali advisers were left in his circle of power. This move further underscored the growing divide between the military regime and the elected representatives, particularly the Bengalis.

Planning of the 'Operation'

At a meeting of all military governors and administrators in Rawalpindi, Yahya Khan decided that the East Pakistanis would be subdued through military force. General Yakub was tasked with finalizing *Operation Blitz*, which was developed for 'security purpose' following the cyclone of 1970 when public discontent was at its peak. General Yakub planned this operation in November 1970,

'Operation Blitz was a contingency plan prepared by me in November 1970 to meet the eventuality of an insurgency and the total collapse of law and order during the period of general elections in 'E. Pakistan' in December, 70. In his hypothetical situation, the mission was to restore order rapidly by the stringent enforcement of martial law, selective arrest of anti-Pakistan elements, vigorous implantation of order to secure key points vital area using minimum force. The object was gain control to be able to meet external intervention.'²¹

Khadim Hussain Raja wrote about this,

'Operation Blitz meant the suspension of all political activity in the country and a reversion to Martial Law rule. This meant that the armed forces of the country would be permitted to move against defiant political leaders and to take them into protective custody'.²²

Siddik Salik mentioned about the operation,

'I, too, was asked to put the final touches to my mini-plan for a total press censorship in East Pakistan. It was to be incorporated in the main 'BLITZ' plan. 'Prepare it in such a way that on the green signal, you enforce complete censorship without raising any queries,' said the brigadier. 'But may I ask one question now?' 'Yes,' he replied. I said, 'What is the basis of this plan? Should I assume that the civil servants are on our side- because censorship is normally carried out with the help of civilian press officers?' He said rather angrily, 'I don't know. It is your job to assess their reaction and find an answer to your problem... But don't get it (the plan) typed. Make only one copy in your own hand and deposit it with me today.'²³

However, General Yakub also noted that *Operation Blitz* was not carried out during his tenure, as he had resigned on March 5, 1971. In a statement written in 1998, he explained,

'After my telegram of resignation, I continued to attend office and carry out my duties until I handed over to my designated successor General Tikka Khan. Operation Blitz was never implemented during my tenure. In fact, Government Ahsan and I strongly advised the President against any action that would invite or lead to a military solution especially after the decisive verdict of the December elections.'²⁴

Troops began arriving in East Pakistan on February 27. Between March 2 and March 24, Pakistan International Airlines' commercial flights transported large numbers of troops to Dhaka via Sri Lanka. Bengali troops were relocated to different areas, while non-Bengali troops were concentrated in key locations. On March 1, Bhutto declared that if the Constituent Assembly convened without his party, he would launch a mass movement in West Pakistan. In response, Yahya Khan postponed the assembly session of March 3, citing a 'political crisis', but he refrained from announcing a new date. He stated, 'Today, Pakistan is facing the most difficult political crisis.'²⁵

During the first week of March, several governors were replaced because they did not support the military's approach to resolving the crisis in East Pakistan. They wanted to deal the crisis politically, while Yahya Khan was opted for military solutions. Admiral Ahsan was forced to resign as Governor of East Pakistan, as he refused to follow Yahya's orders. Following Admiral Ahsan's departure, General Sahebzada Yakub resigned on March 5 as the Chief Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan, warning that the situation would worsen if the National Assembly session was postponed without a specific date. Both leaders advocated for political solutions rather than harsh repressive measures.²⁶

Appointing Tikka Khan as governor replacing Sahebzada Yakub are crucial in understanding the planning behind the genocidal operation that is going to unleash in 25th March. Researchers claims that, genocide, being a systematic mode of extermination, unfolds in stages. Gregory H. Stanton's famous '8 Stages of Genocide' identifies *polarization* as a key early stage, in which extremists work to eliminate moderates who could slow down or prevent genocide.²⁷ The removal of Admiral Ahsan and General Yakub in early March aligns with this stage, as it cleared the way for Tikka Khan, who had already earned the nickname 'Butcher of Baluchistan' for his brutal suppression of rebellion, who will be later became infamous as 'Butcher of Bengal.'²⁸

