CHAPTER TWO

ORIGIN, ORGANISATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE BANGLADESH MILITARY

Bangladesh attained independence on December 16, 1971 after protracted politico-military struggle against the military junta of Pakistan. Independent Bangladesh opted for parliamentary democracy and following the Western liberal model, the military was brought under civilian control. The civilian rule of Awami League, was, however, abruptly ended with military's violent seizure of state power on August 15, 1975. After a series of coups and counter coups, the military finally emerged as the ruling elite in Bangladesh and remained so during the next decade and a half.

The prolonged and dominant role of the military in Bangladesh polity would be better understood if we enquire into its origin, development and organisational features such as composition, strength, recruitment procedures and training patterns; socio-economic background of the military personnel; and the nature of their relationship with other socio-economic and political groups in the country.

Origin and Development of the Bangladesh Military

The phenomenon of politicisation of the Bangladesh military is not merely a post-independent development. The Bangladesh Army is a descendant of the British Indian and Pakistan Army. The genesis of politicisation of the Bangladesh Army can be traced to the growth and development of the military organisation and the role it played in the Pakistan period and the Liberation War of 1971.

The organisation of the military during the British period was basically designed to promote and perpetuate colonial interests in India. After the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the colonial administration devised the notion of the 'martial race' and began to
recruit from only those ethnic and caste groups\(^1\), which they identified as inherently martial and more warlike than others.

What influenced the British military planners to introduce such a military recruitment policy was the fact that they felt very insecure because of the rebellious attitude of certain elements in the British Indian Army, particularly the Bengalees. The colonial administration implicated the Bengal Army for its leading role in the mutiny.

The process of Indianisation of the army was very slow throughout the British rule. The recruitment of natives was gradually increased in the colonial army primarily to meet the logistical needs of World War II. Among the natives, the number of Bengalees had always been low and their recruitment was more or less restricted to the technical services.\(^2\)

At the time of partition, the representation of East Pakistan was extremely poor in all the three services of the Pakistan armed forces; because, prior to independence, there was neither a single Bengali regiment nor a cantonment in the eastern half of Pakistan as no troops were permanently stationed there by the British\(^3\). The partition of the Indian sub-continent and the creation of Pakistan further reduced the number of Bengalees in the army as non-Muslim Bengali officers and jawans opted for India. Thus in 1947, the Bengalees constituted only 1% of the total armed forces in Pakistan.

The Government of Pakistan raised two battalions of East Bengal Regiment in Dhaka on February 15, 1948 and Lt. Colonel M.A.G. Osmani was appointed its commander. Even after the formation of the first exclusively Bengali infantry regiment, the representation of the Bengalees remained low in the Pakistan armed forces. The

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\(^2\) During the World War II, there were about 60,000 Bengalees in various constrution units of the British Indian Army. See Stephen P. Cohen’s, *The Pakistan Army* (New Delhi: Himalayan Books, 1984), p. 43.

Pakistani ruling elites continued with the British concept of ‘martial race’ and most of the commanding posts were held by the West Pakistanis.

The Bengalees were considered to be physically unfit for the military services. The number of Bengalees was slowly increased in the Pakistan military only after they performed well in the 1965 war with India. However, there was strong resistance within the Pakistan Army even to the gradual expansion of East Pakistan’s representation in the military service.

In 1968, East Pakistan had 4 battalions. Six more Bengali battalions were raised in 1968-69. In spite of all these efforts, East Pakistan had hardly any representation in the higher echelons of the army. In 1970, there was only one lieutenant general from East Pakistan. In 1971, the Bengalees constituted only 5% of the total strength of the Pakistan Army. The Bengali representations in the Pakistan Navy and Air Force were 9% and 11% respectively.

The policy measures introduced by the Punjabi-dominated ruling clique over the years only widened the differences between the East and West Pakistanis in the armed forces. The under-representation and ethnic segregation made the Bengali military personnel conscious of the regional imbalance in the Pakistan armed forces. The Bengali military personnel also felt that they were discriminated in terms of pay, promotion and other privileges. These corporate grievances made the Bengali officers vocal against the West Pakistani ruling elites. Furthermore, while the civil-military bureaucracy complex was well entrenched into the levers of power in Pakistan, the participation of the Bengalees in the political decision making was meagre. Under such circumstances, the

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4 One of the major disqualifications for the Bengalees trying to join the army was the height constraint. Only a few Bengalees could meet the minimum height of 5 feet 6 inches. See Jeffrey Lunstead's, “Armed Forces in Bangladesh Society” in Edward A. Olsen and Stephen Jurika, eds., Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), p. 310.


Bengali military officers not only agitated for the protection of their corporate interests, but also sympathised with East Pakistanis' struggle for greater economic and political share.

