

INOMUN 2018:

RESEARCH REPORT

COMMITTEE : Historical Council

SUBJECT : The Bangladesh liberation war against Pakistan in 1971-72

ISSUE :

How can Bangladesh affirm itself as a new independent country socially, politically and economically after losing a large part of its population through migration and the casualties caused by the Bangladesh Liberation War ?

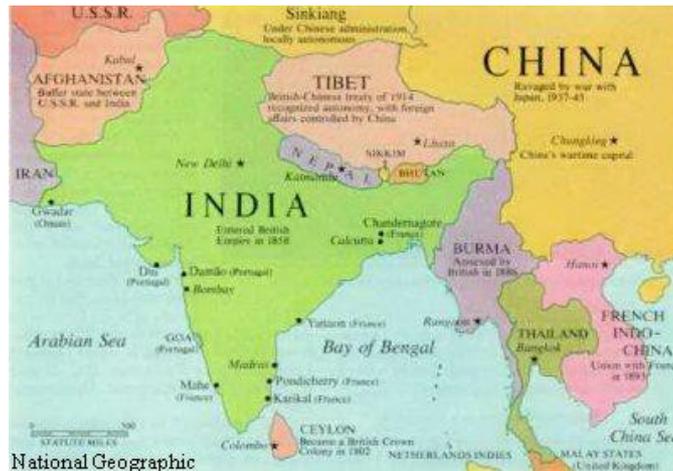
CHAIRS : Charles Monté and Clara Thuru

The conference begins on December, the 16th of 1974, three months after Bangladesh joined the United Nations and three years after the end of the Bangladesh liberation war.

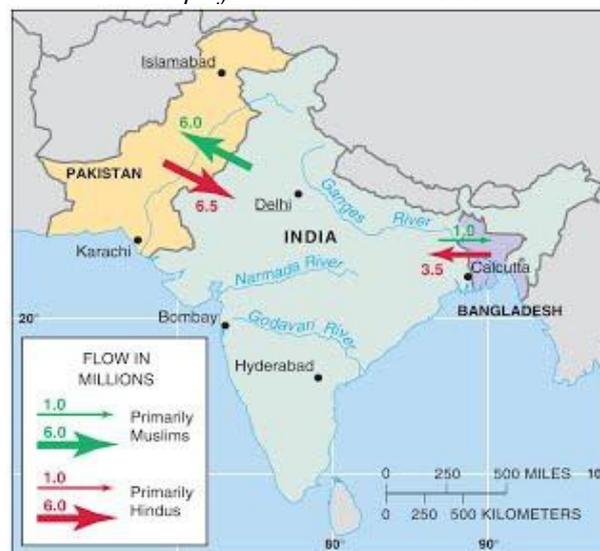
This independence movement takes place in the context of the end of the decolonisation period but also in a tense period in the Cold War between the USA and the USSR, at the end of the Détente period and just before the start of what is known as the New Cold War.

At the time the USA was building better relations with Communist China to widen the Sino-Soviet split, but was also trying to calm Cold War tensions in the context of budget strains following the costly Vietnam War.

NOTE: Bangladeshi is former Bengal, so its inhabitants are called either Bangladeshis or Bengalis.



Map of British India in 1946



The partition and migrant flows in 1947

Note: West Pakistan is 2200 kilometres from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)

Background : (short text needed on Indian independence, migrations, massacres in 1947 to explain the unfeasible state which was Pakistan).

• Introduction:

The Bangladesh Liberation War, also known as the Bangladesh War of independence, was an armed conflict between former East and West Pakistan, respectively Bangladesh and Pakistan, that took place between the **26th of March 1971 and the 16th of December 1971**. It was the consequence of diverse disagreements and cultural differences that sparked the Bengali self-determination movement. The Bangladesh Liberation War is known for its violence and the genocide of Bangladeshis at the hands of the West Pakistani army. **It resulted in Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan.**

Rivalry between India and Pakistan , disputed frontiers

- **Key terms:**

1. **The Awami League** :

Political organization in Bangladesh and Pakistan founded **in 1949** by Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy as an opposition party in Pakistan. It had a moderately socialist ideology and was ruled from 1953 by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led it to win a majority in the 1970 elections. After the rejections of the 6 point plan became a separatist movement, wanting an independent West Pakistan or Bangladesh. **Today it is the ruling party in modern Bangladesh.**

2. **The Bhola cyclone** :

Tropical cyclone that killed 300 000 people in East Pakistan in 1970. It is considered as the world's all-time **deadliest weather event**

3. **Bihari** :

Ethnic minority in Bangladesh subject to persecution. Represented in **the Muhajir people of Pakistan.**

4. **Chittagong** :

Chief port of Bangladesh on the Karnafuli River near the Bay of Bengal.

