



# Military strategy of the Liberation War

Here we publish an excerpt from an interview of General M. A. G Osmani by Hedayet Hussain Morshed.

**Q: How was the Mukti Bahini organised? What were their tactics and strategy between March 26 and December 3?**

**A:** You will remember that from March 26 the brave Bengali soldiers of the East Bengal Regiment (EBR), the brave soldiers of former EPR and Ansar, Mujahed and the brave armed jawans belonging to the police had pounced on the enemy to resist them. They were joined by the youth and students.

In the beginning, the battles were of conventional nature, which continued till May. Conventional tactics were employed so as to restrict the enemy to the cantonments and prevent them from capturing the communication centres. The tactic was to create as many obstacles as possible for the enemy, preserve as many existing natural obstacles as possible, and at the same time hit him from the flanks and his lines of communication (L of C). In spite of being fewer in number, the Mukti Bahini put up a brave fight. During this phase, quite a few spectacular battles were fought, e.g. the battle of Bhairob-Ashuganj. Here the enemy employed two full brigades against a battalion of the EBR. The enemy was held up here for four days.

But I want to stress something here. We had to readjust the conventional tactic of our regular force, they being fewer in number. We employed small groups like patrols or platoons and company groups to hold up the enemy and even attack them. This is how the battle had started in Chittagong and other areas.

About that time it became clear to me and my commanders that it would not be possible for us to conduct the war through conventional means because at that time we had only five battalions of troops. Apart from that we had with us soldiers of former Ansar, Mujahed, police and the youths. It was somewhat difficult to provide the young volunteers with weapons. We could somehow manage to train them with the weapons we carried away with us. We were facing an enemy of three to four regular divisions. And it was clear to us that with that ratio it was not possible to resist them, much less destroy. By April it became clear to me that we needed a large unconventional people's force. This force should be such that would be capable of neutralising the numerical superiority of the enemy. It would, as a guerrilla force, destroy the weapons of the enemy from within like a germ destroys an organ of a body from within. It was not possible to defeat the enemy otherwise. They had larger number of weapons, they had an air force which we did not, and they had much more war materials.

However, it was at the same time clear to us that it would take a long time to liberate our land if we employed classical guerrilla warfare tactics. By then the country would face destruction. Our biggest resource - manpower - would be destroyed. There would be very little left to salvage. Thus by end of April the need for a new modus of operation became clear. The idea was to employ a large guerrilla force from within to make the enemy fight in smaller numbers and disperse and isolate its troops which would neutralise its superiority in numbers.

For this I required a regular force also. I communicated our requirement to the government in writing and also sought support of our allies. My aim was to raise a guerrilla force of minimum 60,000 - 80,000 and a regular force of about 25,000. And these forces should be raised immediately.

We implemented our policy on ground. Gradually a guerrilla - people's force - was created. At the beginning we established bases in different areas and by the end of June the guerrilla force went into action. But before the end of Jul-Aug the enemy did not feel the effect of our guerrilla force, although we had infiltrated a few young men inside the country after training. They had gone to Chittagong and had come to Dhaka too. But it was from July that the enemy began to feel the effect of our guerrilla operation.

At the same time our attention was drawn to another aspect. We received many regular navy officers, warrant officers and sailors. Some Bengali navy personnel of Pakistan Navy undergoing submarine training in Paris defected and joined us. We organised a naval commando group with these personnel and the young volunteers, who conducted successful raids on the waterways. . .

The enemy wanted to internationalize the war in order to save their skin - so that there was a ceasefire under UN and that observers were employed and they save their lives by handing the problem over to the UN. They were sure of their inevitable defeat. When the UN did not intervene they tried to give the conflict an international colour to force the UN to get involved. To this end they conducted air raids on our bases and positions inside Bangladesh and also on areas in West Bengal and Tripura.

There is one more thing I want to say. I had no air force. All we had were two helicopters, an Otter, and a Dakota for my movement. The helicopters and Otter were fitted with machine guns. And from the fliers who were engaged in the field we managed to



M. A. G Osmani with freedom fighters.

successfully organise a small air force. Their tasks were to carry out attacks on a few enemy bases and interdictions.

I wonder whether you are aware that the first air attack on the enemy was conducted by our brave airmen. In the battles conducted between March 26 and December 3, even though we did not have aircrafts, we nevertheless conducted raids on the enemy air bases successfully. Sometime by the end of the war, a brave freedom fighter brought effective machine gun fire on a C-130 at the Sylhet airbase. Although the aircraft was not brought down, it somehow managed to reach Shamsheernagar airport where it was laid off for many days for repair.

