

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)
SEMINAR ON
1971 WAR: INDIA'S GREATEST VICTORY
14 DECEMBER 2011

A Seminar was hosted by CLAWS at the Manekshaw Centre on 14 December 2011 to commemorate four decades of India's Victory against Pakistan in 1971. Titled '1971 War: India's Greatest Victory', the seminar was chaired by Gen VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), former Chief of Army Staff. The keynote address was delivered by Air Cmde Jasjit Singh, AVSM, VrC, VM (Retd), Director, Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS).

The Seminar was attended by a large number of veterans, serving officers, media persons, members of the strategic community and others. The speakers and the subjects covered were as under:

- Politico-Diplomatic Synergy: AVM Kapil Kak, AVSM, VSM (Retd), Addl Director, CAPS.
- Liberation of Bangladesh: Maj Gen GD Bakshi, SM, VSM (Retd).
- Role of Mukti Bahini in India's Victory: Capt (IN) Alok Bansal, Senior Fellow, CLAWS.
- Strategy in the West: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Addl Director, CLAWS.
- Military Lessons Learnt: Maj Gen Ashok Mehta, AVSM, (Retd), former GOC 57 Mtn Div and leading Defence Analyst.

Welcome Remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd)

This year we mark forty years of India's greatest victory in 1971. On 3 December 1971, General Yahya Khan undertook pre-emptive strikes and the war began. The course of the war was short and swift. The race for Dhaka began and ended very quickly. However, the war can teach us a lot. There is a need to delve deeper into the campaign and learn for future wars. This seminar is an attempt to learn from the experiences of the experts and war veterans present among us.

Keynote Address: Air Cmde Jasjit Singh, AVSM, VrC, VM (Retd)

This seminar is very important primarily because the younger generation can learn a lot from the 1971 war. The war fought in 1971 is old, however we can draw some very important lessons that can be useful even today.

While the official date for the commencement of the war is 3 December 1971, the fighting began much earlier. I remember that on 19 November 1971, my nephew got an injured JCO from East Pakistan. The break-up of Pakistan was a result of its internal

instability, repression by the army which resulted in civil war and the creation of Bangladesh. Pakistan learnt what it practiced in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab.

After years of violent protests, Pakistan tried to reunite but failed. In 1990, Lt Gen Kamal Matinuddin had come to India to write on 1971 and his book was titled, 'The Tragedy of Errors: East Pakistan crisis, 1968-1971.' The book perfectly showcases how numerous errors led to the creation of Bangladesh. Ayub Khan's experience with democracy only denied democracy and adult franchise to the people. While the Bengalis were a majority, the Punjabis found it rather difficult to accept that, especially in times of elections where the Bengali desires would stand out.

It is important to note that on 26 March 1971, our Chief of Army Staff indicated that we may have a war and therefore it was important to prepare for it. In April, Gen Niazi asked the government in Pakistan if he could attack India in the East (mainly because the Indian defences in the area were not very strong) and gain some territory. He stated that this territory could have been used as leverage. However, Yahya Khan denied permission to undertake such an attack.

The initial war plan was not to take Dhaka. The plan came about during the progress of the war. The progress during the war was rapid and kept casualties to the lowest. Such swift movement was perhaps achieved for the first time after the North African campaign. The Army did very well and so did the Air Force which attained air supremacy. Many have criticised that the Indian Air Force had dedicated too much energy in bombing the runways in East Pakistan. This was undertaken to ensure that no external power could intervene. The original intention was to take over some territory and use it for negotiation with Pakistan according to Indian terms.

In the campaign, Pakistan thought of using the reserves first while keeping the other forces at the border. This was a big mistake. All the Pakistani plans were visualised by the Army, Air Force and the Navy. It was decided that the Air Force would use all its assets and they had foreseen a loss of 100-130 aircrafts before undertaking a large retaliation. They were confident because the quantum of the force was less on the Indian side.

In the 1971 War, the Battle of Longewala was a great battle. It was a rare aircraft vs tank battle. The battle illustrated that things can happen even when you command the air. After the war, India did handle it right in July 1972 but some say that we could have forced Pakistan to do more. We could have forced them to modify the LoC because we had 90,000 prisoners of war.

