# **ARBIT**it happens here...



A brave lady, freedom fighter, armed with a gun and with three children joined us. She carried a pot of cooked rice for us.

#### Padma Shree L **Col Sajjad Zahir** (Retd) wadhinata Padai Bir Protik, Project rector: Banglades)

l Saijad was a voung artillery officer serving with the Pakistani Parachute with Brigade in the Sialkot Sector when the armed struggle for freedom started in Bangladesh. On learning of

committed by the Pakistan Army on his fellow Bengalis, he defected and crossed over to India, bringing with the Operational Plans of the Pakistan Army, which proved most useful to us when war was declared. He later joined the Mukti Bahini and served under Gen Sagat Singh. For his gallantry and services during the war, he was decorated with a, Swadhinata Padak, Bir Protik, equivalent to our Vir Chakra After the war, amongst other things including writing over fifty books, he has worked tirelessly to promote good relations between our two countries, for which he was awarded the Padma Shree by our Government He is a dear friend and he and Chandrakantii are in almost daily touch with each other.

#### **Col Sajjad**

"1971 was a turning point in the history of the sub-continent. One of the key players in the history of 1971 War was the Mukti Bahini. They were the main strength of the resistance and their inexorable motivation was a key factor for the Mitra Bahini for winning the War of 1971. According to KF Rustamii, the first Director General of Border Security Force (BSF) of India, "Mukti Bahini lacked everything for carrying on



Rickshaws were the favourite mode of transport for us and the Mukti Bahini

the fight except the will and courage to fight." Similarly, in his book 'Witness to Surrender. Major (later Brigadier) of Pakistan Army, Siddiq Salik wrote about the Mukti Bahini, "Their sabotage inventory included damage to, or destruction of, 231 bridges, 122 railway lines and 90 electric installations. They could not reach this figure with out a high degree of motivation. Here is an example of their spirit A Bengali lad was arrested in Rohanpur area (Rajshahi District) in June 1971, for an attempted act of sabotage. He was brought to the company headquarter for interrogation but refused to divulge any information. When all other methods failed, Major 'R' put his sten-gun on his chest and said, "This is the last chance for you. If you don't co-operate, the bullets will pierce through your body." The lad bowed down, kissed the ground, stood up and said, "I am ready to die, now. My blood will certainly hasten the liberation of my sacred land." Siddig Salik further writes. "It was not an easy job for the army to stamp out insurgents so sophisticated in technique and so highly motivated."

The Mukti Bahini was formed



The author with Maj Dhillon Arty during our Mukti Bahini days.

on the night of 25 March when Pakistan Army launched 'Operation Search Light,' the operational order to conduct genocide. The initial resistance was put up by the five battalions of the East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles, Police, Ansars, students and people from all walks of life. With meager arms and ammunition, they started resisting the Pakistan Army. Due to the genocide being committed by Pakistan Army, large number of people started crossing over the border and going to India to save their lives. The number of refugees rose to 98.98.852 who were distributed in 826 camps. This was resulting in huge financial and administrative pressure on the Indian Government.

Initially, the logistics required by Mukti Bahini were provided by the BSF, Colonel (later General) M.A.G. Osmani, Commander-in-Chief of the Mukti Bahini used to mention that the first friend of Bangladesh was the BSF. From 1 April 1971, Mukti Bahini was gradually being organised and trained by the BSF out of the civilians who had reported to the refugee and youth camps in the border areas. In the meantime, the resistance by the Bengali Army, EPR and population started causing sizeable casualties to the Pakistan Army in different areas Bangladesh including Chittagong Hill Chittagong. Tracts, Pabna, Comilla, Jessore, Rangpur and other areas. After the initial resistance. Mukti Bahini was forced to withdraw to the Indian side along the border. Mass killings, brutal atrocities and destruction of properties continued to be carried out by the Pakistan Army.

