

Operation searchlight

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Freedom Fighter during 1971



What is operation searchlight

- Operation Searchlight was a planned military killing carried out by the Pakistan Army to suppress the Bengali nationalist movement in East Pakistan during the liberation war of 1971
- The original plan was to take control of the major cities on March 26, and then eliminate all opposition, political or military within one month.

History of operation searchlight

- In national elections held in December 1970, the Awami League won an overwhelming victory across Bengali territory of the Pakistan National Assembly
- West Pakistan opened talks with the East on constitutional questions as well as the formation of a national government headed by the Awami League.
- The talks proved unsuccessful as the West Pakistan Government was not willing to hand over power to Sheik Mujibur Rahman.

History continues

- March 7, 1971 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared in Racecourse Field that non cooperation movement will continue until the power is transferred to him and Awami League He declared 4 points demand.
- Pakistani Government secretly planned to execute the Operation Searchlight
- Troops were brought in secretly to the East Pakistan to carry out the operation

History continues: 25th March, 1971

- Mujib was arrested at night & was taken to West Pakistan
- The Army started indiscriminate killing in all over East Pakistan. The heaviest attack was on Dhaka University student dormitories where they killed at least 7000 students, faculty and staff on this night.
- Within a week at least 30,000 people were killed and half of the population fled Dhaka. Half of the Chittagong population were also killed.
- The killing continued the rest of the 9 months until December

Planning of operation searchlight

- Major General Khadim Hussain Raza, and Major General Rao Farman Ali drew the plan of operation searchlight in March 1971, as a follow up of to the decisions taken at a meeting of the Pakistani army staff on 22 February
- The operational premises were very clear and conditions for success was to eliminate any one with any connection with Awami League or those who supported the movement against martial law.

Key Requirement of success

- To launch simultaneous attack all over East Pakistan, Capture the radio and TV stations and cut off the international communication
- To eliminate maximum number of students and political leaders without any discrimination of their race, religion and gender
- To take control of Dhaka and major cities.
- To take control of Dhaka University, Secure the cantonments and disarm the East Bengali troops
- Terrorize people so that East Pakistan submit to the martial law within April 10, 1971

Why Students were targeted

- History of India shows student forces always responded to the call of the political leaders since the British period
- Young men and women were always active against the British and were not afraid to lose their lives
- Students force led by political leaders were always fruitful to achieve desired political results for the Indian subcontinent

Students Vs. Pakistani Government: 1948

- The first encounter that the Pakistani Government had with the students of the East Pakistan started in 1948 from the issue of language.
- This triggered off the language movement mostly led by the students against the unjust unilateral decision taken by the Government
- This battle continued through 1952. Dhaka University students were the primary force of this movement.

Student movement won: 1954

- Soon the Pakistani Government realized that this uprising of student movement could not be stopped by killing and arresting
- On 7 May 1954, the constituent assembly resolved, with the Muslim League's support, to grant official status to Bengali as official language.

Government stand against students in 1971

- With such experience, in 1971, the Government of Pakistan saw no other choice than to stop the students
- They planned to stop the uprising of the by giving them no chance to fight back i.e. by attacking them suddenly at night while they are sleeping
- The government assumed the terror would make the civilians surrender within a week from March 25, 1971

Attacks on Political Leaders

- Pakistani Government already had experienced the strong stance of political leaders of the East Pakistan
- In his historic 7th March address of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, clearly instructed all political leaders as well as the civilians to continue fighting.
- With no intention of transferring the power, the government chose to suppress as many political leaders as possible than to resolve the issue.

Political leaders-Continued

- Maj. Rao Farman Ali, commanded the Pakistani Army to achieve the following objectives on March 25:
 - Impose curfew at 0110 hrs and close telephone/telegraph/radio station and shut all presses down
 - Seal off the city by taking over road, rail and river communication and patrol river
 - Arrest Sheikh Mujib and 15 top Awami League leaders during operation

Political leaders-Continued

- Conduct house to house search in Dhanmondi and Hindu areas
- Subdue Dhaka University, EPR HQ and Rajarbagh police line, disarm 2nd and 10th EBR
- Take over and protect Ammunition factory at Gazipur and Arms depot at Rajendrapur.
- The army was given a 6 hour deadline to achieve its goal in Dhaka.

Attacks on political volunteers

- The army subdued some light resistance put up by the Awami League volunteers in the targeted areas including the Radio and TV stations.
- Any one who was in support of the liberation movement and was against Pakistani attack was labeled as “Hindu”, “Mukti” or “Joy Bangla” or “Awami Leaguer”.
- They were also termed as “Gaddar” or betrayer and was executed mercilessly

The attack of the next 9 months

- The indiscriminate killing continued rest of 9 months
- The army searched for every civilian who supported the freedom fighters and either executed them, or captured and tortured them inhumanely
- December 14-16, the Pakistani Army executed their last planned targeted mass killing on political leaders, university professors, medical doctors, engineers as well as journalists

Conclusion

- In my analysis I found that the Pakistani Dictator Government systematically targeted the students and the political leaders of East Pakistan as well other intellectuals to put a stop to the possibility and advancement of a new nation.

THANK YOU ALL

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