Pakistan has always miscalculated how India would react. It is important to remember that when you react instinctively as per the profession, you act right. The Soviets had

told India that they could veto the Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire for 14 days; however the Indians completed the war well before that time period.

The question remains that why did Yahya Khan wait from September to December? Pakistan waited because of the US and China. In November, China was to be admitted to the UN before US opened an embassy in China. Pakistan expected support from the North and South; however that support did not come about. It is still important to study the war in-depth and gain some understanding about the nuances of the same.

Politico-Diplomatic Synergy: AVM Kapil Kak, AVSM, VSM (Retd)

Background

Pakistan was created as a Muslim state, with its two wings separated by India. The religious basis of nationhood could not withstand difference of language and culture between the two wings as also a feeling of economic deprivation felt by the East Wing which led to discord between the Bengali speaking people of East Pakistan and the rest in West Pakistan. But the trigger for seeking separation can be traced to the cyclone which hit East Pakistan in 1970 in which 25,000 people lost their lives. The Central Government, located in the West wing was incompetent in providing relief to the cyclone victims and this led to widespread discontent. This got reflected in the 1971 elections in which Mr Mujibur Rehman of the Awami League, a party based in East Pakistan won all the seats in the East Wing and thereby achieved majority in the legislature. This was unacceptable to the Punjabi dominated West Wing which was loath to hand over power to the Bengalis. Failure to hand over power led to widespread disturbances in the East Wing which were ruthlessly suppressed by the Pakistan Army. This led to insurgency and liberation struggle in East Pakistan.

India's Security Concerns

The suppression and genocide of the Bengali people of East Pakistan led to massive and unending refugee influx to the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. The number of refugees increased from 2,50,000 in April to 1.48 million in May. It rose to 6 million in July and 9 million in November. This led to collapse of limited infrastructure in affected Indian states and adversely affected development efforts in the country. Border insecurities increased with over 800 ISI operatives being caught in Assam and Meghalaya collecting data in the garb of refugees. Apprehensions of communal violence engulfing the states demanded immediate action for resolving the problem.

National Interest Protection and Projection.

The Indian government used all political and diplomatic channels to ensure the refugees could return to their homes. It also prepared for war, in case a military solution was required.

The genocide and its manifestation led to multi dimensional support for the liberation struggle of East Pakistan.

The mobilisation of international pressures on Pakistan was excellent with the Indian Premier, Mrs Indira Gandhi playing a key role, ably supported amongst others by the defence Minister Mr Jagjivan Ram and the Home Minister Mr Swaran Singh.

At the national level, a 'Provisional Government of Bangladesh' was set up. Sanctuary and financial support was given to East Bengal MLAs and to diplomats who defected. Monthly pay cheques were given to all MLAs and diplomats of provisional government of Bangladesh, wherever they resided. Appropriate resolutions were also passed in the Parliament and state assemblies.

In India's internal discourse, the creation of the state of Pakistan was accepted as a fait accompli. However, it was felt that the dismemberment of Pakistan would remove India's vulnerabilities on its Eastern Front.

Diplomatic Strategy

India maintained a nuanced initial position post the crackdown imposed on the East Wing by the Pakistan Army. In the middle of 1971, India, through diplomatic maneuvers, won the support of both the UK and France in blocking USA in any pro-Pakistan moves in the UN. As part of the effort to build alliances and ward off pressure from the US, India signed a 'Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation', with the Soviet Union in August 1971 that specified mutual strategic cooperation. The treaty was a significant deviation from India's previous position of non-alignment during the Cold War and was necessitated as a prelude to the 1971 Indo-Pak War, in a situation of increasing US support to Pakistan and Sino-American ties. The Treaty was significant in that it enabled India to ward off pressure from both the US and China.