In the environment of the military rule in Pakistan, the process of the politicisation of the Bengali personnel already reached a fairly advanced stage. The prominent Bengalees implicated in the famous Agartala Conspiracy Case of 1968 for their alleged involvement in trying to dismember Pakistan with the help of India, included a number of serving and retired military officers, apart from civil servants and politicians. By late 1960’s, several Bengali officers developed close contact with the Awami League leadership. All these developments indicate that the officers from the East Bengal Regiment maintained a strong sub-national Bengali identity during the Pakistan period.

In early 1971, the total number of Bengali armed forces personnel stationed in East Pakistan was about 70,000 composed of approximately 6,000 regulars in the East Bengal Regiment's 6 battalions and 15,000 members of East Pakistan Rifles— a paramilitary force defending the borders. The rest were lightly armed civilian forces like the police and the national guards such Mujahids and Ansars.

Once the Bengali members of the armed forces became the target of Pakistani military offensive on the night of March 25, 1971, their reaction to the Yahya regime was one of immediate revolt. The Bengali armed forces personnel, in fact, provided the initial resistance to the Pakistan Army.

The political motivation of the East Bengal Regiment personnel had been built during the critical days of February and March 1971 which eventually prompted them to

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7 The list of 34 civil–military personnel accused in the case is given in Sirajuddin Ahmed’s, Shere-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq (Dhaka: Bhaskar Prakashani, 1993), p. 5.
8 For details see Saddiq Salik’s, Witness to Surrender (Karachi: Oxford Press, 1977), pp. 11-13; and Abdul Gaffar Choudhury’s, Bangladeshe Civil O Army Bureaucracir Ladai (Dhaka: Nawroj Sahitya Sangsad, 1992).
join the liberation struggle of Bangladesh. When Sheikh Mujib gave the call for 'total non-cooperation' with the Pakistan government on March 1, 1971 and finally the call for emancipation from Pakistani rule in East Pakistan on March 7, 1971, the Bengali population responded overwhelmingly. It was also noticed that the men and officers of East Bengal Regiment in different cantonments were in a rebellious mood. In the words of a former Bangladesh Army officer, "Self-preservation forced the transfer of loyalty from a Pakistani state to a non-existent Bangladesh. Revolt demanded not just the rejection of all earlier beliefs, but their replacement with nearly opposite ones. Extreme trauma, compressed within the last week of March 1971, catalysed the transformation of loyal Pakistanis into rebellious Bengali nationalists".

The Bengali army officers fighting for the liberation of Bangladesh in different parts of the country strongly felt the need for co-operation among themselves. On April 4, 1971, some of them met in a conference and formally organised the Mukti Bahini or liberation forces. Colonel (retd.) M.A.G. Osmani, was unanimously appointed Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the Mukti Bahini.

There were compulsions of a political nature also to create institutional machinery for ensuring effective co-ordination during the Liberation War. Thus a provisional Government of Bangladesh was formed at Mujibnagar on April 17, 1971 and Tajuddin Ahmed was appointed the Prime Minister. The sole objective of the government was to liberate Bangladesh from the Pakistani occupation and it immediately devoted itself to organising the Mukti Bahini. Bangladesh was divided into 11 operational sectors and in order to co-ordinate the military operations, a regular military headquarter was set up in Calcutta.


The Bangladesh Liberation War was a politico-military struggle against the Pakistani Army for a period of 9 months. Although the regulars constituted only a quarter of the total strength of the *Mukti Bahini*, they in fact formed the core of the armed resistance to the Pakistani military. In course of the war, both civilians and Bengali armed forces worked together to liberate their country from the occupation forces. While the regular forces took the responsibility of leading most of the military operations, the political leaders and other freedom fighters tried to motivate the people to lend support and participate in the Liberation War. The provisional Government of Bangladesh had attached a political wing to each army command to co-ordinate the activities of the regular members of the armed forces and other civilian groups. All these resulted in the evolution of a unique pattern of civil-military relationship during the Liberation War.

In the process of their active participation in the Liberation War, the Bangladesh armed forces personnel were exposed to various political groups and ideas. The war was fought without any strict control and direction of a central command. The regular forces fought with the different political groups in fragments under the command of army officers and came in contact with the leaders of various political parties and factions. The result was that many army personnel became affiliated to different political parties. The strategy of guerrilla warfare also radicalised a section of the army.

Another significant development in the Liberation War was that several college and university students joined the *Mukti Bahini*. Among them, 58 were selected for officers' training and subsequently commissioned in the Bangladesh Army in October, 1971. A second batch of 67 cadets was in training. They were commissioned in the army.

