

## **CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)**

### **SEMINAR REPORT**

## **LIBERATION OF BANGLADESH: 1971 RECOLLECTION AND REFLECTION**

**12 DECEMBER 2013**

### **Introduction**

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) organised a seminar titled *Liberation of Bangladesh: 1971 Recollection and Reflection* at the Gulmohar Hall in the India Habitat Centre on 12 December 2013. Veterans who had participated in the war as well as noted experts gathered to go down memory lane through the events that led to the creation of Bangladesh and India's greatest military victory. The seminar was held in tribute to the martyrs of India and Bangladesh and was well attended by serving officers, veterans, members of the strategic community, students and the media.

### **Inaugural Session**

#### **Welcome Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Director, CLAWS**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1971 saw the start of the third war between India and Pakistan, brought on by the brutal repression of the people that were living on the east wing of their country by the Pakistan Army. The world watched without moving a finger as one of the largest genocides and violations of human rights took place in East Pakistan. Millions fled their country and took refuge in India. A resistance movement developed within the country and the *Mukti Bahini* was born. In support of the freedom struggle, Indian armed forces moved to take on the Pakistan military. With the help and assistance of *Mukti Bahini* and the indigenous population, the Pakistani forces were defeated in a swift thirteen days war and surrendered to the Indian Army on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971, giving to India its greatest military victory of modern times. There is no romance in war but when fought for truth and righteousness it brings out the best in men and women. Some of those stories will be told today.

#### **Keynote Address: Shri Jaswant Singh, MP & former Cabinet Minister**

The saga of Bangladesh needs to be written about, heard and discussed much more extensively. Liberation of Bangladesh and India's contribution to it needs to be spoken of and discussed from both military and diplomatic perspectives. If we examine carefully, the roots of the war can be understood from two aspects, regardless of whether faith determines nationhood or other aspects of the nation determine its destiny. Bangladesh continues to be secure and peaceful within its identity and has no inhibitions on the characteristics of civilisation. The principal disturbance in Bangladesh arose first with recognition of Urdu as a

national language. Bangladesh is one country which without any difficulty adopted Rabindranath Tagore's song as their national anthem. Language would have been a challenge that had to be met principally by Bangladesh; had they not revolted against the obscenity of the kind of oppression they suffered by the military hand of West Pakistan. If we examine the history of this development at a certain level I am of the view personally that the 1965 war contributed to the creation of Bangladesh. It is a matter of great concern and disappointment that the soldiers, sailors and airmen have not been given due recognition. Therefore, holding of this daylong seminar by General Dhruv Katoch is a matter of great satisfaction to me.

**Special Address: Mr. Mahbub Hassan Saleh, Acting High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India**

Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 is a historic war, a just war and a lawful war. Though it is late after 40-41 years, we are honoured to honour our foreign friends who participated, laid down their lives and liberators who shed their blood. Therefore, ours is a blood connection. Tripura was not a state in 1971. Ten million people took shelter in Tripura fleeing the atrocities inflicted upon them by Pakistan Army and their local collaborators who are now being tried as war criminals. Tripura's population was 1.1 million in 1971 and the number of people from Bangladesh who crossed over and took shelter in Tripura alone was 1.6 million. You would not find such a parallel in the annals of history. It was unprecedented. The number of people Tripura sheltered was more than its own population. I once again pay my highest respect to all the martyrs of the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971.

Now, focusing on the reflection part, we took off very well immediately after the independence of Bangladesh until 15 August 1975 when the father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with most of the members of the Awami League and other officials including security personnel were assassinated. That actually turned the tide 180 degrees. The defeated forces of the Liberation War who were the collaborators were unfortunately rehabilitated into the political fabric. The spirit of Liberation War is not known to many even in India. It is our failure that we have not been able to make that dent into the information domain of the people across India. We should collectively take pride in the events of 1971. I would like to remind my friends in media that they are almost over obsessed with one particular country in the region, regardless of the kind of dividend that is being received.

I request my friends to invest 10 percent of your resources and time on Bangladesh as that will give you much more dividend and definitely contribute to improvement of the bilateral relations of both countries. Today, we can take some solace if not pride in reviving historic friendship to a certain level not to the extent which was there in 1971-72 but to a level from where we can only look higher and higher. It is a multi-faceted bilateral relationship today. The development corporation aspect is a very recent phenomenon; it was simply not there between Bangladesh and India earlier. We all know about the one billion dollar line of credit which is much talked about in the media, think tanks and political leadership these days. It is the single largest line

of credit offered by India to any country around the world. The multi-faceted relationship involves in my opinion certain aspects such as water sharing, border management and security issues have been addressed to the maximum possible extent by present government of Bangladesh.

We have left no stone unturned for our internal security and India's security. I would like to conclude by saying that I see India not as a big brother but as an elder brother in the region because I believe that the element of care is inherent in an elder brother which is not there in case of a big brother. Lastly, the uniting factors in our bilateral relationship are there very much on the ground. We just need to look at them and keep them in mind. All the dividing factors which are there for different reasons, we need to take them out.

**Vote of Thanks: Maj Chandrakant Singh, VrC (Retd)**

I would like to thank Shri Jaswant Singh for delivering the keynote address. We have had an excellent illuminating lecture by his Excellency the Bangladesh Acting High Commissioner to India. We could have not had anything better. My personal thanks to General Dhruv C Katoch, he is the first person who decided to organise a seminar on this issue after almost 44 years. To thank General Jacob, I would like to paraphrase a quote from "Joan of Arc", "In honouring you, we honour ourselves".

**Session I: Preparation and Run-Up to the War**

**Chairperson: Brig KP Singh Deo, AVSM, VSM, Former Rajya Raksha Mantri**

**Politico-Strategic Developments: *Dr. Srinath Raghavan, Senior Fellow Centre for Policy Research***

Writing about the 1971 Bangladesh War, there are two advantages today. Firstly, there has been a certain perspective that has built over the past forty years and second there is a lot of de-classified documentary primary source evidence available today. It is useful to start with the elections of December 1970 which was the first General Election in the country. The Awami League comes in with a big mandate. The assessment of the Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan at the time is that having an independent East Pakistan would not be in India's interest. The reason for this is that if an Awami League (AL) government came to power in *all* of Pakistan, then bilateral ties with India would eventually improve.

At the time, India wanted the AL to have a shot at governing the entire Pakistan since it was not as obsessed with the Kashmir issue, a sole focus of the West Pakistan leadership. Over the next three months, negotiations took place between the AL and the West Pakistan

leadership. This was not limited to the Military but the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which had interjected itself into the negotiations, making them trilateral.

On 1 March 1971, there is an announcement by Yahya Khan that the National Assembly that was to be convened is adjourned and its meeting was postponed indefinitely. This was to allow the military leadership into brow beating the AL about what the future constitution of Pakistan should be. That very day senior leaders of the AL approach India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the principal external intelligence agency. They asked for military arms and ammunition, medical supplies and transportation facilities. RAW's position is that, India should stand ready in case the negotiations break down and there are clear signs of a liberation war within East Pakistan. On 2<sup>nd</sup> March Indira Gandhi constitutes a Special Committee of five secretaries. Led by the Cabinet Secretary, it would comprise of the Home and Defence Secretaries, PM's Principal Secretary and R N Kao (RAW Chief). All of this is happening 24 days before the breakout of fighting.

There are two other dates that are significant. On the 5/6<sup>th</sup> of March 1971, Mujibur Rahman sends an emissary to the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka asking for support in the event that the Pakistan army decides to use force to crush the AL. On 14<sup>th</sup> March, Mujib's emissary insists that the Deputy High Commissioner (DHC) should actually go back to India and personally convey the same. The DHC comes to Calcutta and conveys the message through RAW channels. This takes three days to get to the PMO's office that sees the message on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1971. It is interesting to note the Indian reaction at this point of time. On the one hand there was awareness that this was a very difficult situation. On the other hand negotiations had begun between Yahya Khan and AL since 15 March and the mood appeared to be that some kind of agreement may be reached. In fact that is what the AL leadership themselves believed at that point of time. They were taken by surprise when the talks broke down. Pakistan army was secretly building up during this period. India could not decipher exactly what Mujibur Rahman wanted since much of the diplomatic reporting at that time seemed to suggest that an agreement shall be reached.

On 26 March 1971, the Indian PM has the first credible reports of the aggressions that have transpired in East Pakistan. The initial Indian reaction is one of great caution in how they should be dealing with the issue. It was viewed as an internal matter of Pakistan and taking an activist stance may bring censure from the international community. Moreover, India has always insisted that it does not want outside interference on the Kashmir issue. For India to respond in any manner to the East Pakistan issue, may create problems in the future. PM Indira Gandhi summons the leaders of the Opposition and tells them of the events in East Pakistan and that the government has to move very slowly. However, it is clarified by the PM that India's support to East Pakistan would be through covert channels. The idea of an overt military intervention was not on the cards at this stage. Indeed, it is to assuage the concerns of persons in favour of an early intervention that the PM summons Gen. Manekshaw. This is also

the period when the initial contacts with the AL leadership are established and Tajuddin Ahmed provides the first credible report of Mujibur Rahman being captured.

Tajuddin also states that before *Bongobondhu* was taken into custody, he had already decided that a cabinet should be formed of the independent Bangladesh. He puts himself forward as the next senior politician. On 17 April 1971, the declaration for a provisional government and the ceremony for an independent country take place. Gen Jacob was instrumental in this. However, India at this stage does not intend on formal recognition. The PM Secretariat and MEA give some legal sounding to the effect that a government can be recognised only if it is capable of holding territory. The implication is that unless the AL provisional government is able to recapture territory, recognition would be premature. At this stage there is also a very sharp upswing in the number of refugees i.e. it goes from a few thousand from the beginning of March 1971 to approximately 3.7 million by 23<sup>rd</sup> of the month. This is what really triggers the alarm bells within the government of India.

Mrs Gandhi visits some of the refugee camps and comes back to Parliament and says that the situation cannot stand. This indicated a very definite shift in what India says and wants i.e. a situation to be created in East Pakistan which allows the refugees to go back. At this point India does not outrightly call for independence. The reason is that the Indian leadership is still unsure what kind of a settlement Mujibur Rahman wanted. There are only second hand reports from Tajuddin Ahmed and Sheikh Fazal Haq Moni. The latter was a nephew of Rahman and close to R N Kao through R&AW channels. Moni conveys that Rahman did not want creation of a provisional government but an armed struggle.

