

MUKTI BAHINI

The Real Heroes of Liberation War

MAHBUB UDDIN AHMED

On December 16, 2022, the proud nation of Bangladesh will celebrate the 51st anniversary of achieving victory over Pakistan in the Liberation War. As amply described in the treatise on

inducted in substantial numbers from the very beginning of the war. From the moment of induction onwards, they resorted to guerrilla tactics to eliminate the Pakistani troops by every means. These tactics were so effective that it created a deep terror among Pakistani

most of the provisions, even by head loads.

Using unconventional routes to carry provisions, arms and ammunitions, and even to move fighters, was an effective means to creating the most essential part

of the Indian war plan: surprise. This technique was also effective in destroying the Pakistani force's movements. This intelligence force was placed under the command of Captain Salahuddin of Bangladesh Army. The Indians provided some wireless sets and other equipment to the Mukti Bahini out of their obsolete stock. To meet the specific needs of guerrilla activities, some new portable transistorised equipment of Japanese origin was also used by our boys.

The Mukti Bahini's indomitable spirit is evident in the writings of Indian Lt Gen Jacob. "They achieved significant results in occupation of areas in the interior, demolitions and harassment of the enemy even before hostilities started. They completely demoralised the Pakistan Army, lowering their morale and creating such a hostile environment that their ability to operate was restricted and they were virtually confined to their fortified locations. The overall achievements of the Mukti Bahini and the East Bengal Regiments were enormous. Bangladesh can be proud of them. Their contribution was a crucial element in the operations prior to and during full-scale hostilities. Due credit must be given to their dedicated efforts to achieve the independence of their country," Jacob wrote in his book *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation* (Pg 94).

He has expressed the same sentiments on many occasions during his many sojourns to Dhaka. According to him, the world had never seen such valour, where a nation fought against an armed-to-the-teeth army and won so decisively.

Regarding the precarious plight of the Pakistan armed forces, Jacob writes, "The Pakistan Army in the East fought... from their defensive positions, where for the most part they remained." He also eulogises the fact that Pakistan never expected "our bypassing strategy using subsidiary roads and tracks and were taken by surprise by our rapid advances" (Pg 158, *ibid*). His continuously focuses on the Mukti Bahini's crucial role: "Due credit must also be given to the Mukti Bahini. Their guerrilla operations isolated the Pakistanis, hampered their movement and were largely responsible for lowering their morale. Their contribution to the victory of the joint Indo-Bangladesh Forces was therefore enormous." (Pg 158, *ibid*).

All hopes of Pakistan's survival was finally obliterated when their much avowed friendly build-up of the US Seventh Fleet failed to cross the Indian Ocean in the face of the threat extended by the naval build-up of the Russian armada. This worked as a final blow to Niazi's boastful utterance, "I shall fight for a thousand years, but will not surrender." Little did he realise that Yahya Khan had already abandoned him, paving the way for his forces to become prisoners of war.

Mahbub Uddin Ahmed, Bir Bikram, was a sub-divisional police officer in Jhenaidah during the Liberation War. He was in charge of presenting the guard of honour to the acting president of the government-in-exile of Bangladesh, Syed Nazrul Islam, at the oath-taking ceremony on April 17, 1971.



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our independence struggle, 93,000 Pakistani soldiers, including 42,000 highly trained regulars holding the most modern arms and ammunition that any army could dream of, surrendered at Ramna Race Course Maidan in Dhaka.

This glorious occasion is preceded by many watershed moments of the Pakistan Army's attempts to suppress the armed struggle carried out by our hurriedly raised, self-styled Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters) in the territory of East Pakistan. It is common knowledge that the Pakistan Army had posted some of its most hawkish high echelon commanders in the erstwhile East Pakistan on March 25, 1971, when the heinous Operation Searchlight was launched. They acted with the sole purpose of committing genocide.

However, they forgot that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had already cemented the spirit of the Bangalee nation to resist Pakistan's atrocious acts at all costs. From the very beginning, our freedom fighters resorted to a policy of attrition as soon as they could find weapons to fight. We took the Pakistani troops on with whatever we had, including our age-old machetes, and captured arms and ammunition.

Looking back at our freedom struggle, historians must take proper note of our inherent spirit of sacrifice, and how the Mukti Bahini, despite limitations in training and weaponry, gave their all in defending the country from the Pakistani military. The world did not perhaps realise the depth of this spirit until we started pouring our sweat and blood into our freedom struggle. This, of course, gained momentum following the then Indian Prime Minister's Indira Gandhi's expressed desire to help the elected representatives of Bangladesh to form a government.

The Mukti Bahini started fighting with full force as soon as the first independent government of Bangladesh was formed in Mujibnagar on April 17, 1971. From this moment onwards, all steps taken eventually led us to Victory Day.

According to the documented history of the Liberation War, 80 percent of the geographical area of Bangladesh was already ceded to the Mukti Bahini before India advanced on December 3, 1971. By that time, Bangladeshi guerrillas numbering no less than 150,000 had already thronged and interspersed themselves inside the Dhaka suburbs, and Indian Army troops had reached the outskirts of Dhaka.

Bangladeshi guerrillas were being

troops, who were then forbidden to move in small groups.

To survive, the Pakistan Army managed to capture a few bordering towns and stayed in concrete bunkers. Bolstered by a huge cache of arms, bombs and bullets, supported by artillery and cannon balls, they stayed put in their secure bunkers and rarely ventured into small-scale operations.

The Indians played some novel tricks to hoodwink the Pakistanis. They hatched plans to bypass Pakistani strongholds in cantonments and other heavily dug-in and fortified locations. Here, the Mukti Bahini extended extraordinary help to them. They gave troves of extremely accurate and sensitive first-hand intelligence reports. This allowed them to misguide Pakistan, bypass them and attack them, creating big surprises behind enemy lines.

To collect useful and reliable information, the Indian Army Eastern Command Headquarters in then-Calcutta created a training outfit for imparting intelligence-gathering techniques to specially recruited young guerrilla fighters. Most of them were recruited in the initial phase of the war. This I know from personal knowledge as some group leaders who proved their fighting ability, strength, wisdom and bravery in the battles of Kushtia, Jhenaidah, Garaganj, Bishoykhali and Boro Bazar were under my command. Some of those selected for this job were Kamaluzzaman, Mokaddesh, Tariquallah, Murad, Hossein Ali, Kamrul Islam Liton, Abu Taher Mintu, Robiul Islam Robi, Khandaker Nurul Huq Mukul, Oliar Rahman, Mahbub Zaman, Aminul Huq, Imdadul Huq and Sattar. They were taken to Fort William and Barrackpore cantonment area and given tactical training, and were specially taught the use of wireless sets.

Within a month's time, they were sent to the forward areas to collect information and transmit on an hour-to-hour basis. During daytime, with the help of their acquaintances, they would collect information regarding the Pakistan Army's movements. Sometimes, to avoid any attention of the enemy, they would hide on tree tops. They also acted as guides to the Indian Army when hostilities were finally launched. Here, the army movement in advance areas invariably entailed the inclusion of Mukti Bahini contingents as part of mobilisation. When the plan to bypass the Pakistani positions was in place, the Mukti Bahini helped the Indian Army use unconventional routes and means. The freedom fighters also arranged local help in advance to carry