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12 The *Mukti Bahini* 's total strength was about 100,000.
13 Some of the members of the National and Provincial Assemblies of Pakistan, elected in the 1970 General Election, mostly belonging to the Awami League were attached to all the 11 operational sectors as "Civilian Affairs Advisers". See the composition of Bangladesh operational sectors in Safiullah, n. 10, pp. 225-27.
14 See Golam Hossain's, "Political Consequences of Military Rule in Bangladesh", in M. Salimullah Khan, ed., *Politics and Stability in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Jahangirnagar University, 1985), pp. 41-42.
immediately after the liberation of Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{15} All these newly commissioned officers who were more influenced by the war than by the regimental traditions of peacetime soldiering brought to the army a high degree of politicisation.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus the Bangladesh Army was converted during the Liberation War into a nationalist army. The 1971 war put an end to the so-called isolation between the military and civilians that had existed during the British and Pakistan period. The army officers while working in close co-operation with the civilians during the Liberation War, became aware of the prevailing state of the weak political leadership and fragile political institutions. These factors made them very conscious of political power. It was, therefore no wonder that after the Liberation War a highly politicised army emerged in Bangladesh.

**Organisation of the Bangladesh Military in the Post-Liberation Period**

During the Liberation War, apart from the regular members of the erstwhile East Bengal Regiment and East Pakistan Rifles, *Mukti Bahini* also drew heavily from the civilian population. In the post-liberation period, the most serious and immediate problem facing the new regime was how to co-opt several thousand freedom fighters in the various branches of the armed forces, para-militia and the police.\textsuperscript{17}

The Bangladesh Government-in-exile within a week of its return to Dhaka,\textsuperscript{18} announced the scheme for forming a ‘National Militia’ comprising all freedom fighters.\textsuperscript{19} On January 2, 1972, an eleven-member Central Board of National Militia was constituted with the Prime Minister as the Chairman. The scheme was designed to reorganise all the

\textsuperscript{16} See Ali, n. 11, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{18} The Bangladesh Government-in-exile headed by Tajuddin Ahmed returned to Dhaka on December 22, 1971 after the Pakistan Army had surrendered to the Allied Forces on December 16, 1971.
members of the *Mukti Bahini* so that the unprecedented zeal displayed by the youth during the liberation struggle could be utilised in the national reconstruction programme.

As Sheikh Mujib returned to Dhaka on January 10, 1972 from captivity\(^{20}\) and assumed the leadership of the country, Tajuddin’s idea of an integrated ‘National Militia’ began to receive less attention. Sheikh Mujib did not reject the idea of a ‘National Militia’ but he emphasised more on disarming the *Mukti Bahini* members. However, his call for the surrender of arms did not evoke much response from the freedom fighters.

Following the surrender of the Pakistan Army, a chaotic situation developed in Bangladesh. In the absence of effective administrative machineries, several sector commanders possessing vast quantities of arms were running almost parallel administration in different parts of the country. They also went on exerting political influence in every sphere of administration. This was perceived by Sheikh Mujib as a direct threat to his government. Having failed to control the freedom fighters, the government in a desperate move banned the *Mukti Bahini* on February 24 and all other guerrilla forces on February 27, 1972.\(^{21}\)

Sheikh Mujib’s attitude towards the Bangladesh armed forces was ambivalent to a certain extent. This was largely a result of his own past political experience. In his struggle against Pakistan, he came to distrust the army. A Bangladeshi political analyst has put it succinctly in the following words - “On the one hand, he was proud of its contribution in resisting the aggressors and fighting for its motherland. On the other hand, his natural suspicion of things military did not allow him to fully trust them”.\(^{22}\)

Finally, the proposed scheme of forming a ‘National Militia’ could not be implemented because the regular forces who participated in the Liberation War, refused

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\(^{20}\) Sheikh Mujib was arrested on March 25, 1971 and kept in a West Pakistan prison. He was released only after Bangladesh attained independence.


to join it. Therefore, the government decided to raise a regular army, navy and air force; a para-military force — Bangladesh Rifles for defending the border; and a national police force for ensuring law and order in the country.

The government announced that selection boards would be formed for the purpose of recruiting commissioned and non-commissioned officers. The government also decided to set up a military academy to train new officers for the nation’s defence forces.

Composition and Strength of the Bangladesh Military

The new Bangladesh armed forces were raised from the former Bengali members of the Pakistan Army, Navy and Air Force who took part in the Liberation War. General M.A.G. Osmani, who was the C-in-C of the combined liberation forces resigned on April 7, 1972. With his resignation, the post was abolished. Instead, separate headquarters were established for the three services of the military - army, navy and air force.

Bangladesh Army

The Army is the strongest and the most important among three services of the Bangladesh military. But at the time of independence, the army was in a state of disarray. The Bangladesh Army inherited only a few war-ravaged cantonments from the Pakistan Army. The army lacked heavy weapons, transport and communication facilities. Besides, most of the officers had no previous experience of running an army headquarter. The Bengali officers who took part in the war were either junior or middle ranking officers who had commanded troops just up to a brigade level.23

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23 During the Liberation War, the regular forces of the East Bengal Regiment and East Pakistan Rifles were reorganised into three independent brigades under the commands of Major Ziaur Rahman (Z Force), Major K. M. Saifiullah (S Force) and Major Khaled Mosharraf (K Force).
<table>
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This table is prepared on the basis of the information obtained from *Military Balance*, 1973-74 to 1996-97.