During the tense moments of March, more events took place around the military operation. News of troops arriving from Pakistan caused strong reactions among the people involved in the non-cooperation movement resulting in injuries and deaths.²⁹ During this period, all West Pakistanis living in Dhaka or other parts of East Pakistan gradually started leaving for Karachi. Siddiq Salik described this as 'as wise birds flee to their nests before the coming storm.'³⁰

Yahya Khan arrived in Dhaka on March 15 for round table discussions, and from March 16 onwards, a series of meetings took place with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, the timeline of the events shows that, the meetings were considered a farce because, by the end of February, a decision of solving the crisis through military means had already been made. So, the meetings, as the political analyst claimed repeatedly, was tactic to give some time for military preparation.

After the meeting with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 17, Yahya Khan told Tikka Khan, 'The bastard is not behaving. You get ready.'³¹ Here Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was referred as 'bastard'. Tikka Khan then called Khadim Hussain Raja that night and informed him, 'Khadim, you can go ahead!'³² From the morning of March 18, Khadim and Rao Farman Ali met at Khadim's residence in the cantonment to draft *Operation Searchlight*.³³ Siddiq Salik writes,

'Both of them agree that the basis of operation 'BLITZ' (that is, the people's -co-operation) was no longer relevant, as had been amply demonstrated since 1 March. They also agreed that the aim of operation BLITZ (to enforce martial law in its classical role), had likewise been superseded by events. Now, if and when any action was taken, it would have to aim at overthrowing Mujib's defector rule and re-establishing government authority'.³⁴

Khadim wrote that on the morning of March 18, he asked his wife to keep his Bengali ADC busy and

away from his office so that he would not suspect anything.³⁵ Although they quickly agreed on the main plan, they wrote two separate versions of the plan. Rao Farman would lead the operation in the Dhaka area, and Khadim would lead in other regions.

According to the plan, Tikka Khan would oversee the overall progress of the operation. Rao and Khadim detailed how they would carry out their responsibilities in their assigned areas. Siddik Salik, a public relations officer of the Pakistan Army, mentioned that Rao wrote the plan on a light blue notepad using a regular pencil.³⁶ Salik said in his autobiography that he saw the draft, which had 16 paragraphs and was five pages long. On March 20, the draft was read aloud at Flag Staff House in front of General Hamid and Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, who both approved it. Siddik Salik also published this plan in his autobiography.³⁷

Content of the Plan

The draft of the Operation Searchlight started with title ‘Basis For Planning’, which stated:

1. A.L. [Awami League] action and reactions to be treated as rebellion and those who support or defy M.L. [Martial Law] action be dealt with as hostile elements.
2. As A.L. has widespread support even amongst the E.P. [East Pakistani] elements in the Army the operation has to be launched with great cunningness, surprise, deception and speed combined with shock action.³⁸

At the start of this plan, it was said that anyone involved with the Awami League would be considered a rebel, since Awami League supporters were also in the army, the operation has to be launched with ‘great cunningness, surprise, deception and speed combined with shock action’. The plan was to begin the operation at the same time across the whole country. It was ordered to arrest Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and all political and student leaders. Each region had specific targets, with Awami League leaders being the main ones, and Communist leaders in Khulna also being targeted. The plan also included arresting ‘extremists’ among students, teachers, and cultural workers. Special emphasis was given to Dhaka University to ensure success there. Educational institutions like medical colleges and universities were also targeted. The plan detailed who would be in charge in each region and when the attacks would start. Khadim Hussain Raja highlighted the main points of the plan as follows:

1. Any act of insurgency was to be treated as open rebellion and dealt with accordingly with an iron fist.
2. The element of surprise and deception was of paramount importance to ensure success. We even suggested that the President be requested to help in the deception and be part of it.
3. Bengali troops and police were to be disarmed as part of the plan. Of particular importance was the taking possession of the kotes* of the East Pakistan Rifles in Peelkhana, the Reserve Police in Rajarbagh, and the armoury of some twenty thousand rifles in Chittagong before they could be distributed among the rebels.
4. All external and internal communication was to be closed down at the beginning of the operation. These would be reopened, selectively, under our own control.
5. The student halls of Dhaka University were to be surrounded and thoroughly searched for arms and wanted criminals.
6. Sheikh Mujib was to be captured alive. Houses of some fifteen important Awami League and Communist Party leaders were to be searched, and these individuals taken into custody if found.³⁹

On March 21, Bhutto arrived in Dhaka to participate in the farce discussion. March 23 was an important

day in the non-cooperation movement. Dr. Kamal Hossain said, 'In earlier years, this day was celebrated as Pakistan Day. But on March 23, 1971, thousands of Bangladeshi flags were sold.'⁴⁰ As this situation was happening across East Pakistan and West Pakistani leaders were waiting at the airport to leave, Khadim Hussain Raja wrote about the progress of the operation. On March 24, Khadim and Rao Farman Ali took two helicopters to meet the brigade commanders outside Dhaka and told them to prepare for military action. They planned to keep these instructions secret so they could handle any problems on the ground carefully. They visited Jessore, Comilla, and Chittagong. Siddiq Salik reported that Brigadier Durrani of Jessore and Brigadier Iqbal Shafi of Comilla were briefed. While Rao Farman returned to Dhaka, Khadim went from Comilla to Chittagong.⁴¹ Chittagong was important because it was believed that Brigadier Majumdar had connections with the Awami League. Senior officers were sent to the cantonments in Sylhet, Rangpur, and Rajshahi. The brigade commanders were told to get ready for the operation, but the exact time of the attack would be shared later since the President was still negotiating.⁴² It was decided that all eight military bases in East Pakistan—Dhaka, Comilla, Chittagong, Sylhet, Jessore, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Syedpur—would start the operation at the same time. The 2nd East Bengal Regiment was stationed in Joydebpur. Notably, even though preparations for the operation were ongoing, no written orders were sent to any military personnel about this operation.

The planning of Operation Searchlight was very detailed and carefully articulated. A few days before the military action, the wives of Rao Farman Ali and Khadim Hussain Raja were asked questions to scrutinize the thoughts of their husband about the operation. The higher authority thought that, they could have some moderate ideas like Genral Yaqub. After asking many questions, it was clear that they would do their duties with full loyalty. However, a backup plan was ready in case they refused. Major General Iftikhar Janjua and Major General A. O. Mitha were sent to replace them.⁴³

On March 25, at 11 a.m., Tikka Khan called Khadim and said, 'Khadim, it is tonight.'⁴⁴ That evening, Yahya Khan quietly left Dhaka. Although there were attempts to keep his departure secret, it was not fully successful. Yahya Khan was seen leaving the airport by Wing Commander A. K. Khandaker of the Pakistan Air Force, who then informed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. As part of Operation Searchlight, Rao Farman Ali was put in charge of Dhaka city, and Brigadier Arbab was given control of the outskirts with the 57 Brigade. Brigadier Arbab's brigade was assigned the following tasks:

13 Frontier Force was to stay in Dacca cantonment as reserve and defend the cantonment, if necessary.

43 Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) Regiment, deployed at the airport in an anti-aircraft role since the banning of overflights by India, was to look after the airport area.

22 Baluch, already in East Pakistan Rifles Lines at Pilkhana, was to disarm approximately 5,000 E.P.R. personnel and seize their wireless exchange.

32 Punjab was to disarm 1,000 'highly motivated' policemen, a prime possible source of armed manpower for the Awami League, at Rajarbagh Police Lines.

18 Punjab was to fan out in the Nawabpur area and the old city where many Hindu houses were said to have been converted into armouries.

Field Regiment was to control the Second Capital and the adjoining Bihari localities (Mohammadpur, Mirpur).

A composite force consisting of one company each of 18 Punjab, 22 Baluch and 32 Punjab, was to 'flush' the University Campus particularly Iqbal Hall and Jagan Nath Hall which were reported to be the strong points of the Awami League rebels.