The US feared that an Indian invasion of West Pakistan would mean total Soviet domination of the region, which could potentially undermine the global position of the United States and the regional position of America's new tacit ally, China. In order to demonstrate to China the bona fides of the United States as an ally, and in direct violation of the US Congress-imposed sanctions on Pakistan, Nixon sent military supplies to Pakistan, routing them through Jordan and Iran, while also encouraging China to increase its arms supplies to Pakistan. Indian war aims were however limited to East Pakistan only, which is why a ceasefire was unilaterally announced by India on 16 December, once Dacca fell. The move of a carrier task force of the Seventh Fleet,

TF 74, to the Bay of Bengal on 11 December 1971, was a move by the US to put pressure on India. The task Force remained about a thousand nautical miles away from Dacca, and was believed to be trailed by two groups of ships of the Soviet Union, sent from Vladivostok. Its move had no impact on the war.

Pakistan hoped that its relations with China would enable them to use the Chinese to tie down large chunks of the Indian Army. The Chinese declared they would support Pakistan, but that support fell far short of what Pakistan wanted as China did not wish to get involved in the war. Most of the Islamic countries also provided only minimal or no help at all which speaks well of Indian diplomatic effort at that time.

Conclusion

At the apex level, Politico-diplomatic crisis management was of a high order. The leadership displayed at the political and military level was a crucial factor in achieving success. As per Mr. PN Haksar, *"In 1971-1973, we once again became possessed of a promise of restoration of national will... relatable to one dominating factor: the existence of a widespread belief in national purpose, a national will and credibility."*

There was an adequacy of political – diplomatic – military synergy, situational awareness was of a high order and decision making was quick and firm. It can be rightly said, that in centuries, this was the first successful Indian military employment to achieve a politico-strategic outcome.

Liberation of Bangladesh: Maj Gen (Dr) G D Bakshi, SM, VSM (Retd)

Setting the Stage

The 1971 war marked the culmination of a deliberate phase of military build up undertaken in response to our tactical humiliation at the hands of China in 1962. The National challenge unleashed a tremendous synergistic response and ushered in an era of hard headed realism in the sphere of foreign policy and National Security. The soft power approach gave way to the creation of hard power capabilities that produced decisive results on the battle field.

The 1962-1972 decade was a peak era of professionalism for our armed forces. The 1965 war provided invaluable combat and directional experience at the divisional, Corps and Theater level. It threw up a crop of battle tested Brigade, Divisional and Corps Commanders and well blooded units and formations. The 1971 war was a logical denouement of the deliberate decade long military buildup and the asymmetric capabilities it generated on the subcontinent. The bifurcation of the monolith IB into the IB and R&AW, post the 1965 war, considerably improved our intelligence and created covert action capabilities that were put to good effect. As such, R&AW's psychological

war division performed very well. A civilian leadership (thoroughly chastised by the 1962 humiliation) now developed a ruthless and single minded approach toward the furtherance of national interests

Political Guidance

Political leadership in the 1971 war was inspirational and charismatic. It displayed a single minded and cold blooded pursuit of national interests. The Government knew its mind and had a clear cut political objective. It had created asymmetric military capabilities on the subcontinent and was prepared to exploit them to further national interests. As per Field Marshal Manekshaw, the political leadership had asked him to undertake operations against East Pakistan in March 1971 itself. (when refugees had begun to pour in as a result of Pakistan's military crackdown). Military advice was to postpone operations till the monsoon season was over and when Himalayan passes had closed (to prevent Chinese intervention). This advice was accepted. This gave the Armed forces seven to eight months to prepare and coordinate plans, stage manage forces and logistics and generate inter services synergy of an unprecedented order.

Strategic Leadership

The leadership provided by all three service chiefs was inspiring and highly professional. A decade of professionalism and active combat experience had thrown up this elite. The Armed Forces had also internalised the lessons of 1962 and 1965. The latter war in particular had provided invaluable operational experience at the theatre, corps and divisional level. The Services had adequate time to integrate and synergise their plans. It was the peak of inter services cooperation and jointmanship.

Bangladesh was designated as the Centre of Gravity of the campaign and an offensive–defensive posture was adopted in the West. Accordingly, signal intelligence resources were focused in the Eastern theatre along with aerial reconnaissance and Mukti Bahini intelligence. This generated information dominance in the East. Logistical infrastructure to support operations in Bangladesh and engineer bridging resources were also focused in the East.

