

Pathaan Bahini of Chandpur

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In the wake of the March 25 massacre, an emergency meeting of the war committee was convened at Paikpara School in Faridganj on April 8. Zahirul was entrusted with the leadership of the Mukti Bahini in Chandpur district.

COMMAND STRUCTURE

Zahirul initially divided the region surrounding Chandpur into six zones and assigned commanders to each to set up a defensive perimeter.

Naik subedar Ali Akbar Patwari was appointed to oversee Hajiganj, Ramganj, Chatkhil, and parts of Raipur. Naik subedar Zahirul Islam was tasked with Matlab upazila; sergeant Joynal Abedin was responsible for Chandpur Sadar and Haimchar; Naik subedar Abdur Rab was assigned to Faridganj, Ramganj, and parts of Raipur; havildar Sirajul Islam was in charge of Kachua upazila; and Nayeab Subedar Mofiz was responsible for the headquarters and Shahrasti upazila.

Initially, Paikpara School served as both the headquarters and training camp for the force. However, the headquarters was later relocated to Thakurbari in Pani Ali village of Ramganj upazila in Lakshmipur.

The Pathaan Bahini also had an intelligence unit, headed by Zahirul and force director Kalim Ullah Bhuiyan. Born on January 8, 1937, Zahirul Haque Pathaan died on January 27, 2024. Kalim Ullah Bhuiyan died on January 5, 2024. He was born in 1925.

FIRST AMBUSH

According to the book “Chandpur Zillar Muktiuddher Itihash”, the force's first engagement of the war took place in the Gazipur union under Chandpur's Haimchar upazila.

On April 27, upon learning that a launch carrying arms and ammunition for the Pakistani army was coming to Faridganj from Chandpur, Zahirul planned an ambush.

Talking about the operation, freedom fighter Lutfar Rahman told The Daily Star, “As soon as the launch entered our ambush position near Gazipur Bazar, we attacked the Pakistani soldiers on board from three directions.

“Several soldiers were killed, and the rest jumped into the river and fled to Dhanua. The launch, damaged by gunfire, sank in the Manikraj river.”

The following day, the freedom fighters salvaged the sunken launch, and from inside they recovered a large cache of munitions.

LOCALS JOIN THE FIGHT

The Battle of Khajuria was different from other battles, for it was joined not only by Pathaan fighters but also by local villagers armed with whatever they could find.

According to the book, Bangladesher Swadhinota Juddho - Sector Bhittik Itihash (Sector-2), on the morning of June 20, two platoons of freedom fighters were positioned at Kamta and Galla to counter the advance of Pakistani forces from Hajiganj and Chandpur. Simultaneously, another platoon was deployed at the WAPDA embankment near Khajuria to resist the Pakistani forces approaching from Ramganj and Noakhali. Another platoon was stationed on the road leading to Sonapur in Noakhali.

At noon, as the freedom fighters at the WAPDA embankment sprung a surprise attack on the advancing Pakistani soldiers, the remaining platoons quickly rushed towards Khajuria. The local villagers also joined the fight alongside the freedom fighters.

Freedom fighter Delwar Hossain said, “As we chased the Pakistani soldiers, we were joined by thousands of villagers from Khajuria Bazar, Rupsa, and Koroitoli, armed with machetes, axes, and other improvised



weapons. Fearing for the safety of these civilians, Pathaan Sahib decided to withdraw and pull everyone back to safety.

“As the retreating Pakistani army headed towards Gollak, they were ambushed by the freedom fighters from three sides. The attack resulted in the deaths of eight Pakistani soldiers.”

BATTLE OF SHASIALI

Freedom fighter Sirajul Haque said the force used the school grounds in Battala, Nakipur, Kadra, and South Sahebganj as training camps and established positions in Toragarh, Lotra, Ugaria, and Naringpur Bazar.

“Towards the end of the war, due to security concerns, we didn't have a fixed training camp. We would prop up makeshift training camps wherever we sought shelter,” said Ajit Saha, another freedom fighter.

Shasiali Madrasa in Faridganj served as one such training camp of the Pathaan Bahini. It was frequently targeted by Pakistani troops, resulting in several battles between the Pathaan Bahini and the Pakistani army. One such significant engagement took place on July 29, known as the Battle of Shasiali.

On July 29, upon receiving intelligence about a Pakistani convoy of 15-16 boats advancing from Faridganj to capture the camp, Pathaan Bahini laid an ambush to intercept the enemy, said Sirajul Haque.

“As the Pakistani soldiers entered the ambush, the freedom fighters

City

Area: Chandpur, Cumilla, Noakhali, and Lakshmipur.

Command structure: Region divided into six zones.

Timeframe: Apr-Dec

Operations: At least 40.

Members: At least 900.

Recent photo of Office Chitoshi in Shahrasti upazila of Chandpur. Here, the Pathaan Bahini fought with the Pakistani army on September 29, 1971.