A platoon of Special Service Group (Commandos) was to raid Mujib's house and capture him alive.

A skeleton squadron of M-24 tanks was to make an appearance before first light, mainly as a show of force. They could fire for effect if required.⁴⁵

The Plan on Action

Operation Searchlight was panned to start at 1:00 AM but actually began at 11:30 PM. However, Bir Uttam Rafiqul Islam said the attack started at 9:30, while Rehman Sobhan heard gunshots around 9:30-10:00 PM.⁴⁶ Siddik Salik described the attack by saying, 'The gates of hell had been cast open.' After observing Dhaka that night, Salik also said, 'The setting was perfect for anything but a bloody holocaust.'⁴⁷

Bhutto came to Dhaka on March 21 for discussions, but, unlike others who left Dhaka, he stayed. Before leaving the next morning of 25th March, he praised Brigadier Arbab at the airport, saying, 'Thank God, Pakistan has been saved.'⁴⁸ He repeated this when he reached Karachi. A Pakistani captain later said, 'The Bengalis have been sorted out well and proper-at least for a generation.' Another major replied, 'Yes, they only know the language of force. The history says so.'⁴⁹

On March 25, before the attacks, all foreign journalists in Dhaka were kept inside the Intercontinental Hotel. They were told the city was not safe and that they had to stay inside. The army found 36 journalists and took them to the airport the next morning, putting them on planes. However, they did not find Simon Dring, a journalist who hid in the hotel. When the curfew was lifted on March 27, Dring, with help from hotel staff, used a small van to visit Iqbal Hall at Dhaka University, the Rajarbagh Police Barracks, and Old Dhaka. He later wrote a famous report published on March 30 in *The Daily Telegraph*. Simon Dring writes:

'In the name of "God and a united Pakistan," Dacca is today a crushed and frightened city. After 24 hours of ruthless, cold-blooded shelling by the Pakistan Army as many as 7,000 people are dead, large areas have been levelled and East Pakistan's fight for independence has been brutally put to an end.... Even so people are still being shot at the slightest provocation, and buildings are still being indiscriminately destroyed. And the military appears to be more determined each day to assert its control over the 73 million Bengalis in the East wing. It is impossible accurately to assess what all this has so far cost in terms of innocent human lives, But reports beginning to filter in from the outlying areas, Chittagong, Comilla, and Jessore put the figure, including Dacca, in the region of 15,000 dead.'⁵⁰

Intent, Perpetrators, and Targeted Groups

The genocide in East Pakistan began with *Operation Searchlight* and continued for nine months. According to Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), to classify violence as genocide, proving intent is crucial. Central directives, speeches, and orders from state authorities are key to proving this intent.⁵¹ The detailed planning of Operation Searchlight clearly shows these central directives. The involvement of key figures like Yahya Khan, military authorities, and civilian elites is also clear. Those mainly responsible for planning and directing the operation were: President General Yahya Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Major General Khadim Hussain Raja, Major General Rao Farman Ali Khan, General Abdul Hamid Khan, Lieutenant General Tikka Khan, Major General Iftikhar Janjua, Major General A.O. Mitha, and Colonel Sadullah. The attack was carried out according to their instructions. Operation Searchlight precisely targeted members of the Awami League, student leaders, and communist leaders. Although the 1948 UN Convention did not include 'political'

groups in its definition of genocide⁵², The International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973 included the category.⁵³ Therefore, these events clearly qualify as genocide.