By mid-April of 1971 Pakistani troops fanned out to different parts of the country, and with additional troops, arrived from West Pakistan, and they started taking position along the Indian border. Three infantry divisions were in position, and

## **The War That Legends Are Made Of**

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#### **#1971 LIBERATION WAR**



Sitting on my right is Col Sajjad, Princess Diya Kumari in a pink saree and Meera Kumari in a red Saree.



The rickshaw seen in the above picture is decorated and displayed in the Raddison Hotel in Dacca. Self with my wife, Lakshmi.

later, two more infantry divisions were raised which put the Pakistan Army in a secure position for conducting their operations. The BSF had limited capabilities and resources available to them for taking care of the security situation along the border and for the training of the Mukti Bahini. As such, a decision was taken by the Government of India that the Indian Army would step in the border areas and take over the border security of West Bengal area by 30 April and Assam (including Meghalaya) and Tripura by 1 May. The BSF came under the operational control of the Army and the 'Operation Jackpot' was launched. The Mukti Bahini training also became the responsibility of the Army and training camps were established

along the border areas. The Mukti Bahini, after initial training and equipping itself, started conducting numerous

inside operations deep Bangladesh, causing heavy casualties on the Pakistan Army. The Bangladesh Army was initially organised with three infantry brigades and two artillery batteries. After rigorous training, a small Air Force and Navy were formed with the help of Indian Air Force and Navy. In addition. Bangladesh was divided into 11 Mukti Bahini sectors, where mainly the newly trained Mukti Bahini members were posted under the leadership of trained army/air force officers and they continued their operations. A force of nearly 500 naval commandos were trained and put under Sector No 10. The naval commandos were successful in destroving the Pakistan forces' river and seagoing vessels, thus disrupting their logistic route. The Indian Army also started conducting operations along the border belt areas with support

Author with young Bengali supporters, 1971.

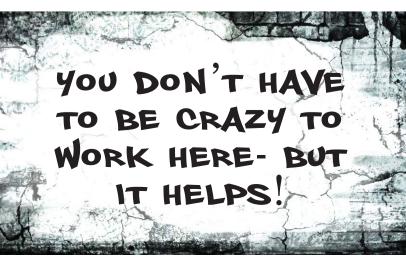
and cooperation of Mukti Bahini and local people. Guerrilla activities by Mukti Bahini members were conducted in Dhaka and other parts of the country that was posing a challenge to the Pakistan Army. On 3 December 1971, after Pakistan Air Force attacked ten Indian airfields, the war between Indian and Pakistan started. During this war, there were many incidents which crowd the pages of history and many are not yet documented. Some of the incidents on contribution of common people which come to my mind are as fol-

• On 7 December 1971. the 4/5 GR under 59 Mountain Brigade of 8 Mountain Division, crossed the Surma River and landed in Mirapara, near Sylhet town, in a classic heliborne operation. During a fierce fight with 31 Punjab Regiment of Pakistan Army

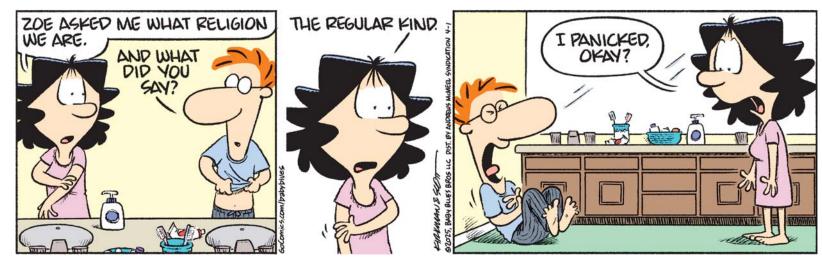


Col Sajjad with Gen VK Singh and Author.