5. **Dhaka or Dacca** :

Administrative center of East Pakistan until 1971. **Capital of Bangladesh since then.**

6. **Dominion** :

A self-governing nation under the nominal rule of the British monarch.

7. **East Pakistan** :

Former Bangladesh.

8. **Language Martyrs' Day :**

Day commemorating the sacrifices of Bengali for Bengla language on the 21st of February 1952. Now known as **Mother Language Day.**

9. **Martial law :**

The law imposed on an occupied territory by occupying military forces, here **favoring Pakistan economically speaking.**

10. **Muhajir :**

Muslim immigrants of multi-ethnic origin who migrated from various regions of India after the Partition of India to settle in the newly independent state of Pakistan.

11. **Mukti Bahini :**

Translated as **Freedom Fighters.** Popular Bengali term which refers to the guerrilla resistance movement formed by the Bangladeshi military, paramilitary and civilians during the War of Liberation that transformed East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971.

12. **Pakistan People's Party (PPP) :**

Political party created by **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1968.** It worked with a number of liberal leftists who wanted Pakistan to disregard the idiom of religion in politics in favour of a program of rapid modernization of the country and the introduction of a socialist economy. Refuses to recognise the victory of the separatist Awami League in 1970.

13. **Operation Searchlight :**

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 justified on the basis of anti-Bihari violence by Bengalis in early March.

14. **Urdu :**

National language of Pakistan, and an official language of six states of India.

15. **West Pakistan :**

Now Pakistan. Before Bangladesh's independence Pakistan was in two parts, West and East

• **Key Figures:**



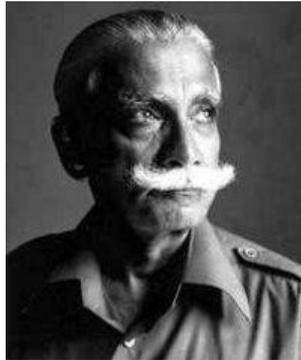
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League that declared the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.



Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People's Party that refused the victory of the Awami League and the independence of Bangladesh in 1970.



Yahya Khan, president of Pakistan from 1969 to 1971.



Colonel M.A.G. Osmani, commander-in-chief of the Bangladesh Forces during the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence



Anthony Mascarenhas, Pakistani journalist and author that fled to Britain in order to write an article about the atrocities of the Bangladesh Liberation War by Pakistani.



Indira Gandhi, Indian Prime Minister from 1966 to 1977.

Year	Spending on West Pakistan (in croorerupees)	Amount spent on West as percentage of total	Spending on East Pakistan (in crore rupees)	Amount spent on East as percentage of total
% of total population		36.23		63.77
1950–55	1,129	68.31	524	31.69
1955–60	1,655	75.95	524	24.05
1960–65	3,355	70.5	1,404	29.5
1965–70	5,195	70.82	2,141	29.18
Total	11,334	71.16	4,593	28.84

Source: Reports of the Advisory Panels for the Fourth Five Year Plan 1970–75, Vol. I, published by the planning commission of Pakistan (quick reference: crore = 10, or 10 million)

GRAPH SHOWING ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST EAST PAKISTAN 5 high population but received only TWO THIRDS of GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The Six Points – East Pakistan’s demands before the start of the war:

1. The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense based on the Lahore Resolution, and the parliamentary form of government with supremacy of a Legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.
2. The federal government should deal with only two subjects: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residual subjects should be vested in the federating states.
3. Two separate, but freely convertible currencies for two wings should be introduced; or if this is not feasible, there should be one currency for the whole country, but effective constitutional provisions should be introduced to stop the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Furthermore, a separate Banking Reserve should be established and separate fiscal and monetary policy be adopted for East Pakistan.
4. The power of taxation and revenue collection should be vested in the federating units and the federal centre would have no such power. The federation would be entitled to a share in the state taxes to meet its expenditures.^[1]
5. There should be two separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings; the foreign exchange requirements of the federal government should be met by the two wings equally or in a ratio to be fixed; indigenous products should move free of duty between the two wings, and the constitution should empower the units to establish trade links with foreign countries.^[1]
6. East Pakistan should have a separate military or paramilitary force, and Navy headquarters should be in East Pakistan

