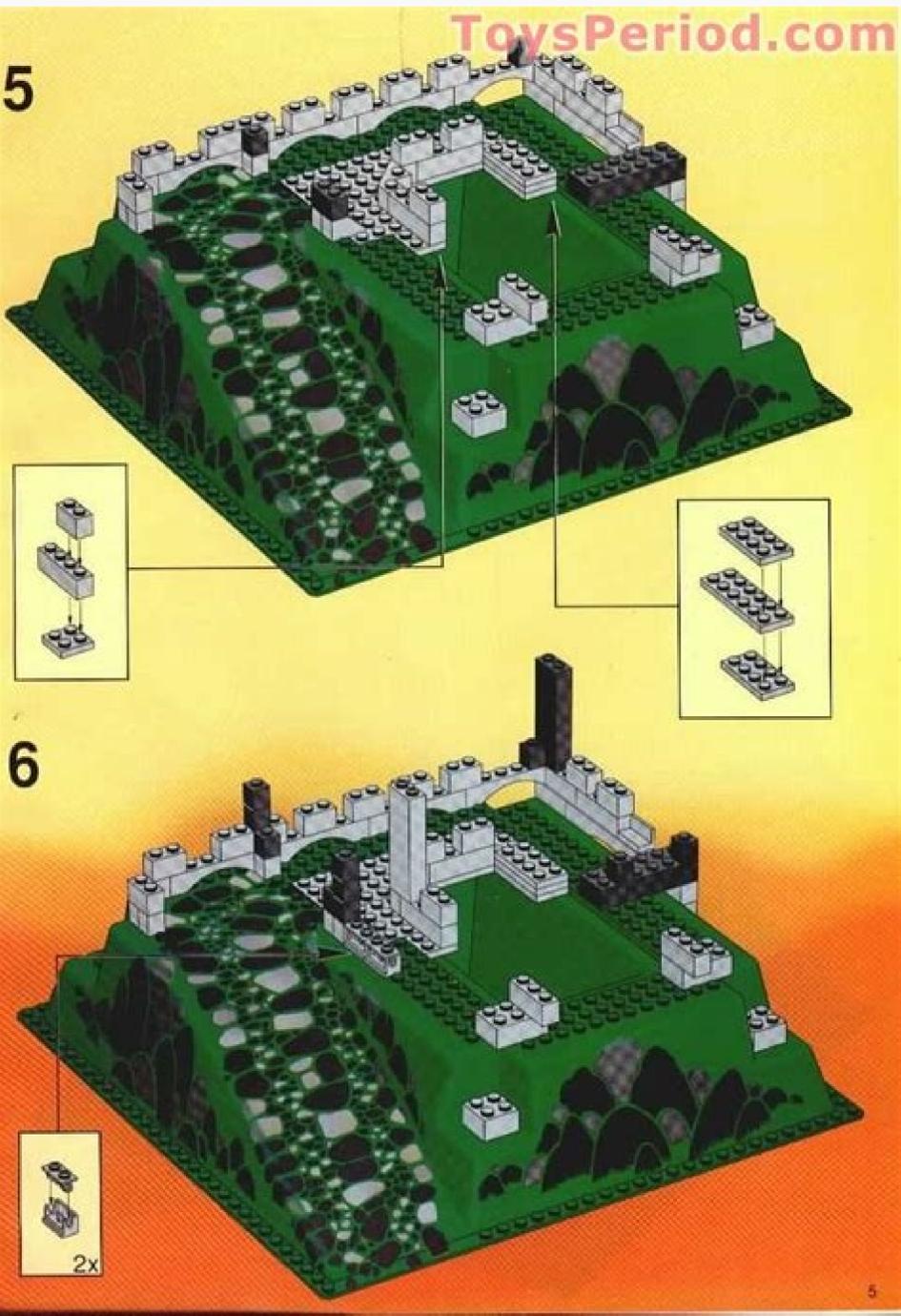


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Pakistani military operation in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War Operation Searchlight Part of the Bangladesh Liberation War Human remains and war material from the 1971 genocide at the Liberation War Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh Date 26 March 1971 - 25 May 1971 [2] Location East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) Result Pakistani operational success Temporary West Pakistani military success Organization of anti-Pakistani Bengali popular resistance Start of the Genocide and the Liberation War Belligents Bangladesh Provisional Government Mukti Bahini Awami League Supported by: India Soviet Union [1] Pakistan Pakistan Armed Forces Supported by: United States China Commanders and leaders Premier Tajuddin Ahmad Col. M. A. G. Osman President Yahya Khan Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan Lt. Gen. A. A. K. Niazi Maj. Gen. A. O. Mitha Maj. Gen. Rao F. Ali Brig. William Harrison RAJin. Mohammad Sharif Air Cdre. Inamul H. Khan Strength Bengali Resistance Forces: ~8,000 Bengali troops from East Bengal Regiment [3] Paramilitary Forces: ~13,000 East Pakistan Rifles [4] ~30,000+ East Pakistani police and Bangladesh Ansar personnel armed with .303 rifles Reinforcements: Unknown number of ex-servicemen and civilian volunteers Pakistan Army: 14th Infantry Division (approx. 18,000+ troops) [5] 1 armoured regiment (75 M24 Chaffee tanks) Paramilitary Forces: ~3,000 East Pakistan Rifles 1,800 East Pakistani police personnel [4] Pakistan Navy: 4 gunboats 1 patrol boat [6] 1 destroyer [7] Pakistan Air Force: 20 North American Sabrejets 3 T-33 jet trainers 4 helicopters 5 C-130 Hercules transport aircraft Land Reinforcements: 9th Infantry Division 16th Infantry Division Casualties and losses Mukti Bahini: 10,000+ KIA or wounded ~4,000+ POWs [8] ~6,000 KIA or wounded [9] Small number of POWs Civilian death toll: 300,000-3,000,000 Bengali civilians and ~150,000+ Bihari civilians [10] [11] [12] [13] Operation Searchlight was the codename for a planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan Army in an effort to curb the Bengali nationalist movement in former East Pakistan in March 1971. [14] [15] Pakistan retrospectively justified the operation on the basis of anti-Bihari violence carried out en masse by the Bengalis earlier that month. [16] [17] Ordered by the central government in West Pakistan, the original plans envisioned taking control of all of East Pakistan's major cities on 26 March, and then eliminating all Bengali opposition, whether political or military. [18] Within the following month, West Pakistani military leaders had not anticipated prolonged Bengali resistance or later Indian military intervention. [19] The main phase of Operation Searchlight ended with the fall of the last major Bengali-held town in mid-May 1971. The operation also directly precipitated the 1971 Bangladesh genocide, in which between 300,000 and 3,000,000 Bengalis were killed while around 10 million fled to neighbouring India as refugees. [20] [21] Bengali intelligentsia, academics and Hindus were significantly targeted alongside Muslim Bengali nationalists, with widespread indiscriminate and extrajudicial killings taking place. The nature of these systematic purges enraged the Bengalis, who declared independence from the union of Pakistan to establish the new nation of Bangladesh. [22] The widespread violence resulting from Pakistan's Operation Searchlight ultimately led to the Bangladesh Liberation War, in which Indian-backed Mukti Bahini guerrillas fought to remove Pakistani forces from Bangladesh. The civil war escalated in the following months as East Pakistani loyalists (mostly from the persecuted Bihari minority) formed militias to support West Pakistani troops on the ground against the Mukti Bahini. However, the conflict took a decisive turn in the Bengalis' favour following the ill-fated Operation Chengiz Khan, which resulted in direct Indian military intervention in the civil war, eventually prompting Pakistan's unconditional surrender to the joint command of Indian forces and the Mukti Bahini [23] on 16 December 1971. Background This section relies largely or entirely on a single source. Relevant discussion may be found on the talk page. Please help improve this article by introducing citations to additional sources. Find sources: "Operation