Options Available

Two options were available. The first was to carry out shallow penetrations to enable the resettlement of 10 million refugees in India and set up provisional Bangladesh Government. The second was to bypass centres of resistance on the periphery and organisationally collapse the Pakistani Army in the East by swift, multi-pronged dash to the strategic core triangle of Dacca. The Pakistan Eastern Army Commander, Lt Gen Niazi was convinced that India intended to aim for shallow penetrations on the periphery. Hence, he had not drawn up plans for withdrawal to the Dacca core and

organise its defence. In the event, Pakistan's strategy was totally unhinged by the by passing of border defences and expanding-torrent concept of attack.

Opposing Forces: Pakistan

- **16 Inf Div.** NW Sector of Hilli- Rangpur (Under Maj Gen Sheikh)
- **9 Inf Div.** Western Sector of Jessore (under Maj Gen M H Ansari)
- **14 Inf Div.** SE Sector of Sylhet- Akhaura (under Maj Gen Quazi)
- **36 Inf Div.** (newly formed with two Bdes) defending the core triangle of Mymen Singh – Dacca

Opposing Forces: India

2 Corps. Under Lt Gen Raina

- 9 Inf Div. Led adv to Jessore. Later diverted to port of Khulna
- 4 Inf Div. Led adv to Kushtia- Jhandia. Finally reached Faridpur on banks of Ganga/Padma. IWT flotilla not utilised for push to Dacca.

4 Corps. Led by Lt Gen Sagat Singh.

- 8 Mtn Div under Maj Gen Krishna Rao: adv to Maulwi Bazar and Sylhet.
- 23 Inf Div under Maj Gen Hira: adv to Chanpur.
- 57 Mtn Div under Maj Gen Gonsalves: adv to Commilla and Daud Khandi.
- Heliborne ops across Meghna R on 7 & 9 Dec to hasten adv towards Dacca. (14 X MI – 4 heptrs; 2xBns dropped.)

33 Corps. Led by Lt Gen Thapan

- 20 Mtn Div under Maj Gen Lehel + 2 Bdes. Initial ops Hilli Sector. Finally reached Bogra.
- 101 Comn Z .Dash for Dacca Led by Maj Gen Nagra
- 2 Para Bn Gp para dropped at Tangail

Conduct of Campaign.

Air Supremacy in the East. The IAF put in a superb performance. It foiled the Pakistani preemptive air attacks in the West and destroyed the Pakistani Air Force in the East. It thereby attained air supremacy over Bangladesh. This enabled a very high tempo of operations by the ground forces. Indian convoys could move bumper to bumper whereas all Pakistani troop movements were subjected to relentless and responsive air attacks. 140 X SU-7 ac were inducted just prior to ops. Air supremacy

enabled para drop of a Bn gp at Tangail. This hastened the fall of Dacca. Air supremacy also enabled launch of heliborne operations to secure assault crossings over the Meghna river to threaten Dacca from the South and East

Psy Ops. Pinpoint air strikes were launched to target the meeting of Gen Niazi and the Governor in Dacca. This Psychologically shattered Niazi and his command elements and hastened the surrender.

Naval Operations. Navy enforced a blockade of Bangladesh and severed the connection between the two wings of Pakistan. It launched a brilliant attack on the Pakistani Navy home base of Karachi, sank capital ships and set fire to oil storage tanks. The aircraft carrier battle group provided close air support for ground operations in Bangladesh and prevented escape of Pakistani forces via the sea. The Naval Commandos sabotaged Pakistani naval and steamer crafts operating in the inland waters.