DMP chief

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culminated with Hasina's ouster and flight to India on August 5, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said in his address to the nation on November 17.

Family members of the victims filed many cases with different police stations. Their neighbours and activists of different political parties also filed many cases accusing several hundred people.

This paper earlier reported that many of the neighbours and activists filed the cases without permission from the injured victims or the families of the dead. These complainants implicated many people from their home districts though the incidents occurred in Dhaka city.

The Daily Star also reported that many complainants appealed to the courts to remove the names of some of the accused, saying their names were “mistakenly” included.

In the meeting with the CRAB leaders, DMP chief Sazzat said neither the complainants nor the police have the authority to withdraw a case. Only the home ministry can do it.

Additionally, the complainant cannot remove names from the case; only the investigation officers can do so after completing their investigation, he said.

“We will deal with the matter with a heavy hand and take legal action against such complainants,” Sazzat said.

The accused with no involvement in these incidents, including journalists, do not need to worry as the police will not harass or arrest any innocent person, the DMP chief said.

Only the people found to be involved will be named in the charge sheets, he said.

“The cases will not be scrapped as the incidents are real. We will build the cases differently by keeping some of the accused [after completing investigation]. So, journalists in these cases will be automatically relieved,” he added.

Recover

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Preparation Committee on Bangladesh's economic condition.

“The findings paint a grim picture, exposing her administration as a kleptocracy defined by systematic looting of public resources.”

Tarique pointed to the report's estimate that \$240 billion was siphoned out of the country over the last 15 years, including \$8 billion misappropriated from 29 major development projects.

Tarique criticised “quick rental” energy initiatives as profiteering schemes, warning that deeper scrutiny into the banking sector could uncover even more widespread corruption.

The BNP leader emphasised the urgency of economic reform and highlighted his party's 31-point reform agenda, including measures to combat systemic failures and rebuild the economy.

“Central to this agenda is the establishment of an effective Anti-Corruption Commission, as outlined in the 13th point. This institution, if implemented, will play a critical role in ending the rampant misappropriation of public funds and ensuring accountability across all sectors,” Tarique said.

He also underscored the importance of creating an Economic Reform Commission, a key aspect of the BNP's 15th point, aimed at fostering transparency, strengthening public institutions, and establishing a corruption-free administration.

“The time for change is now. Our nation cannot afford further mismanagement,” he added, reiterating BNP's commitment to building a transparent, accountable, and equitable governance system.

Assad flees to Moscow as rebels take Damascus

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women and children wandering through Assad's home after it had been looted.

The rooms of the residence had been left completely empty, save some furniture and a portrait of Assad discarded on the floor, while an entrance hall at the presidential palace not far away had been torched.

“I can't believe I'm living this moment,” tearful Damascus resident Amer Batha told AFP by phone.

“We've been waiting a long time for this day,” he said, adding: “We are starting a new history for Syria.”

Assad's reported departure comes less than two weeks after the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group challenged more than five decades of Assad family rule with a lightning offensive.

“After 50 years of oppression under Baath rule, and 13 years of crimes and tyranny and displacement... we announce today the end of this dark period and the start of a new era for Syria,” the rebel factions said on Telegram.

Prime Minister Mohammed al-Jalali said he was ready to cooperate with “any leadership chosen by the Syrian people”.

The head of war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP: “Assad left Syria via Damascus international airport before the army security forces left” the facility.

AFP has been unable to independently verify some of the information provided by the different parties.

Around the country, people toppled statues of Hafez al-Assad, Bashar al-Assad's father and the founder of

the system of government that he inherited.

For the past 50 years in Syria, even the slightest suspicion of dissent could land one in prison or get one killed.

As rebels entered the capital, HTS said its fighters broke into a jail on the outskirts of Damascus, announcing an “end of the era of tyranny in the prison of Sednaya”, which has become a by-word for the darkest abuses of Assad's era.

UN war crimes investigators yesterday described Assad's fall as a “historic new beginning” for Syrians, urging those taking charge to ensure the “atrocities” committed under his rule are not repeated.

The rapid developments came just hours after HTS said it had captured the strategic city of Homs, where prisoners were also released.

Homs was the third major city seized by the rebels, who began their advance on November 27.

US President Joe Biden yesterday said that fallen leader Bashar al-Assad should be held responsible for his rule over Syria now that his government has been toppled.

“Assad should be held accountable,” he said, adding that his administration is ready to engage with “all Syrian groups” over the political transition.

US president-elect Donald Trump said that Assad had “fled his country” after losing Russia's backing.

Rebel factions aired a statement on Syrian state television, urging fighters and citizens to safeguard the “property of the free Syrian state”.

State TV broadcast a message proclaiming the “victory of the great Syrian revolution”.