#### THE WALL



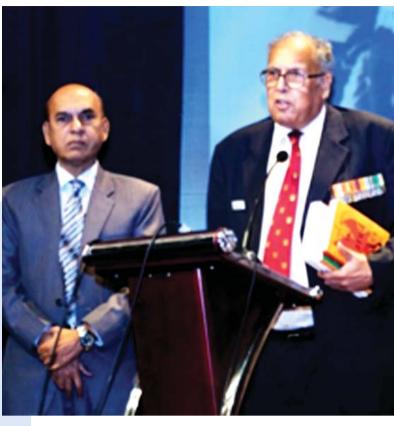
#### **BABY BLUES**





#### World Baking Day: Rise, Bake, and Shine!

elebrated every third Sunday of May, World Baking Day is a sweet reminder to roll up your sleeves and whip up some joy. Whether you're a seasoned baker or just starting out, this day is all about embracing the magic of mixing, kneading, and creating delicious treats. From gooey brownies to crusty bread, baking connects cultures, generations, and hearts. In India, the home-baking trend has soared, turning kitchens into creative labs during the pandemic and beyond. So, preheat that oven, dust off your apron, and celebrate the simple happiness that comes fresh out of the oven!



Col Sajjad and Chandrakant at a seminar in Dacca.



Army,

village people were unforgiv-

ing on Amin Choudhury for

collaborating with Pakistan

Army. They beat Amin

Choudhury to death that very

night, shouting that he was a

traitor to have helped the

enemy against the Mitra

Bahini who were fighting for

Bangladesh. This incident

reflected the emotion and

motivation of the common

people of Bangladesh in 1971.

During the helidrop operation

of Akhaura and paradrop

operation in Tangail, the

Indian Army, Mukti Bahini

and common people in the vil-

lages stood beside each other

and brought success. Captain

Peter of 2 Para under 50 Para

Brigade was sent for recon-

naissance 60 km inside

Bangladesh to select a landing

site which he successfully

conducted with assistance of

the local villagers and Mukti

Bahini. When the paradrop

took place, Mukti Bahini pro-

vided maximum support and

cooperation to the Para

Battalion. The successful Para

Battalion operation broke the

morale of the Pakistan Army

and hastened their surrender.



Major Ian Cardozo, Second-in-Command of the 4/5 GR, was critically wounded and lost his leg. The villagers of Mirapara came to know that a local collaborator of Pakistan namelv Amin Choudhury, having seen the helicopters landing rode off on his motorcycle and informed the matter to Pakistan Army commander Brigadier M. Salimullah (Commander 202 Brigade). Brig. Salimullah sent two ing companies of 31 Punjab Regiment under the command of Lt. Col. Sarfaraz, who tried to intercept the Gurkhas near he landing pad resulting in the Gurkhas suffering 13 killed and 35 wounded. The

Commander FJ Sector, marched to Mymensingh with 6 Bihar Regiment, 93 BSF Battalion and 15,000 members of Mukti Bahini. After the capture of Mymensingh on 14 December 1971, he marched to Dhaka without any vehicles. The common people of the villages provided them rickshaws, vans, trucks, buses and ensured that the troops reach Dhaka by early mornhours of December1971

In the early hours of 16 December, the Pakistan Army and Mitra Bahini were facing each other in Dhaka. the balance of forces were heavily tilted towards Pakistan Army in Dhaka. They had a total 26,500 soldiers and Indian Army had barely 2,000 soldiers. Incidentally, on the 11 April evening, the Chief of Staff of Eastern Command, in a meeting of senior officers of Pakistan Army in the command post of Niazi, suggested that they should prepare and launch street to street fight in Dhaka city with their 26.500 soldiers. Major General

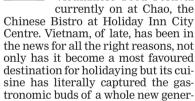
Mohammad Jamshed Khan Commander of 36 Infantry Division, who was a senior and experienced commander said that he was of the opinion that street to street fight in Dhaka city will bring a disaster to the Pakistan Army as every home in Dhaka has more than 2-3 armed Muktis. They will attack the Pakistan Army from three sides and Indian Army will attack them from the front. As such, the plan of street to street fight was abandoned. This was the level of frustration and lack of determination of Pakistan

