JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Operation Searchlight and the University of Dhaka: Beginning of the Liberation War of Bangladesh

Dr. Nasir Ahmad

Associate Professor, Department of History, Jagannath University, Dhaka

Abstract:

Operation Searchlight was a brutal, planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan army on the unaware, sleeping Bengalis of East Bengal at midnight on 25 March 1971. The operation was deployed simultaneously throughout the province, but one of their main targeted places was the University of Dhaka campus. During Operation Searchlight, the Pakistan Army killed around 300 persons inside the university campus. Bengali people evaluated the operation as war and began their nine-month-long liberation war. The purpose of the article is to explore why and how the military government led Operation Searchlight during the negotiation talk with the Awami League. How did the Pakistan Army lead a genocide inside the DU campus, and what was their purpose behind the genocide? Primary and secondary sources have been used to write the article. Descriptive and analytical methods under qualitative approaches have been followed as well.

Keywords: Operation Searchlight, Genocide, Non-cooperation movement, Operation Blitz, Nationalism, Hub.

Introduction:

Operation Searchlight was a brutal, planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan army on 25 March 1971. It signified the beginning of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The operation was unleashed on the unaware, sleeping Bengalis of East Pakistan at midnight to demolish them as a nation. The operation was deployed simultaneously throughout the province. Their main target was the provincial capital, Dhaka. One of their primary targeted places in Dhaka was the University of Dhaka (DU) campus. They launched their

operation on the DU campus at midnight. Inside the campus, their main target was the Zahurul Haq Hall and the Jagannath Hall. However, all the halls, teachers' quarters, staff quarters, Dhaka University Club, and teacher-student centres came under merciless attack. The purpose of the genocide was to demolish the Non-cooperation movement and stop the emergence of Bangladesh. The Bengali nation evaluated the operation as a war and started their nine-month-long war against the military government. The purpose of the article is to explore why and how the military government led Operation Searchlight during the negotiation talk with the Awami League. How did the Pakistan Army lead a genocide inside the DU campus, and what was their purpose behind the genocide?

Formation of Operation Searchlight Plan:

Operation Searchlight was the beginning of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. General Aga Muhammad Yahya Khan (3rd president of Pakistan) and General Tikka Khan (Commander of the Eastern Command of Pakistan) were the masterminds behind the operation. Operation Blitz formed the background of Operation Searchlight. Khadim Hussain Raja (in charge of planning Operation Searchlight) said that at the end of January or early February 1971, Yahya Khan had contemplated the feasibility of a military crackdown followed by a halt on all political activity. He, therefore, provided a plan called Operation Blitz and gave a copy to the General Headquarters. Raja presented the plan to his brigade commanders and guided them in preparing their plan of attack for their respective areas of responsibility.[1] Khadim explained that Operation Blitz meant suspending all political activity in the country and reversing martial law. This meant that the country's armed forces would be permitted to move against defiant political leaders and take them into protective custody. [2]

On 26 February 1971, General Sahabzada Mohammad Yaqub Ali Khan (Governor of East Pakistan and commander of the army's Eastern Command) called a conference in Dhaka. In the conference, he informed the military officers that the President was going to postpone the National Assembly session on 1 March 1971 and commanded them to be equipped to put Operation Blitz into action at short notice.[3] On 27 February, Khadim ordered his brigade commanders to prepare for Operation Blitz and suggested that they may be ordered to

[1] Raja, Khadim Hussain. *A Stranger in My Own Country: East Pakistan: 1969-1971*. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2012. pp. 42-43.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. .42.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

move any time after midday on 1 March. On 27 February, some troops also moved out to implement the operation to Bogra, Barisal, Khulna, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Pabna, and Tangail.[4] After broadcasting the postponement news, Khadim discussed with his senior staff and commanders regarding the probability of Operation Blitz in the prevailing condition. Everyone suggested him not to use military force but to solve the problem politically; otherwise, both wings would be divided forever.[5] General Yaqub called a meeting at the Martial Law Headquarters on the same day. Almost all the senior officers, including Major General Rao Farman Ali Khan (in charge of civil administration in East Pakistan during the Liberation War), were present there. They unanimously took the same decision. The situation was deteriorating fast; therefore, General Yaqub invited the President to visit Dhaka quickly and make essential decisions to solve the problem through political negotiations. Initially, he refused the proposal. Later, he was convinced to visit Dhaka on 15 March.[6]