Searchlight" - news - newspapers - books - scholar - JSTOR (December 2010) After the Bengali Awami League had won a decisive majority (capturing 167 out of 313 seats) in the 1970 Pakistan parliamentary elections, the Bengali population expected a swift transfer of power to the Awami League based on the Six Point Programme. On 28 February 1971, Yahya Khan, then President of Pakistan, under the pressure of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), postponed the national assembly meeting scheduled for March. The PPP had already started lobbying to weaken the stand of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Bhutto was heard saying that he wanted the Bengalis to stay away. The Awami League, in response to the postponement, launched a program of non-cooperation (largely outlined in the 7 March Awami League rally) which was so successful that the authority of the Pakistani government became limited to military cantonments and official government institutions in East Pakistan. [24] Clashes between Bengalis and the Pakistan Army, and between the Bengalis and Biharis erupted and had now become commonplace. President Yahya Khan flew to Dhaka to hold talks with Mujibur Rahman, then leader of the Awami League, or to face the back of the non-cooperation movement, the West Pakistani generals, most of which (including Commander-in-Chief Gul Hassan Khan) supported the PPP, finally decided on a military crackdown against the rebelling Bengalis in East Pakistan. [24] After the convening of the Pakistan National Assembly was postponed by Yahya Khan on 1 March, ethnic Biharis in East Pakistan, who supported West Pakistan, were targeted by the Bengali majority. [26] [27] [17] In early March 1971, over 300 Biharis were killed in rioting by Bengali mobs in Chittagong. [17] Following these series of incidents, the Government of Pakistan used the "Bihari massacre" to justify its military intervention in East Pakistan on 25 March, [17] when it initiated Operation Searchlight. [28] Prior to the launch of the operation, a final meeting was held at the Army General Headquarters (GHQ). The Governor of East Pakistan, Vice-Admiral Syed Mohammad Ahsan objected to the planned operation. [24] Air Commodore Muhammad Zafar Masud, the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) of the Pakistan Air Force base in Dhaka, also objected to the operation. Masud was wary of a military crackdown, suspecting that it would only provoke East Pakistan's Bengali-majority population into more violence. However, under pressure during the meeting from Pakistan Army and Air Force generals, Yahya Khan gave orders to his commanders to launch the operation. [24] Syed Mohammad Ahsan was subsequently relieved of his post. [24] [29] When the operation came into effect, Zafar Masud refused to conduct air sorties and was likewise removed from his post on 31 March. [24] The operational plan The planning process The plan was drawn up in March 1971 by Major General Khadim Hussain Raja, GOC 14th Division, and Major General Rao Farman Ali, as a follow-up of decisions taken at a meeting of the Pakistan Army staff on 22 February. [30] The 16th infantry division from Quetta and the 9th division from Kharan, West Pakistan, were ordered to prepare to move to East Pakistan in mid-February also as a result of that meeting. Before putting the plan into action, senior West Pakistani officers in East Pakistan who were unwilling to support the military attack on civilians, Lt. General Shahabzada Yakub Khan, GOC East Pakistan, and the governor of East Pakistan, Vice Admiral Syed Mohammad Ahsan, were relieved of their duties. [29] Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan became the Governor and GOC of East Pakistan. On 17 March, General Raja was given authority to plan the operation via telephone by General Abdul Hamid Khan, Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army. On the morning of 18 March, General Raja and Major General Rao Farman Ali wrote the plan at the GOC's office at Dhaka (Dhaka) cantonment. The plan was written on a "Light Blue Office Pad with a Lead Pencil" by General Farman containing "16 Paragraphs Spread Over Five Pages". General Farman defined the operational premises and conditions for success, while General Khadim Raja dealt with the distribution of forces and tasks assigned to the individual brigades and other units. It assumed that the Bengali Army and other military units would revolt at the onset of operations [31] and the planners suggested that all armed Bengali units should be disarmed prior to commencing the operation, and the political leadership arrested during a planned meeting with the President, General Yahya Khan. No operational reserves were earmarked. [31] The handwritten plan was reviewed by General Abdul Hamid Khan and Lt. General Tikka Khan on 20 March at the flag staff house. General Abdul Hamid Khan objected to the immediate disarming of regular army Bengali units, but approved the disarming of the EPR, armed police and other para-military formations. Yahya Khan refused to sanction the arrest of Awami League leaders during a meeting with him, as the plan had proposed. [31] The amended plan was approved and distributed to various area commanders. The Operation was to start on the night of 25 March 1971 in Dhaka, and other garrisons were to be alerted via phone about their zero hour to start their activities. General Farman Ali commanded the forces in Dhaka, while the rest of the province was commanded by General Khadim. Lt. General Tikka Khan and his staff were present in the 31st field command centre, to supervise and support the command staff of the 14th division. The initial plan to arrest by a company of No 3 SSG, led by Major ZA Khan was scheduled at 0100 on 26 March night. Major components of the plan Operational premises As outlined by the Pakistani planners, the operation aimed to eliminate the Awami League apparatus and any civilians and personnel of the armed forces supporting the Awami League movement in defiance of martial law. Cunning, surprise, deception and speed was emphasised as crucial for success. Use of free and greater force was authorised. Search and assault of civilian areas and Hindu areas also were authorised. [32] Requirements for success Requirements for success: [32] Operation to be launched simultaneously all across East Pakistan. Maximum number of political and student leaders, and those among cultural organisations and teaching staff to be arrested. Operation must achieve 100% success in Dhaka. Dhaka University would be occupied and searched. Free and greater use of fire authorised for securing cantonments. All internal and international communications to be cut off, including telephone, television, radio and telegraph. All East Pakistani (Bengali) troops to be neutralised by seizing weapons and ammunition. To deceive the Awami League, President Yahya Khan to pretend to continue dialogue, even if Mr. Bhutto disagrees, and to agree to Awami League demands. The designated centres of offensive operations under that plan were Dhaka, Khulna, Chittagong, Comilla, Jessore, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Saidpur and Sylhet, areas where West Pakistani army units and paramilitary elements in other areas of East Pakistan were to maintain control of their respective areas and await reinforcements during the initial phase of the operation. Once Dhaka had been secured, the 9th and 16th divisions from Pakistan were to be airlifted into East Pakistan as reinforcements. Cities with airfields (Chittagong, Sylhet, Jessore, Rangpur, Comilla) would be reinforced via C-130 aircraft or helicopter troops directly from Dhaka. Although the plan did not specify the time needed to subdue East Pakistan, it was assumed that after the arrest of the political leadership and disarming of the Bengali military and paramilitary units, civilians could be terrorised into submitting to martial law within a week. [30] Lt. Gen. Tikka Khan estimated that no resistance would remain after 10 April. [19] Composition of Pakistan Armed Forces in East Pakistan Operation Searchlight: The location of Pakistani and Bengali units on 25 March 1971. Some unit locations are not shown. The 14th infantry division was the only Pakistan Army division stationed in East Pakistan in March 1971. This division had four infantry brigades attached to it, instead of the normally allotted three brigades. [33] The 57th infantry brigade (under Brig. Jahanzab Arbab - W. Pakistani) was headquartered in Dhaka, the 53rd (Brig. Iqbal Shafi- W. Pakistani) was in Comilla, the 23rd (Brig. Abdullah Khan Malik - Pakistani) in Rangpur and the 107th (Brig. A.R. Durrani - W. Pakistani) was in Jessore. Brig. M.H. Mozumdar, a Bengali, was in command of the Chittagong area. Normally, each brigade contained 3 or 4 infantry battalions and a field artillery regiment and various support elements. These four brigades had 12 infantry