This problem of how to look at the provisional government becomes progressively more difficult for the Indians. The support for the Mukti Bahini remains quite low till the end of July 1971. This had created three sorts of dissensions within the provisional government:

1. There was the dissonance in the military vs. civilian part of government. However, the senior military commander was an AL member himself and able to bridge the gap to some extent.
2. The other division was between the AL and other political parties of East Pakistan. The Indian leadership had communicated that the Mukti Bahini movement should not purely be an AL lead venture and that other parties should be brought in.
3. There are also dissensions within the AL itself. These pertain to plans of Fazal Haq Moni who manages to convince RAW to raise a separate militia called the Muji Bahini which works parallel to Mukti Fauj. Thus, there is a clear problem of multiple militias operating simultaneously. There are also dissensions within the exile Cabinet. The Foreign Minister Khandakar Mushtaq Ahmad in fact reaches out to Americans and does a deal with Yahya Khan behind the back of his colleagues.

By September 1971, PM Gandhi appoints a very trusted aide of hers, Durga Prasad Dhar, who was serving as the Ambassador to Soviet Union. She asks him to come and take charge of her dealings with the government in exile and to make sure that all the existent differences are resolved. Thereafter, she visits various capitals around the world to drum up support. Upon her return, Durga Prasad Dhar has created a stable platform for engagement with the provisional government. The D-day for Indian intervention is set at 4 December 1971.

### **Military Preparation: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal, Former Director CLAWS and Distinguished Fellow SAISA**

Bangladesh is a key neighbour and there are still many lessons to be learnt from the 1971 war at the strategic, political and the tactical level. Lord Mountbatten has written that he told Jinnah that his moth-eaten Pakistan will not last 25 years. Of course, this was written much after Jinnah was no more. If these words were indeed said, then they were very prophetic. Whichever way one looks at it, the 1971 war was India's finest hour. It was military history's greatest surrender since the Second World War. It was a brilliant campaign. The political leadership was very decisive. Indira Gandhi was of course known as the only woman in the Cabinet, steeped in realpolitik unlike her father. She very correctly identified the national interest and pursued it relentlessly. That is something which has been lacking in the last few decades in India's history.

In history the defeat of Macedonian Greek Generals by the Mauryan army was considered India's greatest victory. The 1971 war surpassed that victory. In the time available to me, I shall cover three key issues. Firstly, the important decision, whether to go to war right away in April 1971 or to defer fighting till a little later. Second, the synergy that was there at the political and military level. Lastly, some detail on the military preparations for war, the movements etc. There are different accounts of whether or not what Field Marshal Manekshaw had said is true. What were the reasons for asking the PM to defer the actual conduct of war to liberate East Pakistan?

First and foremost we are talking of mid-end April 1971 when this decision was debated. The monsoon was almost upon us. Bangladesh is a riverine country and resembles a large swamp during the monsoons. The tentative military planning was to conduct a multi-prong thrust into East Pakistan from several directions i.e. from the west, north, the east and of course the blockade from the sea i.e. Chittagong and the other ports. Since that was the tentative military planning, it made sense to avoid the monsoon completely. A lot of improvisation was required. Indeed, the campaign is known for it. In improvisation, the Indian army excelled all others in the 1971 campaign. There had been reports that insinuated that China might come to Pakistan's aid. The China-Pakistan friendship at that time was not like it is today. However there were clear indicators that China might come to Pakistan's aid diplomatically and politically. What kind of aid China might provide to Pakistan in a campaign against India remained unclear. Thus, for India, the prudent approach was to wait for the passes to close.

Once that happened, any kind of large scale military assistance from China was ruled out. That was the second reason for General Manekshaw to suggest that the war fighting be postponed. Time was needed for logistics preparation and that was the third reason.

The fourth reason was that the deficiencies in the holdings had to be made up. This is an old story. As the Army Chief, General Bipin Joshi had written a letter to the Prime Minister spelling out bottom line deficiency figures without which the Indian army would be unfit for war. Last year it was disclosed that General V K Singh had written a similar letter. So this is an old story which does not seem to change. We don't seem to learn the lesson. For war, those deficiencies needed to be made up and time was required. Even Babu Jagjivan Ram, the Defence Minister was opposed to postponing the war. Ultimately, the Army Chief's view prevailed and the war fighting was postponed by a few months, till after the monsoons and the passes closed.

During this time 10 million refugees came in to India from Bangladesh and Mrs Gandhi went around the world seeking assistance, but there was no help forthcoming. The famous Kissinger visit to China also happened in July 1971. Mrs Gandhi followed up with a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union in August 1971. That treaty would, by and large, address Chinese plans to assist Pakistan in a big way. With 40 Russian divisions lined up on their Northern borders, the Chinese were not going to be fool-hardy. However, this did not stop the Americans who still sent in the USS Enterprise.

There was a clear political objective in India's intervention although this is disputed by some scholars and historians. The aim was to capture sufficient territory through the multi-pronged offensives from all directions and establish the Government of Bangladesh which could then be recognised by the India. Whether there was a plan to capture Dhaka appears to be in a great deal of doubt particularly after General Jacob's very fine book. It appears there was not initially a plan to capture Dhaka i.e. to go all the way. The political leadership gave a free hand to the military leadership to plan and conduct their operations. Within the senior leadership of the Army and the Chiefs of Staff Committee, there was a very good functional relationship. This was primarily driven by the personality of General Manekshaw.

In terms of military preparation, Pakistan had one division on either side comprising four infantry brigades in East Pakistan. They very quickly air lifted two more divisions i.e. nine and sixteen. These were filled with light weapons and equipment because they had to be flown by air through a long route via Sri Lanka. Air space had been closed to Pakistan over flights since the hijacking of an Indian airline plane and its burning on the tarmac. Pakistan always believed Yahya Khan and his coterie that the defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan. Therefore, they focused on developing their offensive operations capabilities where they thought that they could take the Indians on. After the 1965 war and before the 1971 war they raised three new Corps headquarters i.e. one, two and four Corps.

Earlier they had only one corps headquarter and one of the lessons they learnt in the 1965 war was that GHQ dealing directly with divisions was not appropriate. So they had one Corps Army Reserve North (ARN) in the north, two Corps Army Reserve South (ARS) in the south (Bahawalpur area) and of course 10 Corps in the holding role. The stoppage of US military aid to Pakistan had denuded their army of considerable amount of capability. In 1965 and earlier, the US had given Pakistan M-48 tanks, F-104 star fighters and F-82 sabre jets. The spare parts were not forthcoming after the 1965 war because of the sanctions imposed by the US. This reflected in the preparations of the Pakistan army.

Overall India had 32 infantry/ mountain divisions against Pakistan's 15 divisions. However, many of the Indian divisions were deployed in the north. Some of them were pulled out. India had fairly new Vijayant tanks, 130 millimetre guns and some additions to the arsenal of the Navy and the Air Force. Some writers and scholars have mentioned ratios between India and Pakistan to the effect of 2:1. This is very favourable for victory in a short and sharp conflict. Once again, due to decisive political leadership, a well-rounded diplomatic campaign and plans drawn up by Services Headquarters, India attained a decisive military victory.

**Creation of Mukti Bahini: Lt Col Sajjad Zahir (Retd), Swadhinata Padak, Bir Protik, Project Director Bangladesh Army History project**

As a part of my research work to unearth the correct history of contribution of common people of Bangladesh in our Liberation War of 1971, I undertake trips to the remote areas of Bangladesh. While present in those areas I talk to the students of primary schools and try to inform them about history of our glorious Liberation War. I also visit the mass graves, places of genocide and talk to the families of the victims of the atrocities committed by Pakistan Army and their collaborators during the war. I try to document each and every episode as it is within my scope of my research. The new generation of Bangladesh deserves to know the history of Liberation War and about the creation of the Mukti Bahini that had immense contribution in our Liberation War. It was a force formed on the trail of genocide perpetrated by heinous elements of Pakistan Army and their collaborators. The main strength of the Mukti Bahini was their indomitable motivation and desire to free their motherland from Pakistani domination.

As students of history, we understand that history is a fascinating entertainer but a very poor teacher. Humans have hardly tried to learn lessons from history and that is one of the reasons that the aggressors end up committing horrific atrocities during all wars. The Pakistani military junta was the aggressor in 1971 and launched 'Operation Search Light' on 26 March 1971, to commit acts of genocide on the people of Bangladesh. The genocide and war crimes continued to be committed till their unconditional surrender on 16 December 1971 to the Indian and Bangladesh Forces at 1631 hours. But ever since Pakistan military and military backed civil administration has been in a state of denial about the genocide and war crimes committed by them along with their collaborators. Their historians and army officers who took part in the 1971 war in Bangladesh have largely denied the acts of genocide and war crimes. History is



known to be written by the victor but in the context of 1971, lots of books on Bangladesh Liberation War have been written by the defeatist forces commanders. A number of generals and other high ranking officials wrote books on 1971 War where they have denied the acts of genocide.

Pakistan Army, as aggressors, has repeatedly failed to achieve their aim. In 1948, they invaded Kashmir but failed to capture it. In 1965, in order to justify his illegal election and manipulation of results, President Field Marshal Ayub Khan attacked India on 3 September, 1965 to divert the attention of people of Pakistan and again failed to achieve his aim. In 1971, Pakistan Army launched a war of genocide against the people of Bangladesh who were only demanding for their democratic rights. The repeated use of military and imposition of martial law in Pakistan gave their generals the unlimited power to use the military to suppress the common people of Pakistan in both the wings. The initial resistance in 1971 against their military came in the form of the patriotic Mukti Bahini.

Pakistani historians claim that they were outnumbered during the 1971 war on both the eastern and western front. The actual situation was that in the eastern front, the troop ratio between Pakistan and Indian Army was 1:8. With the Mukti Bahini on board, the ratio became largely in favour of India and Bangladesh. However, Pakistani forces on the western front were superior in number as compared to Indian forces as they always believed that the defence of the east lies in the west. They had in total four corps including their Frontier Corps (deployed around Kashmir which had 12 brigades in its strength). For historical record, we must know that Lt. Gen. Irshad Khan was GOC of I Corps, Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan was the GOC of II Corps, and Lt. Gen. Bahadur Sher Khan was GOC of IV Corps. For confidential reasons Pakistan Army never disclosed the commander's name of the Frontier Corps. Compared to Pakistan's four corps, Indian's had three corps on the western front. These facts are known because when the genocide started in Bangladesh, I was serving in the Pakistan Army from where I managed to escape and joined the Liberation War. Pakistan Army awarded me with the highest punishment under military law in absentia. However, I had adequate information on the areas of operation which I shared with the Indian Army. Pakistan Army ensured burning of our house but as my parents and family members had taken shelter in the village, they escaped unhurt.