On the other hand, various other speeches and documents prove that 'Bengali's are directly targeted, which validate the event as 'genocide' per CPPCG. For example, in November 1971, a government press note announced a reward for the surrender of the 'miscreants'. Those identified as 'miscreants' are as follows: a) Regular members and supporters of the so-called Mukti Bahini; b) Those who voluntarily supplied food, vehicles, or goods to the rebels; c) Those who sheltered the rebels; d) Those acting as informers or messengers for the insurgents; e) Authors or publishers of subversive materials related to the Mukti Bahini.⁵⁴

From this 'miscreants' identity assigned, it is clear that almost all the inhabitants of the then East Pakistan would be included in it. As the nature of the liberation war was a people's war, all the people except the collaborators of the Pakistani army were involved in it to varying degrees. Everyone in East Pakistan fell under the auspices of the above criminal. General Niazi said in a speech in September that the separatists must be found and 'eliminated'.⁵⁵ In April, General Tikka Khan said in a radio address that the armed forces and other law enforcement agencies are determined to 'exterminate' infiltrators, miscreants, anti-social and anti-ethnic groups.⁵⁶ From such statements of Niazi or Tikka Khan, their guidance in killing and destruction is more clearly proved.

The document titled 'The Remedy', which is preserved in the Genocide Museum, Khulna shows that Bengalis were specifically targeted.⁵⁷ According to Muntassir Mamoon, it is a letter written by Niazi.⁵⁸ Although the exact number of pages is not known, three pages are in the archive. A handwritten note in blue ink on the document says, 'This was written to Rao Farman Ali.'

The document says that the Bangladesh Movement isn't just led by the Awami League but is a rebellion involving the entire Bengali community. It claims that many people, from mosque leaders and university officials to police and judges, were involved in this 'revolt'. It also notes that Bengali leaders from other political parties, like the Muslim League, Jamaat-e-Islami, and the PDP, were involved. The document compares the movement to the last world war, saying that just as the war was not only 'Hitler's war' but involved all of Germany, this movement is not just about the Awami League or Mukti Bahini but includes all Bengalis. It criticizes the peace committees, saying they seem to help the military but are actually supporting the Mukti Bahini. The document warns martial law authorities to be careful with advice from pro-Pakistan Bengali leaders, as they are seen as betraying the 'Islamic Republic of Pakistan' and Islam, and suggests they should face death as punishment. The document also dehumanized the character of Bengali by stating, '...what is paw to a tiger, what is sting to a bee, what horn to a buffalo, deceit is to a Bengali'. It was believed that every Bengali, when examined, is found to be a separatist, with very few exceptions. They need complete brainwashing for at least ten years: 'They need a total brainwashing at least ten years. They can be separated sentimentally West Bengal only by change of their language.' Therefore, if the authorities think the punishment given so far is enough, it would be a mistake. If everything is reopened to make things look normal, Pakistan's future will become uncertain. It was also advised that Bengali civil officers (about 75%) should be removed, and the army and intelligence agencies must be freed from Bengali influence, as they secretly support separatists. This document shows that when the officials talked about 'separatists and troublemakers,' they were actually talking about the Bengalis. The idea of 'teaching a lesson' to Bengalis was also present in the writings of Pakistani military officers.

There were clear orders on how to attack the Bengalis. For example, on the night of March 25, when the Pakistani army carried out their operation, their coded orders included instructions to shoot anyone they saw: ‘Anybody doing so will be shot on sight. Owners of building either side of the road will be persecuted and their buildings demolished. This should also be announced by your roving patrol.’⁵⁹

The ‘intention’ and the ‘targeted groups’ were clearly indicated or proved from the Operation Searchlight and the documents afterwards. The report by the International Commission of Jurists also talked about this, saying that:

In any case where large numbers were massacred and it can be shown that on the particular occasion the intent was to kill Bengalis indiscriminately as such, then a crime of genocide would be established. There would seem to be a prima facie case to show that this was the intention of some occasions, as for example during the indiscriminate killing of civilians in the poorer quarters of Dacca during the ‘crack-down’.⁶⁰

Conclusion

This article provides a detailed account of the historical context and planning of Operation Searchlight, as narrated by Pakistani military officials. Since the genocide of 1971 was initiated through this operation, the planning of this event demonstrates the genocidal intent of that period. Critical elements of proof for genocidal intent, such as central directives and executive statements, are emphasized in this article. Additionally, the argument that an identity-based ‘targeted group’ is essential to constitute genocide is supported by evidence from Operation Searchlight and related documents, which this article seeks to substantiate.

