The sheer scale of the mayhem makes it unlikely to have been a violent agitation over things such as pay, subsidised food and holidays. Surely it would make more sense in that case to hold the officers hostage. Experts now believe the objective was the elimination of the army officers, and the demands were a smoke screen.

"They didn't give us the chance to say anything," recalled Col. Quamruzzaman, who was wounded, but survived. "The DG kept saying tell me your demands. But they just opened fire."

During the mutiny, unruly jawans repeatedly railed against their officers. They called for appointing officers from their own ranks rather than sending army officers on deputation.

Retired Major Yead Ali, formerly commanding officer of 21st Rifles Battalion, thinks there is another, darker, reason for the BDR soldiers to resent army officers. "Unfortunately, some jawans in the border areas become involved with smuggling rings," he said. "Army officers are sent on deputation for relatively short periods of two to three years. It is difficult for the corrupt jawans to operate if the officer is honest. Sometimes they try to involve their officers. But by the time that happens, it's time for the officer to go, and another one comes in his place."



Major Yead said part of the raison d'etre of a paramilitary force is to fight alongside the army in a war. "If the command structure is totally different, it becomes difficult to operate under a unified command when the need comes."

Nayek Babul Mia of the 44th Rifles Battalion said although harsh punishment is often meted out for crimes, this would not lead to Jawans turning their guns on their superiors. "I have fought alongside officers on many border skirmishes with the Indian BSF. We support each other," said Babul.

So if the rank-and-file Jawans were not that dissatisfied with their superiors, who started the killing spree? The evidence points to the existence of a hardcore element within the BDR headquarters on that fateful day. This core group was intent on eliminating the officers. This group planned and carried out the murders. They then incited other jawans by a variety of techniques. A rumour was spread that the DG had shot a soldier in the Darbar hall. Others were told that the army was coming and if they did not take up arms they would be massacred. Still others were swayed by the inflammatory rhetoric against the alleged oppression of army men.

In the last few days, some suggestions have emerged that agents may have come in from outside to lead the mutiny. But BDR soldiers, speaking to the Star magazine, have debunked that theory. "The soldiers are used to obeying their own JCO (Junior Commissioned Officers) and NCO (Non commissioned Officers)," said Imamul Hossain of the 14th Rifles, who won a BDR Medal for bravery from the prime minister the previous day. "They are not stupid enough to obey just anyone and start shooting." Imamul said he was supposed to receive a cheque worth Tk 50000 from the DG during the Darbar, but fled when the firing started.

"I would have resisted if I could," said Imamul. "But there were too many of them, and they were too organised. I received my medal for fighting off a BSF incursion in 2005 in which I saved many officers. I love my country. Why would I want to harm my superiors?" Imamul Hossain fled the Pilkhana, only to return after the fighting was over.

It is clear that whoever planned the mutiny knew the Pilkhana and the surrounding area intimately, and they knew how to incite the men. But if the issues of who and why are vexing enough, how the entire incident unfolded also raises many serious questions.

One crucial issue being hotly debated is the government response to the mutiny. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ordered the army to stand by while her government pursued a negotiated solution. The government, she said, opted for talks to save lives. While she has been lauded for solving the crisis "without expending a bullet", questions have been asked as to whether the delay ultimately increased the death toll, and whether the general amnesty declared early on Wednesday was properly timed.

Could a rapid strike from the army have saved lives? Many military experts believe it could. "It would take APCs (armoured personnel careers) fifteen minutes to get from Jahangir Gate to the BDR HQ," said Lt. General Mir Shawkat Ali. "The BDR men with their rifles wouldn't have been able to resist. I think they would turn tail."

An officer of Military Intelligence said on condition of anonymity that RAB units in the area could have been used as a striking force while army reinforcements moved up. "It takes time for tanks to mobilize," he said. "But RAB units are usually ready to move quickly."