

REAPING THE WHIRLWINDREFUGEES START POURING IN

The reign of terror, death and destruction imposed by the West Pakistani military junta from 25/26 March 1971 - "Operation Searchlight" - wrought havoc on East Bengal and its people. A stream of terrified and dumb-founded men, women, and children fled East Bengal and poured into India to escape torture and death at the hands of West Pakistani soldiers and their henchmen.

Eastern Indian states were not unfamiliar with large-scale migrations from East Pakistan. But the exodus since 25 March 1971, was an altogether different proposition.

Since the creation of Pakistan, over 5.2 million persons, had migrated to India from East Pakistan up to 25 March 1971. The entire refugee population of East Bengal that had entered India up till 1969 (numbering about 5 million) had been rehabilitated by June 1971. Upto 19 July 1971, an expenditure of Rs.3580 million had been incurred on relief and rehabilitation of persons who migrated from East Bengal.

The main reasons for the pre-crackdown migrations from East Pakistan to India, as gathered from various reports,(11) had been:-

- (A) General: 1. Adverse economic conditions and growing unemployment.
2. Generally insecure conditions due to deteriorating law and order situation.
3. Propaganda, in the beginning of 1970, in rural areas in East Pakistan that the United Front Govt. in West Bengal had seized huge areas of jote and benami land for distribution among landless cultivators (approximately 2 hectares per family) and if they (East Bengalee landless cultivators) went to West Bengal as refugees, they might get land and other reliefs from West Bengal Government. East Pakistan border officials collaborated in helping landless cultivators to cross over to India.
- (B) Affecting only minorities: 1. Harassment and oppression of minorities (which, for all practical purposes, meant Hindus who constituted 14% of the

total population of East Pakistan), like

- i) forcible occupation of properties of Hindus,
- ii) creation of conditions calculated to disturb and damage their religious, social and cultural life e.g., desecration of temples and religious places, slaughtering cows by Muslims in Hindu houses, etc.,
- iii) forcible conversion to Islam,
- iv) offences against women e.g., molestation, rape abduction, forcible marriages to Muslims, and so on,
- v) dacoities and robberies in the localities inhabited by the Hindus,

together with police authorities' indifferent attitude to complaints against such acts of victimization. They often told Hindus that they need not stay in East Pakistan.

2. Discrimination in matters of general administration and denial of equal opportunities for employment.

3. Anti-Hindu communal riots e.g., in January 1964.

4. Communal politics, particularly on the eve of elections when ultra-rightist communalist parties incited anti-Hindu violence by charging the minorities of nurturing "alien culture", and questioning their loyalty to Pakistan. This happened after 1 January 1970 when full political activity was resumed there.

As an aftermath of the partition, 4.1 million persons of minority communities had migrated from East Bengal to India until 31 March 1958. Thereafter, the number of migrants tapered off and almost ceased by the end of 1963. Later on, one or more of the above-mentioned causes were responsible for fresh exodus of minorities from East Bengal. For instance, as a result of serious communal disturbances in January 1964, large-scale influx began again, and by the end of 1964, 6,93,000 persons had reached India. During the period 1965 - 1969, 1,61,000 more persons migrated to India(2). From January 1970, due to political conditions created by the impending general elections in Pakistan and the propaganda about availability of land in West Bengal for distribution among landless cultivators, the exodus of members of minority communities began again. With the victory of Awami League in December 1970, the minorities looked forward to better days and the exodus reduced

considerably. However, about 2,59,000 persons had migrated from East Pakistan to India from January 1970 to 25 March 1971(3).

