**Mythbusting the 1971 war**

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In the 1970 general elections, Mujib’s Awami League won almost all seats in East Pakistan while Bhutto’s Peoples Party won a majority in West Pakistan. Delay in the transfer of power resulted in chaos and confusion. After the failure of negotiations and General Yahya’s inability to call the session of the National Assembly (NA), a secessionist movement was launched in East Pakistan. In March, 1971 operation ‘Searchlight’ was launched by the army against terrorists who were destroying communication infrastructure and killing West Pakistanis and Biharis. A formal military leadership of resistance was created in April 1971, headed by Colonel M A G Osmani. The resistance movement included East Bengal Regiments, East Pakistan Rifles and the Mukti Bahini. RAW provided training, organisation and safe havens. Under the garb of this force, India concentrated its force along the borders.

On April 28, 1971, India’s cabinet met under Indira Gandhi’s tenure while General Manakshaw was in attendance. Indira Gandhi told him, “Go into East Pakistan.” He pointed out that this would mean war. “We don’t mind it”, was the reply he got. To justify the aggression, the Indians propagated the issues of the refugees and the freedom struggle of the people of East Pakistan. India’s political objective was to dismember Pakistan by creating an independent state of Bangladesh and its military objective was to capture East Pakistan. Pakistan’s political objective was to avoid war and safeguard its national Integrity and the safety of the country while its military objective was to defend East Pakistan with an emphasis on the defence of Dhaka.

[Met Office forecast cold, dry weather across country](https://nation.com.pk/21-Dec-2020/met-office-forecast-cold-dry-weather-across-country)

On November 21, 1971, the Indian army crossed the border and launched a full-scale invasion of East Pakistan. India’s invasion was on 23 fronts simultaneously, while Pakistan’s army troops were on the move to their battle locations. Pakistan had only one corps and the total number of forces available were around 34,000. In his book, ‘Witness to Surrender’, Siddiq Salik mentions that the army had been deployed in ‘penny pockets’ all around the border with India to prevent India from seizing territory and setting up a puppet state. Most of the battalions were reduced to two regular companies and most of the companies were reduced to one regular platoon.

Fighting inside East Pakistan against an insurgency, the Eastern command was in no position to deal with an Indian invasion on 23 fronts. Their commander succumbed to pressure on December 16, 1971, and Dhaka fell. Dhaka was the centre of gravity, its fall could have been delayed for weeks by turning Dhaka into a fortress defence. It is analysed that if the war had been prolonged on the eastern front for another few days, the fall of Dhaka could have been avoided. After the war, Indira Gandhi said, “we have taken the revenge of a thousand years and we have drowned the two-nation theory in the Bay of Bengal.” Here Indira Gandhi proved wrong as Bangladesh became a separate Islamic country instead of merging into India. According to the then Indian Army Chief, General Manekshaw, “The Pakistan army in East Pakistan fought very gallantly but they had no chance, they were thousands of miles away from their base. I had 8 to 9 months of preparation, I had at most a 50 to 1 advantage.” According to Roedad Khan, former civil servant, the three key players responsible for the fall of Dhaka were Yahya, Bhutto and Mujib.

[Sindh Assembly to hold session on December 22](https://nation.com.pk/21-Dec-2020/sindh-assembly-to-hold-session-on-december-22)

There are a lot of myths, false and fabricated stories often linked with the 1971 war. There are many acts of heroism where soldiers and officers preferred to die fighting rather than surrender. Brigadier Sultan Ahmed has written an important book, ‘The Stolen Victory’, which provides a detailed account of war. On the night of December 9 or 10, an enemy brigade plus force attacked the Jamal Pur fortress held by 31 Baloch command by Lt Col Sultan. Brigadier Hardit Singh Kler asked Lt Col Sultan, through a letter, to surrender. Lt Col Sultan’s reply was, “Give my love to Mukties. Let me see you with a stent in your hand next time instead of the pen you seem to have much mastery over.” His reply was wrapped round a bullet. Major Muhammad Akram was commanding a company of 4 Frontier Force in Hilli area. The objective of Indian army in this area was for Bogra to cut the rest of the Pakistani forces from the north and this was only possible through Hilli.