The mass upsurge of the people of Bangladesh mainly in March 1971 is well documented in the pages of history. Pakistan military junta and West Pakistani political leaders were refusing to hand over power to the elected representatives. On 7 March 1971, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addressed a mammoth gathering of more than a million people at Race Course Ground. He gave directives to the people of Bangladesh, "In every house, build a fort and defend yourself against the enemy with whatever you have." He, as the democratically elected undisputed leader, also directed the people to prepare to fight for their independence if they were attacked. He also said, "The struggle now will be the struggle for emancipation and independence." Prior to the historical 7 March declaration of Bangabandhu, it was largely unknown to the common people of Pakistan that on 17 January 1971 at Larkana,

Sindh, West Pakistan, a secret meeting was held between the leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, four top generals of Pakistan Army and President Gen. Yahya Khan. For members of the public, it was declared that Gen. Yahya Khan had gone to Larkana to shoot birds. A conspiracy was hatched and it was decided that power will not be handed over to the majority leader of elected parliament (Bangabandhu). But as there were inadequate troops present in East Pakistan to start an operation of genocide, secretly troops will be flown in from West Pakistan to augment their strength. In the meantime, Gen. Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto will continue their dialogue so that people of East Pakistan are not aware of their main aim. This conspiracy is known as 'Larkana Conspiracy' and was effectively followed up by the Pakistan Army.

On 26 March midnight Operation Search Light was launched. Presently many books written by Pakistani generals give their side of the story but none could effectively deny the acts of genocide committed by this operation. A close study of the operational order reflects two words which are 'Arrest' (for civilian leaders and population) and 'Disarm' (for military, para-military, police). Both the words were coded for order to kill. Mindless killing started all over Bangladesh. In Dhaka, the Rajarbag Police Line, Pilkhana East Pakistan Rifles headquarter, Dhaka University halls, Old Dhaka Hindu populated areas, Syedpur population, East Bengal Regimental Centre Chittagong, slum areas etc. were attacked which resulted in massive casualties.

At that time, in Bangladesh, there were only five battalions of East Bengal Regiment (EBR) present. Out of the battalions, 2, 4 and 8 could revolt with full strength but a part of 8 EBR was earlier sent to West Pakistan. 1 and 3 EBR were attacked unprepared and had to incur heavy losses. Out of the EBR, Major Ziaur Rahman, Major Shafiullah, Major Khaled Mosharraf, who were the senior most, started their resistance against Pakistan Army. In most of the cantonments, Bengali officers and soldiers were killed. The resistance was also being organized by about 13,000 Bengali officers and men of East Pakistan Rifles (EPR). On the backdrop of the genocide and initial resistance, on 30 March 1971, the Prime Minister of India, Shrimati Indira Gandhi declared in the Lok Sabha that Indian people and government will give assistance to the suffering humanity in Bangladesh.

With the deteriorating situation in the Bangladesh border, by the end of the month of March 1971, four officers of BSF were posted to the bordering areas who were Brigadier B C Pandey at Agartala, Col. Megha Singh at Bongaon, Col. M S Chatterjee at Balurghat and Col. Ram Pal Singh at Cooch Behar. They along with their under command BSF troops were assigned for protecting the borders, assisting the refugees coming across the border and providing support to the Mukti Bahini. After Teliapara conference, small arms and ammunitions were being provided to the members of the Mukti Bahini by the BSF.

Contact was made between Mukti Bahini and BSF of India by the end of March 1971 and limited assistance were being received from the BSF. On 1 April 1971, Bangladeshi political

leader Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed and few of the senior leaders of Awami League crossed over to India. On 7 April Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed met Shrimati Indira Gandhi in Delhi who assured support to the people of Bangladesh in their just struggle.

On 4 April 1971, a conference of all Bangladeshi senior army officers was held in the tea garden of Teliapara, Sylhet. In this conference, four operational areas were created namely Chittagong area, Comilla area, Sylhet area and South-west area each to be commanded by a senior major of the Mukti Bahini. From the Indian side, the district magistrate of Agartala Mr. Saigal and Brigadier B C Pandey of BSF attended the conference.

On 11 April 1971, proclamation of independence of Bangladesh was declared and on 17 April the Bangladesh Government was formed at Mujibnagar, Kushtia in a ceremony which was attended by large number of journalists from world over. A small cabinet was formed. Col. M A G Osmani, a retired officer from British and Pakistan Army and also member of the parliament was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of Mukti Bahini.

Youths coming from all over Bangladesh were joining the youth camps set up inside India in large numbers. The initial training upto 15 April 1971 was provided by the BSF and from 16 April the Indian Army took charge of the training and logistics of the Mukti Bahini. Mukti Bahini guerrillas used to be trained for four weeks and later he would be sent for advance leadership or other trainings as per suitability. The trained Mukti Bahini boys were sent to the Mukti Bahini camps for induction into Bangladesh. With the rise in numbers of volunteers and more trained Bengali officers coming and joining the Mukti Bahini, more camps were being set up. The training of about 500 naval commandos in phases started under the supervision on Indian and Bengali naval officials in Palashi near Bhagirathi River. Many volunteers who could not join these training camps received training inside Bangladesh which was organized by Bengali ex-military, para-military personnel. After training they also took part in operations against the Pakistan Army. In addition, after August, the EBR battalions started getting reorganized. Three new battalions were raised which were trained by Bengali officers. With the old and new battalions, three infantry brigades were formed.

On 12-17 July, a conference was held in Mujibnagar (8, Theatre Road, Calcutta) in which Bangladesh territory was marked into 11 sectors for military operation. A number of points were discussed and decisions taken to improve the capabilities of the Mukti Bahini which included training of two batches of 60 officers to be commissioned, supply of better arms and ammunitions, formation of two artillery batteries, etc. The naval commandos were put under Sector No. 10 which was under command of the C-in-C. Later, in September, with the assistance of an air force was organized with three aircrafts provided by Indian Government. A small naval force was also created with two gunboats namely BNS Padma and Palash.

Creation of the Mukti Bahini was a classic example of cooperation and display of unity between political leadership of India and Bangladesh. In the field, the harmony between Indian

forces, BSF and the Mukti Bahini was profound. Within a short duration, a large force was raised which could undertake military operations all over Bangladesh causing heavy casualties to the Pakistan Army. A volunteer force composed of very young and dutiful citizens of the country was able to strike terror in the heart of the enemy. The cooperation and harmony between Indian forces and Mukti Bahini was a landmark factor for the great victory of 1971.

### **Pre-war Operations: Brig O S Goraya (Retd) & Maj Chandrakant Singh, VrC (Retd)**

Indian Army apart from raising the Mukti Bahini, also raised the Bangladesh artillery which was called the Mujib Battery. Brig O S Goraya was the Brigade Major of the Indian regiment and drafted the operational instructions. Within two months, the battery with new recruits picked up from refugee camps, was trained as gunners in different technical fields. During training they were made to fire live ammunition on light targets into then East Pakistan. Training started in July and they were made fit for war by the end of September 1971. The Mujib Battery was made up of 3.7 inch guns transferred from two Indian regiments which were getting new equipment. This battery was later attached to Kilo force which fought in the Feni and Chittagong area. On 10 January 1972 this battery gave salute to Bangabandhu as he returned as President of Bangladesh after the liberation. Later, another two batteries were raised with 105 Italian guns.

A few operations were carried out before the actual war began on 3 Dec 1971 and were referred to as 'nibbling operations'. These included several enclaves of East Pakistan jutting into Indian territory. There were several aims mainly to cut off the enclaves and induct the newly trained Mukti Bahini into the actual war. They did a very good job and were supported by our troops from our side of the border. Another objective was to convey to the Pakistanis that we meant business. We intended to take out communication centres close to the border and draw out their forces from depth areas which otherwise would have caused trouble later. The strategy seemed to have worked as Gen Niazi pushed most of his regular troops to defend these enclaves. We wore them out before the actual war began.

Major Chandrakant was a very young officer at that time with 4 Guards but had the chance to see the unfolding scene from close quarters. When Cyclone Bhola struck Bengal, the effect was so devastating that the Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare Training School at Vairengte in Mizoram, which was 200 km inland, was totally wiped out. The fate of people in low lying areas is not hard to guess. The mishandling of relief work by Pakistan in its East Wing was the trigger that led to the immediate dissatisfaction among the local Bengali population against the ruling establishment. Meanwhile in the Mizo hills we were being subjected to the same insurgency supported, trained and funded by Pakistan from Chittagong hill tracts. By March 1971, 4 Guards was moved to Sabroom in Tripura which was opposite the East Pakistan town of Ramgarh. The biggest battle between the regular troops of the Pakistan Army and the East Bengal regiment under Major Ziaur Rahman was fought towards the end of March 1971 at Sabroom. Our unit played a supportive role here.

By end of June 1971, we were moved from Sabroom to Balonia area which sits astride the Comilla-Dhaka highway. For the next three months we interdicted their rail and road traffic. Thirty three of their heavy vehicles were knocked out and two border outposts were captured by Capt Rafiq Ullah's platoons. We suffered a few casualties including a Company Commander, Major Chauhan. We were pulled back to Agartala where 18 Rajput commanded by Col Ashok Verma fought two border operations, first one at Dharmagarh and the second one at Mukundpur. The later one was a major success.

Another major operation was on the enclave in Chandrapur. Capt J C Sharma was the FO and the Company Commander was Lt Aziz from the Mukti Bahini. Unfortunately the attack did not succeed. 19 Punjab Regiment, which was kept on standby, sent in a company commanded by Major Grewal. He was severely wounded and later succumbed to his injuries. However, the enclave was captured with the attack supported by 59 Mountain and 28 medium batteries and one light battery from 82 Light Regiment. In this battle eleven soldiers of 19 Punjab were martyred and twenty three soldiers were wounded. The enemy had sixteen casualties. This denotes the intensity of the fighting. Chandrapur was later deliberately vacated as part of operational planning.