References

1. Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, 2009.
2. Siddik Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, Oxford University Press, 1977
3. A. A. K Niazi, *Betrayal of East Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, 1998.
4. Oxfam, *The Testimony of Sixty*, Oxfam, 1971
5. Enayetur Rahim, ‘Pakistan: Rajnitite Samorik Bahini (1947/1971)’, Sirajul Islam (ed.), *Bangladesher Itihas: Rajnoitik Itihas*, Bangladesh Asiatic Society, 1993
6. Enayetur Rahim, 1993
7. Enayetur Rahim, 1993
8. G. W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan*, C. Hurst & Co., 1974.
9. Anthony Mascarenhas, *The Rape of Bangladesh*, Vikas Publications, 1971.
10. Anthony Mascarenhas, 1971.
11. Anthony Mascarenhas, 1971.
12. Siddik Salik, 1977
13. Siddik Salik, 1977
14. For chronological historical accounts please see, Rabindranath Trivedi, *71- Er Dosh Mash*, Kakoli, 2023
15. Siddik Salik, 1977
16. K. H. Raja, *A Stranger in My Own Country*, UPL, 2012.
17. Enayetur Rahim, 1993
18. Siddik Salik, 1977
19. Anthony Mascarenhas, 1971
20. Siddik Salik, 1977

21. Muntassir Mamoon, *Pakistani Generalder Mon: Bangali, Bangladesh, Muktiyuddho*, Somoy Prokashon, Dhaka, 2010
22. K. H. Raja, 2012.
23. Siddik Salik, 1977
24. Muntassir Mamoon, 2010
25. For the chronological history of Non-cooperation Movement, see Rabindranath Trivedi, *71- Er Dosh Mash*, Kakoli, 2023; Hosne Ara Khanam, *Osohojog Andoloner Kalponji*, Gonohotta Jadughar, 2020.
26. Siddik Salik, 1977; Muntassir Mamoon, 2010 0
27. Gregory H. Stanton, 'The 8 Stages of Genocide', *Genocide Watch*, n.d. Web. Accessed 5 July 2024.
28. Willem van Schendel, 2009.
29. Rabindranath Trivedi, 2023
30. Siddik Salik, 1977
31. Siddik Salik, 1977
32. Siddik Salik, 1977
33. K. H. Raja, 2012
34. Siddik Salik, 1977
35. K. H. Raja, 2012
36. Siddik Salik, 1977
37. Siddik Salik, 1977
38. Siddik Salik, 1977
39. K. H. Raja, 2012
40. Dr. Kamal Hossain, *Muktiyuddho keno onibarrjo chilo*, Prothoma, 2016
41. K. H. Raja, 2012
42. Siddik Salik, 1977
43. Siddik Salik, 1977
44. Siddik Salik, 1977
45. Siddik Salik, 1977
46. Golam Murshid, *Muktiyuddho O Tarpur: Ekti Nirdoliyo Itihas*, Prothoma, 2018
47. Siddik Salik, 1977
48. Siddik Salik, 1977
49. Siddik Salik, 1977
50. *Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 1971
51. Sohul Ahmed, 'A Revisit to the Concept of Targeted Group and Intention of Genocide: In the Context of Bangladesh Genocide of 1971', *Journal of Genocide and Liberation War Research*, Issue 5, December 2023
52. Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Routledge, 2006
53. <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-435.html>
54. Hasan Hafizur Rahman, *Bangladesher Swadhinata Juddho Dolil potro: Soptom Khondo*, Ministry of Information, Government of Bangladesh, 1984
55. Dainik Pakistan, 17 September 1971
56. Dainik Pakistan, 19 September 1971
57. The three-page document titled 'The Remedy' is on display at the 1971: Genocide-Torture Archive and Museum.
58. Muntassir Mamoon, *Muktiyuddher Itihas: Onnovabe Dekha*, Somoy, 2018
59. Hasan Hafizur Rahman, 1984
60. *The Events in East Pakistan, 1971*, A legal study by the Secretariat of the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 1972.