battalions [34] (regiments normally had 915 soldiers each) containing purely West Pakistani personnel (mainly hailing from Punjab, Baluch, Pathan and Sindh background) before 25 March 1971. This division also had 5 field artillery regiments, a light anti aircraft regiment, a commando battalion (the 3rd), all of which contained a majority of Pakistani personnel, in various East Pakistani bases. [34] The only armoured regiment in East Pakistan, the 29th Cavalry in Rangpur, was a mixed unit. [35] 20% of the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) personnel were also from West Pakistan, while the support elements of the various units and cantonments were mostly of mixed nationality. Most of the individual unit commanders and majority of the officers were from West Pakistan. West Pakistani Army personnel were also posted at Station HQ, Dhaka, Pakistan Ordnance Factory, Gazipur, Central Ordnance Depot, Dhaka,



23. Pakthakurgaon, CO Major Sawar Muhammad Hussain) and EPR Wing 10 (5 companies, HQ Rangpur, CO Major Md. Kazmi - W. Pakistan). [148][149] EPR 8 wing had 2 companies at Dinajpur and the rest was deployed near the border at Biral and Basudevpur. EPR 0 wing companies were deployed at Thakurgaon, Ruhia, Chilahati, Tetulia and Paneldia. EPR 10 wing companies were posted at Hattga, Chitaganj, Patarganj, Moghlat and Joymanpur. EPR 8 wing had 5 BR companies and 5 BR companies had been posted away from Saiduipr to minimise their threat.[150] and its anti tank weapons were given to the 26 FF company in Dinajpur for training purposes.[151] further diminishing its firepower. 26 FF planned to disarm the EPR troops at Dinajpur during a Bara Khana[148] on 23 March, which failed because Bengali troops protested the presence of armed Pakistani soldiers in the dinner area and refused to eat until the Pakistani contingent put away their arms before sitting down to eat.[152] Pakistani troops moved into Rangpur on 25 March around 12.00 am and took up positions around the city. Capt. Nawajsh had barely escaped from the EPR HQ with some men, but the Pakistanis neutralised the police and remaining EPR troops easily. Pakistani troops also took control of Saiduipr without any resistance.[152] The situation in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Saiduipr remained calm. Pakistani troops from 23rd Field and 29th Cavalry began regular patrolling in Rangpur from 26 March onward, aided by local non-Bengali police members.[152] On 27 March a group of Bengali civilians, armed with spears and such tried to enter Rangpur cantonment and were mown down by automatic fire, their bodies were burnt.[153] Captain Ashraf, after persuading 3 EBR 21C Major Akthar of his desire to stay loyal to Pakistan, was sent to Thakurgaon with a 3 EBR company from Saiduipr on 26 March morning. There were no clashes between Pakistani and Bengali forces although the situation remained tense and some Biharis began looting Bengali property at Saiduipr. At Thakurgaon the EPR troops did not react to the martial law declaration. The following morning EPR troops entrenched themselves at the wing HQ. There were civil demonstrations at Thakurgaon during 26-27 March, and Pakistani troops fired at the crowds causing some casualties. Things remained unchanged until 28 March, when EPR companies deployed on the border became aware of the countryside Pakistani crackdown from radio intercepts, and began to neutralise Pakistani EPR personnel in their midst. Capt. Nawajeshuddin met with EPR company commanders of the 10th wing and decided to take control of the Tista bridge, thus cutting off all territory north of the Tista river from Pakistani control on 28 March. On 28 March around 1:30 am a rumour spread among EPR troops in Dinajpur that they might be attacked, and a clash with the 26th FF company erupted around 5:00 pm. The combatants began shellng each other with anti tank weapons and mortars and began exchanging fire from entrenched positions at their respective HQ. EPR troops posted in the city rushed to the EPR HQ, the police also joined the EPR troops.