**Q: What were the strategy and tactics of the joint forces from December 3 to 16?**

**A:** [ . . . ] The Indian forces entered the battle on December 3 till the surrender of the enemy on December 16. When the involvement of the Indian military became imminent we drew up a plan jointly. Since they had tanks, artillery and aircraft, the Indian forces were to engage the enemy's main forces at the beginning. Mukti Bahini forces were to outflank the enemy and engage them in their flanks or attack the enemy rear while the Indian forces engaged and held them from the front. Those areas that the Mukti Bahini liberated were done under the battle plans of the Mukti Bahini. . .

**Q: When the joint forces advanced together it was Mukti Bahini that led the advance**

**with the Indian troops in support?**

**A:** It was done in two ways. First, suppose there was an enemy stronghold. The resources of the Indians were used to engage the strong point from the front while the Mukti Bahini elements engaged in outflanking that strong point to make their position untenable. Thereafter if a subsequent enemy position were to be engaged the Mukti Bahini would lead the advance, they being familiar with the terrain. Where necessary we would be supported by the Indian artillery and air force. . .

**Q: How many sectors were there? Where were the headquarters?**

**A:** There were eleven sectors under a sector commander. The sector headquarters were inside Bangladesh territory. . .

**Q: What was the strength of the regular forces and how were they armed? What was the size of the Gano Bahini?**

**A:** We had difficulty in expanding the size of regular forces. It was difficult to acquire weapons in spite of the good intentions of everyone. My intention was to acquire various categories of weapons as quickly as possible. And if the Indians had not joined the war on December 3 then we might have had to continue the war for another six months.

By the end of the war we were able to raise a regular force of about 20 to 22 thousand strong men with the help of the regular officers and troops. We started the war with five EBR battalions. 1 EBR was decimated and I got only 188 personnel. Eventually we made

up the strength of the five battalions and raised an additional three battalions by the end of the war. Apart from that we raised sector troops with each sector having a number of companies. The regular EBR troops made up the three brigades named as "Force" after the initial of the force commanders like "Z" Force, "K" Force and "S" Force.

We raised two artillery batteries, the first with some old guns provided by the Indians. It was named, "Number -1 Mujib Battery." It participated in the war. The second battery had newer guns and participated in the war too. . .

**Q: Was the Gano Bahini under a different sector? What was the so-called C-in-C's special organisation?**

**A:** Bangladesh armed forces, known as the Mukti Bahini, composed of army, navy and air force. Many mistakenly think that the guerrillas were the Mukti Bahini. There were two components of the Mukti Bahini, the regular forces and the guerrilla or the irregular forces. And the Gano Bahini and Mukti Bahini worked under the 11 Sectors.

About C-in-C's Special Force, initially the guerrillas were given training for two weeks, later it was increased to three. I had devised special training for some guerrillas as special course and their task was to provide leadership to the other guerrillas and do special operations not possible by the ordinary guerrillas. These people were specially selected and I personally employed people to select them. There was nothing like C-in-C's special force as such. . .

**Q: How did you maintain contact inside Bangladesh?**

**A:** We had organised bases inside the country from the early stages of the war. These were activated further after Gano Bahini started operating. There were three types of bases and we maintained contact through couriers and wireless communication.

**Q: What type of response did you receive from the people in the occupied areas?**

**A:** We received unstinted support from the people of Bangladesh, except for a few - the Razakars and al-Badr. We felt as if the seven crore Bengalis were breathing with us. . .

**Q: Did you ever come to Dhaka during this time?**

**A:** No, I did not come to Dhaka, though many say that I did. I have been to different areas but not to Dhaka. It was not possible. . .

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## Salahuddin's Disappearance Discrepancies in police and eyewitness testimonies

One finds there exist major discrepancies in the narratives of what had taken place in Uttara Section 3 on the fateful night of March 10. The submissions of LEAs stand out in sharp contrast to the course of events reported in the media.