But the exodus that began as a consequence of 25 March crack-down was altogether different in character and magnitude. The atrocities perpetrated by the West Pakistani soldiers on an unprecedented scale was directed to crush the nationalist democratic aspirations of the people of East Bengal. General Tikka Khan, the "Butcher of Baluchistan", was appointed on 7 March 1971, Governor and Chief Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan(4). It was lust for political power that moved the Pak military rulers to let loose brutality on the people of East Bengal, whose only crime was that they now refused further economic exploitation and political subjugation by West Pakistan. Giving an eye witness account of the brutalities let loose by the Pakistani military forces, Dr. John E. Rhode, a Physician stationed in East Pakistan under the U.S. Aid Programme, wrote in April 1971, "It is clear that the law of the jungle prevails in East Pakistan where the mass killing of unarmed civilians, the systematic elimination of the intelligentsia and the annihilation of the Hindu population is in progress"(5).

Refugees had streamed into India since partition, but they had been Hindus fleeing away from the newly created Muslim state of Pakistan. But the exodus of refugees in the early stages after the crack-down of 25 March, had a "fundamental difference" - they were largely Muslims "fleeing from a country they had been taught to regard as their own religious state"(6).

The number of refugees coming into India after the military crack-down in East Bengal was not big initially(7). However, by 17 April 1971, 1,19,566 persons(8) had crossed into the Indian border states of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. From the middle of April the refugee influx started increasing rapidly.

This development was probably due to the fact that the immediate impact of the crack-down was felt in Dhaka and its surrounding areas. It would have taken some time for refugees from those areas to trek down to India. The army must have taken some time to fan out into far flung areas of East Bengal and for the people there to have the taste of their brutality. Moreover, the Bengalee nationalist forces had increased their harassment of the West Pakistani troops, which led to the latter increasing their tempo of arson, loot, rape and murder against the local

population. E. Gallagher, a member of the US House of Representatives, after interviewing a cross-section of the refugees, came to the conclusion that the "brutal policies" of the Government of Pakistan were aimed at crushing the people who had won the elections and that "a calculated attempt to crush the intellectual life of the Bengalee community occurred because of mass killings of professors, students, and everyone of any distinction by the Army. This, in my judgement gives credence to the charge of genocide"(9). The effort, it seems, was to crush the soul of Bengalee nationalism so that it could never again raise its head to demand autonomy or independence from the West Pakistani exploiters.

### INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH PROCLAIMED

Sheikh Mujib, while giving a call for a general strike on 1 March 1971, at the postponement of the National Assembly, had warned, "You will see history made if the conspirators fail to come to their senses"(10). The beginning of the history of an independent and sovereign Bangladesh was made when Major Ziaur Rahman, an officer of the 8th Battalion of the EBR at Chittagong, on 26 March, shortly after the military crack-down, made an electrifying broadcast on "Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra" (Free Bangla Radio) announcing the establishment of an independent Bangladesh. He said, "I, Major Zia Rahman, at the direction of Bango Bondhu Mujibur Rahman, hereby declare that Independent People's Republic of Bangladesh has been established. At his direction, I have taken the command as the temporary Head of the Republic. In the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, I call upon all the Bengalees to rise against the attack by the West Pakistani Army. We shall fight to the last to free our motherland. Victory is, by the Grace of Allah, ours, Joy Bangla"(11).

A few days later, word reached Golok Majumdar, the Inspector General of the BSF at Calcutta, that two senior leaders of the Awami League had arrived at the Indian border near Banpur. When he reached the place, he was met by two workers of the Awami League who confirmed the information, and went back into East Bengal. It was a dark night, and in half an hour Golok Majumdar saw four muffled figures emerging from the shadows of the mango orchard before him. One of them was Tajuddin Ahmed, the General Secretary of the Awami League.

In similar fashion, most of the prominent leaders of East Bengal, including the vast majority of elected legislators, had crossed over to India by early April. The entire Awami League High Command,

except Sheikh Mujib, who had been imprisoned and constitutional adviser, Dr. Kamal Hussain, who was abroad, were in India.