President Yahya Khan arrived in Dhaka on 15 March and called a conference in the evening.[7] Almost all the high officials presented there. They suggested the President not take any military action because there were many Bihari settlers, and a significant number of them were from West Pakistan, and such an action would jeopardise their lives and property. The President listened to their speeches and quickly dissolved the meeting.[8] On 17 March, at about 10 pm, General Tikka Khan (Governor of East Pakistan and commander of the Eastern Command of Pakistan Army) called Khadim to meet him in the Command House with Farman urgently. Both of them went there and found General Abdul Hamid Khan (chief of staff of the Pakistan Army). Tikka Khan told them that the negotiations with Sheikh Mujib were disappointing. Therefore, Yahya Khan recommended preparing for military action and planning accordingly. Tikka Khan did not provide them any written order. He commanded them to plan together and discuss the plan with the two high officials.[9]

On 18 March, Farman met with Khadim at his office and prepared a draft plan. They again met in the evening and finalised the plan, which they named Operation Searchlight. Regarding the choice of the name, Khadim

[4] *Ibid.*, p.43.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
[7] Khan, Rao Farman Ali. *Bangladesher Janmo (A Bengali Translation of How Pakistan Got Divided*). Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1992. p. 76.
[8] Raja. *A Stranger in My Own Country.* p. 69.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

said, "The new plan, prepared by Farman and myself, was named 'Searchlight'. There was no particular significance to its name." [10] Siddiq Salik said that General Farman wrote down the new plan on a light blue office pad, using an ordinary school pencil. He saw the original plan in General Farman's clean hand. General Khadim wrote the second part, which dealt with distributing resources and tasks to brigades and units. The hand-written plan was read out to General Hamid Khan and Lieutenant–General Tikka Khan at Flag Staff House on the afternoon of 20 March. Both of them approved the principal contents of the plan.[11] Rao Farman Ali said he and Khadim had prepared and presented the Operation Searchlight plan to General Hamid and General Tikka Khan.[12] They did not fix any date for the operation. However, it was mentioned that they had limited time and would inform the senior officers of the final news soon.[13] Finally, President Yahya Khan approved the Operation Searchlight plan before leaving Dhaka on the evening of 25 March. However, he did not issue any written order. It was implemented on verbal orders.[14] Rao Farman Ali said that on 25 March at 6 pm, they came to know that the operation would start that night at 1 am.[15]

Contents of the Plan:

Operation Searchlight's plan was divided into two major parts. The first part was the central plan, divided into 16 Articles and many sub–articles. The second part was related to the allotment of troops to tasks. It was divided into eight parts, corresponding to the names of different areas, such as Dhaka, Jessore, Khulna, Rangpur-Saidpur, Rajshahi, Comilla, Sylhet, and Chittagong. In every city, the work was divided into two significant heads: troops and tasks.

Analysing the first part of the plan, it is evident that the DU campus was one of the main targeted places, and the student leaders were their principal targeted group. For instance, Article 5 of the plan said, "Operation must achieve a hundred per cent success in Dacca. For that, Dacca University will have to be occupied and searched." [16] Article 4 said, "Maximum number of political and student leaders and extremists amongst

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[11] Salik, Siddiq. *Witness to Surrender*. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2020. p.63.
[12] Khan, *Bangladesher Janmo*. p. 82.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[14] Raja, *A Stranger in My Own Country.* p. 77.
[15] Khan, *Bangladesher Janmo*. p. 85.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

teaching staffs, cultural organisations to be arrested. In the initial phase, top political leaders and top student leaders must be arrested."[17] Article 13 of the plan mentioned the names of 16 leaders who must be arrested. Among them, 12 were former and the then student leaders of the DU, such as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Sirajul Alam, Professor Muzaffar Ahmed, Oli Ahad, Matia Chowdhury, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Tofail Ahmed, A.A. Siddiqui, ASM Abdur Rab, Abdul Kuddus Makhon.[18]