Another major operation was at Dhalai. It was a small town opposite Kamalpur and was surrounded by tea estates and gave depth to Kamalpur. On 26 October 1971, one full battalion of Mukti Bahini launched an attack but unfortunately it failed. When Gen Sagat Singh learnt of it, he tasked 61 Brigade commanded by Brig S D S Yadav to capture the objective. He wanted to ensure success, as a failure at the start of war would not have been good for morale. Two companies of 2 Jat achieved partial success after going through the tea estate, but were later pushed back by heavy shelling. Brig Yadav moved forward to control the battle but unfortunately was wounded. Subsequently a company of Rajputana Rifles was pressed in. success proved elusive however, though the company managed to extricate the brigade commander. There were significant casualties on both sides. This was one battle where the Pakistani Army put in their best.

### **Personal Anecdotes and Interactive Session**

- Delay in war fighting (Gen Jacob): Manekshaw was being pushed by the Government to move in. He kept on pushing me to move in. He asked for a brief. It was sent by hand by Brigadier Seyta. The brief was read out by Manekshaw to Mrs Gandhi and her ministers. Mrs Gandhi accepted it. That's the fact.
- Capture of Dhaka (Gen. Jacob): P C Ram in his book, *My Years in the IAS*, says categorically the Dhaka was never an objective. It was to be only limited operations to take territory and establish a Bangladesh in exile. He also mentions that there was no coordination in service headquarters. Each service did what it thought was best.

- Operation at Boira (Gen Jacob): There was an incursion. Pakistan army moved a squadron of tanks, battalion and infantry. We went to 63 Cavalry and got their tanks and machine guns and awaited their assault. I saw a squadron of tanks being lined up. All 14 tanks were taken down by 63 Cavalry.
- Battle of Mukundpur (Maj Gen Ashok K Verma): This was a complete success. The 13 Frontier Force was holding a post about 15 km south of Agartala. The technique adopted by 18 Rajput, the battalion I was commanding was to overtake by stealth. We surround the post and pounded it for seven hours with artillery and mortar till it got to a point where we could assault it and run through it. We had two casualties when some soldiers got out of their foxholes. Mukundpur was a complete reversal of what had happened, a little while ago at Dhalai.

## **SESSION II: The Operations**

### **Role of Mukti Bahini: Lt Col Sajjad Zahir (Retd), Swadhinata Padak, Bir Protik, Project Director, Bangladesh Army History Project**

1971 was a turning point in the history of the sub-continent. One of the key players in the history of 1971 War was the Mukti Bahini. They were the main strength of the resistance and their inexorable motivation was a key factor for the Mitra Bahini for winning the War of 1971. According to KF Rustamji, the first Director General of Border Security Force (BSF) of India, "Mukti Bahini lacked everything for carrying on the fight except the will and courage to fight." Similarly, in his book 'Witness to Surrender', Major (later Brigadier) of Pakistan Army, Siddiq Salik wrote about the Mukti Bahini, "Their sabotage inventory included damage to, or destruction of, 231 bridges, 122 railway lines and 90 electric installations. They could not reach this figure without a high degree of motivation. Here is an example of their spirit. A Bengali lad was arrested in Rohanpur area (Rajshahi District) in June 1971, for an attempted act of sabotage. He was brought to the company headquarter for interrogation but refused to divulge any information. When all other methods failed, Major 'R' put his sten-gun on his chest and said, this is the last chance for you. If you don't co-operate, the bullets will pierce through your body. The lad bowed down, kissed the ground, stood up and said, I am ready to die, now. My blood will certainly hasten the liberation of my sacred land." Siddiq Salik further writes, "It was not an easy job for the army to stamp out insurgents so sophisticated in technique and so highly motivated."

The Mukti Bahini was formed on the night of 25 March when Pakistan Army launched 'Operation Search Light' – the operational order to conduct genocide. The initial resistance was put up by the five battalions of the East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles, Police, Ansars, students and people from all walks of life. With meagre arms and ammunition, they started resisting the Pakistan Army. Due to the genocide being committed by Pakistan Army, large number of people started crossing over the border and going to India to save their lives.

The number of refugees rose to 98,98,852 who were distributed in 826 camps. This was resulting in huge financial and administrative pressure on the Indian Government.

Initially the logistics required by Mukti Bahini were provided by the BSF. Colonel (later General) M.A.G. Osmani, Commander-in-Chief of the Mukti Bahini used to mention that the first friend of Bangladesh was the BSF. From 1 April 1971, Mukti Bahini was gradually being organised and trained by the BSF out of the civilians who had reported to the refugee and youth camps in the border areas. In the meantime, the resistance by the Bengali Army, EPR and population started causing sizeable casualties to the Pakistan Army in different areas of Bangladesh including Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Pabna, Comilla, Jessore, Rangpur and other areas. After the initial resistance, Mukti Bahini was forced to withdraw to the Indian side along the border. Mass killings, brutal atrocities and destruction of properties continued to be carried out by the Pakistan Army.

By mid-April of 1971, Pakistani troops fanned out to different parts of the country and with additional troops arrived from West Pakistan, they started taking position along the Indian border. Three infantry divisions were in position and later two more infantry divisions were raised which put the Pakistan Army in a secure position for conducting their operations. The BSF had limited capabilities and resources available to them for taking care of the security situation along the border and for the training of the Mukti Bahini. As such, a decision was taken by the Government of India that the Indian Army would step in the border areas and take over the border security of West Bengal area by 30 April and Assam (including Meghalaya) and Tripura by 1 May. The BSF came under the operational control of the Army and the 'Operation Jackpot' was launched. The Mukti Bahini training also became the responsibility of the Army and training camps were established along the border areas.

The Mukti Bahini, after initial training and equipping itself, started conducting numerous operations deep inside Bangladesh causing heavy casualties on the Pakistan Army. The Bangladesh Army was initially organised with three infantry brigades and two artillery batteries. After rigorous training, a small Air Force and Navy were formed with the help of Indian Air Force and Navy. In addition, Bangladesh was divided into 11 Mukti Bahini sectors, where mainly the newly trained Mukti Bahini members were posted under the leadership of trained army/air force officers and they continued their operations. A force of nearly 500 naval commandos were trained and put under Sector No 10. The naval commandos were successful in destroying the Pakistan forces river and seagoing vessels and thus disrupting their logistic route. The Indian Army also started conducting operations along the border belt areas with support and cooperation of Mukti Bahini and local people. Guerrilla activities by Mukti Bahini members were conducted in Dhaka and other parts of the country that was posing a challenge to the Pakistan Army. On 3 December 1971, after Pakistan Air Force attacked ten Indian airfields, the war between Indian and Pakistan started. During this war, there were many incidents which crowd the pages of history and many are not yet documented.

Some of the incidents on contribution of common people which come to my mind are as follows:

- On 7 December 1971, the 4/5 GR under 59 Mountain Brigade of 8 Mountain Division, crossed the Surma River and landed in Mirapara, near Sylhet town, in a classic

heliborne operation. During a fierce fight with 31 Punjab Regiment of Pakistan Army under their 202 Brigade. Major Ian Cardozo, Second-in-Command of the 4/5 GR, was critically wounded and lost his leg. The villagers of Mirapara came to know that a local collaborator of Pakistan Army, namely Amin Choudhury, having seen the helicopters landing rode off on his motorcycle and informed the matter to Pakistan Army commander, Brigadier M. Salimullah (Commander 202 Brigade). Brig. Salimullah sent two companies of 31 Punjab Regiment under the command of Lt. Col. Sarfaraz, who tried to intercept the Gurkhas near the landing pad resulting in the Gurkhas suffering 13 killed and 35 wounded. The village people were unforgiving on Amin Choudhury for collaborating with Pakistan Army. They beat Amin Choudhury to death that very night, shouting that he was a traitor to have helped the enemy against the Mitra Bahini who were fighting for Bangladesh. This incident reflected the emotion and motivation of the common people of Bangladesh in 1971.

- During the helidrop operation of Akhaura and paradrop operation in Tangail, the Indian Army, Mukti Bahini and common people in the villages stood beside each other and brought success. Captain Peter of 2 Para under 50 Para Brigade was sent for reconnaissance 60 km inside Bangladesh to select a landing site which he successfully conducted with assistance of the local villagers and Mukti Bahini. When the paradrop took place, Mukti Bahini provided maximum support and cooperation to the Para Battalion. The successful Para Battalion operation broke the morale of the Pakistan Army and hastened their surrender.
- Brigadier Sant Singh, Commander FJ Sector, marched to Mymensingh with 6 Bihar Regiment, 93 BSF Battalion and 15,000 members of Mukti Bahini. After the capture of Mymensingh on 14 December 1971, he marched to Dhaka without any vehicles. The common people of the villages provided them rickshaws, vans, trucks, buses and ensured that the troops reach Dhaka by early morning hours of 16 December 1971.
- In the early hours of 16 December, the Pakistan Army and Mitra Bahini were facing each other in Dhaka, the balance of forces were heavily tilted towards Pakistan Army in Dhaka. They had a total 26,500 soldiers and Indian Army had barely 2,000 soldiers. Incidentally, on the 11 April evening, the Chief of Staff of Eastern Command, in a meeting of senior officers of Pakistan Army in the command post of Niazi, suggested that they should prepare and launch street to street fight in Dhaka city with their 26,500 soldiers. Major General Mohammad Jamshed Khan, Commander of 36 Infantry Division, who was a senior and experienced commander, said that he was of the opinion that street to street fight in Dhaka city will bring a disaster to the Pakistan Army as every home in Dhaka has more than 2-3 armed Muktis. They will attack the Pakistan Army from three sides and Indian Army will attack them from the front. As such, the plan of street to street fight was abandoned. This was the level of frustration and lack of determination of Pakistan Army.

Indian Army made very heavy sacrifices for the success in the war. They were not an invading Army but a liberator Army. It was a war conducted for freedom of people from genocide and atrocities. It is known that Pakistan Army commanders believe that defence of the east lay in the west. Pakistan Army had mobilised more forces on the western sector as they felt that they would be able to defeat the Indian Army in the western sector which would affect the war in the east. The Pakistan Army had four corps in western front (Frontier Corps, I Corp, IV Corps and



II Corps), whereas, Indian Army had three corps (XV Corps, I Corp and XI Corps). Yet, they could not bring success in the battlefronts in western front also. It is important for us to study and document the history of 1971. The sharpest memories of our experience of working together have already started to fade but yet we have to recollect the memories and document them. It is the people who had witnessed the bloody struggle can give the best evidence, it is the brave who make history, and it is the brave who can also write real history as it takes courage to write the truth, the whole truth.