Indian Army made very heavy sacrifices for the success in the war. They were not an invading Army but a liberator Army. It was a war conducted for freedom of people from genocide and atrocities. It is known that Pakistan Army commanders believe that defence of the east lav in the west. Pakistan Army had mobilised more forces on the western sector as they felt that they would be able to defeat the Indian Army in the western sector which would affect the war in the east. The Pakistan Army had four corps in western front (Frontier Corps, I Corp, IV Corps and I Corps), whereas, Indian Army had three corps (XV Corps, I Corp and XI Corps). Yet, they could not bring success in the battlefronts in western front also. It is important for us to study and document the history of 1971. The sharpest memories of our experience of working together have already started to fade, but yet we have to recollect the memories and document them. It is the people who had witnessed the bloody struggle and can give the best evidence. It is the brave who make history, and it is the brave who can also write real history as it takes courage to write the truth, the whole truth.' 111

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com



A Bengali women raped and shot by the Pakistani soldiers.

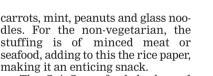


At Chao, the culinary journey lles with fresh Vietnamese corian-

For vegetarians, it uses a generous use of vegetables, herbs and noodles that makes a great beginning for the experience ahead. For those who like their food spicy, there is Hanoi Can'h Chua ca, a fish soup, it was actually rich with balanced flavours, sour, sweet and spicy. A popular Vietnamese dish served with pineapple, basil and fresh lime.

Starters were a perfect blend of flavours and freshness. The Vietnamese fresh vegetable rolls are far healthier than the Chinese spring rolls. These near translucent parcels were first packed with salad greens,





stuffing is of minced meat or seafood, adding to this the rice paper, making it an enticing snack. The Goi Cuon, fresh herbs and prawn paper rolls were included.

Lean proteins like chicken and tofu boosted both its taste and food value. The main course is literally akin to having Vietnam on a plate. Bun'h Thit Nuong is a very popular noodle dish from South Vietnam. It was all of salty, sweet, soft and the crushed peanuts and pickled carrots gave it a crunchy kick.

And now about the national dish of Vietnam, Pho, the fresh noodles soup with sticky rice noodles and accompaniments that turned it into a burst of flavour. Slowcooked to extract the maximum flavours. enough to revel in the bowl of taste-



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

and





### **#PLATED VIETNAM@CHAO**

### You'll not forget this 'bread'

Slowcooked to extract the maximum flavours, enough to revel in!





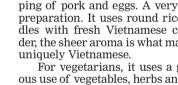
aten bread is soon forgot-



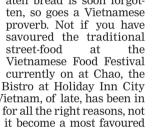
tronomic buds of a whole new gener-

begins with Bun Thang, a typical North Vietnamese dish. It is a mixed bag of herbs, chicken base and topping of pork and eggs. A very basic preparation. It uses round rice nooder, the sheer aroma is what makes it

uniquely Vietnamese.



Sadhana Garo Journalist &









added to its taste.





ful concoction, and Pho get all your worries! The stir fried Tofu, popular y known as soya paneer in India, was not only silken but the fresh red chillies, fresh lime, bamboo shoots, scallions and shiitake mushrooms

Another popular dish from South Vietnam, or specifically the Mekong Delta, is Ga Khao Sa Ot Made from minced chicken with beans, broccoli bamboo shoots and braised with fresh lemon grass and lime make it simple but deli cious with all the ingredients giving it a texture and taste that is very special. For those who swear that seafood is for the soul or those for whom it is a constant reminder of the ocean's bounty, there is Ca Han Xi Dau a homely Vietnamese steamed fish with bamboo shoots. scallions fresh chillies, lime and shiitake served with ginger sauce and it is a reminder of how rich the Vietnamese cuisine is without being complex. Sans the use of dairy and oil well, almost the food festival at Chao should be every foodie but fit person's go-to-desti

Also, for those who think curry is just a yellow sauce, check out the Vietnamese golden curry made from coconut milk, fish sauce, cilantro, chicken and served with Jasmine

For dessert, there was Che Chupi Hap. Simply put, caramalised bananas, sago pearls, simmered in fresh sweetened coconut milk. no dairy, no fat, but comfort and sumptuousness in a bowl. Actually, that literally sums up this very popular painstakingly curated Vietnamese Food Festival at Chao!