Analysing the second part of the plan, it is evident that the Pakistan Army particularly wanted to occupy Iqbal Hall and Jagannath Hall of DU and targeted the student communities and Awami League activities everywhere. For instance, regarding the task of Dhaka city, the plan mentioned that Iqbal Hall and Jagannath Hall of DU must be captured.[19] Regarding the task of Jessore town, it said, "Secure Jessore town and arrest Awami League and student leaders". Regarding the task of Khulna Town said, "Arrest Awami League students and communist leaders."[20] Regarding the task of Rangpur-Saidpur, the plan said to arrest "Awami League and student leaders at Rangpur." Regarding the tasks of Rajshahi, the plan mentioned that the main target was Rajshahi University and Medical College. Moreover, Awami Leaguers and student leaders must be arrested.[21] Regarding the task in Comilla, the plan said, 'Secure town and arrest Awami League leaders and students'.[22] Regarding Sylhet, the plan said to arrest "Awami League and student leaders".[23] Regarding the tasks of Chittagong, the plan said, "Arrest of Awami League and student leaders after above accomplished." [24]

East Pakistan was divided into two significant sections under two commands for executing Operation Search Light. One was Dhaka city, while the other included the major cities of the then East Pakistan, such as Jessore, Khulna, Rangpur-Saidpur, Rajshahi, Comilla, Sylhet, and Chittagong. Dhaka city was placed under the command and control of Maj-Gen Farman, and the rest of the province was put under the command and control of Major-General Khadim. However, the whole operation was monitored by Lieutenant-General Tikka Khan from the Martial Law Headquarters. Siddiq Salik said, according to the plan, "Major-General Farman, with 57 Brigade under Brigadier Arbab, was responsible for operations in Dacca city and its suburbs while Major-

[17] Salik. *Witness to Surrender*, p. 228.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 230.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 231.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 232.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

General Khadim was to look after the rest of the province. In addition, Lieutenant-General Tikka Khan and his staff were to spend the night at the Martial Law Headquarters in the Second Capital to watch the progress of action in and outside Dacca." [25]

The University of Dhaka on the night of 25 March

According to the Operation Searchlight plan, the main targeted city was Dhaka, and one of the notable places targeted was the DU campus and its students, teachers, and employees. The activities of Operation Searchlight began from the Dhaka cantonment around 11 pm on 25 March. Siddiq Salik said it started when the green telephone of Khadim started ringing at about 11 am. From the other side, Tikka Khan said, 'Khadim, it is tonight'.[26] Khadim passed the order to his staff for action. As part of the plan, the army marched out of the cantonment around 11 pm. Jacob said troops began to move from the cantonment into the city at 2300 hours on 25 March.[27]

On the way, the Pakistan Army faced a roadblock at Farmgate constructed by students, Bengali soldiers, police and party volunteers. Farmgate is one kilometre far away from the cantonment and three kilometres from the DU campus. Salik said,

"The first column from the cantonment met resistance at Farm Gate, about one kilometre from the cantonment. The column was halted by a huge tree trunk freshly felled across the road. The side gaps were covered with the hulks of old cars and a disabled steam-roller. On the city side of the barricade stood several hundred Awami Leaguers shouting *Joi Bangla* (Hail Bangla) slogans. I heard their spirited shouts while standing on the veranda of General Tikka's headquarters. Soon, some rifle shots mingled with the *Joi Bangla* slogans. A little later, a burst of fire from an automatic weapon shrilled through the air. Thereafter, it was a mixed affair of firing and fiery slogans, punctuated with the occasional chatter of a light machine gun. Fifteen minutes later, the noise began to subside, and the slogans started dying down. Apparently, the weapons had triumphed. The army column moved on to the city".[28]

[25] *Ibid.*, p.71.
[26] Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, p. 71.
[27] Jacob, LT Gen JFR. *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation*. Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2019. p. 33.
[28] Salik, *Witness to Surrender*. pp. 73-75.