However, it needs to be mentioned that the Liberation War was fought in one of the most trying conditions in which the army officers had to take the responsibility of recruiting, organising, training and equipping guerrillas. Despite lack of experience of working in the higher command and staff positions, an army headquarter with divisional command structure soon began to function. The provisional Tables of Organisation and Equipment (TO & E) were also approved by the government. The three most prominent freedom fighters - Col. K.M. Safiullah, Col. Ziaur Rahman and Col. Khaled Mosharraf...
were appointed Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief of General Staff respectively.

The strength of the army in 1972-73 was only 17,000.\textsuperscript{24} About 2000 surviving members of the East Bengal Regiment and some new recruits from among the irregulars of the \textit{Mukti Bahini} constituted the nucleus of the Bangladesh Army for the first one and half years. To these were added 20,000 Bengali army personnel, including 400 officers repatriated from Pakistan in 1973. These repatriates had been stationed in West Pakistan since 1969 and could not join the Liberation War. Most of them were gradually absorbed into the Bangladesh Army. Thus the strength of the army rose to 30,000 in 1975.\textsuperscript{25} There were about 1200 officers in the army in 1975. But the number of senior officers above the ranks of captain and major was not more than 250.\textsuperscript{26}

After the August 15, 1975 coup, the 25,000 strong elite para-military force — \textit{Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini} was integrated with regular army. This resulted in a sharp increase in the size of the army. In 1976, the total strength of the army was reported to be 59,000.\textsuperscript{27}

Table No.1 shows that the size of the army has been expanding rapidly since 1975. During the military rule, Bangladesh Army’s strength increased three fold — from 30,000 in 1975 to 90,000 in 1990.\textsuperscript{28} The trend of expansion continued even after the transition to civilian rule in 1991. The present strength of the army is 101,000.\textsuperscript{29}

The Bangladesh Army has also undergone a major transformation in its composition in the last 25 years. Since most of the coups during the Zia period were plotted by the highly politicised freedom fighters, their ranks steadily declined with each

\textsuperscript{26} See Emajuddin Ahmed’s, “Dominant Bureaucratic Elites in Bangladesh”, in Mohammad Mohabbat Khan and Habib Mohammad Zafarullah, eds., \textit{Politics and Bureaucracy in a New Nation} (Dhaka: Centre for Administrative Studies, 1982), p. 150.
purge that followed an unsuccessful coup. Thus, by 1981, only 15% of the Bangladesh armed forces were freedom fighters, 25% were repatriates and the rest 60% had been recruited since 1975.30

The number of repatriate personnel has also reduced to a large extent as most of them retired in the 1980s and early 1990s. Hence, the post-1975 recruits constitute the majority of the army’s rank and file today. The new generation officer corps have so far reached the rank of colonel. Currently they are occupying the middle and lower echelons in the army. The total strength of the officer corps in the Bangladesh Army in 1989 was about 4000. At the top rungs it had one lieutenant general, 20 major generals, 80 brigadiers, 100 colonels, 200 lieutenant colonels. The rest of the officer corps consisted of majors and lower ranks.31

Despite severe resource constraints, the successive military regimes in Bangladesh attempted to expand and modernise the army. During the Mujib period, the army had only five divisions. But after the establishment of military rule, two more divisions were raised. At present, the seven infantry divisions of the 101,000 strong Bangladesh Army are stationed in Dhaka, Comilla, Bogra, Chittagong, Rangpur, Mymensingh and Jessore. The Bangladesh Army intends to raise two additional divisions. The army is organised into 17 infantry brigades (26 infantry battalions), 1 armoured brigade (2 armoured regiments), 1 artillery division (6 artillery regiments), 1 engineering brigade and 1 air defence brigade.32 The army headquarter is in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Navy

The Bangladesh Navy was formed in November 1971. It included 860 naval commandos raised mainly from the Bengali naval personnel who had defected from the Pakistan Navy and newly recruited freedom fighters. The navy played a heroic role

32 See n. 29.
during the Liberation War in the port areas of Chittagong, Mongla, Chalna, Narayanganj and Chandpur by organising commando attacks.\textsuperscript{33} In 1971, the Bangladesh Navy had some riverine vessels which proved very useful in interrupting Pakistani forces' mobility in the inland waterways.

The Awami League leadership realised the necessity of rebuilding the navy for the protection of Bangladesh's maritime interests. In March 1972, Lt. Commander Nurul Huq, an engineering officer who had escaped from Pakistan, was appointed temporary Chief of Naval Staff and promoted to the rank of a Commander. The Navy headquarter was set up at Dhaka. By the end of 1974, Chittagong emerged as the country's first full-fledged naval base.