C R ABRAR

A spectre of insecurity is looming large on the citizens of the country. This feeling is particularly pronounced among the opposition political activists. At a time when people were reeling from the trauma of near-disappearance of the prominent political figure, media personality and likely mayoral candidate for Dhaka North Mahmudur Rahman, they were appalled to learn the dreadful news of disappearance of Salahuddin Ahmed, leader, former minister of state and serving spokesperson of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Salahuddin was picked up late evening from an apartment at Section 3 of the northern township of Uttara. His family claimed that members of the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) took him away. Following a writ petition filed by the spouse of the victim and at the instruction of the High Court all four agencies of the police - Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Special Branch (SB) submitted separate reports to the Attorney General's office, denying any role in Salahuddin's disappearance. In its statement the DMP authorities claimed that Ahmed had disappeared on his own, and no law enforcement agency had arrested him. Taking cue from the

accounts of all four agencies in his submission to the Court the Attorney General contended that the victim staged a drama simply to embarrass the government and the LEAs. In hindsight, it appears that the esteemed Officer of the Court laid misplaced faith in the authenticity of the reports submitted by the LEAs.

The high profile nature of the case drew intense media attention. The correspondents of electronic and print media filed a number of reports after visiting the site of occurrence and talking with the guards of the household concerned and others in the neighbourhood. There was a fair degree of likeness in the presentation of facts among those reports. However, they stood in pointed contrast to what the LEAs claimed in their testimonies to the Court.

In their submission the police said that it did not find evidence of anyone picking up Salahuddin from the Uttara house against his wishes. The police quoting the security guards stated that a guest of one of the apartments left the house in a car with four-five others at around 10pm. They also referred to the guards' observation that those with whom the guest left the house did not appear to be law enforcers and there was no indication that he was coerced into joining them. The police stated that the guards informed them that none of those who came to the house wore uniforms nor did they have any

firearms in their possession. The police stated that the vehicle parked did not appear to the guards to be of any LEA. Based on the above, the police claimed that none of its personnel went to the said house on the night in question and involvement of any other agency could not be traced.

The claims of the police differ substantially from what the guards of the apartment block and those in the vicinity reported to the journalists.

Firstly, in contrast to the police version, various dailies citing the guards reported that several vehicles were used in the operation. Of those, two were parked on both ends of the Road 13/B of Uttara Section 3 and another four were parked in front of the concerned house. The number of occupants of the vehicles was estimated to be 20-25, of whom 6 or 7 entered the premises.

Secondly, the police stated that the guards informed them of their ignorance about the political affiliation of the victim, who the owners of the house introduced to the latter as 'Raihan'. A prominent English daily quoted guard Akhterul whose statement was exactly opposite to what the police claimed. Akhterul observed, "I knew he was a BNP leader. I saw him many times on TV. He came to this house four days ago."

Thirdly, press reports contradicted the police version that the guards did not think the guests with whom the

victim allegedly went off were members of any LEA. The reports published did not corroborate this. They inform that when the guards demanded to know the identity of the persons who entered the premise, they were told that they belonged to LEA. A few brandished their detective branch identity cards that were tied to their belts. In one instance one guard preferring anonymity told a reporter that he was subjected to interrogation. Included among the questions were if other political leaders visited Mr. Raihan and if so, who they were.

Fourthly, the media reports also challenge the veracity of the police claim that the guards did not see any firearms. A few reports citing the guards noted that they saw pistols under their jackets of some members of the team. The guards also stated that they were subjected to slapping and were asked to keep quiet while the operation was on.

Fifthly, while the police claimed that the guards did not think the victim was coerced into the vehicle, a number of reports citing the guards note that Salahuddin was blindfolded with his hands tied behind his back before being pushed into one of the vehicles parked outside.

Finally, in their submission to the court the police claimed that neighbours did not think the LEAs picked anyone up that night. One Bangla daily, quoting a security guard of the Uttara Sector 3 Society, reported that

he had seen a microbus standing at the entrance of Road 11 with 6-7 well built persons hanging around. They introduced themselves as members of a LEA. Another guard reported that he saw someone being picked up. Upon enquiry by the guard, one of the members involved in the act told him that members of a LEA were apprehending a criminal. He further informed although those involved did not don any uniform, one of them was carrying a rifle. A correspondent of a leading Bangla daily reported that security guards of three buildings close to the site of occurrence believed that the armed intruders were members of a LEA.

Thus one finds there exist major discrepancies in the narratives of what had taken place in Uttara Section 3 on the fateful night of March 10. The submissions of LEAs stand out in sharp contrast to the course of events reported in the media. A close scrutiny would make any discernible observer cast grave doubt on the genuineness of the statements furnished by LEAs to the apex court of the land.