Regarding the obstacle, Simon Dring said Pakistani troops faced obstacles by 11 pm, and the early casualties included those who had started to erect makeshift barricades, overturned cars, tree stumps, furniture, and concrete piping.[29]

Overcoming the Farmgate obstacle, a composite force consisting of one company each of 18 Punjab, 22 Baluch and 32 Punjab marched towards the DU campus under the command of L. Corner Taj.[30] Later, Taj was awarded a promotion as Deputy Sub Administrator Martial Law (DSAML) due to his mass killing.[31] The final goal of the *Taj Bahini* was to kill every student, teacher and employee inside the campus. Archer Blood said, "What was generally believed that the Army plan of attack at the University was to take no prisoners and to kill all students present in the dorms."[32] Dr Muazzam Hussain said he could hear the voice of the control on the radio saying, "There is no question of taking prisoner… wipe them off." [33]

According to the plan, Operation Searchlight was to start on the DU campus at 1 am and be completed within the morning. For instance, Article 11. b. iii. of the Operation Searchlight plan said, "Tps (troops) earmarked for cordon University -0105 hrs." Article 11.b. viii said, "Tps (troops) move to University area-0500 hrs." [34] However, the military could not maintain the prescribed time properly. They attacked the Jagannath Hall around 12.30 am and the Zahurul Haq Hall at 1.30 am. At night, they attacked the Ruqayyah Hall, Dhaka Hall, and in the morning they attacked the Salimullah Hall, Surjasen Hall, Mohsin Hall, teachers quarters of the Salimullah Hall, teachers quarters of Nilkhat, esp. house nos. 23, 24 and 25, teachers quarters of Jagannath Hall, teachers quarters at Fuller road, DU teachers club, Sibbari, Ramna Kali Bari and TSC. They took 36 hours to complete the DU operation. Ratan Lal said the total duration of the DU operation was 36 hours. It started at midnight on 25 March and ended on the morning of 27 March.[35]

Pakistan Army attacked on un-armed DU campus equipped with modern weapons. They used tanks, heavy mortars, rocket launchers, automatic rifles, light machine guns, and recoilless rifles during the operation. There

[29] *The Daily Telegraph*. March 30, 1971.
[30] Islam, Rafiqul. *Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay (Dhaka University in the Freedom Struggle)*, Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, 2016. p. 153.
[31] Rahman, Hasan Hafizur (*ed.*). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra (History of Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents)*, Dhaka: Hakkani Publishers, 2011, Vol. 8, pp. 354.
[32] Blood, Archer K. *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat*. Dhaka: UPL, 2021. p. 207.
[33] Rahman (*ed.*). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol.8, p. 354.
[34] Salik. *Witness to Surrender*. pp. 229-230.
[35] Chakraborty, Ratan Lal. *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay- 1947-1971 (The Liberation War of Bangladesh and Dhaka University, 1947-1971)*. Dhaka: The Universal Academy, 2015. Vol. 1, pp. 541-543.

was no counterattack inside the DU campus, but Siddik Salik Simon Dring, Daily Azad and Khadim Hussain Raja described the story of resistance. For instance, Salik said,

"At about 2 a.m., the wireless set in the jeep again drew our attention. I was ordered to receive the call. The Captain on the other end of the line said that he was facing a lot of resistance from Iqbal Hall and Jagan Nath Hall (Jagannath Hall). Meanwhile. A senior staff officer snatched the hand-set from me and shouted into the mouth-piece: 'How long will you take to neutralize the target? … Four hours! … Nonsense … What weapons have you got? … Rocket launcher, recoilless rifles, mortars and … O.K., use all of them and ensure complete capture of the area in two hours." [36]

Simon Dring wrote, "But they (students) had nothing more than a few rifles… equally ancient pistols, and some homemade bombs … Once the shooting started, the jeering, the shouting, the open defiance of the military might of the Pakistan Government died a quick death."[37] *Daily Azad* wrote that to attack the students, the Pakistan military used tanks, cannons, mortars, rockets and bullets when the students of Ikbal Hall were resisting them with three nought three rifles.[38] Khadim Hussain Raja wrote, "However, there was a good bit of resistance from the University Halls, including the use of rifle and automatic fire."[39]

The fact is that there was no counterattack at the DU campus because most of the students had left the campus at the beginning of March. The campus had been closed for several days due to the non-cooperation movement. Most students received money from their homes through a courier service. Due to the March movement, the courier service was stopped, and the supplies of the canteen were also stopped. Therefore, it was tough for the students to stay on campus. Therefore, only two categories of students remained on campus during the second half of March. Firstly, the student leaders, radical activists who took military training and secondly, who had tuition and had no alternative option to take shelter. The first category of students had left campus before Operation Searchlight because they had confirmed news regarding the attack. They also knew the brutality of the military attack. So, they did not try to launch any counterattack on the campus and also did not provide any instructions for resistance. Only some of the students who belonged to the second category remained in the halls during the operation. Evidence showed that the presence of the students at Jagannath Hall was more

