



Indian army's support structure

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As per the decision, Indira Gandhi first tasked BSF, India's border force, to take on the Pakistani force—a decision which later proved to be futile. In fact, to India's great humiliation, the Pakistani military caught some BSF personnel and paraded them on the streets of Dhaka as prisoners of war.

Major General J.F.R Jacob, the-then chief of staff of the Eastern Command of the Indian Army, in his book titled 'Surrender at Dhaka: The birth of a Nation', recalled why he laughed at the notion that a paramilitary force like BSF would take on a conventional army. He writes, "Shortly afterwards, I was visited at my residence in Fort William by a delegation from the Border Security Force (BSF), headed by its Director General, K Rustomji. He was accompanied by Golok Mazumdar, (Deputy Inspector General), and Maj Gen Narinder Singh, seconded to the BSF. They were very excited. Rustomji said he was in a great hurry as he had much to do. Intrigued, I asked what it was about. He told me that since the Eastern Command would not throw the Pakistanis out of East Pakistan, the government had asked the BSF to do so. I thought that he was joking and laughed. But he replied in all seriousness that the object of his visit was to invite Eastern Command to send a contingent to the victory parade in Dacca that he intended to hold in about two to three weeks."

After the failure of the BSF endeavour, the responsibility of taking on Pakistani troops was finally given to Indian Army's Eastern Command.

OPERATION JACKPOT

The collaboration between Bangladesh and Indian armed forces was codified under a name, "Operation Jackpot". In our country, it is most generally taken that the Operation Jackpot was a naval commando operation, which is not correct. The entire collaboration was called "Operation Jackpot". The sinking of river vessels or sea vessels was a part of the operation, but not the operation itself.

Major General Jacob writes, "On the request of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh, the Government of India directed the Army to provide assistance to the *Mukti Bahini* who controlled areas of East Pakistan contiguous to our borders. The code name given to the guerrilla operations in East Pakistan was 'Operation Jackpot'."

India's field formation—a military formation that fights battles in the field—was inherently incapable of supporting *Mukti Bahini* logistically because their primary task was to fight. Such formations being non-static was not organised to ensure supply of logistics to other forces.

Therefore, the Indian government decided to raise a new organisation—of course, clandestine—to provide logistical supports to *Mukti Bahini*. Initially, Major General Onkar Singh Kalkat commanded this organisation, but he turned out to be a failure. Two months later in August, Major General B N Sarcar, a Bengali who originally hailed from Jhalakathi's Pratappur Jamidar Bari, replaced Major General Kalkat. Having known Bengali psyche well, B N Sarcar created six logistical sectors under his command contiguous to the border. Each of these sectors used to support one or more of the 11 sectors of the

Bangladesh force.

Academically, our liberation struggle can be divided into three phases: Initial resistance, armed struggle, and final offensive. Initial resistance was from March 26 to May 10. By that date, five east Bengal regiments had crossed over to India for rest and refit. *Mukti Bahini* only controlled the rural areas, while all the district headquarters were taken by Pakistan army.

From May 11 to December 3, it was a war fought by *Mukti Bahini* alone, without Indian physical support. *Mukti Bahini* was divided into a regular force (*Niyomito Bahini*) and *Gano Bahini*. The regular force consisted of the members of Pakistan armed forces who revolted against Pakistan, while *Gano Bahini* consisted of non-military

CHANGE OF AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (AOR) OF INDIAN AIR FORCE

While Eastern Army Command was fighting, it needed air support. The south of Ganges River, a part of the area of responsibility (AoR) of Indian Eastern Army Command, was within the AoR of Central Air Command, while the rest of Eastern Army Command's AoR was under that of Eastern Air Command. That means the area under the Eastern Army Command was under two air commands: Eastern and Central. If the army needed air support, it had to ask two different air commands for support, complicating the situation.

The problem was brought to the attention of India's Chief of Air Force, Air Chief

consented, and Air Commodore Purushottam was posted in the advanced air headquarter.

BANGLADESH-INDIA JOINT-FORCES

A joint-forces agreement between India and Bangladesh was signed on December 4, 1971. It should be mentioned that India recognised Bangladesh on December 6. Therefore, the joint-forces agreement did not have a legal standing because Bangladesh's sovereignty was not recognised by any country except for Bhutan, which recognised Bangladesh on the same day the agreement was signed. In spite of the legal ambiguity, both parties went on with the agreement.

As per the agreement, Eastern Army Commander Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora was chosen as the commander of the joint forces. He had three corps headquarters, meaning no less than 60,000 troops. With him was the *Mukti Bahini*—a force of at least 120,000 fighters. BSF and independent formations had a total of 70,000 fighters, with each force contributing equally.