Army Operations. The Army mounted a classic Blitzkrieg. Three corps offensives (2 Corps, 33 Corps and 4 Corps) converged on to Dacca. It contained and by passed strong centres of resistance on the periphery and raced for the core objective of the capital city of Dacca. 4 Corps operations were most fast paced and brilliant, which brought Dacca within artillery range. Lt Gen Sagat Singh's handling of his Corps was outstanding. Other important points were as under:

- A bn Gp was para dropped at Tangail. 101 Comn Zone ops launched from the North to exploit exposed flank.
- 20 Mtn Div removed at great risk from Chinese front and deployed to sp ops towards Dacca.
- Dacca fell in just 14 days. Proved to be a brilliant, text book tri-services campaign
- Over 93,000 Pakistani troops surrendered in the East.
- A new nation state was created with the force of arms for the first time after the Second World War.
- It was a just war-just in its causes and aim and also in its conduct.
- The Mukti Bahini provided excellent support by harrasing and wearing down the Pakistani Army in the East and providing real time and accurate intelligence.
- It was a victory of historic proportions and in a way, reaffirmed the Kautilyan paradigm of swift and decisive ops preceded by extensive covert ops (covert campaign conducted by the Mukti Bahini).
- The Bangladesh operations provide an Indian Paradigm for war fighting. They were characterized by a steadfast selection and maintenance of aim.
- A comprehensive decade long military build up to generate an asymmetry was taken to its logical conclusion through decisive military operations.

- Given the constraints of the cold war era on the use of conventional military force, proved to be a decisive conflict that (for the first time after the Second World War) created a new nation state with the force of arms and dismembered Pakistan.
- Decisive campaign characterised by march on enemy capital and regime change.

Other Important Aspects

- The Mukti Bhani operations destroyed the politico-military balance of the Pakistani forces in the East.
- Air supremacy totally demoralised the Pakistan Forces and enabled a very high tempo of operations. Acted as a most significant force multiplier and enabled a classic air land campaign.
- The Naval blockade induced a sense of isolation and hopelessness in the Pakistani grn. Naval air support speeded up ops and sealed off routes of escape.
- The Navy's successful attack on Pakistan's home port of Karachi was a bold and most spectacular op in the annals of Naval warfare. Highly innovative in design and execution. OSA missile boats were towed for attack.
- India's only amphibious operation so far launched in Cox's Bazar (towards the end of war). Unopposed landing prevented escape of Pakistani forces towards Burma by sea.

Lessons of 1971

- The 1971 campaign provides an Indian Paradigm of war-fighting based on information dominance, covert action to destabilise the adversary and a rapid and high tempo tri service campaign based on manoeuvre and simultaneity.
- This model was premised on careful and methodical preparation of minimum 6-8 months (for the military phase) and rapid execution (two weeks).
- It mirrored the Kautilyan war paradigm based on information dominance, covert action and high mobility shock action.
- Psy Ops and shaping the regional and global information environment played a major role. R&AW was the lead agency.
- Covert action to destroy the politico-military balance of the adversary was key component.
- Air power and Naval power projection ashore were the most critical force multipliers.
- Political direction was par excellence and inter services plans superbly synthesised.

Strategy in the West: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd),

The War in the Western theatre began when the Pakistan Air Force launched a series of air attacks on Indian airfields at Amritsar, Awantipur, Faridkot, Pathankot and Srinagar on 3 December 1971, at about 1730h. This was followed by attacks on selected Indian posts on the same night. As per strategic thinking within Pakistan, the defence of East Pakistan lay in its Western Wing. In pursuance of this policy, Pakistan went on the offensive in the West when Indian support to the freedom fighters in East Pakistan was stepped up.

The Pakistani plan had two ingredients. First, formations other than those in reserve were to launch limited offensives. Second, a major counter offensive was to be launched concurrently into India. The latter part of the plan was altered by General Yahya Khan in respect to its timings. As per the revised plan, the main offensive would take place only after local operations had secured ground. This change ostensibly was made due to shortage of equipment and also due to operational voids caused by move of forces to its East Wing.

The Indian strategy had its war aims focused on the East. Strategic defence was to be maintained in the West and a counter offensive would be launched only after Pakistan initiated hostilities. This served the larger strategic purpose of ensuring that India was not accused of aggression which could have had a negative effect on its operations in the East Wing. The initiative in the West thus lay in the hands of the Pakistan military.

Force Levels

There was near parity of forces between India and Pakistan as far as the armour component was concerned. However, Pakistan was deficient in Infantry and here India had an edge. To Pakistan's ten infantry divisions in the Western Theatre, India had thirteen, one of which was deployed opposite the Tibet border in Ladakh. Pakistan had seven infantry divisions and an independent infantry brigade deployed in a holding role along the international border and the cease fire line. Two armoured divisions, an armoured brigade, three infantry divisions and an independent infantry brigade were available for offensive tasks or for stabilising the front.