### **Role of Air Force: Wg Cdr Vinod Neb, VrC\* (Retd)**

The dimension that is not seen is generally ignored. The dimension in this context is the third dimension called the Air Force. Air Force is very quick, precise and decisive. The Indian Air Force was deployed all around Bangladesh. There were three mixed squadrons, four Hunters squadrons, three Gnat squadrons, one Sukhoi, and a Canberra at Gorakhpur having a joint headquarters with the Eastern Command. Pakistan had, at that point of time, only one squadron in East Pakistan. This kind of overwhelming superiority was required as the Army had to be supported in the close air support role. The time available to the Indian Air Force was limited and it had to meet its objectives within that span of time. This was another reason why such kind of forces was deployed.

There were also various aspects of the air warfare. There were Fighter operations, Bomber operations, Transport and Heliborne operations. Coordination of operations was a major challenge but the job was very well done. The Indian Air Force got down to achieving a series of objectives and it did so effectively and on time, achieving air superiority on the first day itself. This was not an easy task but nevertheless the IAF accomplished it. The PAF was denied the use of their aircraft and though they did manage to repair some and tried to operate in a guerrilla fashion, this too was short-lived. Thereafter, there was no enemy air power over East Pakistan.

As far as personal experiences go, I was stationed at Hasimara. It was on the morning of 4 December 1971 that the first strike was carried out by 37 Squadron led by the then Wing Commander SK Kaul and his No. 2 Flying Officer Harish Masand. They had gone to strike Tezgaon and were returning; we were to follow five minutes later. In the time and space we were near the initial point just short of Dhaka, I saw two Hunter aircraft returning and three Sabres behind them. In my formation on the right side was Lele, the leader, on his right was Buster Bains. I was the deputy leader and was on the left, and to my left was Bajwa. We were to strike Kurmitola. We turned into the enemy aircraft, but for some strange reason, Lele did not turn hard enough, I crossed over him in the shortest moment, the sabre aircraft split into 2 and 1. Having turned there, the one that stayed behind Lele and Bains managed to hit Bains drop tank. I thought that his aircraft had been hit and caught fire, and hence asked him to eject. Soon however, I realised that his aircraft was not on fire but the fuel was streaming from the drop tank, so I cancelled my last transmission and asked him to carry on with the mission by just dropping his tanks. I got involved with the other two aircraft in scissors, in other words got into a dog fight with them. After three scissors I realised that I was losing in horizontal fight.

Hunters were well known for manoeuvring in horizontal plain in Indian Air Forces' inventory. At that point in time I failed to realise that the Sabre is far superior to us in turning and the advantage that I had over the enemy fighter soon started fading away. I realised then that it was not possible to win in horizontal fight. In the meantime, the guy who was firing on me head on had ball ammunition. I knew it would not do much damage to me, but at this time my fire warning light came on and I had to throttle back. Even after carrying out the procedures to check the power of the aircraft, the fire warning light did not go away. I then decided to head for the aircraft which was coming onward. Because both time and fuel were short, I projected my belly towards him; as he was coming down onto me, I was going up. The enemy Sabre aircraft did not know that I could see him, and probably thought that I would collide with him on a head on mode. So the sabre pilot rolled to his left and I just followed him, got behind him and got him thereafter. The game was over within a matter of 15-20 seconds.

Having withdrawn from the area of the fight, I was low on fuel to go back all the way. There was a place called Roopsie in our territory, and I asked the base for direct landing. Upon landing, I realised that I had no fuel at all. Anything extra that I would have done would have destroyed a serviceable aircraft. Thinking back, all actions were taken in the nick of time for which we were able to recover. After this, we went back and were deployed at Kumbhigram. From Kumbhigram we were told clearly that we had to support the Army. I carried out a number of missions and I am going to talk of a few which are of relevance and will connect with the Army because they did achieve something great in that area. In Comilla, when I was striking, we were quite a distance from the base that we were to strike and were given a target which had a 'Black Top'. For the first time, we were happy with GLO for being able to explain the target so vividly. We went overhead, orbited and fired on the black top building. But what happened was just a big hole. Subsequently, in the orbit, I picked up another black top building, which was on the west side and not on the east side of the railway line. Having finished my rockets, I was left with only guns. So I looked for ventilators in the hope that if I put a couple of rounds through them, the damage would be done. There were ventilators at the ground level and I made a pass towards the town side, and fired the first shot which however was well off the target. In the next attempt, however, I managed to put two or three rounds inside the ventilator and the entire building exploded into a huge ball of fire. This happened to be an ammunition dump! This definitely helped the Army because it was probably their main dump. At Comilla, in the northern area, they had massive POL dump in the cantonment area. Unfortunately, it was marked with a Red Cross. This was supposed to be the target. With a little bit of hesitation, I forgot all that has been taught and put in the rounds. Subsequently, it was found out, that it was purely a dump. The other two relevant sorties where I did achieve a lot were in the Chittagong Tracks where I assisted the Brigade stationed there to achieve their objectives. The enemy was on a hillock, with two gun positions on the top and bunkers on the eastern side of the hill. We destroyed these two positions and thereafter were left with front gun ammunition which we sprayed along the side of the bunker. The objective of the Army was achieved very easily after that. Much later I was to learn that a person who survived that attack was Major Musharraf who was into ISI activity assisting the Mizos. He later became the Army Chief and also ruled Pakistan!

On 12 December 1971, I moved to Hasimara and was operating from a different theatre altogether. While operating out of Hasimara, on the second sortie, on the 14th morning when

returning from a close support operation to the army, I saw a very unique aircraft, looked like an Otter, but painted grey without any markings and no insignia. It was neither an Indian Air Force nor a Pakistan aircraft. While orbiting over this aircraft, I was not very sure whether to take on the aircraft or not, as Group Captain Chandan Singh used to fly a similar aircraft. Due to lack of information, I decided not to engage and returned to base. Thereafter at debrief, I was informed by the GLO that it was Gen Niazi's plane. The General would use that aircraft, land on the road, and then have the aircraft pushed under the trees for cover! This was something which I should have never ever missed in my life. This was the one that got away!

The high point of the Air Force action came when information was received that a meeting was to take place at the Governor's house and the time given to us to act was only one hour. This included the 40 minutes of flying time from Guwahati and Hasimara from where we were operating. Nevertheless, the formation reached Governor's house and we struck one hour late. The meeting was however still in progress and the rockets fired were spot on target on the Governor's house. This proved to be the proverbial last straw which broke the camel's back.

### **Role of Navy: Cmde Ranjit B Rai (Retd)**

The Navy is a silent service and its stellar role in the 1971 war in the East needs telling. A few hundred Indian naval sailors and divers were secretly whisked in to the Bengal Army area at Plassey to join and train Bangla swimmers who were excellent watermen for raids in to East Pakistan. Many Naval officers and sailors undertook such raids along with the Mukti Bahini but their exploits being secret were not recorded. The touching brave exploits of Lt Cdr JK Roy Choudhry VrC (Roy now living modestly on his VrC pension in Lebong near an Army station) and Lt Cdr Ashok Roy VrC (Aku Roy, a POW missing in action in an Alize loss in December 1971) are touching but never touted by the Indian Navy or the many who did the Navy proud.

I was in Bombay on INS Nilgiri under final stages of construction of the new powerful India's first Leander at Mazagon Docks Ltd (MDL) as second in command with no Captain yet. Lt Cdr Madhvendra Singh (Madhu) who later rose to be the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) was Nilgiri's Gunnery Officer. He was the son of late Maj Gen Bhagwati Singh of Kashmir fame. We were told around end June to get the ship ready for a possible war. CMD MDL Rear Admiral Chippy Samson and Naval Architect goaded us to work overtime and work picked up with dedicated workmen and Navy's Warship Overseeing Teams (WOT) and Warship Production Superintendent (WPS), not written about. The Indian Army too was fantastic, as many of us saw it getting ready for war, when we went to Devlali to train on the Tiger Cat SAM with a famous naval aimer Leading Seaman Chand, who shot down three British drone targets in INS Nilgiri's trials off Singapore.

On night of 4th December 1971, Madhu and I were on night watch in the Maritime Operations Room (MOR) in INS Angre in Mumbai when the signal "ANGAR" was received from the Osa Missile boats K25 indicating that Karachi had been struck. Vice Admiral SN Kohli, later CNS was ecstatic when he arrived in the MOR to announce the sinking of PNS Khaibar and Muhafiz by the Killers and a missile hit on Kemari oil tanks to the world media. However, it was Wing Commander Don Conquest of the IAF with 4 OCU Hunters from Jamnagar with new drop tanks who had by total happenstance set the Karachi oil tanks on fire early on 4th December

morning. This author researched and unearthed this fact 34 years after the war. On 8th December Lt Cdr Jerath (INS Vinash) hit the tanks on Kemari with his first Styx missile and set the tanks on fire, when the Pakistanis had just doused the flames. The IAF Canberras had claimed the hit which actually landed on the Naval Dockyard Landing jetty at Karachi that evening and killed a Naval Lt and some sailors and workmen and a memorial has been erected on the site for the Shuhudas.

In the 1971 war for the Indian Navy, INS Vikrant Task Force, divers and volunteers played a stellar role in the East. The Navy was lucky to have the divers and Marcos (marine commandos), because with the help of Mukti Bahini, they sank twenty-six ships and some 200,000 tons of enemy shipping to throttle and disable the East. While the Indian Air Force was looking after one squadron plus of the Pakistan Air Force Sabres, the Indian Navy was playing hell in Cox's bazaar, Chittagong, Khulna and such areas from INS Vikrant, which ship the Western fleet did not want in its order of battle (ORBAT). In July, Vikrant had developed boiler problem. She had lost speed. Subsequently, Vikrant was told to go to the East coast because the Western Fleet Commander, Rear Admiral Chandy Kuruvilla opined that "the Pakistani Daphne submarines would sink Vikrant".

The Vikrant operated off the Andamans with recalled experienced pilots. To deceive the enemy, FOC-in-C East, Vice Admiral N Krishnan, a brilliant tactician with a DSO in the Second World War, generated signals with Vikrant call sign to indicate that the air craft carrier was off Vishakhapatnam. This was the beginnings of Information Warfare in the Indian Navy to divert Pakistan and it worked.