[148] while Bengali EPR officers were captured by Pakistani troops and Pakistani EPR personnel and officers joined the 26th FF. The battle raged throughout the night and continued for the next 3 days. An EPR company took up position at Phulbari on 29 March while the other companies made for Dinajpur, including some EPR 10 Wing troops from Rangpur. EPR troops at Phulbari fought a series of battles on 29 and 30 March, and managed to retain their position. A group of Pakistani EPR troops retreating towards Saiduipr were also ambushed on 29 March, leading to the death of 2 Pakistani officers but Pakistani survivors managed to reach Saiduipr. As the situation grew serious for the Pakistani troops at Dinajpur, a detachment from the 26th FF (CO Captain Fida H. Shah) was sent to Dinajpur. [148] They ran afoul some Bengali EPR en route but managed to reach the city by nightfall. Unable to linkup with the Pakistani detachment at Dinajpur, this column resumed their advance the following morning, advanced slowly through the town. By this time Brig. A.K. Malik had decided to evacuate Dinajpur, but a communication mix up prevented a concerted action between the two groups. The beleaguered Pakistani troops left the town using one avenue while Capt. Fida's group reacted to the Pakistani base to find it empty and fought their way out. The retreat was disorganised and some Pakistani troops were killed in an ambush en route. EPR troops freed the captured Bengali officers. By 31 March Dinajpur was in Bengali hands. Thakurgaon EPR troops learned of the Dinajpur clash on 28 March evening, and attacked the Pakistani EPR troops around 10:30 pm that night. The Pakistanis, however, were prepared and a firefight raged throughout the night and the following day around a 3-story building housing the Pakistani personnel. 9th Wing EPR companies were requested to come to Thakurgaon via Radio on 29 March, while the police joined the EPR. On 30 March the Pakistani troops at Thakurgaon were wiped out. EPR companies from the border arrived the following day. Lt. Col. Hakeem was almost ambushed while leading a detachment towards Bogra in Palashbari on 30 March (or 28 March, according to other sources)[154] around 1:30 pm and by a EBR platoon and some EPR troops. Col. Hakeem fortunately managed to avoid the trap by calling out Lt. Rafiquddin Sarkar, 3 EBR platoon leader and keeping him in his jeep before opening fire, and returned to Saiduipr after a firefight erupted.[155] Lt. Rafiq was executed by Pakistanis later.[156] Brig. Malik decided to disarm the 3 BR and 29 Cavalry Bengali personnel on the same day. Disarming Bengali soldiers 29 cavalry Bengali troops were used to small groups for patrolling on 28 March, and their return was staggered from Rangpur. Pakistani troops first disarmed Bengali guards at Rangpur cantonment, then each Bengali patrol group was surrounded by waiting Pakistani soldiers on their return and disarmed. Bengali officers and soldiers of 23rd Field and 29 cavalry were neutralised this way and most were executed.[157] 3 EBR companies were at Parvatipur (CO Maj. S. Shaffat Hussain - Pakistani), Thakurgaon (CO Captain Ashraf - Bengali), Ghoraghat (2 companies, CO Maj. Nizamuddin - Bengali) and Saiduipr (Rear party and HQ company, OC Capt. Anwar). 3 EBR companies conducted routine work during 26-28 March, when the news on Pakistani attacks on Bengalis caused all except the one in Saiduipr to revolt. Bengali troops at Ghoraghat were the first to react by setting up the failed ambush under Lt. Rafiq at Palashbari on 28 March. Other EBR companies stayed in their positions until 31 March. 26 FF attacked the 3 EBR barracks on 30 March (1 April, 3:00 am, according to other sources)[155] with 23rd Field regiment guns providing fire support. Captain Fida was killed at the beginning of the battle, and the surviving EBR was finally forced to retreat after a bloody firefight that took a heavy toll on both sides.[158] The initial attack on the Bengali positions was launched from the north, the second from the north west.[156] while small groups of Pakistani troops infiltrated the positions to take out defensive strong points. After a few hours, surviving Bengali troops decided to retreat and left their position in 2 groups, having suffered 55 casualties out of 120 soldiers. Families were left behind and after some Pakistani soldiers abused them (including raping the wives of officers).[159] they were moved to the Saiduipr and Rangpur jail. Several Bengali officers attached to the 23rd Brigade were executed[160] while several Bengali officers were sent to West Pakistan.[161][162] Securing the air-link EPR 10th wing troops had taken control of the Tista bridge on 28 March, and had deployed 2 companies near the bridge, 1 at Lalmanirhat airfield and the other 2 at Kurigram and Moghoul. No clashes with Pakistani troops took place until 1 April. Helicopters began ferrying 48 Punjab and 4 FF troops began to Rangpur after the disarming of Bengali troops.