

BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR 26 MARCH 1971

On 26 March 1971, Bangladesh was proclaimed as an independent nation by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, this led to Bangladesh Liberation War when a guerilla war ensued between Pakistan and Bangladesh liberation forces with Indian support. In this article, you can read about the Bangladesh Liberation War in which India played a big role. The Bangladesh Liberation War culminated in December 1971 with the defeat of Pakistan.

Liberation War 1971

- Ever since the 1947 partition of India into India and Pakistan (comprising present-day Bangladesh), the residents of East Pakistan felt their culture and status were being undermined by the forces in West Pakistan.
- The Language Movement was started in 1948 meant to assert the rights of the Bengali-speaking population of Pakistan and also for the equal status of Bengali with Urdu, which alone was declared as Pakistan's federal language.
- There were also disparities in the economic status of both sides. The western side received more money from the common budget.
- The Bengali attempt to increase their status and earn respect for their language was met with severe suppression from the authorities.
- After the general elections in Pakistan in 1970, Mujibur Rahman's Awami League won a clear majority. But, the military in Pakistan (which had only about 5% of Bengali officers) was opposed to him becoming the country's supremo.
- The military government of Yahya Khan was unwilling to give up power to Mujib. Bengali nationalism was on the rise.
- On the night of 25th March 1971, the Pakistani army started the now infamous 'Operation Searchlight'.
- **Operation Searchlight** was a planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan Army to curb the Bengali nationalist movement in the erstwhile East Pakistan in March 1971, which the Pakistani state retrospectively justified on the basis of anti-Bihari violence by Bengalis in early March. Ordered by the central government in West Pakistan, the original plan envisioned taking control of all of East Pakistan's major cities on 26 March, and then eliminating all Bengali opposition, political or military, within one month. Pakistani President Yahya Khan at a conference in February 1971 said "Kill three million of them and the rest will eat out of our hands." Pakistani

military leaders had not anticipated prolonged Bengali resistance. The main phase of Operation Searchlight ended with the fall of the last major Bengali-held town in mid-May. The operation also precipitated the 1971 Bangladesh genocide, in which 300,000-3,000,000 civilians were killed and roughly 10 million refugees fled to India. Bengali intelligentsia, academics and Hindus were targeted for the harshest treatment, with significant indiscriminate killing taking place. These systematic killings enraged the Bengalis, who declared independence from Pakistan, to establish the new nation of Bangladesh.

- The violence resulting from Operation Searchlight led to the Bangladesh Liberation War, in which Mukti Bahini fought to remove Pakistani occupation forces from Bangladesh.
- Since it was obvious that the West Pakistan authorities would not give legitimate power to Mujib, he declared the country's independence on 26 March.
- After this, the guerrilla war started between the Pakistani army and their collaborators who were called Razakars and the Bangladeshi liberation forces. The latter forces were called the 'Multi Bahini'.
- The **Operation Jackpot** was a codename for three operations undertaken by Bengali *Mukti Bahini* in former East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) against the Federation of Pakistan during the climax of the Bangladesh Liberation War.
- After Pakistan Army drove the Bengali resistance across the Indian border at the conclusion of Operation Searchlight, Indian Army implemented a supply and training operation for the Mukti Bahini from 15 May 1971, with the goal of sending ever increasing number of trained fighters to attack Pakistani forces and sabotage military and economic assets to demoralize the Pakistani soldiers and disrupt their supply network. This enterprise was dubbed "Operation Jackpot".
- The *Mukti Bahini* Naval Commandos launched several sabotage efforts in the cities of Chittagong, Chandpur, Mongla, and the Narayanganj District against the operating combined forces of the Pakistan Soldiers, Pakistan Marines, Pakistan Navy SEAL Teams, and the East Pakistan Security Forces on the night of 15 August 1971. Bengali Submariners who had defected from Pakistani submarine PNS Mangro (S133), then based in Toulon in France, led the attacks, and this is also known as Operation Jackpot. Pakistani military initiated countermeasures to improve security by increasing the door-to-door clearance and the applied counterinsurgency tactics by the Army Special Forces and the Navy SEAL Teams, but this failed to curb the Mukti Bahini activity.

- The third operation was the operational plan designed by Lt. Gen Sagat Singh, commander of the Indian Army IV Corps attached to the Eastern Command and the Bangladesh forces operating in his operational area against the Pakistani forces in Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong as part of the overall campaign during 21 November – 16 December 1971.
- When the Pakistani forces started attacking civilians in Bangladesh, millions of refugees came to India, especially to West Bengal and Assam.
- Many Bengali soldiers from the Pakistan army defected to the Bengali side to fight for independence.
- Indian forces were helping by giving arms and training to the soldiers of the Mukti Bahini. India entered into combat officially on 3 December 1971 when Pakistan attacked Indian Air Force Bases.
- Pakistan was unable to defend Dhaka once India entered into the war. On 16 December 1971, Pakistan surrendered. India won the war and Bangladesh became a free country.
- India played a key part in Bangladesh achieving recognition from other countries of the world. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had toured several countries to publicise the atrocities conducted by the Pakistani military in Bangladesh. This ensured that India's entry into the war did not cause international rebuke and also helped the new nation gain quick international recognition.
- Bangladesh celebrates 26th of March as its independence day.