In addition, Major General Sujat Singh Uban had a force under his command—of nearly 15 thousand fighters - namely Bangladesh Liberation Front (BLF) that later became known as *Mujib Bahini*. Army Headquarters asked its Eastern Command to see whether it could integrate the force under Major General Uban with its operational plan, but the Eastern Command declined and suggested Uban be given a separate objective. Then, the Hill Tracts, which had very little or no tactical importance, was given as Uban's area of responsibility, while Eastern Command retained its overall command over the war.

In total, Lieutenant General Aurora had a force of nearly 265,000 troops under his command. In the military history of the world, it was unprecedented for a lieutenant general to command such a vast number of troops.

In general, by the rule of the military, one has to attack the enemy with troops three times that of the latter. If one attacks a company position of the enemy, for example, they will need a battalion. Indian generals claim that they won the war against the Pakistanis at the troop ratio of only 1.8: 1, not mentioning that they 120,000 freedom fighters, BSF personnel and independent formations.

They forget to mention the wholehearted support rendered to them by the people of Bangladesh. What is not mentioned in their narratives is that the arrowheads of their major offensive was formed by Bangladeshi guerrilla fighters. Neither do they mention how in the dark of the night the guerrilla fighters with lantern in their hands showed the way to the Indian tanks. No mention has ever been made about how their PT- 76 tanks, that were about to sink while trying to swim across the Meghna, were rescued by local boatmen.

At every level, the support of the people towards the Indian force was full. Otherwise, it would not have been possible for India to win against the Pakistani force in Bangladesh.

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The piece was transcribed by Nazmul Ahasan, a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

INDIAN ARMY SECTORS				
SECTOR	LOCATION OF HEADQUARTERS	COMMANDER (INDIAN)	COORDINATED BANGLADESH FORCES SECTORS	BANGLADESH FORCES SECTOR COMMANDERS
A (ALPHA)	Murti, West Bengal	Brig B K Joshi	6 Sector	Wg Cdr M K Bashar
B (BRAVO)	Raiganj, West Bengal	Brig Prem Singh	7 Sector	Maj Nazmul Huq Maj Quazi Nuruzzaman
C (CHARLIE)	Kailyani, West Bengal	Brig N A Salik	8 and 9 Sectors	8 Sector Maj Abu Osman Chowdhury Maj M A Manzur 9 Sector M A Jalil
D (DELTA)	Devtamura, Agartala	Brig Sabeg Singh	1, 2 and 3 Sectors	1 Sector Maj Ziaur Rahman 2 Sector Maj Rafiqul Islam 2 Sector Maj Khaled Mosharraf Maj A T M Hyder 3 Sector Maj K M Shafiullah Maj A N M Nuruzzaman
E-1 (ECHO-ONE)	Masimpur, Assam	Brig MB Wadke	4 and 5 Sectors	4 Sector- Maj CR Dutta 5 Sector- Maj Shawkat Ali
F/J (FOXTORT/ JULIET)	Tura, Meghalaya	Brig Sant Singh (Babaji)	11 Sector	Maj M A Taher Sqn Ldr Hamidullah Khan (Acting)

Note: Bangladesh Forces Sector No 10 included the riverine and the coastal areas of Bangladesh. Its headquarters and training centre were located at Plassey, West Bengal on the bank of river Bhagirathi with code-name C-2P. Naval commando operations used to be coordinated and assisted by the respective Bangladesh Force Sectors.

personnel from all walks of life.

It is understood that with a view to defeating a conventional army, the guerrillas could do harm, damage, harass and destroy the enemy, but the final defeat required a conventional army. However, we did not appreciate the notion that Indian army would come physically to fight alongside us to defeat Pakistani army. Instead, we were preparing for the final battle ourselves. With that aim in view, we raised three brigades: Z Force, S Force and K Force.

During the final offensive, Indian Army realised that they were running short of combat troops. Subsequently, India decided to convert the existing six logistics sectors, which had originally been created to support the Bangladesh force, into field formations, engaging them in the final offensive.

Marshal Pratap Chandra Lal. On his instruction, the map was redrawn to coincide Eastern Army Command's AoR with that of Eastern Air Command only. However, another problem persisted.

Eastern Air Command, under Air Marshal Hari Chand Dewan, was situated in Shillong to counter the Chinese threat, while Eastern Army Command was headquartered in Fort William. Despite the fact that their AoR was now the same, the physical distance between the two commands was problematic.

In order to facilitate the army movement, Indian Air Chief was again requested to set up an advanced air headquarter to be co-located with the Eastern Army Command at Fort William. Again, Air Chief Marshal Pratap Chandra Lal