

A Journalist Is Linked To Murder of Bengalis

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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DACCA, Pakistan, Jan. 2— To his fellow reporters on the Bengali-language paper where he worked, Chowdhury Mueenuddin was a pleasant, well-mannered and intelligent young man. He had an open, handsome face, with a neatly trimmed beard, and there was nothing exceptional about him except perhaps that he often received telephone calls from the leader of a right-wing Moslem political party.

But, investigations in the last few days show, those calls were significant. For Mr. Mueenuddin has been identified as the head of a secret, commando-like organization of fanatic Moslems that murdered several hundred prominent Bengali professors, doctors, lawyers and journalists in a Dacca brickyard.

Dressed in black sweaters and khaki pants, members of the group, known as Al-Badar, rounded up their victims on the last three nights of the war, which ended on Dec. 17. Their goal, captured members have since said, was to wipe out all Bengali intel-

lectuals who advocated independence from Pakistan and the creation of a secular, non-Moslem state.

If the war had not ended when it did, many Bengalis believe, Al-Badar would have succeeded. The bodies of 150 persons, many with their fingers chopped off or fingernails pulled out, were found in the brickyard. Hundreds more are believed buried in 20 mass graves in nearby fields.

It has now been determined that Al-Badar was composed of Bengalis, not of the hated West Pakistanis or the Bihari immigrants from India who have long oppressed the native Bengali majority.

"There is nothing in the world that has not been done to us," remarked Ehtesham Chowdhury, the editor of the paper where Mr. Mueenuddin worked. Mr. Chowdhury's brother was kidnapped and presumed killed by Al-Badar, and he himself escaped capture only because he stayed late in his office on the night

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Al-Badar came to his house.

"When I think about what has happened, my legs buckle," Mr. Chowdhury said. "It would have been better if these people had just plowed us under."

There is growing evidence that Al-Badar was equipped and directed by a special group of Pakistani Army officers. Among papers found in the desk of Maj. Gen. Rao Firman Ali, the military adviser to the Governor of East Pakistan, were a series of cryptic references to Al-Badar.

"Captain Tahir, vehicle for Al-Badar," and "use of Al-Badar," one scrawled note said. Captain Tahir is believed to have been the almost legendary Pakistani commander of the razakars, the Bihari militia used by the Pakistani Army to terrorize Bengalis.

On another page, the author wrote: "Nizamuddin, motivated news." Nizamuddin Ahmed was a Bengali journalist known for his anti-Pakistani views. He was kidnapped from his home two days before the war ended. Beside his name the author had penciled in an ominous check mark.

The executioners left few clues. They rounded up their victims at night during the curfew. They never identified themselves. And they carried out their killings in a remote and heavily guarded area.

Farmers who lived near the brickyard, on the northwest edge of Dacca, saw men dressed in black sweaters and khaki pants escorting an endless procession of

bound and blindfolded prisoners on the last nights of the war. But they couldn't get close enough to see who the men were.

A handful of people escaped to tell parts of the story.

Prof. Mohammed Rauf, a statistics teacher, was roused from his bed by loud knocks on the door just before dawn on Dec. 13. His wife answered. She told 12 armed men at the door that her husband was not at home, but they barged into the house.

"They said nothing to me, just searched until they found him," Mrs. Rauf recalled. "They tied his arms behind his back and took him away."

By chance, a clerk from a pastry shop where the Raufs often shopped had been thrown into the same room as the professor. The clerk, Sri Chandpal, was later released through the intercession of a friend who was a fanatic Moslem.

"There were 42 of us in the room," Mr. Chandpal remembered. "We were all tied with our hands behind our backs and had blindfolds. But I managed to work my blindfold loose. Most of the people in the room were professors and doctors. The guards wouldn't give us anything to eat, and when we asked for water they laughed and said, 'Go and ask Indira Gandhi'."

Mr. Chandpal said he had no idea who his captors were until he overheard them discussing Al-Badar. "They kept talking about the need to kill Bengalis," he recalled. "We could hear screams from the other rooms."

The following night, Mr. Chandpal said, the guards took away 10 prisoners, including Professor Rauf. They never came back.

When he was released on Dec. 15, Mr. Chandpal discovered that he had been kept in a dormitory of the Dacca College of Physical Education, a group of modern concrete buildings built with American aid.

Makbul Hossain, a janitor at the college, also remembers those nights. "They brought in hundreds of people, all nicely dressed and

tied up. We could hear screaming all the time from the rooms," the janitor said.

The name Al-Badar is derived from the place near Medina where the Prophet Mohammed fought a great battle in 624. His valiant, outnumbered troops were given the name Al-Badar.

According to one captured member now being held in the Dacca jail, the reporter, Mr. Mueenuddin, had been mastermind of the organization. A diary belonging to Mr. Mueenuddin's roommate has been found. It listed the names of Al-Badar members and how much money they contributed to the group.

The two men lived next door to the Dacca headquarters of Jamaat-i-Islami, a right-wing Moslem political party that ran in the elections for the National Assembly last year but won less than 1 per cent of the vote.

Al-Badar is believed to have been the action section of Jamaat-i-Islami, carefully organized after the Pakistani crackdown last March.

Mr. Mueenuddin was last seen on Dec. 13 after having had an argument with a fellow reporter at their paper, Purbodesh. That reporter was kidnapped from his house by Al-Badar a few hours later.

Atiqur Rahman, another reporter in their office, has started a search for Mr. Mueenuddin. "We will find him," Mr. Rahman said. "We will find him, or there can be no rest for any of us."