[36] Salik. *Witness to Surrender*. p.76.
[37] Dring, Simon. 'Dacca Eyewitness: Bloodbath, Inferno'. *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1971.
[38] *The Daily Azad*, February 14-15, 1972.
[39] Raja. *A Stranger in My Own Country*, p. 82.

as compared to other halls. Jagannath Hall was the only place where the non-Muslim students lived. As the cause, Ratan Lal said that most of the students at Jaganath Hall were economically poor due to the partition of 1947 and other reasons. Most of them would bear their educational expenses by earning money from private tuition. So, the presence of the students at Jagannath Hall was greater than that of other halls.[40] Then the question remains: why did they stay in the halls after knowing about the attacks? They stayed in the halls because they thought they would only be arrested because, in the earlier movement, the students of DU had faced gunfire at the worst point from the police but never faced actual warfare or military invasion. It was unexpected to them. So, a few students and staff could not launch a counterattack at the campus against the Pakistan Army. Rafiqul Islam wrote that there was no war between the Pakistan Army and the DU students inside the campus on 25 and 26 March. When one party was equipped with a tank, mortar, heavy machinegun, anti-tank recoilless rifles, rocket, grenade, Chinese automatic rifles and attacked unarmed students and teachers' halls and residences, how can it tell war? It was not war. It was genocide.[41]

Pakistan army had faced some blockades and fear Inside the DU campus. Professor Mafizullah Kabir (Head of the Department of History, DU) said that he was living in a two-storied University bungalow opposite the *Shaheed Minar*. On 25 March evening, he saw students and workers erecting barricades on the road using the Titas gas pipes, drain pipes, big trees, logs of wood and similar objects.[42] Basanti Guha Thakurta said that on 25 March, she saw some people constructing barricades through the big trees, water tanks and brick-bats.[43] There were some other obstacles, such as all the main gates of the halls being locked. All the buildings' gates and the rooms' doors were closed. The Pakistan army had to break all the gates and doors to enter inside the Halls, buildings and rooms. They also feared that the students might attack them.

After overcoming all the obstacles, Pakistani troops led their operation at Zahurul Haq Hall (Iqbal Hall), Jagannath Hall, Salimullah Muslim Hall, Shahidullah Hall (Dhaka Hall), Surjasen Hall (Mohammad Ali

[40] Chakraborty, Ratan Lal (ed.), *Dhaka Bishwabidyalayer Ganahatya: 1971 (Jagannath Hall) [The Genocide at Dhaka University: 1971 (Jagannath Hall)]*. Dhaka: Agamee Prakashani, 2019. p. 14.

[41] Islam, Rafiqul, *Swadinata Sangrama Dhaka Vishwavidyalaya (Dhaka University in the Freedom Movement)*. Dhaka: Aytijja, 2004. p. 158.

[42] Kabir, Mafizullah. *Experiences of an Exile at Home: Life in Occupied Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Rezina N. Kabir, 1972.

[43] Rahman (*ed.*), *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol. 8, p. 12.

Jinnah Hall), Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall, Ruqayyah Hall and their adjacent teachers quarters nearer Nilkhet, esp. house nos. 23, 24 and 25, teachers quarter of the Salimullah Muslim Hall, teachers quarter and staff quarter of Jagannath Hall, teachers quarter of the Fuller Road, teachers club, Shibbari, Ramna Kali Bari and TSC. They killed students, teachers, security guards, liftmen, gardeners, guards, peons, and bearers and made the DU campus an epicentre of the genocide on that black night.[44]