India had Western and Southern Command opposite the Pakistani Forces. Western Command consisted of 15 Corps, 1 Corps and 11 Corps. The 15 Corps Sector stretched from Samba to Ladakh and was held with five divisions, one of which was opposite Tibet. The 1 Corps Sector stretched from Samba till short of the Dera Baba Nanak Enclave on the Ravi River. This was initially held by a division and presented to Pakistan the weakest gap in the Indian defences in the event of a preemptive attack. Located in the hinterland, 1 Corps was to assume responsibility of this sector on arrival. It had in its orbit 36, 39 and 54 Infantry Divisions and 2 and 16 Independent Armoured

Brigades. 11 Corps was holding area from Dera Baba Nanak Enclave till South of Anupgarh. It had 15 and 7 Infantry Divisions, an armoured brigade and an ad hoc division sized force holding the general area astride Fazilka called Foxtrot Sector. Southern Command had two divisions under its command and was responsible for the Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Kutch Sectors. 1 Armoured Division stationed in Muktsar area and 14 Infantry Division stationed in Faridkot area constituted the Indian Army's reserves.

Conduct of Operations

In conformity with their war strategy, Pakistan launched four attacks on 3 and 4 December. In the hill sector, Poonch was attacked on night 3/4 December and Chhamb at first light on 4th December. The former attack was beaten back after heavy fighting spread over three days. The attack on Chhamb was partially successful with Pakistan reaching up to the Munawar Tawi. However, Pakistan's attempt to secure a bridgehead was defeated and the defences were stabilised along the Munawar Tawi.

In Fazilka, the attack was launched on night 3/4 December with Pakistan gaining a foothold on the Sabuna distributary. This provided depth to Pakistan for defending the Sulaimanke Headworks. Indian attempts to evict the Pakistani forces were foiled but the Pakistani bridgehead was contained. The fourth major attack which took place was in the desert sector where Pakistan aimed to capture Ramgarh. They were stopped at the Indian post of Longenwala where the Indian company put up a stiff resistance. Thereafter the Indian Air Force with just two Hunter aircraft destroyed the bulk of the Pakistani armour. The area of operations was outside the range of Pakistani aircraft which enabled the two lone Hunters to operate unhindered.

From the Indian side operations in the Ladakh Sector led to the capture of Turtok and in the Kargil sector to the capture of strategic features overlooking the Leh Srinagar Highway. In the 19 Infantry Division Sector, gains were made in the Minimarg area and in capture of the Kaiyan bowl. Further South, in the Jammu Region, the Chicken's Neck area was also captured. The desert Sector saw Indian forces advance up to Naya Chor. In addition, the war saw offensive action at the local level which led to the capture of a large number of enclaves by both sides.

The major Indian offensive took place in the Shakargarh Sector. The ceasefire however came into effect when Shakargarh had been contacted. Pakistan lost a large part of their armour on the last two days of the war in futile counter attacks against the bridgehead made across the Basantar River.

Analysis

At the political level, diplomatic initiatives taken by Indira Gandhi set the stage for ultimate victory in East Pakistan. But both the antagonists were found wanting in defining political and strategic goals and war aims. Operational art was conspicuous by its lack of application throughout the conflict in the Western theatre. Senior commanders on both sides missed out capitalising on fleeting opportunities. Both sides showed a remarkable hesitation in use of reserves. While preservation of resources is part of command responsibility, in the context of short duration wars there is a need to effectively utilise all available resources in furtherance of the higher commander's aim. At the junior level, leadership displayed was of a high order. This was reflected in the success achieved in Ladakh, Kargil, Chicken's Neck and many other areas all across the front. The defence of the bridgehead at Barapind across the Basantar River, or the defence of the post at Longenwala are also fine examples of junior leadership rising to exceptional heights.

