

Razakars of Bangladesh

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In news– Recently, six members of ‘Razakar Bahini’ were sentenced to death for ‘crimes against humanity’ by Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal.

History of Razakars-

- **Razakars were a locally recruited paramilitary force that collaborated with the Pakistan army** during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.
- **Composed of mostly pro-Pakistani Bengalis and Biharis from Bangladesh** (formerly East Pakistan), the approximate 50,000 Razakars **assisted the army in raids against the local population and were accused of committing horrific atrocities.**
- **Razakar literally means ‘volunteer’ or ‘helper’ in Persian and Urdu,** but has come to mean ‘collaborator’ and is associated with betrayal in Bangladesh.
- **Razakars mostly consisted of Urdu-speaking Bihari Muslims and religious parties** that opposed the separation of East and West Pakistan, like Jamaat-e-Islami, Al Badr and Al Shams.
- **The nationalist struggle in Bangladesh was brutally suppressed by the Pakistani army and the allied Razakars,** with a death toll around 300,000 civilians.
- **After Bangladesh achieved independence in December 1971, the newly formed government very quickly banned organisations that collaborated with Pakistani state forces,** such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, and many of its influential leaders escaped to Pakistan.
- **The Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order was passed in 1972** and in the following year, the **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s government** introduced the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act in 1973, to investigate and prosecute those that committed atrocities during the

war.

- After Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in a coup by sections of the Bangladesh army in August 1975 and the **ruling Awami League was ousted from power**, the generals that took over allowed Jamaat-e-Islami, the Muslim League other Islamic parties that had fled the country to return, and over time many of the alleged war criminals gained important positions in the government.
- In 2010, almost 40 years after its violent struggle for independence from Pakistan, the Bangladesh government headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina established its International Crimes Tribunal in order to administer justice to those accused of committing war crimes against its people.
- Abul Kalam Azad (also known as Bachchu Razakar), a former leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami was the first person to be convicted by the tribunal in 2013.
- On December 15, 2019, the day before the 49th Victory Day in Bangladesh (a national holiday celebrating the surrender of the Pakistani Army in Dhaka), the government published a list of 10,789 Razakars who had collaborated with the Pakistani army in committing atrocities against Bengalis during the war.
- This was the first time that Bangladesh's government made such a list public, and it included names of 127 politicians and influential people.

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