Meanwhile, the West Pakistani forces were continuing their genocidal repression by indulging in indiscriminate killings, rape and plunder. This further added fuel to the burning fire of Bengali nationalism which soon engulfed the whole of Bangladesh. Political rivalries were forgotten. The pro-Peking NAP of Maulana Bhashani, the pro-Moscow NAP of Muzaffar Ahmed and also the Communist Party of East Pakistan, now renamed Bangladesh, all extended full support to the liberation struggle and its leadership by the Awami League. Only the rightist parties such as Jamaat-i-Islami, the three factions of the Muslim League and the Nizam-i-Islami Party, as well as the right of centre Pakistan Democratic Party, all of whom had been routed in the elections, did not support the independence of Bangladesh. They became the hangers-on of the Pakistani army and were regarded as traitors by the general masses.

The freedom fighters in Bangladesh were bravely fighting the armed forces of Pakistan under a symbolic Bangladesh authority which had not yet taken any shape and, therefore, they lacked a central direction. Without an organised central authority they could not get international support to any appreciable extent. The Bengalees in different parts of the world, including those working in Pakistani Missions, were keen to lend their support to the freedom struggle, but found themselves in a state of vacuum without a recognised governmental authority(12). Bearing these considerations in mind, and above all to legalise the freedom struggle, the vast majority of elected representatives from Bangladesh who had taken shelter in India, resolved on 10 April 1971, to set up the Provisional Government of Bangladesh in order to carry out the massive mandate given to them by the people of Bangladesh.

Their Proclamation of Independence Order, dated 10 April 1971, recounted the treacherous acts of the West Pakistani authorities in preventing the elected representatives from framing a constitution and in launching a genocidal and repressive campaign by the army, which had forced Sheikh Mujib to declare the independence of Bangladesh on 26 March. It went on to proclaim, "we the elected representatives of the people of Bangla Desh, as honour bound by the mandate given to us by the people of Bangla Desh whose will is supreme, duly constituted ourselves into a Constituent Assembly, and having held mutual consultations, and in order to ensure for the people of Bangla Desh

equality, human dignity and social justice, declare and constitute Bangla Desh to be sovereign people's Republic and thereby confirm the declaration of Independence already made by Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and...confirm and resolve that till such time as a constitution is framed, Banga (sic) Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman shall be the President of the Republic and that Syed Nazrul Islam shall be the Vice-President of the Republic..." In the interim period till a constitution was framed, the President was to exercise all the executive and legislative powers,... "do all other things that may be necessary to give to the people of Bangla Desh an orderly and just government." In the absence of the President, the Vice-President would exercise all his powers, duties and responsibilities. The Proclamation also said,... "we further resolve that we undertake to observe and give effect to all duties and obligations devolved upon us as a member of the family of nations and by the Charter of the United Nations; we further resolve that this proclamation of independence shall be deemed to have come into effect since 26th day of March, 1971"(13).

The formal installation of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh took place on 17 April at Bhaberpura village located near the border in Meherpur Sub-division of Kushtia district of East Bengal. The place was renamed Mujib Nagar. The ceremony took place amidst thunderous cheers from a 10,000 strong crowd which included correspondents, photographers and TV cameramen. There were reporters from USA, UK, Germany, France, Italy and many other countries, besides Indian newspapers and news agencies' correspondents(14).

#### BANGLADESHI DIPLOMATS DECLARE ALLEGIANCE

The establishment of the provisional Government of Bangladesh made it a focal point for Bangladeshis serving in Pakistani missions or living abroad to rally round it to help the liberation struggle. The Deputy High Commissioner of Pakistan in Calcutta, Hussain Ali, was the first diplomat to declare his loyalty to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Bangladesh on 18 April 1971. All the 70 Bengalee members of his staff, including 5 officers, also transferred their allegiance to the Bangladesh Government(15). Hussain Ali, in a statement recounted how the Pakistan government had flouted the clear verdict of a democratic election and engaged itself in "a planned attempt to subdue and crush the entire Bengali nation". He found it "impossible to continue to represent the Pakistan Government which is engaged by all evidences in a deliberate and systematic

genocide of Bengalis in Bangla Desh". He also made arrangements for meeting the expenses of members who had transferred their allegiance withdrawing on 17 April the entire money in account of the Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner in a bank(16). had the by the in a

Two East Bengalee diplomats of the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi - Second Secretary, K.M. Shahabuddin and the Assistant Press Attache, Amjadul Haque - who had defected and obtained asylum in India on 6 April 1971, declared their allegiance to the Bangladesh government on 20 April. They stated that they had severed connections "with the fascist military dictatorship in Islamabad as our conscience no longer permits us to act against our deepest convictions"(17).