However, the Bangladesh Navy remained very weak in the early seventies due to resource constraints. The navy was so poorly equipped that it could not perform even the most routine patrol of the Bangladesh coastline.\textsuperscript{34} In 1973, the strength of the navy was only 500.\textsuperscript{35} In the same year, a repatriated officer Captain Mosharraf Hossain Khan was promoted to Commodore and appointed Chief of Naval Staff. Commodore Khan was further promoted to Rear Admiral and he continued to hold the post until 1979.

The Bangladesh Navy has retained the basic structure and disciplinary code of the Pakistan Navy. Its rank pattern is derived from the Royal Indian Navy.\textsuperscript{36} In 1977, the Zia regime decided to set up a Naval Academy in Bangladesh. The regime also tried to improve the training facilities for the technical personnel and procure necessary naval vessels, ships and modern equipment. Bangladesh has four naval bases - Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Kaptai.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} For details see M. Khalilur Rahman's, \textit{Muktijuddho O Nau Commando Abhijan} (Dhaka: Author, 1997); and the \textit{Bangladesh Times}, November 20, 1996.
\textsuperscript{34} See Lunstead, n. 4, p. 311.
\textsuperscript{35} See n. 24, p. 50
\textsuperscript{37} See n. 29.
During the military rule, the manpower of the Bangladesh Navy increased manifold -- from a meagre 500 in 1975 to 4,000 in 1980. The absorption of about 2,700 repatriate naval personnel including 30 officers into the Bangladesh Navy largely contributed to this increase. Since 1975, the Bangladesh Navy has also recruited several thousand new officers and sailors and its current strength is 10,000.

The Bangladesh Navy's principal duties include: a general police function for customs, fishery protection, search and rescue, and a military transport function to assist the army with internal security and disaster relief. Besides, it is the responsibility of the Bangladesh Navy to ensure proper exploration, preservation and utilisation of the potential marine resources in the 40,000 square miles of the exclusive economic zone in the Bay of Bengal. However, in the absence of adequate seagoing vessels, the Bangladesh Navy's law-enforcement surveillance in the last 25 years has been less effective. Recently Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced that her government intends to build a modern and self-reliant naval force in the country.

Bangladesh Air Force

The Bangladesh Air Force was raised in September 28, 1971 with a few armed helicopters and light aircraft. About 45 Bengali officers and 673 airmen who had escaped from the Pakistan Air Force contributed significantly to the liberation struggle. Since immediate acquisition of aircraft was difficult, its officers and men fought on land together with other members of the Mukti Bahini. In the words of a Bangladesh Air Force officer, "The mission for all was to defeat the enemy with the limitations of time and efforts. To that end all elements of the Bangladesh forces had to coordinate their efforts. Bangladesh Air Force, the Air Arm of the Joint Military forces was formed as the

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39 See n. 36.
40 See n. 29.
41 See the Bangladesh Observer, January 13, 1992 and the Independent, June 5, 1996.
core of the nascent B.A.F. of today". 43 It was only in December 1971, when a full scale war broke out, that the Bangladesh Air Force launched its first serial attack on Pakistani positions.

After liberation, Bangladesh faced enormous difficulties in reorganising the air force. A freedom fighter officer is of the opinion that the Bangladesh Air Force, "inherited from the enemy nothing but shambles, destroyed aircraft, damaged runaways, looted stores, neutralised maintenance facilities -- in short a disorganised mess". 44

In April 1972, Group Captain A.K. Khondkar was promoted to Air Commodore and appointed Chief of Staff. The air force headquarter was set up at Dhaka. In 1973, the Bangladesh Air Force had only 400 men. 45 In 1975, its strength increased to 5,000, 46 following the induction of repatriate air force personnel.

In spite of the sudden increase in its manpower, the air force was not properly equipped in those years. All that Bangladesh Air Force had at its disposal were a few Soviet supplied MIGs, helicopters and operational bases only in Dhaka, Chittagong and Jessore.

After the August 15, 1975 political changeover, Group Captain M.G. Tawab was promoted to Air Vice-Marshal and appointed Chief of Air Staff. Following his resignation on April 30, 1976, Air Commodore M. K. Bashar was promoted to the rank of Air Vice-Marshal and made Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh Air Force. But he died in an air crash on September 1, 1976. Air Commodore A.G. Mahmud succeeded him as Chief of Air Staff. 47

On October 2, 1977, a serious mutiny had taken place in the Bangladesh Air Force. The revolt originated in a conflict between the air force rank and file and the

45 See n. 35.
46 See n. 25.
47 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, October 15, 1976.
senior officers over pay and service conditions. During the attempted coup, 11 air force officers -- 2 Group Captains, 1 Wing Commander, 1 Squadron Leader, 2 Flight Lieutenants, 1 Flying Officer and 4 Pilot Officers were killed by the mutineers.

The revolt was immediately crushed by troops loyal to Zia. The trials of the mutineers began before military tribunals on October 7, 1977. It was officially announced on October 18 that 460 air force personnel had been tried, of whom 37 were executed, 20 sentenced to life imprisonment and 63 acquitted; the remaining 340 had been sentenced to shorter terms of imprisonment.