There are numerous accounts regarding the attack at DU. For instance, as an eyewitness of the brutality, Abdul Kader, an MA student of the DU, wrote a letter to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland, on 21 June 1971. The letter stated that on 26 March 1971, he visited Iqbal Hall, S.M. Hall, Jagannath Hall and Ruqayyah Hall. He saw that the Pakistani troops had partly destroyed the Iqbal Hall. They killed many students. Some dead bodies were left on the streets, and their books were scattered in the field. The entire office of the S.M. Hall was burnt. Jagannath Hall suffered the worst destruction. A large number of students were killed there. The ground floor of Ruqayyah Hall was set on fire, and the fleeing girls and those who tried to jump from the upper storeys were shot dead. The Pakistani troops also took away many girls from the Hall. They destroyed all the *Shaheed Minars* and constructed a Mosque on the side of the Central *Shaheed Minar*.[45] As an eyewitness of the incident, Siddiq Salik said that on 27 March, he visited the DU area and found three pits five to fifteen metres in diameter each. They were filled with fresh earth. However, no officer was prepared to disclose the exact number of casualties. He mainly visited Iqbal Hall and Jagannath Hall and found grave damage. The rooms were mainly charred, and a few dozen half-burnt rifles and stray papers were smouldering at that time.[46] A letter of R.C. Majumdar and S.N. Sen was published in *The Times* Newspaper. The letter said they came to know that a cruel massacre took place at the DU on the 25 and 26 March night. Pakistani troops burnt down University buildings and killed many students, including girls and several leading intellectuals, including their family members. Due to the intense press censorship, the international community was kept in the dark about the East Bengal situation.[47] G.W Chowdhury said, “Iqbal hall and Jagannath hall-the two largest dormitories of Dacca University were almost completely gutted, and many students were killed.”[48]

[44] Jacob. *Surrender at Dacca*. p. 34.
[45] Rahman (*ed.*). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol. 8, p..6.
[46] Salik. *Witness to Surrender*. p. 77.
[47] Letter from R.C. Majumdar (Former Vice-Chancellor of Dacca University) to SN Sen (Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University), *The Times* (London), April 13, 1971.
[48] Choudhury, G.W. *The Last Days of United Pakistan*. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2018, p. 184.

Joan Baez's song titled *Song of Bangladesh* also portrayed the massacre of the DU campus. For instance,

"And the students at the university Asleep at night
quite peacefully The soldiers came and
shot them in their beds

And terror took the dorm awakening shrieks of dread And
silent frozen forms and pillows drenched in red

Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bangladesh,
Bangladesh When the sun sinks in the
west Die a million people of the Bangladesh." [49]

Number of Deaths at the University of Dhaka Campus:

It is difficult to estimate precisely how many people were killed during Operation Searchlight. It is estimated around 5000 to 7000 were killed in Dhaka city alone. Among them, around 300 were killed inside the DU campus, including nine teachers, many students, staff, their family members, relatives, guests, and slum dwellers.

There are numerous accounts regarding the number of killings in Dhaka city and the DU. For instance, Blood sent one more telegram to the State Department in March 1971. In his first telegram, he stated that the casualties in Dhaka were estimated to be 4,000 to 6,000.[50] Michel Laurent reported perhaps 7000 died in Dhaka alone.[51] Regarding the number of deaths at the DU, Rafiqul Islam said it is estimated that around 300 persons were killed inside the DU campus on 25 and 26 March, along with ten teachers.[52] The number of 300 was also determined from the discussions between 88 units and the control room of the MLA on the morning of 26 March. Dr Moazzam Hossain[53] recorded the discussions. The discussions were:

[49] Joan Baez, 'Song of Bangladesh', accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20sMZbiiBhk, on 12 July 2020.
[50] Department of State, Telegram, 31 March 1971, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 79, 2002.
[51] *The Times*, March 30, 1971.
[52] *Islam. Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*. p. 159.
[53] Dr Moazzam Hossain was a scientist. During Operation Searchlight, he could hear the discussion of the different army units through radio and recorded some portion of the debate. He sent his recorded copy to Calcutta through his friend during the war. *Akash Bani Kolkata* broadcasted the record in the middle of May

'Control: how many persons are wounded in the university area. It is enough if you tell me the approximate number—answer 300.

Control: wonderful. All 300 is killed or someone wounded or captured.

The answer, I only like one thing. Three hundred die." [54]

The causes behind the killing at the University of Dhaka campus:

The article investigated the causes of Operation Searchlight and divided the reasons into two broader senses: the government version and the real causes.