• **Background information:**

1. **The causes for war:**

Both East and West Pakistan remained united because of their religion, Islam. West Pakistan had 97% Muslims and East Pakistan had 85% Muslims. However, there were several significant reasons that caused the East Pakistani people to fight for their independence.

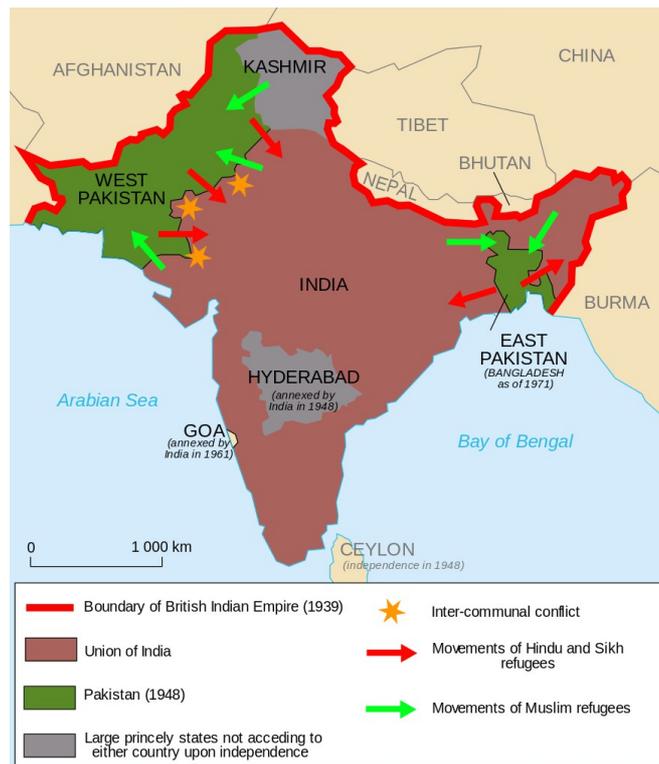
West Pakistan was made up of many races including the Punjabis (the most numerous), Sindhis, Pathans, Balochis, Mohajirs (Muslim refugees from India) and others. East Pakistan, on the other hand, was much more homogeneous and had an overwhelming Bengali-speaking population. Also, the population of East Pakistan was more than the total population in West Pakistan.

West Pakistan had four provinces and a fifth province which was East Pakistan. Having control over the provinces, the West used up more resources than the East. Moreover, while the East produced more money, it received less for its population. This was termed economic discrimination (see graph above).

Although East Pakistan had the largest population among all the provinces, it had much less political power than West Pakistan. After realization of discrimination by West Pakistan, East Pakistan under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman launched the 6-point movement (see above). This movement asked for more autonomy for East Pakistan in terms of administration, trade and military. The then president of Pakistan Ayub Khan rejected the movement and said any such demand will be met with force. This led to widespread revolts in East Pakistan.

There was also the language issue that kept East Pakistan and West Pakistan in an uneasy status. In 1948, Mohammad Ali Jinnah stated in Dhaka that Urdu was the official language for Pakistan. Most of the West Pakistanis spoke Punjabi and Sindhi, while East Pakistanis spoke Bangla. East Pakistan therefore disagreed; **seven students were killed in a fierce protest on February 21, 1952.**

The already tense situation was further aggravated by a tropical cyclone that struck East Pakistan in 1970. This cyclone was particularly devastating and **killed more than 500,000 people**. The fact that West Pakistan did not respond fast enough or generously enough to this natural disaster helped the Awami League to gain even more popularity in East Pakistan.



Moreover, the political situation in Pakistan favored the entrance in War. A separatist movement developed in East Pakistan while they were sharply limited during the martial law in force between 1958 and 1962 (and between 1969 and 1972.)