The abortive coup of October 2 had a catastrophic effect on the small Bangladesh Air Force. In December 1977, 11 air force officers resigned when Air Vice-Marshal A.G.Mahmud was superseded as Chief of Air Staff by Group Captain Sadruddin, who was promoted to Air Commodore. As a result, there were 11 officers left in the entire service, of which only 3 were capable of piloting an aircraft. In 1979, the total strength of the Bangladesh Air Force was reduced to 3000. However, several new officers and airmen have been enrolled since 1980. At present, the total strength of the Bangladesh Air Force is 6,500.

Despite acute resource constraints, the Bangladesh Air Force has made considerable progress over the years. Some new air force bases have been constructed such as Ishurdi, Saidpur, Sylhet and Cox Bazar. The Bangladesh Air Force has also procured advanced fighters and helicopters. The Air Force Academy was set up in 1982. The primary responsibility of the air force is to defend Bangladesh's air space. In addition

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50 See n. 48.
51 Ibid.
53 See n. 29, p. 159.
to this, the Bangladesh Air Force has been actively engaged in containing insurgency in
the Chittagong Hill Tracts and relief and rescue operations for the past two decades. 54

Selection and Recruitment Procedures of the Bangladesh Military

Recruitment is by voluntary enlistment. The Bangladesh military offers one of the
most secure and well-rewarded occupations in the country. However, in the backdrop of
serious unemployment problem in Bangladesh, the entry is highly competitive. The
recruitment procedure includes several examinations -- a nationwide selection based on
educational qualification, medical fitness and various other tests such as initial interview
and written test, a medical examination, a review by Inter Services Selection Board and
an intensive three day interview. Moreover, an elaborate investigation is conducted into
the background of a prospective cadet to ensure non-political recruitment. 55

Entrants to the Bangladesh Military Academy are Higher Secondary school
graduates. For army jawans, the minimum educational requirement is eighth standard. 56
Since the late 1970s, the Bangladesh military has been able to set higher standards for its
officer corps. The new recruits are also found to be less interested in politics. According
to a repatriate army officer, "There is a marked improvement in the intake of the officers
in Bangladesh military. In some ways, it is better than what used to be in the Pakistan
days". 57 Most of the Bengalees who joined the Pakistan Army had received their earlier
education in public schools, because, in the erstwhile East Pakistan, there was only one
cadet college.

Nowadays, the majority of the Military Academy entrants come from cadet
college background. After 1975, 15 more cadet colleges have been established in
Bangladesh. Cadet colleges follow the curriculum of public schools with a tinge of

54 Group Captain Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, "The Bangladesh Air Force: Agenda for the Future", Biman Sena,
vol. XX, June 1996, pp. 9-16.
56 Personal interview with Colonel (retd.) Shafat Jamil on April 2, 1995.
57 Personal interview with Brigadier (retd.) M.A. Hafiz on April 18, 1995.
military training. As the standard of public schools has deteriorated over the years, cadet colleges have become the centre of attraction for good students in Bangladesh. Unlike the public schools, cadet colleges are better equipped. Apart from academic excellence, a cadet college emphasises physical fitness and discipline. The tuition and other fees of cadet colleges are higher than those of the public schools, yet the pressure for admission into these colleges is growing every year.

However, in a poor country like Bangladesh, where only a quarter of its population is fully literate, such cadet colleges inevitably create an elitist bias in the society. A retired Bangladeshi civil servant is of the opinion that unless such cadet colleges are properly integrated with the mainstream educational institutions, the possibility of alienation will remain.

Training Pattern of the Bangladesh Military

At the time of independence, Bangladesh did not have any institute for the training of officers. In 1974, the Bangladesh Military Academy was set up at Comilla. Initially, the aim of the Academy was to run courses for Short Service Commission only. During 1972-75, the military personnel received their training mostly in India. In 1976, the Bangladesh Military Academy was shifted to Bhatiary near Chittagong. It was reorganised in 1978 and Long Courses for regular commission were introduced. Since then, the army officers are trained within Bangladesh. There has been a strong emphasis on discipline and morale-building incidentals like drill, smart new uniforms, distinctive regimental marks and so on. Such steps have been taken to check the recurrence of coups and mutinies that seriously undermined the chain of command and cohesion of the Bangladesh Army in the late seventies.