Role of Mukti Bahini in India's Victory: Capt (IN) Alok Bansal

India's greatest victory in recent times would not have been feasible without the support of Mukti Bahini. It is often forgotten that the liberation of Bangladesh could not have been achieved within the short time frame of 14 days without the invaluable support of Mukti Bahini and the local population. The enormous sacrifices made by Mukti Bahini during this period have been often glossed over by both Indian and Bangladeshi historians.

The fact that the Bangladesh Army after 1975 was generally dominated by the anti-liberation officers, those who had not taken any part in the liberation war and had been repatriated from Pakistan after the War, ensured that the Mukti Bahini's role was generally played down. On the other hand, Pakistanis keen to hide their misdeeds - the rape and genocide in Bangladesh, also played down the internal dissent and projected their defeat to be the result of Indian machinations. It did not suit Pakistani military or the political leadership to accept that their policies had led to large-scale internal dissent and consequent defeat. In India there was a clamour to claim credit for this unprecedented and unexpected victory. Amongst those jostling to take credit, there was no inclination to share this glory with Mukti Bahini.

Mukti Bahini ensured that the Pakistani Armed Forces were worn out by the time they faced Indian Army. The continuous harassment and interference with the supply lines of Pakistani Army had already degraded the fighting efficiency of the Pakistani Forces. During the war, Mukti Bahini, not only provided the valuable inputs about the terrain, but it also ensured that there was total support of the local population. It provided invaluable intelligence about enemy disposition and even gave the maps of the area to the Indian Army, which were at point not available with Indian authorities. It also garnered local means of transportation to facilitate cross country movement of Indian troops.

Mukti Bahini was the successor of Mukti Fauj, which comprised of Sangram Parishads, formed by the student and youth leaderships of Awami League in March 1971. Mukti Bahini comprised of the Sangram Parishads and the members of the armed forces, para military forces and police of erstwhile East Pakistan. The rebellion by the uniformed personnel, by and large began after the declaration of independence by Major Zia ur Rahman from Chittagong. Initially Zia assumed the title of 'Provisional Commander in Chief of the Bangladesh Liberation Army', even though his area of operations remained confined to Chittagong and Noakhali areas. Subsequently, on 17 Apr 1971, a retired officer Colonel MAG Osmany took over as the Commander-in-Chief of Bangladesh Armed Forces at Teliapara (Sylhet) headquarters.

However, despite rebellion by most of the Bengali officers and men present in East Pakistan and the initial success of Mukti Bahini, the absence of heavy weaponry and lack of officers and JCOs, led to Pakistani Army with a combat strength of 38, 717 officers and men recapturing most of the territory within a month. Mukti Bahini attempted to fight Pakistani Army in a conventional war rather than a guerrilla war and failed. Despite exhibiting extreme valour and determination, the force suffered heavy casualties in fighting pitched battles at Bhairab Bazar.

Mukti Bahini realised its mistakes and reorganised itself in July 1971 and decided on a two-pronged approach. It was resolved that both guerrilla warfare and frontal assaults would be undertaken simultaneously. Irregular forces were trained for guerrilla warfare. Five to ten member guerrilla teams were deployed for specific tasks in different parts of Bangladesh, whilst combat soldiers would continue frontal assaults against enemy. Volunteers both armed and unarmed were tasked to gather intelligence about the enemy. The guerrillas were sent inside to carry out raids and ambushes. All industries were brought to a grinding halt and the electric supply was severely disrupted. Pakistanis were prevented from exporting either the raw material or the finished products from Bangladesh.

Communication networks were targeted to disrupt the movement of Pakistani forces. The guerrilla actions forced Pakistanis to disperse forces to maintain control. Mukti Bahini attacked scattered Pakistani troops with the intention of annihilating them.