[163] On 1 April a 4 FF platoon probed the area around Tista Bridge, and in the ensuing clash Maj. Ejaj was killed. The following day an infantry company with 29 cavalry reconnaissance troops moved to the bridge. They directed artillery on the Bengali position and with the aid of air strikes and tanks managed to force the Bengalis to fall back slightly by evening. Another Pakistani column moved north and crossed the river at a different point and attacked and captured Lalmanirhat airfield. The outflanked EPR troops abandoned the bridge, and by 4 April the airport was fully operational, with troops and supplies being flown in and families flown out. Apart from small hit and run attacks, Pakistani position remained secured north of the Tista river. On 11 April around 3:30 am 4 EPR companies attacked the airfield, but Pakistani resistance forced them to break off the attack at daybreak. Bengali deployment around Saiduipr 1 April EPR troops at Thakurgaon began to take up positions north of Saiduipr from 31 March. On 2 April, Bengali officers and EPR JCOs of 8 and 9 wings decided to deploy troops around Saiduipr. Thakurgaon EPR contingent moved to Nilphamari to the north of Saiduipr. Bhushibandar to the west of it. Small contingents were deployed in areas in between these two positions. Pakistani troops moved to Parvatipur, south of Saiduipr after 3 EBR company had gone south to Phulbaria on 2 April.[164] On 4 April Bengali commanders held another near Bhatgaon and decided to attack Saiduipr, after which 1 EBR and 2 EBR companies (CO Captain Ashraf) dug in at Bhushibandar, another EPR company (CO Capt. Anwar) went to Badarganj (west of Parvatipur), and another company stayed at Bhatgaon. 3 EBR companies attacked Parvatipur on the same day, the Pakistani troops and armed Biharis retreated to Saiduipr.[164] The significance of the employment of the Bengali forces in the west, south and north of Saiduipr in a semicircle, with the road east to Rangpur open, was not lost to the Pakistani commanders.[165] Pakistani counterattacks from Rangpur/Saiduipr Bengali troops lacked proper communication equipment for co-ordinating an attack on Saiduipr and although Indian authorities had been contacted for help, none had been received. Pakistani troops, reinforced through the air after the capture of Lalmanurhat, began to attack Bengali positions from 6 April onwards. Task forces were created from the 26 FF, 48 Punjab and 4 FF battalions, accompanied by a squadron/ troop from the 29th cavalry and artillery pieces from the 23rd Field regiment.[163] Several Pakistani infantry columns backed by air support began to attack Bengali positions simultaneously from 4 April. Bhushibandar was taken on 5 April, Parvatipur was taken on 6 April, Nilphamari was unsuccessfully fought the same day. 3 EBR troops attacking Parvatipur from Phulbari on the same day met with bloody repulse and retreated to Phulbari. Pakistani troops attacked Nilphamari on 7 April. Bengali troops left the town the same day and Pakistanis took the town the following day. By 10 April, Pakistani troops were poised to attack Bengali positions at T-junction to the west of Bhushibandar, and areas to the west of Nilphamari and south of Parvatipur. By 27 April the division was secured, and the area north of the Tista river was retaken by Mid May. But in securing the division, 26 FF, the same regiment that had the maximum casualties later on till surrender of Pakistan Army, lost a very valuable resource on 1 May. Capt. Mujahid who was at the flank along with three soldiers and his CO, Lt Col Hakeem was attacked by the 3rd EBR. The attack put the team of five in a defensive mode and cross firing started. As a result, Mujahid was brutally injured. A shot went clean through his heart resulting in his Shahadat. The overall Searchlight Operation saw mass rape by many Pakistani troops against Bengali women, though the figure of millions was a huge exaggeration by the war's winners given that at its peak the Pakistani garrisons numbered no more than a few thousand soldiers (Qutubuddin). Some Bengali forces also massacred non-Bengali civilians both during and after the war. See Dr Yasmin Saitika's book on rape in the Bangladesh. Operation Searchlight. Pakistani army operation 10 April - 19 June. Not to exact scale and some troop movements/locations are indicative only. By the dawn of 10 April, Pakistani forces had gained control of Dhaka, Rangpur-Saiduipr, Comilla, Chittagong, and Khulna. Their forces had lost or abandoned Rajshahi, Sylhet, Pabna, Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Kushtia. The vital airfields and all the cantonments remained under Pakistani control, while the rest of the province was unoccupied and outside government control.