58 Ibid.
59 Personal interview with Mr. A.M.A. Muhith on May 8, 1995.
The Bangladesh Military Academy follows a training pattern similar to that of the Pakistan Military Academy and the Royal Military Academy. The selected army cadets undergo a training of two years at the Academy. The training programme emphasises character building and learning of military skills. Along with military training, academic subjects like military history and doctrine, military geography, current affairs etc. are taught at the Academy. The cadets usually complete B.A. or B.Sc. degree which is awarded by the University of Chittagong. They receive commissions as second-lieutenants in the regular army upon graduation. About 200-250 officers are graduated each year in Bangladesh. 62

Air force cadets attend a training programme of about two and half years consisting of five terms at the Bangladesh Air Force Academy in Jessore. In the first three terms, the Academy provides instructions on education, general service skills, air force culture etc. The final year is flying-dominated in which cadets learn skills and leadership in the air. Besides, flight cadets have to follow a special syllabus prepared for by the University of Rajshahi, which confers B.Sc. degree on them upon successful completion of the course leading to their coveted commission. 63

Navy cadets are trained at the Bangladesh Naval Academy in Chittagong for two and half years and like the army cadets, their degree is awarded by the University of Chittagong.

The primary objective of the Bangladesh Military Academy is to provide a sound educational base so that a cadet can pursue higher courses after becoming an officer. 64 For in-service examinations, officers have to study international affairs as well as domestic issues like population control, flood management etc. Such studies have

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undoubtedly contributed to broadening the outlook of the officers but it is the Staff Course where the officers are really exposed to creative works. However, the vacancies for the Staff Course are few in comparison to the number of aspiring officers. In 1992, there were only 381 officers in the Bangladesh Army qualified from various staff colleges. At the eighth or ninth year of service, officers appear for a selection test for the Staff Course. The selection process is based purely on merit.

Defence Services Command and Staff College was set up at Mirpur on December 30, 1977. It is the highest seat of military learning for the officers of Bangladesh Defence Services. Officers from three services - army, navy and air force are trained at separate wings of the college for a period of ten months. About 60% of the training duration is devoted to single service matters and the rest 40% is allotted for joint services studies.

The syllabus of the Staff College includes three broad aspects:

a) National, International and Strategic Studies.
b) Command, Leadership and Management.
c) Science and Technology.

The military officers study modern methods of warfare, country's civil defence and internal security problems. They also study various other geo-political and socio-economic issues of Bangladesh. In the sphere of international and strategic studies, the foreign policies of South Asian countries with particular reference to Bangladesh and major powers are analysed in depth by invited guest speakers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, University of Dhaka and Bangladesh Institute of International and

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65 See Jamal, n. 62.
66 See n. 57.
67 See "Extract from the Address of the Commandant on the Occasion of Graduation Ceremony 31 December, 1987", Torch, no. 8, December 1987, p. 84.
Strategic Studies. All these studies help the officers to understand the role of military in Bangladesh society.

Every year, a few officers of the rank of colonel and above are sent abroad to attend advanced training courses in war colleges. One noticeable aspect of the post-1975 training pattern is the decline of India's role in training Bangladesh armed forces personnel. Instead, Bangladesh has established close relations with China, Pakistan, U.K., U.S.A., France, Malaysia and other countries to train its military officers. The defence cooperation between Bangladesh and the countries mentioned above also include supply of arms and ammunition and participation in joint exercises. Bangladesh's military rulers have tried to raise the professional standards of the defence personnel by improving their training and other service facilities. The present system of training has been designed in such a way as to enable the officers to play a greater role in internal security, disaster management, combating insurgency and socio-economic development of the country.

Socio-Economic Background of the Bangladesh Military

In the Pakistan period, a few Bengalees who had joined the military services, were from middle class and lower-middle class families. The Mukti Bahini members who provided most of the recruits to the different wings of the armed forces of independent Bangladesh consisted of students drawn largely from peasant, lower-middle class and middle class families. A section of the freedom fighters came from the working class too. Besides, there were farmers among the guerrillas.69

The Bangladesh liberation struggle also attracted the upcoming businessmen, bureaucrats and other professional groups. But after independence, military service did not appeal much to the upper strata of the society. About 125 students who were

recruited as officers during the Liberation War and finally opted for military service had come from middle and lower-middle class families. For the last two decades, it has been observed that the wards of top military officials, high ranking bureaucrats and big businessmen have developed a negative attitude towards military services. They rather prefer to go abroad for higher studies or seek employment either in corporate houses or civil services. One study shows that 75% of the officers commissioned in the Bangladesh military after 1975 were born in middle class families, about 15-20% in the upper classes and about 10-15% in lower classes. Thus the representation of upper class in the Bangladesh armed forces is considerably low.

Like the upper class, the representation of lower class in the officer corps is also limited, but for different reasons. Most of the poor families in Bangladesh cannot meet the educational expenditure of their children. Besides, the labour of young members is commonly needed to supplement the meager income of poor families. As a result, they do not get education of a quality which can enable them to compete for getting entry into one of the branches of the armed forces. Under such circumstances, the participation of officers of lower class origin has always been modest.

Since Bangladesh is predominantly rural, the officers and other ranks are generally recruited from the countryside. Only a small section of the officer corps come from big cities like Dhaka and Chittagong. The majority of the officers recruited into the Bangladesh Army after 1975 are of rural or small-town origin. Officers coming from rural areas belong to the landowning class. The privates on the other hand, are either landless or marginal farmers.