Indian 20 mountain division, commanded by Major General Lachman Singh, attacked this company supported by one armour brigade, one engineer brigade and with support of corps artillery. The position was attacked several times but 4 Frontier Force Regiment companies repulsed many of them. On one night, Major Akram moved forward with a rocket launcher and destroyed three enemy tanks. In the process he embraced martyrdom and was posthumously awarded the Nishan-e-Haider. Lt Col Suleiman, a commander who passed away on December 9, 2019, refused to surrender in East Pakistan. Under a challenging environment, he rescued his injured buddy, Major P D Khan (later Lt Gen), from the battlefield, escaped to Burma and bought him to Pakistan safely. He was famously known as ‘Suleiman the Magnificent’. Another hero, Raja Nadir Pervez, SJ Bar: along with other officers, escaped from the Indian POW camp, Fateh Garh. Lt Gen HS Panag (retired) wrote an article in The Print on the battle of Jessore-Khulna sector that the 107 Brigade, under Brigadier Hayat, fought a brilliant defensive battle. He wrote, “I have a strong memory of it because the battle left me with a grudging respect of the Pakistan army’s brigadier Muhammad Hayat.”

[PML-N Senator Kalsoom Perveen dies due to COVID-19](https://nation.com.pk/21-Dec-2020/pml-n-senator-kalsoom-perveen-dies-due-to-covid-19)

The Pakistan army is often accused of the genocide of Bengalis and the alleged massacre of three million, which is baseless and a lie. No evidence has ever been produced to substantiate the allegation. Bengali journalist, Sarmila Bose in her book, ‘Dead Reckoning: Memories of 1971 Bangladesh war’, rejected these figures. In a story carried by BBC on her book, describing the three million figure as a ‘gigantic rumour’, she says it is not based on any accounting or surveys on the ground. She also accused Bengalis for atrocities: Bengali nationalists in East Pakistan turned to xenophobic violence against non-Bengalis, especially against West Pakistanis and Urdu-speaking people who migrated to East Pakistan from India at the time of partition. Qutbuddin Aziz has written an eyewitness account in his book, ‘Blood and Tears’, and has gone onto exposing the crimes committed by the Indian army and Mukti Bahini against the people of East Pakistan.

Another myth is that 90,000 soldiers of the Pakistan armed forces surrendered to India. According Junaid Ahmed’s book, ‘Creation of Bangladesh Myths Exploded’, these baseless claims have been rejected. The three divisions of the Pakistan army comprised of a total force of 45,000, including 34,000 combatants while the remaining 11,000 were non-combatants including supporting men and civil armed forces personnel. India had a strength of five corps supported by two lacs trained and equipped Mukti Bahini and thousands of Awami League miscreants. These figures are also confirmed by General Niazi, the eastern commander in his book, ‘The Betrayal of East Pakistan’. According to him, “The total strength available to me was forty-five thousand—34,000 from the army plus 11,000 from CAF and West Pakistan’s civilian police and non-combatants”. Air Marshal Rahim Khan, PAF Chief (69 to 72) and Air Marshal Zulfiqar Ali Khan, the commander of the eastern wing of PAF, confirmed the total strength of Pakistani troops never exceeded 33,000 to 34,000. US Congressman, Charles Wilson remarked in a discussion, “In 1971, it was certainly not possible for the 35,000 Pakistani troops in Dhaka to fight the combined strength of 200,000 Indian army men and more than 100,000 Indian trained Bengali guerrillas”.

[Pakistan reports 1,792 COVID-19 cases in single day](https://nation.com.pk/21-Dec-2020/pakistan-daily-covid-19-cases-below-2-000-for-first-time-in-over-a-month)

Various books published after the 1971 war gave details of India’s clandestine intervention in East Pakistan. ‘Indictment and Lament’ reveals the anti-Pakistan role played by a large-scale section of East Pakistani elite who were materially corrupted by Indian agents. In his book, ‘RAW and Bangladesh’, Mohammad Zainul Abdedin wrote, “I saw large-scale loot and plunder by Indian army personnel. The soldiers swooped on everything they found and carried them away from India. They lifted everything from ceiling fans to military equipment, utensils and water taps. Such a large-scale plunder could not have been possible without the connivance of higher India authorities”. Indian Prime Minister Modi, during his visit to Bangladesh, confirmed his participation in the Jana Sangh campaign by backing Mukti Bahini. He said the establishment of Bangladesh was the desire of every Indian and that’s why Indian forces fought along with Mukti Bahini. December 16 is the darkest day in the history of Pakistan as it was dismembered and Bangladesh came into being. The leadership, both political and military, lacked the power of decision and vision which caused a disaster for the country that ultimately led the spirited troops of the Pakistan Army to a situation of surrender. The people of Pakistan and the young generation must be told that the armed forces fought bravely, while being outnumbered, against all odds—embodying the spirit of Jihad.