The regular forces initially consisted of five under strength East Bengal Regiment battalions. By October 1971, eight regular battalions and one artillery regiment had been raised and were organised into three brigades. Z Force operating in Chittagong and Noakhali Sector under the command of Major Zia ur Rahman, K Force operating in Sylhet-Comilla Sector under the command of Major Khaled Musharraf and S Force operating in Mymensingh-Tangail Sector under the command of Major Shafiullah. Subsequently, Kushtia-Jessore Sector and Faridpur-Barisal-Khulna-Patukhali Sector were placed under the command of Major Usman and Major Jalil, respectively. After the reorganisation, the whole of Bangladesh including the seas off the coast was divided into 11 sectors and the regular forces were organised into battalions and divided into these sectors. Besides the regular and irregular forces, there were various independent

forces like Mujib Bahini, Kaderia Bahini, Afsar Battalion and Hemayet Bahini, which fought in various parts of Bangladesh and liberated certain areas.

Bangladesh Navy was created in August 1971 with two ships MV Polish and MV Padma and 45 former naval personnel of the Pakistani Navy, which included many frogmen. The ships were fitted with 40 mm Bofors and proved to be extremely effective for warfare in the estuaries. They launched many successful attacks on Pakistani targets, sinking over a lakh ton of shipping. Bangladesh Air Force started functioning from Dimapur on 28 September 1971 under the command of Gp Capt AK Khandekar and consisted of 17 officers and 50 technicians who had deserted the Pakistani Air Force to set up the nascent force. The aircraft inventory of the Force included a Dakota, an Otter and an Alouette helicopter. It was mainly employed in communication duties with the Bangladesh Government in exile and the military top brass. After the Indian war of liberation began in December, the air force commenced its combat role and successfully launched 12 sorties against Pakistani targets.

Mukti Bahini carried out numerous raids on Pakistani forces since October 1971 and continuously harassed the Pakistani forces. The psychological impact of nine months of hostility on Pakistani troops is not often appreciated. Once Indian forces attacked Pakistani forces, the Mukti Bahini not only fought alongside Indian troops, but also ensured that supplies to Pakistani troops were disrupted. Heli-lifting, para dropping or largescale crossings by ferries of troops could not have been attempted if the population was hostile and local support from Mukti Bahini was not available. When the forces of Major General Nagra entered Dhaka, they were escorted by Tiger Siddiqui. The enormous support of Mukti Bahini ensured that despite the difficult geomorphology of Bangladesh, it was liberated in two weeks giving India its greatest military victory in centuries. Mukti Bahini was represented at the surrender ceremony by its Second in Command Group Captain Khandekar.

India needs to acknowledge the immense role played by Mukti Bahini, in its most spectacular victory and as a nation should express its gratitude to Mukti Jodhas. Mukti Bahini veterans should be honoured at India's victory day celebrations. As the citizens of the two countries shed their blood to achieve this spectacular victory; they also need to celebrate it.

Lessons Learnt: Maj Gen Ashok Mehta

Lessons

- We did not have a National Security Council, there was no Chairman Chief of Staff, yet we succeeded.
- There was clarity of Aim and objectives at all levels of leadership / command.
- Differences between Commanders at various levels did surface, but all for the same cause and yet operations went on smoothly.

- Civil-Military Relations were of very high order. Role played by Raksha Mantri needs special mention. It was commendable.
- The stage management of operations was outstanding.
- **Logistic and Engineer Support.** Axis of Advance were converted into Axis of maintenance. At places, Engineers were required to rip off old railway tracks to create roads / tracks. Heavy bridging, track laying tasks and road maintenance tasks were performed.
- **Development of favourable International Opinion.** India was not able to conclusively highlight the role of Pakistan army in genocide in East Pakistan.
- **Handling of Foreign Media.** Could have been better.

Future: Where are We ?

1. Last Full Scale Major Conventional war in 1971. Now it is only low intensity conflicts.
2. **Civil-Military Relations.** Are deteriorating.
3. Tri Service Integration, despite IDS, has to be improved further.
4. **Military Modernisation.** Present RM has mentioned in a number of fora about our lacking in military modernization and infrastructure management. Snail pace of this development.
5. **Strategic Restraint** or is it government's alibi for lack of military preparedness.
6. **Question of GOM Report of Kargil Recommendation.** Border Management, Security, Intelligence, Higher Direction etc. About 114 recommendations were made but only 67 implemented / partly implemented / likely to be implemented. Key ones are not yet implemented. Naresh Chandra Task Force is supposed to remove these bottle necks but its tasks remain inconclusive.