By October end the Eastern fleets INS Vikrant, Brahmaputra and Beas and patrol craft were operating off the Eastern coast while Vikrant was in the Andaman Islands and the pilots were all raring to go. The two Brahmaputra class ships were commanded by Captain Awati and Commander Ramdas. Foxtrot class submarine INS Khanderi was commanded by Roy Milan. There were also LSTs INS Magar, Guldar and Gharial. The IN ingeniously converted INS Magar into a tanker which was used for fuelling all the ships including Vikrant which drank fuel. Outside Vishakhapatnam, there were INS Rajput (Lt Cdr Inder Singh), Akshay, Panvel and Pulicat). For the Pakistan's Eastern fleet, there were PNS Rajshahi, Jassore, Comilla and Sylhet, and Rear Admiral Shariff was in Command, with four merchantmen. As such, they never came out to meet the Indian Navy blockade and fought in riverine operations like Op Barisal, hunting for Mukti Bahini. The PNS Rajshahi heroically escaped the blockade after the war and sneaked in to Malaysia with a deck full of Pakistani troops and naval personnel. In November 1971, PN sailed PNS Ghazi (ex USS Diablo) transferred from the US Navy on lease to Pakistan strictly for training. She was due for a refit.

The story before the war was that the Eastern fleet, which was formed in September 1971 was taken over by Rear Admiral Sharma only in October of the same year, to work up the ships on Flag Ship – INS Vikrant (Capt Suraj Prakash). Bengali DNI Cmde MK Roy at NHQ got hold of Bangladeshi sailors and deserted Daphne submarine crew from France with help of the Indian Embassy and got them over and they disclosed details about the Pakistan Navy. The Bangladeshis like the Mukti Bahini helped the Indian Navy when they were staying at a safe house with the Indian Navy in Delhi. In my view, the gates of our memories of Mukti Bahini will

never close given their contribution in India's war to liberate East Pakistan. Deep in our hearts they must stay.

When the war began in the East, the fleet commander and commanding officers opened their sealed orders, rehearsed battle drills earnestly, briefed their command teams and spoke to their men for that ultimate in command – drive your ship to near death, deliver deadly blows and come away if you can, unscathed. It was near midnight on 4th December when INS Rajput sighted a suspicious disturbance resembling a periscope whilst on patrol off Visakhapatnam and attacked the spot with depth charges. A loud under-water explosion followed which was heard and experienced by the coastal battery and residents of Visakhapatnam, accompanied by a flash from the disturbed sea. The ship continued with her mission little realising that her depth-charge attack had in some way led to the sinking of PNS Ghazi. Two fisher men recovered a life raft and they were given Rs 500 each, and naval divers went down and brought the log book and the diaries. Thereafter, the defence minister, Shri Jagjivan Ram was given ocular proof as he demanded and announced in the Indian Parliament that Indian Navy has sunk PNS Ghazi, to thumping. Regrettably, INS Khukri was sunk by the PNS Hangor under Cdr Md Tasnim, later VCNS of Pakistan.

On 4 December 1971, the Indian Navy started hammering Cox's Bazaar airfield. The first sortie, flown by a bevy of the finest pilots - Gigi Gupta, Gulab Israni, Ash Sinha, Fido Sharma. Mike Bhada and AK Mehra as section leaders, drew blood. The anti-aircraft gunfire was braved and much damage done to the airfield. Upon the return of the flight, when the fighter controller reported all eight contacts on the radar screen, the ship's company of INS Vikrant went mad with cheer and happiness and received their pilots. They then began to turn around and re-arm their aircraft. From 5 December 1971 to 8 December 1971, the battleground was now fully in East Pakistan and the Mukti Bahini forces moved in complete concert with the Indian Army in the East and liberated areas in Bangladesh and entered Balmonirghat.

In the meantime, sortie after sortie were mounted from INS Vikrant. Areas to the west of Khulna, Mongla and Chalna saw naval aerial attacks and a warning was issued that only a white flag would save lives on ships and shore bases. The Chief of the Naval Staff was pleased with the progress of the war and made the famous signal to the Navy – Personal from CNS, good shooting, well done. Hit hard and keep on hitting. Pilots gained combat experience and confidence as they were seen to choose targets carefully. At Mongla, the air-strike was received with heavy anti-aircraft fire from gun positions on river banks and from anti-aircraft guns mounted on Pakistani gun-boats. Two guns were silenced and heavy strafing was attempted wherever gunfire emanated. At Khulna, anti-aircraft fire spat forth from batteries and from the merchant ships, which had to be silenced. On the Pussur River, which is a tributary of the Ganges, the port wireless station, the lifeline for Pakistan naval communication was put out of action and when the merchant ship Ondarda fired anti-aircraft fire, the Seahawks went from her and sent her to the bottom of the sea with their rocket attacks.

Around 8 December 1971, three boats of Force Alpha under Cdr MN Samant in INS Panvel, the Padma and Palash in concert with the Mukti Bahini entered into Bangladesh with BSF craft Chitragada which set sail from Calcutta. They were advised to display a yellow bunting cloth, four feet by four feet square on the ship's bridge top to avoid being strafed by the Indian Air

Force and Indian Navy planes and to fly a yellow flag. They departed Hasnabad from the Indian side and arrived at Akram point to enter the Pussur River. At around 2 am they saw two merchant ships on radar trying to escape. The ships were out of range of the Bofors 40/60 mm but the reporting led to the capture of Anwar Baksh and Baqir carrying Baluchi troops and families to Karachi when they reached the open seas and the famous story of Lt Cdr Raz Bajaj killing a soldier on board Anwar Baksh. Upon reaching Mongla and Chalna early morning and while nearing Khulna in single column, a formation of IAF Gnats appeared overhead and began to pull up for a diving run. No one realised the snafu that the yellow bunting was helping the IAF Gnats to aim better on otherwise camouflaged boats. When all hell broke loose and their ammunition meant for the Pakistanis was now lashed on Sammy's force, Roy Chou, seeing his boat Padma subjected to another strafing decided to beach his boat and ordered 'abandon ship'. When contacted, Lt Gen JFR Jacob commenting on this incidence of Blue on Blue fire by Gnats, said that the Panvel task force had crossed the Bomb Line, thrusting blame on Samant. Lt Cdr Roy Chou grounded his boat, most of his crew was killed and he was badly injured in his leg. He was picked up by Panvel and sent to MH Calcutta with Mitra.

Lt Gen Niazi had lost the war in his mind as early as 6 December 1971, just four days into the war. By 12 December 1971 he had given up all hope of any help from outside. Along with naval attacks on Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong, efforts on Barisal were also kept up. Alizes went into the area with moonlight conditions but no movement of ships was observed in Tetuha, Bighai and Bisukali rivers in the Barisal area. The Tigers 300 Squadron were luckier and in their second wave of six Seahawks in the Barisal, Bakarganj and Patuawali areas they located and destroyed three enemy barges laden with troops, arms and equipment, in addition to attacking Pakistani troop concentrations and gun positions. The hard-pressed Pakistani troops looked to escape by any means. All riverine craft were pressed into service and merchant ships too were used to escape. The interception of a merchant ship named Azul Hasan Maru near the entrance to the Pusur River proved to be the most dramatic. The ship was actually Anwar Baksh, a 7,235-ton Pakistan merchant ship and carried hundreds of six foot tall Pathan soldiers posing as labourers. A boarding party of 18 under Lt Cdr Raz Bazaz of INS Beas boarded the ship. When he discovered the ship's actual crew, he relayed that his 18-man boarding party was too small to physically contain such a large number of soldiers. He heard an alarm from an Indian Naval sentry that a Pakistani soldier was trying to attack him. Armed with a light machine gun, Raz Bazaz went forward and there found the mob in frenzy ready to attack. He warned them to be silent and behave. When they threatened him, he fired a shot in the air but seeing the leader of the mob lead an assault, he opened up rapid fire and just two feet from him the leader fell in a pool of blood. Courage and timely action brought the situation under control and all crew were taken prisoner. Raz Bazaz remained an unsung hero, a modest man who kept a low profile and hence was not even mentioned in dispatches. Hindsight is great sight and large mouths did comment that he should have avoided the killings. Raz Bazaz has since left the Navy, like Lt Cdr Roy Choudhry VrC only after 13 years of service when they were not promoted to retain pride.

On 9 December 1971, the Army Chief as Chairman Chiefs of Staff suggested a landing operation to prevent the escape of Pakistani Army stragglers. This was code named Operation Beaver and entailed landing of one company of 1/3 Gurkha Rifles, two companies of 11 Bihar, 881 Light Battery and ASC and medical platoons under Brig SS Rai in south of Cox's Bazaar

in East Pakistan. The execution of the operation left much to be desired. NHQ planned 12 December 1971 as the D day, and the Chief of Staff, Eastern Command, Maj Gen JFR Jacob took charge and nominated the beach from his Second World War experience. Unknown to many, the beach had a sand bar. The biggest Landing Ship Tank, INS Magar was acting as a make shift tanker for INS Vikrant so two other smaller LSTs INS Garial and Guldar were nominated to ferry the infantry. The troops were cramped and shipped at Calcutta on a merchant ship MV Vishwa Vijay. During the transfer in Calcutta, Maj Mastana, AMC slipped and drowned. The transfer of troops to Gharial and Guldar at sea though was brilliantly accomplished by the Indian Navy. However, the date of landing kept changing, the arrival of the ships on the beach was late and tide was rising. The INS Gharial (Lt Cdr Shorty Sharma) got bogged down in the sand bar near the beachhead. The ill-trained Gurkhas first landed in to the deep bar with heavy 85 lbs weight on their shoulders and three drowned, and two were saved and operation stopped till a rope was passed ashore by Cdr R P Bhalla. A half-hearted landing of some 170 personnel followed and luckily there was no opposition.

The Navy's war in the East contributed in great measure to the Army and Air Force effort to achieve victory in thirteen days. Its air power also operated with IAF and parts of the 80,000 strong Mukti Bahini. Information warfare ensured PNS Ghazi sank. These are the lessons and recollection of 1971. No one individual but jointness triumphed, but the concept of CDS and Jointness has been lost on the Government for partisan interests and speaks poorly of the Nations' war ethos.

### **Operations in North and West Bangladesh: Maj Gen LS Lehl, PVSM, Vrc (Retd)**

I was GOC 20 Mountain Division, part of 33 Corps which was commanded by Lt Gen ML Thapan. 33 Corps, headquartered in Siliguri, was responsible for operations in the North-Western Sector of East Pakistan. This sector consisted of the important districts of Rangpur, Dinajppur, Bogra, Pabna and Rajshahi and covered approximately one third of East Pakistan. As far as the operation plan went, after much iteration, it was decided that 20 Mountain Division would launch the major offensive of 33 Corps along axes Dinajpur-Rangpur and Dinajpur-Bogra. After capturing initial objectives, we would head for the North-South Line of Rangpur-Bogra as and when operations progressed. To accomplish my task, in addition to the integral complement of 202, 165 and 66 Mountain Brigades, I had been allotted 340 Mountain Brigade Group and 471 Engineer Brigade. 71 Mountain Brigade would also form part of our offensive plan, however directly under command HQ 33 Corps.