The Government version:

Operation Searchlight of 25 March was a brutal genocide in history. The government and their agencies tried to legalise the brutality in the name of Pakistan's integrity, re-establishing control over Dhaka and saving the DU campus from the terrorist group. Yahya Khan and Bhutto tried to approve the brutality in the name of Pakistan's integrity. On the evening of 26 March, President Yahya Khan, in his air and on television address, said he explored every possible avenue for arriving at some reasonable solution and tolerated one illegal act after another. But the government failed because the Bengali people were enemies of Pakistan. They wanted East Pakistan to break away entirely from the country. So, he told the Pakistan Armed Forces that it was their duty to ensure Pakistan's solidarity, integrity, and security. He ordered them to do their task and fully restore the authority of the government.[55] After Operation Searchlight, when Bhutto was leaving Dhaka, he said to his chief escort, Brigadier Arbab, 'Thank God, Pakistan has been saved.' He repeated the statement on his arrival at Karachi.[56] On 30 October 1971, Doctor A.M. Malik, Governor of East Pakistan, in an interview with Altaf Hossain Koraishi (editor of the Monthly newspaper Urdu Digest), said that the 25 March activities of the military saved Pakistan.[57] Some government sources said that Bengali people had a counter-attack plan against the Yahya government based on the DU. To resist that attack, they attacked on the DU. For instance, referring to the narration of Major-General (ret.) DK. Palit, Siddiq Salik wrote that MAG Osmani also had a counter plan for military action against Yahya's government. His plan included the following courses of action: (a) Capture of Dhaka airport and Chittagong seaport to seal East Pakistan. (b) East Pakistan Rifles and

[54] Rahman (ed.). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol. 8, p. 355.
[55] Rahman (*ed.*). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol.1, pp. 276-77.
[56] Salik. *Witness to Surrender*. p.77.
[57] Rahman (*ed.*). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol-7, p .550.

the Police, aided by armed students to control Dhaka city with a base at Dhaka University. [58] Farman also cited the same purpose. Blood said that according to Farman, the Awami League had a plan to drive the army back into the cantonment and thus control Dhaka with the assistance of Awami League volunteers, Bengali police and East Pakistan Rifles.[59]

Some of the government sources said that DU had been turned into an arsenal, and the students were terrorists. To save the campus from the miscreants, they attacked there. The government paper described that the students of DU had turned the campus, especially the Iqbal Hall and Jagannath Hall, into arsenals. The students raided the Narayanganj Rifle Club, firearms shops at Baitul Mukarran and New Market, looted arms and ammunition, arms vehicles and funds and preserved them, especially inside the Zahurul Haq Hall and Jagannath Hall. They also built a military training camp inside the campus, and many students took military training. It was alarming for the government. So, they attacked DU.[60] Two pro-Pakistan teachers of DU also recognised the government's attitude. They were Sazzad Hossain (the then Vice-Chancellor of Rajshahi University) and Muhammad Mohar Ali, a reader at the DU history department. On 7 June, they said Ikbal Hall and Jagannath Hall had been turned into arsenals by Awami League volunteers.[61]

All the causes were the pleas of the government to legalise the genocide. Evidence showed that they had a clear plan for genocide. For instance, Dr Muazzam Hussain said that he could hear the voice of the control room on the radio saying, ‘There is no question of taking prisoner…wipe them off.’[62] Blood said, ‘What was generally believed was that the Army plan of attack at the University was to take no prisoners and to kill all students present in the dorms.’[63] After completing the mission, troops reported to Tikka Khan as eyewitness Salik said, ‘General Tikka Kahn left his sofa at about 5 a.m. and went into his office for a while. When he reappeared, cleaning his glasses with a handkerchief and surveying the area, he said, 'Oh, not a soul there!’[64]

[58] *Ibid*., p.64.
[59] Blood. *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh*. p. 197.
[60] Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Information and National Affairs, *White Paper on the Crisis in East Pakistan*, (Islamabad: Printing Corporation of Pakistan Press, 5th August 1971, pp. 29-30.
[61] *The Times*, July 7, 1971.
[62] Rahman (*ed.*). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol. 1, p. 354.
[63] Blood. *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh*. p. 207.
[64] Salik. *Witness to Surrender*. p.77.