[166] The Bengali resistance had put up an unexpected stiff resistance and had managed to derail the initial Pakistani estimate of pacifying East Pakistan by 10 April. The initial successes were not sustainable as the Bengali forces began to suffer from lack of trained men, officers, co-ordination among scattered troops and lack of central command structure, proper supplies (despite limited aid from BSF).[166] The Pakistani army had airlifted the 9th and 16th infantry division to Bangladesh by 10 April and was poised to seize the initiative. Gen. Niazi, who took command of Pakistan forces in Bangladesh on 11 April, obtained a brief from Gen. Raja (the departing GOC) and implemented the following strategy.[166] Clear all the big cities of insurgents and secure Chittagong. Take control and open all railway, highway and rail communication network. Drive the insurgents away from the interior of the country Launch combing operations across Bangladesh to wipe out the insurgent network. Against this strategy Bengali field commanders opted to go with "holding as much area for as long as possible".[167] The Bengali leadership hoped to keep the Pakistanis confined into the cities, while the Bangladesh government in exile sought diplomatic recognition and the resistance prepared for eventual guerrilla warfare[168] and awaited the expected Indian military intervention.[169] Lacking every other option, Mukti Bahini and the Bangladesh government in exile, enjoying superiority in a number of trained men, firepower and complete air superiority and played to the strength of Pakistan. Choosing to attack Bengali forces all over Bangladesh simultaneously, Gen. Niazi concentrated battalion and brigade size forces over company and battalion size defence positions repeatedly, used air strikes against artillery to soften targets, and employed Helicopter troops to flank positions and hammered through to reach chosen objectives. Pakistani troop convoys were repeatedly ambushed, but the Bengalis delayed the Pakistani advance temporarily. By using their superiority of weapons and command of air ruthlessly, with little regard for safety of civilians and often targeting civilian areas to spread terror, the Pakistani army began to fan out of their bases and take over the province. By late April, all the major cities had fallen, by mid May all major towns had been captured and by mid June the battered remnant of Bengali fighters had been driven across the border into India. The Bengali resistance, suffering from a lack of trained men, proper logistics and co-ordination, lost the conventional battle against the Pakistan forces. Temporary Pakistani occupation Lt. General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi had been posted as GOC East Pakistan Command on 11 April 1971, while Gen. Tikka Khan was retained as the governor of the province. General Khadim Raja was relieved from the command of the 14th division, and General Farman continued to serve as advisor on civilian affairs to the governor. The Pakistani Army in East Pakistan, after being reinforced by "Operation GREAT FLYIN", was reorganised to run the counterinsurgency operation. The 9th division (HQ Jessore, Maj. Gen. Shaukit Riza commanding) was given the 57th (HQ in Jhenaida) and 107th (HQ in Jessore) brigades for controlling Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Barisal and Pataukhali districts. The 16th Division (HQ Natore, Maj. Gen. Nazar Hussain Shah commanding) was given the 23rd (HQ Rangpur), 205th (HQ Bogra) and 34th (HQ Nator) brigades and was to control Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna and Rajshahi districts. The 14th division (HQ Dhaka, Maj. Gen. Rahim Khan) controlled the rest of the province with the 27th (HQ Mymensingh), 313th (HQ Sylhet), 117th (HQ Comilla) and the 53rd (HQ Chittagong) brigades. E.P.C.F (East Pakistan Civil Armed Force) was organised to replace the EPR. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Jamshed, this force contained 17 combat wings, 7 sector wings and 3 Sector HQs at Dhaka, Mymensingh, Jessore, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Comilla and Chittagong totalling an estimated 20,000 personnel [West Pakistanis and Biharis], serving under the command of Pakistani army officers. The force was deployed to patrol the border, maintain internal security and support army operations. Razakars and Shanti Committees were formed to support the army occupation. Mostly recruited from Bengalis and ex-EPR servicemen, an estimated 400,000 Razakars (against a target of 100,000 recruits) of mixed effectiveness was eventually fielded. Al-Badr and Al-Shams, formed by Jaamaat-Islami, contributed another 5,000 members each. Pakistan also deployed hundreds of West Pakistani civilians and 5,000 police to support the occupation. Admiral Mohammad Sharif, who was Rear-Admiral at that time, and the principle commander of Navy of East Pakistan, released his autobiography, entitled, "Admiral's Diary". In his autobiography, Admiral Sharif provided the account of Operation Searchlight, as he said Sharif concluded, "The initial military success in regaining the law and order situation in East Pakistan in March 1971 was misunderstood as a complete success. In actuality, the law and order situation deteriorated with time, particularly after September of the same year when the population turned increasingly against the army as well as the government".[170] Creation of Mukti Bahini The initial resistance, which started on 26 March, functioned without any central command structure. Senior Bengali army officers met at Telapara in Sylhet on 10 April, and selected Col. (ret) M. A. G. Osmani as commander of Bengali armed forces. On 11 April Osmani designated four sector commanders: Major Zia for the Chittagong area, Major Khaled Mussarraf for Comilla, Major Shafulah for Sylhet and Major Abu Osman Chowdhury for Jessore area. The Bangladesh government in exile was formed by the Awami League leadership on 17 April at Meherpur in Kushtia, which confirmed Col. Osmani as commander of Mukti Bahini (regular armed forces and insurgents) under the authority of Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad. Bangladesh Forces Headquarters were set up in Kolkata (Calcutta) with Col. MA G Osmani as commander in chief. Lt. Col. MA Rab as Chief of Staff (based in Agartala, Tripura), and Group Captain AR Khandaker as deputy Chief of Staff. The Bengali resistance, after being driven out of Bangladesh, began reorganising to focus on irregular warfare. Bengali refugees in India a few thousand people sought refuge during April and May, mostly from the resistance. However, as Pakistani army operations spread throughout the province, refugees fleeing to India increased. Ultimately approximately 10 million people would leave East Pakistan, and about 6.7 million were housed in 825 refugee camps. An estimated 7.3 million were in West Bengal, and 1.5 million in Tripura. The rest were mainly in Assam and Bihar. The temporary presence of this large foreign population created economic (the cost of feeding, housing and medical care), social (tensions between locals and refugees) and national security (arms falling in the hands of Mizo and Naga rebels) concerns for India. India's role The main reason Generals Farman and Yakub had opposed any military action against civilians in East Pakistan was the fear of an Indian attack.[171] while the Pakistan army was woefully unprepared to meet in March 1971. After the crackdown, Tajuddin Ahmad met with Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 3 April 1971 and asked for all possible aid.[172] by which time the Indian government had already opened East Pakistan border and the BSF was offering limited aid to the Bengali resistance. The issue of direct military intervention was discussed between the Indian military and political leadership in April 1971.[173] The case for intervention was based on the following: Until 10 April, most of Bangladesh was outside Pakistani control, and the troops were bottled up in a few cities and were facing fierce resistance.[174][175] It is likely the Indian Army, with proper air support, could have quickly taken control of most of the province by aiding the Mukti Bahini. Indian Eastern Naval contingent (1 aircraft carrier and several warships)[176] could have imposed a blockade of the province and cut off supplies from the sea, as the Pakistan Naval arm in the east only contained 1 destroyer and 4 gunboats. 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