The defection of Bengalee diplomats, in Calcutta and in New Delhi proved a trend-setter for Bengalee diplomats working in Pakistani missions in other countries, who also followed in their footsteps and began to transfer allegiance to the Bangladesh government. In all, about 126 East Bengalee officials of Pak Missions abroad, including Ambassadors posted in Iraq, Philippines and Argentina, decladred their allegiance to Bangladesh upto December 1971(18).

The defection of the Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta led to rapid deterioration in the already strained Indo-Pak relations. The newly appointed Deputy High Commissioner, Mehdi Masud, was unable to take over the premises of the Deputy High Commission. Pakistan threatened India of "serious consequences" if the premises were not cleared of its illegal occupants. India told Pakistan that the possession of the premises was an internal matter of Pakistan, and no force would be used by the Indian authorities. On 20 April, India prepared to pull out the staff and their families from its Deputy High Commission in Dhaka as "it had become impossible for the personnel of the Deputy High Commission to live and move about safely in Dacca." India also protested against the rough treatment given to Smt. Sen Gupta, the wife of the Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka, at the Dhaka and Karachi airports. She was taken out of the plane at Karachi and so was the Indian diplomatic courier. Pakistan had debarred Indian diplomats and their families from leaving the country. India retaliated by imposing similar restrictions on Pak diplomats on 26 April.

On 24 April, Pakistan decided to close down its Deputy High Commission in Calcutta and asked India to wind up its Deputy High Commission in Dhaka. It

suggested that all personnel of the Indian Deputy High Commission in Dhaka and of the Pakistan Deputy High Commission in Calcutta be brought to Karachi from where the Indians could go to New Delhi. This was a ruse for forcible repatriation of Hussain Ali and other Bengalee officials of the Deputy High Commission in Calcutta to Pakistan. India emphatically refused to use any force for the purpose as the concerned officials were free to make their own decisions and it was wrong to connect the closure of the Deputy High Commission with total repatriation of the employees. India said that it would follow international conventions in this regard. Pakistan wanted facilities for Mehdi Masud to meet the Bengalee officials of its former Deputy High Commission individually and privately. Hussain Ali offered to meet him on behalf of all the Bengalee staff and suggested that if individual meetings were considered necessary, they be conducted in the presence of an impartial third party. India, while willing to provide facilities for the meetings, refused to use any pressure to force the unwilling Bengalee staff members to meet Mehdi Masud. Because of these illegal demands of Pakistan, the staff and dependents of the former Indian Mission in Dhaka, who had been virtual prisoners for 108 days, could return to New Delhi only on 12 August(19).

In a press statement on 17 April, the date of the formal proclamation of the Provisional Bangladesh Government, its Prime Minister, Tajuddin Ahmed, appealed to all nations of the world to recognise the new nation and give "assistance with material and moral" for its struggle for nation-hood. He declared, "Pakistan is now dead and buried under a mountain of corpses. The hundreds and thousands of people murdered by the army in Bangla Desh will act as an impenetrable barrier between West Pakistan and the people of Bangla Desh." He expressed gratitude to the people of USSR and India and the freedom loving people of all the countries for their full support already given to their struggle. He further added that he would welcome similar support from the People's Republic of China, USA, France, Great Britain and others. Bangladesh sought friendship with all countries, big or small, but would not join any pact or block. Any help rendered must be "free from any desire to control our destinies. We have struggled far too long for our self-determination to permit ourselves to become anybody's satellite"(20).

#### MUKTI BAHINI TAKES BIRTH

Driven out from East Bengal, the Bengalee "deserters" from the Pak military and para-military



forces were steeled into freedom fighters by the brutality of the Pak forces, and were the first to start hitting back.