Accordingly, in November 1971 we had moved to our Concentration Area in the Balurghat Bulge and my Brigades deployed opposite Dinajpur-Hilli-Jaipur Hat ready to head towards our objective at the appointed time. The Army Commander, Lt Gen JS Aurora visited my Division on 12 November 1971 and expressed his desire to visit 202 Brigade, which was deployed opposite Hilli. Upon reaching the Brigade location and being briefed about their tasks, he was not very impressed with the tasking for the Brigade. While leaving he made it clear, that in the event of an attack, only one battalion would be used and no tanks would be available. Subsequently, when I instanced the 1965 War and the importance of armour, he permitted use of armour, however only if the enemy attacked first.

I briefed the Corp Commander about what had transpired between me and the Army Commander, whereupon he told me not to take any action, and invited me to the Corps HQ to discuss the issue. So the next day I went to Siliguri where Gen Thapan started dictating a Brigade attack to me. He however made it clear that, in case the attack failed, both he and I would be hanged! The Battle for Hilli was without doubt one of the bloodiest battles fought in the Eastern Sector. In all fairness it must be mentioned here that Hilli was well defended by 4 Frontier Force of Pakistan Army, a fact we did not know at that time, and would consequently learn after repeated efforts to capture the heavily fortified Hilli failed in a struggle that raged from 24 November to 11 December.

Let me recount the first battle encounter of the Division which was basically the attempt to capture Hilli on 22/23 November 71 by 8 Guards of 202 Brigade. This was fought before the actual hostilities began in December. 8 Guards, under command Lt Col Shamsheer Singh, commenced the attack on Morapara (Hilli) on night November 22/23 at around 0130 Hours. Despite strong opposition from enemy defences, the Battalion gained a foothold and suffered heavy casualties in bunker-to-bunker fighting. 2/Lt Shamsheer Singh Samra, leading one of the platoons, was hit by machine gun fire. He assaulted the enemy position by throwing a grenade, when he was hit again and died with a second grenade still in his hand. Lance Naik Ram Ugrah Pandey, another Guardsman, was also successful in clearing two bunkers. When attempting to clear a third bunker with a rocket launcher, he was shot down by enemy fire and died on the spot. Both were awarded Maha Vir Chakras (MVC). The CO himself was awarded the third MVC for exemplary personal bravery during this daring, though unsuccessful attack, in which the battalion lost 60 soldiers, including four officers, which included most of the company commanders. Many more were wounded. Let me highlight some of our failings. One important issue was we had no integral artillery with 20 Mountain Division and so our artillery effort was inadequate, though we had been allotted two regiments from 27 Division. Another matter was we did not know the enemy strength because of insufficient intelligence from aerial reconnaissance. As for armour, the tanks were bogged down in the slushy approach to the enemy post and thus were effectively useless in this operation. Thus came to end the first encounter of the 1971 War for our Division in which 8 Guards became heroes!

### **Crossing the Meghna: Helicopters and Boats: Maj Chandrakant Singh, VrC (Retd) and Wing Cdr Unni Kartha (Retd)**

The game changer which brought about the final surrender was the heli borne crossing of the Meghna which Gen.Sagat conjured out of nowhere. To put into context, about 12-14 helicopters of 110 and 105 Helicopter Squadron had been allotted to 4 Corps for casualty evacuation because we did not have a base hospital nearby. Gen Sagat sought permission from Eastern Command to use these helicopters for heli borne operation anywhere. Eventually, he was given permission for the heli lift of one company of infantry for any special operation. Eastern Command, Army HQ and the Air Force HQ wanted a plan for heliborne operations before they were committed to the task, but Gen Sagat was of the view that their use would depend on the operational situation and could not be pre-determined. Eventually, Gen Sagat used the helicopters in an unconventional manner, moving six thousand men by



helicopters over the Meghna River in in over 350 sorties; a unique feat indeed in the annals of military history.

The battle was fought in about five phases – the crossing of the Meghna. In the Phase-I, from 1-5 December 1971 was the capture of Akhaura, which means punching hole in the outer defenses of the Pakistanis. 18 Rajput, 10 Bihar and my battalion was involved in that. This was the only divisional level battle that was fought in the eastern theater where the entire divisional artillery was used. Although we were promised close air support, Gen. Verma and my close friends from Artillery 65 and 59 division, it was the Pakistani Sabres that attacked us on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3 December 1971. The unfortunate aspect is that there was utter lack of coordination in the higher levels as there was no close air support inspite of the promises. My company suffered the most because we had crossed over to the Pakistani side and we could not carry anti-tank munitions with us. Further, instead of our PT-76 tanks, the Pakistani PT-76 that turned up and started firing upon us. Fortunately, three of those Pakistani PT-76 tanks were captured in serviceable condition and used them against the Pakistanis.

On 3 December 1971, one of our RCLs was brought up by 18 Rajput and then taken over by us. As an infantry man who had seen a tank attack. It is a fearsome sight. 65 Mountain Regiment had a artillery OP with my company. However, after its wireless operator got killed we were left with no artillery support because we were out of range. But by 5 December 1971 the first line was captured and then we were told to clear an area at Ashuganj going southwards. We led an ambush in the Comilla-Brahmanbaria highway where we knocked up some vehicles. On 8 Decmber 1971, Brahmanbaria was the objective of 73 Brigade. Unfortunately, the commander of that Infantry Brigade did nothing. 73 Brigade was to capture Brahmanbaria but they did not move out of their bunkers. Subsequently, we were moved to Brahmanbaria. The bridge was damaged. Brahmanbaria was the Pakistani forces' 14 Divisional HQ. We cleared Brahmanbaria on 8 December 1971 morning. Upon capturing the place we found jawans from Bihar regiment hanged and shot in the head along with some more Bengalis who were also tied up and shot in the head.

The bunkers as described by Gen Sagat, was as if it was build to survive a nuclear strike. One of the documents that we picked up from the bunker was a top secret Pakistani intelligence report by the G1 of the Eastern Command. On the 12 March 1971, Gen. Taj had written in the report quite categorically 'the show is over for Pakistan, there is no turning back from parting of the ways'. So, the Pakistani intelligence was quite clear that the war was over. On 8 December 1971, my company mounted on Gen. Mehta's tanks and headed towards Ashuganj. In a place called Talasaher, three kilometers short of Ashugang we harboured for the night. Next morning we get orders to withdraw to Brahmanbaria. 10 Bihar was to take over and 18 Rajput were to come and 73 Brigade was on our left. We had a set back here because the Divisional Commander, the Corp Commander and the Battalion Commander were all involved in another operation.

As such, these two Battalions were left without artillery support, without senior commanders and the only senior Commander available with this entire Brigade was two kilometers from them, the Commander of 73 Brigade who again did not operate out of his fox hole. Upon withdrawing back to Brahmanbaria, we found out that there are twelve helicopters lined up in

the stadium and we were given maps of right across Meghna upto Dacca. This is on the 9 December 1971. By 4:30 in the afternoon the first sortie consisting of four aircrafts and 2 Gnats flying from Agartala. Thereafter we were landed in the first aircraft with the rear doors open. The helicopters, which were designed to carry 12-13 men, were carrying about 20 men. Fortunately, in the stadium they could have a pre take-off run to take off with the extra load. Four helicopters at a time, the first carrying a platoon including me landed across the FAC and mark the landing zone with the Goose Neck flares. Then I was asked by my Commander to take a recce patrol including a wireless operator and two other ranks to go to the railway station, which was our objective. I was to go there stealthily there and capture it.

By the time I reached there the helicopters had arrived from nowhere and about 10,000 Bengalis turned up shouting 'Joi Bangla, Joi Indira'. There were regular Pakistani troops at Mitigandaand when they heard the vast roar of the local Bengali crowd, they packed their baggage, load them into a railway wagon and pushed them into Narsinghdi. Subsequently, my company and others hit the Pakistani defenses at Bhairab Bazaar. The sad part is I lost six men and some wounded. With the helicopters flying, the Pakistanis thought that a Brigade had crossed over. This happened in the night of 9-10 December 1971. 19 Punjab was provided artillery support to cross the Meghna by ferry. On the 10 December 1971 morning, we sent off one company toward Narsinghdilt was 30 Km away and a big industrial town.

We captured Narshinghdi by last light. Thereafter, by 12 December 1971 morning we were asked to advance to Dacca. By last light on 12<sup>th</sup> we had reached Dacca. On 13 December 1971, the firing started. On 14 December, the tanks made to Dacca across the river. After the 12<sup>th</sup> in our sector there was no fighting. From the moment we crossed the border on the 1December 1971, we were the first to get Brahmanbaria, the first to get behind Akouda. It is the same battalion that moved upto Dacca. This is probably the reason why Gen. Jacob mentioned about my battalion.

### **Ops in Eastern Bangladesh: Lt Gen SS Mehta, PVSM, AVSM\*, VSM (Retd), Fromer GOC-in C, Western Command**

Being commissioned in 1962, when the Chinese had invaded India, I have seen the ignominy of a defeated Army. Thereafter I saw the 1965 War and then the 1971 War. The 1971 War has no parallel in any war in the last century. No country has defeated another army in two weeks and left that country in three months. We were not there as an occupying army but as a liberating army. Though taught to wage attrition warfare, the forces that fought the 1971 War waged the expanding torrent warfare. An Army brought up in attrition warfare, exercised manoeuvre in the most difficult terrain in the world. This was made possible by the intelligence provided by the Mukti Bahini. I saw teamwork of the highest order in the 1971 War.

While victory in 1971 was achieved through a joint effort, the tragedy in the present times is that we are still fighting about the need for joint collaboration of all the Services. During the war, General Sagat Singh was the ideal role model. He was well read and always on the move. He was confident of himself and took right decisions at the right time, which yielded results. Many people do not know the fact that when we were going from Akhaura to

Bramanbaria, his helicopter landed there even before the troops landed. Another notable contribution in leadership is that of General Jacob. When it came to the trying task of getting General Niazi to surrender, the panache and the guts that he showed in facing an adversary in his capital that had not yet surrendered are commendable. There is no doubt that they were great achievers in the Indian Armed Forces, which particularly was reflected in the 1971 War.