Unlike the army, navy and air force personnel are drawn mostly from urban areas. Both the services accept only fully literate personnel and almost everyone in the ranks is a secondary school graduate.

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70 Hossain, n. 31, p. 56.
71 Ibid, p. 58.
The occupational background of parents is also an important factor in understanding the socio-economic background of the officer corps. Information based on interviews with two retired Bangladesh Army officers on the occupational background of the parents of officers suggest that a vast majority of them are middle ranking officers in the various ministries, government undertakings and private sectors, urban professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers etc., petty businessmen, small and medium entrepreneurs, landowners, retired military officers and serving Junior Commissioned Officers.  

The above facts suggest that the social base of officer recruitment has broadened in Bangladesh after 1975. Young Bangladeshis from urban professional groups and rural affluent families have shown a keen interest in joining the military services which provide good salary, perks and perquisites. Moreover, an army career offers excellent opportunities for higher studies, particularly in the medical and engineering corps. A Bangladeshi political analyst has pointed out that this marks a major change since the Pakistan period, when the bright boys were less enthusiastic about joining the defence services. Thus, for Bangladeshis of middle class and lower middle class origin, the military profession has become an avenue for upward social mobility. In the backdrop of the country's prevailing socio-economic conditions, this trend is likely to continue in the near future.

The Nature of Relationship between Military Personnel and Dominant Socio-Economic Groups in Bangladesh

The Bengali society in erstwhile East Pakistan was basically a small middle class segment with its few colleges and universities providing men for the armed forces and the civil service. There was a close affinity among the officers of both the services as they

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72 See n. 56 and n. 57.
73 Personal interview with Mr. Bazlur Rahman, the editor of the Bengali daily-Sangbad on May 6, 1995.
came from the same socio-economic background and in some cases even studied together.\textsuperscript{74}

This phenomenon has continued after independence. The military personnel are not different from the general people of Bangladesh. The military has close and intimate links with the civil population. In fact, they retain many of the characteristics and peculiarities of a Bangladeshi. In the rural areas, families are generally large and highly integrated. A young Bangladeshi coming from such a background maintains close ties with the family after joining military service. In Bangladesh, most of the families are dependent on the income of officers and other ranks.\textsuperscript{75}

Though it has been claimed that there is no formal interaction between clergy and military,\textsuperscript{76} relevant reports indicate that some sort of personal ties did develop between army commanders and Islamic priests. For instance, during 1982-83, about 50 key army officers, including the Army Chief Lt. General Ershad along with 20,000 troops became disciples of Atroshi's Pir (holy man) - one of the most influential religious leader of Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{77} It was Lt. General Mir Shawkat Ali who played a significant role in forging links between the Pir and the army. When he was commander of the Jessore garrison in the late 1970s, he organised the initiation of 15,000 of his men as followers of the Pir.\textsuperscript{78}

The generals used to visit Atroshi's Pir quite frequently.\textsuperscript{79} According to one report, Lt. General Ershad visited the Pir at least 100 times during his rule.\textsuperscript{80} The military

\textsuperscript{74} See Choudhury, n. 22.
\textsuperscript{76} Personal interviews with Prof. Talukdar Maniruzzaman on April 22, 1995 and Mr. Badruddin Umar on May 5, 1995.
\textsuperscript{77} Some of the Pir's followers included: Major General Nooruddin Ahmed Khan, Chief of General Staff; Major General Abdur Rahman, G.O.C. of the Jessore Division; Brigadier Malumudul Hassan, Director General of Defence Forces Intelligence; Brigadier Abdullah Hussain, Chairman of the first special military tribunal; and Brigadier Matiur Rahman, Deputy Director General of the Bangladesh Rifles. See Far Eastern Economic Review, April 7, 1983, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{79} For details see Far Eastern Economic Review, October 29, 1982, pp. 18-19; and n. 77, pp. 16-18.
leadership adopted such device to bolster its image in the society. In Bangladesh, the Islamic leaders command high respect from the majority of the people who are Muslims.

Like the military officers, the political elites in Bangladesh come more or less from similar socio-economic background - the middle and upper-middle classes composed of civil servants, affluent farmers, urban professionals and emerging business and industrial groups. Many military officers have family ties with these groups and as in most of the traditional societies, primordial loyalties are very strong in Bangladesh. This situation often promotes merger of political and economic interests between the military and other dominant socio-economic forces. In Bangladesh, nearly 75% of the military officers come from middle class families while this class makes up only 12-13% of the total population. As members of this tiny middle class by birth, the Bangladeshi officer corps has always tried to protect and promote its interests. Successive military regimes' economic policies - favouring the rich peasantry and upper strata of the urban middle class had been approved by the officer corps. The restoration of Islam, in place of secularism was also fully accepted by the Bangladesh military.81

80 See Dainik Bangla, April 12, 1991.