

SWADHIN BANGLA BETAR KENDRA

The Story of March 26, 1971

By M. A. Yusuf

THAT ghastly night of March 25, 1971, when "Yahya" let loose his army of bloodhounds on the freedom and peace-loving millions of Bangladesh he was determined to annihilate the last vestige of their hopes and aspiration.

At this historic moment of our life, the meteoric birth of "Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra" represented a living symbol of freedom. The voice of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra bamboozled the barbaric forces in their cowardly invasion of the peace-loving people, and a new consciousness awoke in the bewildered mass with a new rhythm.

Its birth was not an isolated phenomenon. It was the result of a long struggle for liberation which this section of the humanity was engaged even at the greatest peril of its life. The mask of unknown events has been lifted, the mystery has been unravelled and the story regarding this Betar Kendra has come to light in various newspapers. All these facts constitute a precious gem in the annals of the freedom struggle. The journey towards its birth was perilous, strenuous and difficult.

But perils of the journey neither daunted nor blinded them to the splendour of its achievements. In spite of its irregular broadcast in the first phase, each item of its irregular programme embodied an unflinching resolve of the fierce struggle against the ferocious might of the colossus. No obstacle could greater deter its determination to transmit the free voice of the people. Rather, the greater the obstacle the more the determination. It is a great surprise to ponder how those sentinels of freedom never known to Betar Kendra, acted to instil confidence in the disappointed and despairing hearts.

We awake reminiscences of March 26, 1971. The residents of Agrabad residential Area, Chittagong, assembled in the house of Dr. Syed Anwar Ali in the morning, and discussed the future programme of providing rations to the freedom fighters and necessary treatment to the wounded. Also the women of the area, fired by inspiration and indomitable courage, were engaged in cooking food for the freedom fighters.

To distribute food to the camps of the freedom fighters a pick-up No. Chittagong TA-015 was collected from WAPDA engineer Mr. Ashikul Islam. Dr. Syed Anwar Ali took the responsibility of driving the car and was accompanied by the two WAPDA engineers, Mr. Ashikul Islam and Mr. Dilip Chandra Das for distribution of food to various places for the freedom

fighters.

A group of students handed over to them a telegram containing the Bangabandhu's declaration of Independence of Bangladesh. At that time, Chittagong Radio Station was silenced. They decided to transmit the Bangabandhu's message through the radio to every house and inspire them to join the crusade of freedom.

There was little time for decision. Dr. Mrs. Manjula Anwar immediately translated the message into Bangla. They, along with Mrs. Kazi Hosne Ara the announcer of the Chittagong Radio Station, after distributing food to various camps, made their way to the Agrabad Broadcasting House and expressed their mission of transmitting the Bangabandhu's declara-

tion to the (afternoon) and that the message would be broadcast from the Kalurghat transmission station. At this all were encouraged and Dr. Anwar Ali drove the pick-up towards Kalurghat. On reaching the transmitting Station they dropped Mr. Dilip Chandra Das, Mr. Mahbub Hassan, Mr. Belal Mohammed and Mr. Abul Kashem Sandwipi. Dr. Anwar Ali, Mr. Ashikul Islam and Mrs. Kazi Hosne Ara, after crossing the Kalurghat Bridge came to know that the East Bengal Regiment Jawans had shifted their camp to Patya.

On enquiry, they came to know that a group of soldiers had been staying at a nearby School. Engineer Ashikul Islam went there with great difficulty and



From left: Mr. Ashikul Islam, Dr. Syed Anwar Ali, Mr. Dilip Chandra Das.

tion to the Bangla Police force guarding the Studio. The Police force immediately opened the Studio.

Entering the Studio the trio, Dr. Anwar Ali, Mr. Ashikul Islam and Mr. Dilip Chandra Das began to operate the Radio Station to broadcasting the Bangabandhu's message of Independence to the Nation.

In the mean time Mrs Kazi Hosne Ara went to call Mr. Mahboob Hasan, Mr. Belal Mohammed and Mr. Abul Kashem Sandwipi. All of them arrived in the Studio within a few minutes. But in spite of their efforts and repeated approaches, at that critical time, they failed to obtain necessary permission from the authority to run the Radio, which was at that time necessary for the Kalurghat transmission station.

In spite of their protracted efforts and labour, at this moment of disappointment Dr. Anwar Ali showed them a ray of hope. Dr. Ali did not like the idea to propitiate for permission from the authority; on the contrary, he suggested that they should cross the Kalurghat Bridge and take the assistance of the Jawans of the East Bengal Regiment under Major Ziaur Rahman, (to whom they distributed

persuaded them to send about ten Jawans for guarding the transmitting Station.

When they reached the Transmitting Station with the Jawans, they were faced with another vicissitude and two technicians being impatient left the station. Dr. Anwar and Mr. Ashikul Islam again went out and brought them back from their way to the Station.

Thus the crimson glow of twilight of March 26, 1971, witnessed the materialisation of the Radio Station "Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra". The long cherished dream became a reality. Bangabandhu's declaration of Independence of Bangladesh was radioed in English by Mr. Ashikul Islam, WAPDA engineer and in Bengali by Mr. Abul Kashem Sandwipi and later on a speech by Mr. Hannan, Awami League Leader.

At the beginning of the programme all felt the necessity of naming this Biplobi Betar Kendra. At last, the proposal of Mr. Dilip Chandra Das naming "Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra" was considered proper and was accepted. The Radio which came to light to transmit the message of Bangabandhu made an onward march even in the midst of its perilous journey undaunted by disaster and adversity.