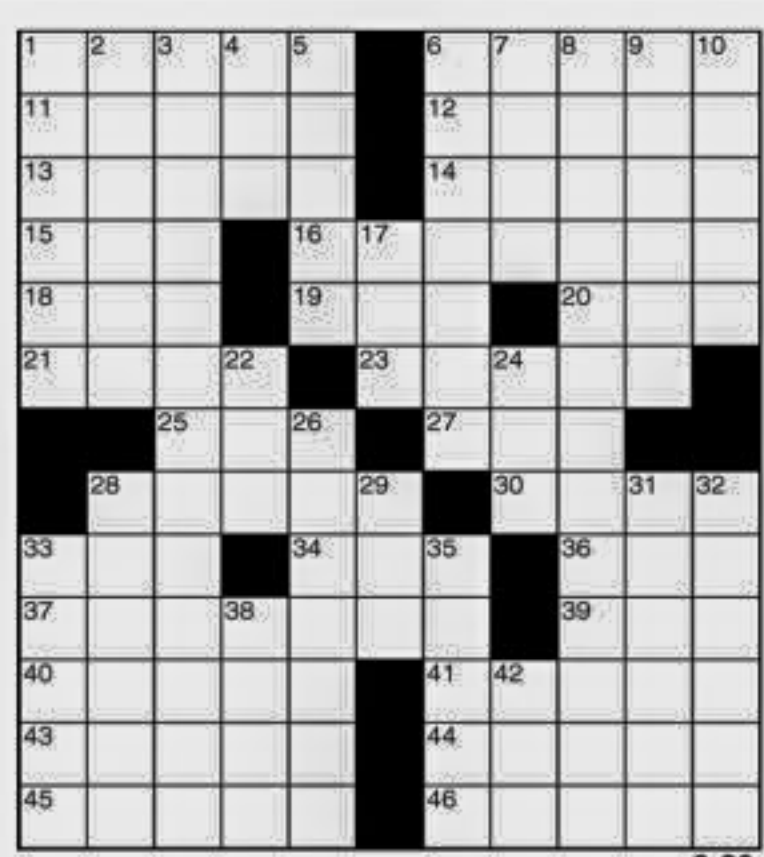
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QUOTABLE Quote  
  
To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders.  
  
Lao Tzu

### CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- 1 Prince of India
  - 6 Sports summary
  - 11 Cherish
  - 12 "Don't Cry for Me" singer
  - 13 Tatter
  - 14 Shoppers' aids
  - 15 -- XING (street sign)
  - 16 Quick looks
  - 18 Bit of history
  - 19 Slippery one
  - 20 Apply
  - 21 Bears' lairs
  - 23 Big party
  - 25 Clumsy fellow
  - 27 Tentative taste
  - 28 Schemes
  - 30 Unhearing
  - 33 Zodiac creature
  - 34 Frank McCourt book
  - 36 Paris pal
  - 37 Hot stuff
  - 39 Convent resident
  - 40 Highly excited
  - 41 Rotten fellow
  - 43 Mix up
- DOWN**
- 1 Sounded hoarse
  - 2 Stick
  - 3 Candy store choice
  - 4 Verb for you
  - 5 Bushy boundary
  - 6 Remembers
  - 7 Former senator Bayh
  - 8 Candy store choice
  - 9 Swear
  - 10 Out of fashion
  - 17 Isr. neighbor
  - 22 Hotel feature
  - 24 Lend a hand
  - 26 Lures
  - 28 Easter event
  - 29 Attack command
  - 31 Entertains
  - 32 Fancy clothes
  - 33 Make a new chart
  - 35 Witch trial town
  - 38 Incline
  - 42 Low die roll



### Yesterday's answer

BARB PROFS  
AREA SLIPUP  
LIES PASTRY  
MAKENICE  
MAKEASURE  
SCRAPE SOD  
LOONS REEVE  
ARC HOLDEN  
MAKETIME  
MAKEGOOD  
PIMPLE ABLE  
ELATES NOEL  
PLOYS TEST

**CRYPTOQUOTE** 24  
MOGATDZZ AZ TYXJATV FYHD XJOT XID  
JOWAX YU HDZXATV WDUYHD PYR VDX  
XAHDL. -- KRMDZ HDTOHL

**YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE:**  
SOME PEOPLE DRINK FROM THE FOUNTAIN OF  
KNOWLEDGE, OTHERS JUST GARGLE.  
-- ROBERT ANTHONY

### BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



### HENRY by Don Trachte