In terms of my reflections of warfare over the last century, I believe that conflict termination has been badly addressed across the world. Why did we stop operations in 1947? We should have finished the operations. Why did we hand over POWs post our victory in 1971? Why did the Americans leave Saddam Hussein to fight for another day? All in all, conflict termination has been a weak area across the world. The other thing I would like to highlight is that we suffer from a complex, may be because of our inheritance. Five thousand years of our culture has brought us to the culture of patronage. The culture of patronage translates into a culture of security. Culture of security translates into being defensive. Culture of defensive translates in culture of status quos. Unfortunately, we enjoy the status quo. We do not make an effort to change. In 1971, Col Himmat and his battalion, and other Brigade Commanders changed the status quo. That brought us victory. Since then, however, we have been upholding the status quo for too long. We need to challenge and alter the status quo. We have to start accepting people who say 'no'. Personally, for me, General Himmat Singh was an outstanding officer and an ideal role model. The tragedy of the present times is that we have not produced too many such people. This must change.

### **SPECIAL ADDRESS**

**Lt Gen JFR Jacob, PVSM (Retd), Former GOC-in C, Eastern Command, former Governor of Goa and Punjab**

The Bangla elections took place at the end of 1970. The West Pakistanis on no account wanted a Bangladesh Prime Minister and did everything to oppose it. It was after the slaughter at Dacca University that Operation Searchlight took place. I saw the refugees come and it was terrible. They were streaming in wounded, smashed and beaten. On 31st of March, Indian Parliament asked Pakistan to transfer power to the Bengalis. On 29th April, we were told to assist the freedom fighters. The BSF in the border areas was then put under the Army. In early April, I got a phone call from Manekshaw saying "Jake, government wants the Army to move in to East Pakistan". We set up a number of camps for the Mukti Bahini. At least eight to start with and later it was increased to ten eleven.

The Mukti freedom fighters played a major role in the defeat of the Pakistan Army. They broke their morale and created an environment of fear. Due credit must be given to them for their role. We had no maps; the ones we had were fifty year old and had no relation to what was on ground. I requested freedom fighters to please get us maps. They got a complete set of maps which I gave to Survey of India in Park Street, Calcutta. These were printed in Survey of India and issued in November. We used Pakistani maps throughout the war. The only intelligence we got from R&AW was two half pages. It was Signals Intelligence that gave us all the intelligence we got. By the end of April I made a draft plan and sent it to Delhi. It was done during monsoons. We doubled the capacity at the railway line and got Border Roads

Organisation (BRO) to build roads. We built up the infrastructure and logistics. When the war started everything was in place.

The works through the monsoon and logistics were the key factor in winning this war. I want to quote (Then Chief of Air Staff) PC Lal, a very competent officer. "Dacca was never an objective, as it was considered not possible to capture. The war had to be short, as UN would intervene. With these restrictions, the objectives were limited to get territory for Bangla government in exile". Once limited objectives were agreed to, each service did what it thought was best. The Pakistan strategy was to defend territory, towns and main roads. Therefore, we based our plans to bypass these and go for the centre of gravity, Dacca. We received Army Headquarters operation instruction on 15th of August. The war officially started on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, when Pakistan bombed our airfields. As far as we were concerned, however, the war for us had started earlier, on 22<sup>nd</sup> November. As the Pakistanis were shelling us, we asked for permission to silence these guns and were given permission to go up to ten miles.

The offensive went according to plan, we bypassed the cities. Meanwhile the American fleet was moving into the Straits of Malacca. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, there was an American resolution at the United Nations, which was vetoed by the Soviet Union. The Soviets said no more vetoes. Sam Manekshaw reacted and sent us an order to capture "all the towns in Bangladesh except Dacca." All the towns we had bypassed were listed, but though we were outside Dacca, no mention was made for its capture. As these orders had also been sent to HQ 3 Corps, we rang up the corps and told them to ignore these orders. The Army Commander, Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora came agitated into my room, showed me the signal from Army HQ and said that it was entirely my fault as he wanted to capture the towns, but I did not support his view. That night I got hold of General Niazi on the wireless and told him that our forces outside Dhaka were very strong, a Mukti Bahini uprising was imminent, ethnic minorities would be protected and that they would be treated with dignity if they surrendered.

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, I got an intercept that there was a meeting at the Government House in Dhaka. There were two government houses in Dhaka, so we took an educated guess, and fortunately it was the correct one. The Indian Air Force bombed it within two hours. The governor of East Pakistan resigned. About 4 pm that afternoon, Niazi and Major General Farman Ali went to see Spivack, the American Consul General, with the following proposals: Ceasefire under the United Nations, withdrawal under UN, handover of the government to the UN and no war crimes trials and other stipulations. I got to know about it through one of the embassies. So I informed Manekshaw, who spoke to the American Ambassador in India, who didn't know anything about it.

That same day, the American embassy in Islamabad sent it to New York, and it was given on December 15 to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He refused to accept it. The Americans then gave it to us. On December 15, the ceasefire was ordered. On the morning of December 16, Manekshaw phoned me and said: "Go and get surrender." I asked, "On what terms?" "I have already sent you a draft surrender document. Do I negotiate on that?" "You know what to do, just go!" he replied. Then I made a mistake. I told him that when I was talking to Niazi, he had invited me for lunch, and I forgot about it. On the staircase, I met Mrs Aurora, and she told she was going to Dhaka with her husband. "My place is beside my husband," she said. I was changing

helicopters at Jessore to get to Dhaka, when a man came running to me with a signal from Army HQ. I opened it, thinking well, now I have some orders. I was unarmed, and carrying the document which I had typed and sent to Delhi. Only a staff officer was with me. I opened the letter, and it said: "The government of India has approved of General Jacob having lunch with Niazi." Who wanted their permission?

Anyway, I landed at Dhaka still carrying this paper which I had sent to Delhi. On my arrival, I was met by the UN representatives who said we are coming with you to arrange the withdrawal of the Pakistani army and the takeover of the government. I said thank you very much, I don't need your help. Fighting was going all around Dhaka between the Pakistani troops and the Mukti Bahini. A Pakistani brigadier met me at the airfield to guide me to Niazi. En route, we were stopped by a unit of the Mukti Bahini, who refused to let us proceed. We are going to attack Niazi's headquarters, they said. "He is surrendering, please let me go," I said. A long argument took place with the Mukti Bahini, until I said, "Look, your new government is coming in tomorrow, and Niazi wants to surrender, for God's sake let us go!" Finally they let us go. I arrived at Niazi's headquarters, where I had the draft surrender document read out to him.

This is an unconditional surrender, he said. "You have only come here to discuss the ceasefire and the withdrawal of the Pakistani army." "General," I replied, "this is not unconditional; I have worked on this for some time. I had put in it that we would protect ethnic minorities that we would ensure the safety of them and their families, that they would be treated with dignity as officers and men according to the Geneva Convention. So it is not unconditional. Where would you find all these conditions laid down?" But he said no. I listened to the arguments for some time. His aides like Farman Ali were advising him not to surrender. Finally, I told him, "Look General, you surrender, I will ensure your safety, the safety of your families, ethnic minorities, everyone. You will be treated with respect. If you don't, I am afraid I can take no responsibility for what happens to you or your families. What is more, we will have no other option but to order the immediate resumption of hostilities. I give you 30 minutes." I walked out.

Aurora was supposed to land soon to sign the instrument of surrender. I fervently hoped he was bringing what we had sent Manekshaw. I was alone in a very hostile environment. I was thinking, suppose he doesn't surrender, what do I do? He has 30,000 troops, we have 3,000 and he can fight for three weeks at least! The Hamidur Rehman report also says when they asked him why you surrendered; Niazi told them 'General Jacob blackmailed me! He threatened to hand us over to the Bahini, and that they would bayonet us.' All rubbish. I did put pressure on him and I didn't say I would hand him over to the Mukti Bahini for them to massacre. I said I would not be responsible. I never said I would hand them over. That's a lie.

In fact, in the Hamidur Rehman report, one of the officers who was present said Jacob never used the word bayonet. Anyway, I was wondering what was going to happen as I walked back after half an hour. The paper I gave him was lying on the table. "General, do you accept this paper?" I asked. He kept quiet, he didn't answer. I asked him three times. So I picked it up, and held it high, and said, "I take it that it is accepted." There were tears in his eyes. There were glares from the other Pakistani generals and admirals. I had no advice, no orders, other than to get a surrender. I didn't know what was going to be signed. What came to be signed had to be re-signed in Calcutta two weeks later. The signed document was wrong. I will

surrender in my office, Niazi said. I said no, I have already given instructions that you will surrender at the racecourse, in front of the people of Dhaka. "I won't," he said. "You will," I said. "You will also provide a guard of honour." I made my own modalities for the surrender.

This surrender is unique. It is the only public surrender in history where a ceasefire was converted into surrender and signed in four hours. Niazi had the capacity to fight on for two to three weeks, and the UN was in session. He was taken to task by the Hamidur Rehman report, which said not only had he agreed to surrender but he had shamefully agreed to a public surrender and guard of honour when he could have fought on for some weeks, enabling the UN to intervene. Then there was that lunch which Gavin Young described as the Surrender Lunch, with all the silverware laid out. After that, while we were going to the airport in Niazi's car, the Mukti Bahini stopped the car and jumped on it. Near the airport, I saw a few of our troops trickling in. I saw two para boys in a jeep and I took them with me. When I got to the airport, Tiger Siddiqi turned up with a truckload of Mukti Bahini.

I don't know why, but I felt he wanted to shoot Niazi. If Niazi was killed at the airport, there would be no surrender. I told the two para boys to shield Niazi, walked up to Siddiqi -- I told the two para boys to point their rifles at him -- and ordered him off the airfield. Then Aurora and his entourage, including his wife, landed. I was supposed to travel with Niazi and Aurora, but I was told to make way for Mrs Aurora. She was more important. Since everyone else had gone, and this was the last car, I hitched a ride in a truck. After the signing, the crowd wanted to lynch Niazi. We had very few troops there. So we had put a cordon around Niazi, put him in an army jeep which whisked him away. We lost 1,400 men; 4,000 were wounded. The credit for our victory should go to the officers and men who fought gallantly against stiff resistance by the Pakistanis. Due credit must go to Indira Gandhi who displayed courage and determination throughout the crisis. She stood up to (US President Richard M) Nixon and the UN, and led the country to its greatest victory. We took 93,000 prisoners. The rifle and bayonet at the Amar Jawan memorial in New Delhi belong to an unknown soldier who gave his life in the Jessore sector. Let us not forget their sacrifice.