The Islamist leader of HTS, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, visited

Damascus's landmark Umayyad Mosque, as crowds greeted him with smiles and embraces, AFP images showed.

HTS is rooted in the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda.

Proscribed as a terrorist organisation by Western governments, HTS has sought to soften its image in recent years.

Before yesterday's announcements, residents had described to AFP a state of panic in Damascus, but morning saw chants and cheering, with celebratory gunfire and shouts of “Syria is ours and not the Assad family's”.

In the afternoon the rebels announced a curfew in the capital until 5:00 am (0200 GMT) Monday.

The commander of Syria's US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which controls much of northeast Syria, hailed as “historic” the fall of Assad's “authoritarian regime”.

The Observatory yesterday said Israel struck Syrian army weapons depots Sunday on the outskirts of Damascus.

Assad's rule had for years been supported by Lebanese group Hezbollah, whose forces “vacated their positions around Damascus”, a source close to the group said yesterday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the overthrow of Assad was a “historic day in the... Middle East” and the fall of a “central link in Iran's axis of evil”.

“This is a direct result of the blows we have inflicted on Iran and Hezbollah, Assad's main supporters,” he added.

The rebel offensive began the very day a ceasefire took effect in Lebanon after nearly a year of conflict between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah.

2 countries to try to mend relations

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Misri is also likely to call on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain.

This is the first high-level visit from India to Bangladesh after the political changeover on August 5. Earlier on August 16, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken over the phone.

In late September, Touhid Hossain and Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met on the sidelines of UN General Assembly in New York.

“The FOC will be more a meeting on how to bridge the gap, [and] set the political tone,” a diplomatic source in New Delhi told this correspondent yesterday.

Another diplomatic source in Dhaka said Bangladesh will seek political support from India for the Yunus-led interim government.

Since Sheikh Hasina took shelter in India, the bilateral relationship saw strains, with Indian visas becoming limited for Bangladeshis and affecting trade and tourism between the two countries. The Indian-funded connectivity projects were also suspended for some weeks on security grounds after August 5.

Meanwhile, the arrest of a Hindu priest Chinmoy Khrishna Das on charges of sedition and the denial of his bail in late November triggered demonstrations in various parts of

India. The Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala also came under attack, sparking protests in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has also accused the Indian media of exaggerating the incidents of attacks on minorities, and some Indian politicians of making provocative remarks on the issue.

“We would expect that they [India] would hold a fruitful discussion,” Touhid Hossain said at an event at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, referring to the FOC.

“After August 5, there has definitely been a change in the quality of our relationship with India. India has to accept it [the political changeover] and take the relationship forward.

“If we want to solve any problem, we need to admit there's a problem,” he said, adding, “We hope we can overcome the stalemate. For this, the most important thing is mutual communication.”

The FOC, which is an annual foreign secretary-level meeting held alternatively in Dhaka and New Delhi, discusses all the aspects of relationship.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mohammad Rafiqul Alam last Thursday said some of the major issues to be discussed include water sharing, border management, trade and connectivity.

Over the last few years, Dhaka has expressed concerns over border killings. It has also shown dissatisfaction with

India for not signing the Teesta water sharing deal.

Additionally, there is an impression that New Delhi gained more from Bangladesh during the AL regime, especially with regard to connectivity and trade. The Hasina-led government guaranteed security in northeast India, which was lauded by the Indian leadership.

After the formation of the interim government, Touhid Hossain had said Bangladesh would review the agreements and memorandums of understanding signed with India. So far, there was no progress in that regard.

A diplomatic source in New Delhi said there might be changes in how Bangladesh negotiates with India, but the relationship should continue without focus on political rhetoric.

“Currently, we see a lot of strains mostly because of political rhetoric. Oftentimes, these are used for domestic political gains. This has to calm down.”

The very fact that the FOC is taking place suggests that both sides have the willingness to work together, he said.

“Bangladesh and India have a lot of mutual interests – be it water, trade, health and education or security. There's no alternative to working together. The political leaderships of both the countries need to realise this and work accordingly,” the source added.

Young Tigers extend Asian dominance

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semifinals, the pacers ran riot and picked up seven wickets between them to bowl Pakistan out for 116, which ultimately led to a seven-wicket win.

But when it comes to India, the rivalry has been brewing for the past few years, peaking during the 2020 U-19 World Cup final in South Africa which was one of Bangladesh's biggest achievements. Similar atmosphere and rivalry was once again on show in Dubai yesterday. The bowlers were once again on their game, showing defiance in body language to come out victorious.

The young guns felt the pressure of defending just 198 but the pacers in particular showed the right mindset. The length, the movement and the aggression caused India's reliable top-order to stumble as they were bowled out for 139. The aggression was set when pacer Al Fahad uprooted India opener Ayush Mhatre's off-stump in the second over of the innings with a brilliant in-swing.