The real causes

All the above accounts clarify that Operation Searchlight was conceived to conduct genocide. So, the earlier-mentioned causes do not justify their brutality. G.W Chowdhury said, 'The Pakistan Army's brutal actions, which began on the midnight of March 25, 1971, can never be condoned or justified in any way.'[65] Pakistani troops attacked the DU campus for multiple reasons, such as they wanted to demolish the Non-cooperation Movement and the emergence of Bangladesh.

Demolish the Non-cooperation Movement:

The duration of the non-cooperation movement was only 23 days, from 3 to 25 March 1971. The primary purpose of the movement was to force the government to hand over power to the elected representative of the election of 1970. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman particularly highlighted the issue in his 1 March, 3 March and 7 March speeches and during the negotiation talks. However, Bengali nationalists paralysed the whole machinery of the government in East Bengal by the middle of March 1971 under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sheikh Mujib ran a parallel government in East Bengal during the movement. President Yahya Khan, in his 26 March speech, identified the actions of the Non-cooperation movement as an act of treason. He said Mujib and his party defied the lawful authority for over three weeks. They had insulted the photograph of Jinnah and the flag of Pakistan. They had tried to run a parallel government in East Bengal and created terror, turmoil and insecurity.[66] According to the movement demand if the government would agree to hand over power to the elected representatives of the 1970 election. Awami League would come into power in the centre and East Pakistan. If the Awami League came into power, they would establish democracy in Pakistan and autonomy in East Pakistan. The majority of the people of Pakistan were Bengali. According to the democracy, the supremacy of the Bengali people would be established, and West Pakistan would lose its 23 years of supremacy. So, they attacked the DU campus to demolish the movement and the spirit of autonomy. As the DU was one of the main places for the non-cooperation movement, and the students of DU were the main forces of the movement, they attacked DU.

[65] Chowdhury. *The Last Days of United Pakistan*. p. 181.
[66] Rahman (*ed.*), *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*, pp. 276-77.

Demolish the Spirit of Independent Bangladesh:

March 1971 was the highest stage of Bengali nationalism. The DU has fostered a large number of Bengali nationalist leaders since its creation. They have led all the nationalist movements since the creation of Pakistan. In March 1971, with the non-cooperation movement, the desire for an independent Bangladesh reached its peak. Some of the prominent student leaders of DU lead that spirit. They formed *Shwadhin Bangla Chattra Sangram Parishad* at Zahurul Haq Hall on 1 March 1971 and hoisted the national flag of Bangladesh on the university campus first on 2 March 1971. Due to their activities, by 23 March, the red-green flag of upcoming Bangladesh became famous worldwide. It gave the message to the world that Bangladesh is coming. They declared the *Shwadhinatar Istihar* of Bangladesh on 3 March and participated in arms training for the upcoming war. They also continued meetings and processions and gave different types of statements during March. Due to their activities, the demand for an independent Bangladesh became so popular that it was a matter of time that Bangladesh is going to emerge as an independent country. To demolish the spirit of Bengali nationalism, they led Operation Searchlight.

Conclusion:

The 25 March killing at DU was a genocide because it was deliberate and systematic destruction to destroy the Bengali nation, and their main centre was the DU campus. Some scholars of the Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong University, and the affiliated colleges who were in Scotland for their higher studies during the liberation war, wrote a letter to the Members of the British Universities on 4 April 1971. In the letter, they identified the killing of 25 March as genocide. They said, 'Considering the extent and nature of this organised political killing to eliminate intellectuals, we feel bound to appeal to our colleagues in this country to raise their voice against the genocide.' [67]A.A.K Niazi said, 'The military action was a display of stark cruelty, more merciless than the massacres at Bukhara and Baghdad by Changez Khan and Halku Khan, or at Jallianwala Bagh by the British General Dyer.'[68]

[67] Rahman (ed.). *Bangladesher Swahdinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra*. Vol. 4, p. 13.
[68] Niazi, A.A.K. *The Betrayal of East Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 46.

The purpose of the killing was to destroy the Bengali nation and nationalism. DU was the hub of Bengali nationalism and, therefore, one of the main targets of the operation. They killed most of the students, teachers, and staff of DU who stayed inside the campus that night. However, they could not understand that it is impossible to abolish a nation by killing. Bengali nations evaluated Operation Searchlight as war and started their nine-month-long War of Independence.