After becoming the Commander of the Eastern Command, relieving Lt Gen Tikka Khan on 11 April, Lt Gen A.A.K. Niazi issued a new operational directive for further operations, to be completed by 15 May 1971, in the following five phases :-

- Phase I - Clearing of all major border towns and sealing off the routes of infiltration.
- Phase II - Clearing and holding of Chittagong Base and keeping it safe from artillery and mortar fire.
- Phase III - Opening of essential river, road and rail communications.
- Phase IV - Clearing of all towns in the interior and the coastal area.
- Phase V - Combing of the whole of the province and elimination of rebels/infiltrators"(21).

Emphasis was placed on speed and multi-thrusts towards the objectives. By end April, the Pak Army had occupied all border outposts except the 388.5 sq km Belonia salient where the 'rebels' had consolidated their defences(22). Also by this date, the ports of Chittagong, Chalna and Khulna were secured, and railway communications between Khulna and North Bengal and between Dhaka and Rangpur were made operational during day-time. By the end of May, except for a few small pockets here and there, the 'rebels' had been driven out of all parts of East Pakistan(23).

Now the Pak forces established a reign of terror in the areas occupied by them. They launched a genocide operation in a planned manner in three phases. First, the assaulting group would capture an objective, then the second group would arrive to rape and kill, and the third group, consisting of criminals and supplied with petrol, kerosene, etc., by the Government, then set them on fire. "It is reported that a large number of convicted criminals were transferred from the West Pakistan jails to Bangladesh and set free to commit these atrocities"(24). The targets of the genocide were the Bengalee members of the EBR, EPR, Police, Ansars, Mujahids, the Awami Leaguers - all office-bearers and volunteers down to

the lowest link in the chain of the party command - students, Bengalee intellectuals such as professors, teachers, doctors, and journalists, and the Hindus at large without discrimination(25).

But Niazi's troubles were far from over; in fact they were just beginning.

According to F.M. Khan, on 25 March 1971, there were six Army battalions and one National Service battalion of the EBR, all fully manned by Bengalee ORs, but officered by both East and West Pakistanis. There were 16 Wings of East Pakistan Rifles, manned mostly by East Pakistanis, except for some West Pakistani officers. Its total strength was about 13,000(26). Out of the EBR battalions, posted in East Pakistan, one battalion was preparing to go to West Pakistan on relief, and 75 per cent of its men were on leave. Besides, one newly raised EBR battalion was awaiting embarkation in Chittagong for a move to West Pakistan(27). East Pakistani element in the Pakistan Air Force posted in East Pakistan at that time was 50% of the total PAF strength deployed there(28). According to Major Rafiq-ul-Islam, who was himself an officer in the EPR, there were approximately 15,000 EPR men all over East Pakistan, commanded by Army officers who came on deputation for two to three years. According to him, ninety per cent of the officers and twenty per cent of the men in the EPR were West Pakistanis(29).

The following was the disposition of the EBR in East Pakistan on 25 March 1971(30):

- 1 EBR - Jessore area
- 2 EBR - HQ in Joydebpur in the north of Dhaka.
  - i) 1 Coy in Tongi
  - ii) 1 Coy in Gazipur
  - iii) 1 Coy in Tangail
  - iv) 1 Coy in Mymensingh
- 3 EBR - Saidpur area
- 4 EBR - Comilla Sector
- 8 EBR - Chittagong (Maj Ziaur Rahman, a Bengalee, was Second-in-Command).
- 9 EBR (under raising) - Chittagong
- 10 EBR - East Bengal Regimental Centre in Chittagong(31).

(The 10 EBR was a National Service Battalion consisting of students under training).