Thirteen-year-old prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi played two masterful strokes to make his presence felt before Maruf Mridha got the better of him, getting him caught at backward point for nine.

Principles of justice

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Aspirations of Disadvantaged Communities” at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Agargaon in the capital.

The Citizen Platform for SDGs is organising the two-day event.

“Standing on this rubble, we must embark on a new journey. The challenge is enormous. From today, in every noble, positive, and welfare-oriented initiative, the judiciary will remain committed to the people and focused on the public. At this critical juncture in the country's history, the judiciary is not exempt from this state of decay.”

The judiciary has already taken bold steps to implement institutional reforms aimed at addressing this situation and has embarked on a transformative path, he said.

“This historic moment of victory for students and the masses offers a golden opportunity to stand beside the oppressed and the persecuted. We must always ensure that we make the best use of this opportunity.”

Lamia Murshed, principal coordinator for SDGs Affairs at the Chief Adviser's Office, said, “The government has launched a series of reforms aimed at rebuilding and achieving sustainable change to prevent a regression to the old, broken, and corrupt system.”

Governance reform is a national priority, she said.

“However, systemic challenges in governance and accountability continue to hold us back. Weak institutional structures, systemic

opened fire. The surprise attack resulted in the deaths of six Pakistani soldiers, including an officer, and eight policemen, including a sub-inspector from Faridganj Police Station.”

The retreating Pakistani army encountered resistance from freedom fighters in several areas, including Shasiali, Kamalpur, and Patwari Bazar, leading to skirmishes, said Ajit Saha.

“Some fleeing Pakistani soldiers hid in a house in Kamalpur. The freedom fighters surrounded the house and engaged in a fierce gun battle with the trapped soldiers. All the Pakistani soldiers were killed in the ensuing firefight, and Farooq, a freedom fighter, was injured.”

Other battles fought by Pathaan Bahini include the Battle of Thakur Bazar in Shahrasti in early May; the Battle of Ramchandrapur Kheyaghat in Balakhal, Hajiganj on May 17; the Battle of Naringpur in Shahrasti on July 15; the Battle of Hasnabad in Laksham, Cumilla on August 27-28; the Battle of Suchipara Kheyaghat on September 7; the attack on a Pakistani food convoy in Faridganj; and the Battle of Office Chitoshi on September 29. Additionally, the Pathaan Bahini fought against the Pakistani army on the Meghna River at Mohanpur, Matlab, in the first week of December.

In October, Zahirul Haque Pathaan visited Kolkata, met with Sector 2 Commander Khaled Mosharraf, and provided a detailed report on the activities of his force. Following this meeting, Pathaan was appointed as the commander of the Chandpur-Madhumati sub-sector.

Chandpur was liberated on December 8. Twenty-one days later, on December 29, the Pathaan Bahini surrendered their weapons at Chandpur Technical High School ground.

Translated and edited from Bangla by Subrata Roy.

Iqbal Hossain Emon, who got the player-of-the-series award, produced a fine spell of fast bowling, finishing with three for 24 and becoming the highest wicket-taker of the tournament. He took two wickets in the 21st over and then another in the 23rd over to get the Young Tigers on top with India at 81 for six. With the task getting steeper for India, Bangladesh skipper Azizul then sent back his counterpart, Mohammad Amaan, for a 65-ball 26 to break the back of the chase. Azizul also took the last wicket to send Bangladesh team and their fans into euphoria.

“You saw in the semifinals that we were a good bowling side and we are very confident in our bowling,” the captain said at the post-match ceremony.

Earlier, after a stuttering start with bat, Mohammad Shihab James (40) and Rizan Hossain (47) steadied the ship with a 62-run stand before Farid Hasan's 39 saw Bangladesh reach 198 all out in 49.1 overs.

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus and Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Mahmud Sajib Bhuiyan congratulated the team on their success.

corruption, and unequal access to public services hinder our progress toward building an inclusive and people-centric governance framework.”

In his opening remarks, Debapriya Bhattacharya, convener of the citizens' platform, said, “A change in government does not automatically lead to a change in governance. If we fail to alter the methods of governance and address systemic issues, the sacrifices made for [the regime] change will go in vain.”

UNDP Resident Representative Stefan Liller said, “Governance that is disconnected from the people it serves falters. This is not just a time for reform; it is a time to reimagine governance as a system firmly rooted in inclusion, equity, and accountability.

“The rise of misinformation, disinformation, and technology-facilitated violence erodes public trust, undermines informed decision-making, and fuels societal division. These issues create significant barriers to governance rooted in truth, transparency, and inclusion,” he added.

Corinne Henchoz Pignani, chargé d'Affaires at the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh, highlighted the importance of accountability and grassroots inclusion.

“For reforms to be successful, no one must be left behind. Governance structures and reform agenda must prioritise education and dialogue to address current challenges,” she said.