Of the above-mentioned Bengalee elements, 1 EBR, located in Jessore, was disarmed on 30 March 1971, after some resistance in which many EBR men were

killed, and the rest escaped to the districts of 24 Parganas and Nadia in West Bengal. 2 EBR, which revolted on 28 March 1971, was also disarmed. Some of them were killed and the rest escaped towards the north into Indian territory. 3 EBR and 4 EBR in Saidpur and Comilla areas respectively could only be partially disarmed. Most of them moved towards Hilli and Sylhet respectively and eventually into Indian territory. However, 4 EBR in order to defend the Bhairab Bazar Bridge had fought a 48-hour pitched battle against a brigade-size Pakistani force, consisting of two infantry battalions, two commando coys, a troop of tanks, and a section of heavy mortars, supported by one gun-boat and some fighter aircraft, launched by Pakistan's 14 Infantry Division. In this battle 500 Bengalee defenders were reportedly killed(32). However, this EBR Battalion, although defeated, escaped to Tripura in good order in April 1971(33).

The 8, 9 and 10 EBR, which were all stationed in Chittagong, shared the same fate. Between them there were about 4,500 officers and soldiers, mostly Bengalee (including approximately 300 from 8 EBR), who revolted(34). The East Bengal Regimental Centre in Chittagong had a strength of about 2,500 men, including 9 EBR, which was being raised,(35) of whom more than 2,000 were Bengalees(36). Approximately 200 of them were killed by 20 Baluch after mid-night on 26 March 1971, and about 1,300 trained soldiers escaped(37). The rebels occupied Chittagong town except the Naval base, harbour and the air-field for several days before they were driven to the Indian territory of Tripura.

One scholar has estimated that the Bengalee military, para-military and police forces who took refuge in Indian territory after the Pak Army crack-down of 25 March 1971, numbered 20,000 in all(38).

These were trained men, and also had weapons acquired from many different sources. For example, 172 rifles, 6 revolvers and some ammunition were taken away from Satkhira Armoury, and in subsequent raids, some RCL guns, HMGs, 3" mortars and vehicles were captured by them in Kushtia district(39). They attacked the Habiganj (in Sylhet district) Sub-Treasury on 28 March, seizing 516 rifles of .303 bore and large quantity of ammunition. They raided a BOP at Akhaura on 30 March, killing ten Pak soldiers and capturing all the arms and ammunition at the post. On 1 April, the Bengalee personnel of EPR in Comilla deserted with arms; and in Jessore, the freedom fighters captured the arms and ammunition of 200 Pak

troops who surrendered on 8 April(40). In addition, 45,000 rifles, stored at various police stations in East Pakistan for the Ansars, were taken over by these 'rebels'. The Bengalee residents abroad also procured arms, ammunition and money for them(41). A sum of £45,000 was collected from the Bengalees in the UK for the purchase of material from foreign countries to help the freedom fighters of Bangladesh(42). On 19 April 1971, Rs. 1,12,60,000 was taken away by MF from Kurigram State Bank(43). Large amounts of money were looted from number of other Treasuries and Sub-Treasuries(44). Towards the end of April, the freedom fighters raided the National Bank at Habiganj and removed about 15 million rupees.

The 'rebels' thus, had arms, and training to use them, and they were in large numbers. Motivation was hardly lacking! And so they began to hit back at the Pakistan army immediately after the crack-down of 25 March, and skirmishes continued all along the border.

As expected, India's Border Security Force, had been watching closely the momentous developments in East Bengal. They had witnessed and kept in touch with the intense agitation by the Bengalee people in March 1971 and the terrible repression and genocide launched by the Pakistan Army from 25 March. The unequal struggle between the EBR, EPR and the people against the heavily armed Pakistan Army, and the indescribable sufferings of the refugees fleeing the terror, was a daily experience for the BSF men. In common with the Indian people - and indeed the Indian government itself - their sympathies lay entirely with the Bengalees. No human being could remain unaffected and unconcerned with the brutalities being perpetrated right before the eyes of the BSF troops. In their bloody campaign against the freedom fighters, the Pakistani forces were firing and intruding into Indian territory again and again at numerous places. In 1947, and again in 1965, Pakistan had deliberately planned and secretly executed armed aggression against India, leading to the two wars already fought between them. In fact, Indian and Pakistan forces had long come to regard each other as natural enemies. The situation developing after 25 March was too much for anybody to care for legal niceties and international proprieties. The BSF officers and men knew and realised that even their senior commanders would secretly bless and support any blow struck against the brutal Pakistanis, provided it caused no diplomatic embarrassment to the Indian government. The utterly confused situation, with extreme violence all round and spilling over into India all too frequently, provided an excellent opportunity to strike small blows without attracting notice. So, without any

written orders, the BSF gave to the Bengalee fighters whatever help it could in the form of tactical guidance and training, small arms and ammunition, encouragement and fire support. The freedom fighters (with BSF support) carried out forays, ambushes and demolitions of many bridges, rail tracks and installations, to harass the Pak forces and to disrupt their lines of communication. In the Tripura Sector particularly, there was much BSF activity by a small force operating under Brig B.C. Pandey, from the end of March to the middle of May. When Col M.A.G. Osmani arrived at Agartala from Dhaka on foot on 2 April 1971, he met Brig Pandey, and the rebel fighters took new heart. Similarly Col Megh Singh, Vr C, operated with his 18 BSF Commando Bn in the Bongaon Sector, Col Rampal Singh, with 103 BSF Bn in Cooch Bihar and Brig M.S. Chatterjee, MC, in the Balurghat Sector. The BSF activities, at that stage, however, were basically defensive and local, and very different - in scale as well as nature of operations - from anything like Indian military involvement in the Bangladesh crisis(45).

On 11 April, Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, announced from the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra that a mighty liberation army was being formed with the trained personnel of the EBR, EPR, Police, Ansars, Mujahids, and from thousands of Awami League and other volunteers. He also announced the formation of the following regional commands under commanders to fight the Pak forces effectively:

- 1) Sylhet-Comilla region -  
Major Khaled Mosharraf of the EBR
- 2) Chittagong-Noakhali region -  
Major Ziaur Rahman of the EBR
- 3) Mymensingh-Tangail region -  
Major Md Shafiullah of the EBR
- 4) Kushtia-Jessore region -  
Major Osman of the EPR
- 5) Faridpur-Barisal-Khulna-Patuakhali region -  
Major Jalil
- 6) Rajshahi district - Major Ahmed
- 7) Saidpur area - Capt Nazrul Huq
- 8) Rangpur area - Capt Nowazesh(46).

On the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Bangladesh as a formally constituted state on 17 April 1971, Col M.A.G. Osmani, a retired officer of the Pak army and elected Member of the National Assembly, was co-opted as a member of the Cabinet and appointed the C-in-C of the Bangladesh Liberation Army(47).

The initial shortage of officers in the Mukti Bahini was partly met by arrival of 20 Bengalee officers who had managed to escape from West Pakistan(48), by the induction of a few retired officers and also by requisitioning the services of some Air Force officers.

In spite of these early efforts and brave declarations, the Mukti Bahini was not a properly organised, well trained force in April-May 1971. But its men and leaders were burning with such fierce anger that they started hitting back at the Pakistan Army in East Bengal without waiting for more arms or better training.

During May-June, the unorganised Freedom Fighters caused some damage to the Pak forces and certain vital installations in several areas of Bangladesh. On 1 May, they clashed with the Pak Army at Hemu, about 19.3 km north-east of Sylhet, and inflicted about 31 casualties on them, including one General Staff Officer(49). They captured the Pak river vessels Kiwi and Bral and set them on fire on 12 May(50). About the end of May, they destroyed four East Pakistan border outposts in different districts(51). On 2 June, the Freedom Fighters destroyed one more border outpost in area Barabaldin in Jessore district. Ten days later, they raided Pak army positions in Jaintiapur area of Sylhet district, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. On the same date it was reported that during an attack on the Belgachi bridge in Bogra, they inflicted 10 casualties on the Pak army, themselves suffering a loss of 17 killed(52). However, on 23 June, the Pak army killed 26 freedom fighters at Morellganj, about 38.6 km south-east of Khulna, and sank two boats loaded with ammunititon(53). During May-June, the Freedom Fighters damaged a large number of road and railway bridges and telecommunication facilities throughout East Bengal.

First effort towards induction of "panic groups" deep inside East Pakistan for destruction of communications and harassment of the Pak army in towns was also attempted from May onwards. However, the outcome of these missions was, by and large, disappointing, and most of the "panic groups" returned

unsuccessful(54).

These developments coming within weeks of the crack-down, showed the definite failure of Yahya's attempt to crush East Bengal. He had sown the winds; now the whirlwind had begun. Very soon India also got sucked into the turmoil, and a new and grave international crisis descended on the world.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From Official Records.
2. From Official Records.
3. Ibid.
4. He earned this sobriquet when as Commander of the army in Baluchistan during 1958-60, through a reign of terror, he suppressed the Baluch insurgency.
5. BD I, p.538.
6. Ibid., p.495.
7. Minister of Labour and Rehabilitation R.K. Khadilkar informed Lok Sabha on 27 May 1971 that between 26 and 31 March 1971, only 300 refugees had crossed into India, Lok Sabha Debates(LSD), Vol.II, 27 May 1971.
8. From Official Records.
9. BD I, pp.550-553.
10. Ibid., p.190.
11. Sen Gupta, pp.325-326.
12. Ibid., p.333.
13. BD I, p.282.
14. Ibid., pp.289-291.  
Sen Gupta, pp.341-342.
15. From Official Records.
16. Asian Recorder (AR), 11-17 June 1971.
17. Ibid.
18. From Official Records.
19. AR 11-17 June 1971 and 17-23 September 1971.
20. BD I, pp.291-298.
21. Khan, p.86. See Map 3.
22. Belonia bulge fell to the Pak forces on 19 June.  
Islam, p.178.
23. Khan, p.87-88.
24. Islam, p.164.
25. Bhuiyan, p.191.
26. EBR were deployed alongwith West Pakistani units in various towns of East Pakistan, whereas EPR were deployed all along the 3200-km border, and their officers were generally from West Pakistan on deputation - BSF HQ "Ops Tripura-Assam border, 1971". Part-I, pp.6-7.
27. Khan, p.67.
28. Ibid., p.68.
29. Islam, p.42. According to the Bangladesh government-in-exile, the strengths of the EBR, EPR & the Police deployed in East Pakistan on 25 March 1971, were 3,000, 17,000 & 24,000 respectively.
30. However, according to the BSF sources, there were eight bns of East Bengal Regiment, and out of these, three were in West Pakistan and the advance party of another (8th Bn) had also gone to West Pakistan. Most of them were commanded by West Pakistani officers, though the majority of



junior officers were Bengalees. Very few senior Bengalee officers were serving in East Pakistan at that time - BSF HQ "Ops Tripura-Assam border, 1971". Part-I, p.6.

31. Khan, pp.78-80. The 10 EBR was a National Service Battalion consisting of students under training.
32. Ibid., p.84.
33. Gen Sagat Singh's Interview.
34. Islam, p.60.
35. Khan, p.78.
36. Islam, p.60.
37. Khan, p.78.
38. Jackson, pp.55-56.
39. From Official Records.
40. From Official Records.
41. Khan, p.81.
42. From Official Records.
43. From Official Records.
44. From Official Records.
45. Appendix I.
46. Bhuiyan, pp.194-195 & Maniruzzaman, p.99.
47. Bhuiyan, p.199. However, according to Maj Gen Khan, Osmani was appointed on 14 April 1971. Khan, p.94.
48. There were about 1,100 Bengalee Officers and 28,000 Bengalee ORs in West Pakistan during the period of struggle, 25 March to 16 December 1971. Maniruzzaman, pp.113 and 136.
49. From Official Records.
50. From Official Records.
51. From Official Records.
52. From Official Records.
53. Ibid.
54. From Official Records.

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