General Yahya Khan asked for elections to be held in 1971. The whole of East Pakistan was united against West Pakistan and gave an overwhelming victory to Awami League. Whereas in West Pakistan the single largest party was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami league was supposed to form the government because of majority in 313 seat at the parliament. PPP refused to accept the results of the election and decided not to be part of the National Assembly session until Awami League backed down on its 6-point movement.

The rejection of the electoral mandate and the right of the Awami League to form a government in favor of a country with two Prime Ministers was the final nail in the coffin. The two leaders met on the March 8, 1971 to decide of the fate of the country but the talks failed. This led to mass uproar in East Pakistan and nationwide strikes.

On March 7, 1971, Rahman gave a speech and mentioned a further four-point including the lifting of the martial law or the immediate transfer of power to the elected representative of the people before the assembly meeting March 25. He wanted East Pakistan to turn into a fort of resistance and to fight for their independence.

However, the Bengali opposition to the West Pakistani government was really badly seen by the Pakistani government. On March 25, **Operation Searchlight** started, its main goal was described as "crushing" the Bengalis. The actions that the Pakistan Army did during this operation are often referred

to as a genocide. No journalists could talk about it without being deported from Bangladesh and all the Bengali members of military services were disarmed. Although the violence focused on the provincial capital, Dhaka, ethnic elimination was also used around Bangladesh. The only Hindu residential hall of Bangladesh was for example destroyed and between 600 and 700 students were murdered. All these massacres, even though denied by the Pakistan Army has been secretly filmed by a professor of the East Pakistan Engineering University. By midnight, Dhaka was literally burning, especially the Hindu dominated eastern part of the city. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was considered dangerous and, hence, arrested by Pakistan Army. The Awami League was banned by General Yahya Khan while some other Awami League leaders were arrested or escaped Dhaka to avoid arrest.

Following the killings of the night of 25 March, East Pakistan began an armed struggle against the Pakistani occupation forces. **On March 26, 1971, M. A. Hannan, an Awami League leader from Chittagong, is said to have made the first announcement of the declaration of independence over radio.** This day is now considered for a lot of Bangladeshi as the official Independence Day marking the first use of the name Bangladesh.

2. **The war:**

A clash between the Pakistan Army and the insurgents was inevitable and the Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters) emerged increasingly visible. They then jointly launched operations against the Pakistan Army killing many in the process. This setback prompted the Pakistan Army to induct Razakars, a paramilitary force, from the local populace to bolster their numbers. This helped Pakistan stem the tide somewhat as the monsoon approached in the months of June and July.

Undeterred by this setback, Mukti Bahini regrouped as they gained in strength and capability while being aided by the Indian government in West Bengal. As there was no action during the monsoon, it was seen by the Pakistan military brass as a weakening of the Bangladesh cause. However, it was merely the calm before the storm as the troop strength was increased to more than 80,000. This caused a rise in tensions and the Indian military were preparing for the eventual onslaught with the aid of the separatists and waited for the end of the monsoon season to enable easy passage.

Pakistan decided to nullify such an attack on December 3 and launched a series of preemptive air strikes. However, the plan failed to achieve the desired success and was seen as an open act of unprovoked aggression by the Indians which Indira Gandhi answered to by ordering the immediate mobilization of troops to invade West Pakistan. This was the official beginning of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. The Indian Army, far superior in numbers and equipment to that of Pakistan annihilated Pakistan on air, land and sea with the help of the Mukti Bahini guerrilla army.

On December 16, within just 12 days, the capital Dhaka fell to the allied forces. Lt. Gen. Niazi surrendered to the combined forces headed by its commander Lt. Gen. **Jagjit Singh Aurora by signing the Instrument of Surrender at Ramna Racecourse, 16:31 Indian Standard Time. Bangladesh was liberated.**



• End of the war and its consequences:

1) **End of the war**

After Pakistan's surrender late in 1971, people in Bangladesh rejoiced at their liberation. This was followed by the need for international acceptance for Bangladesh who asked admission into the UN but China vetoed recognition as Pakistan was its key ally. However, the United States grudgingly recognized it. To ensure a smooth transition, in 1972 the Shimla Agreement was signed between India and Pakistan. The treaty was a watershed in the history of the South Asian region as it ensured that Bangladesh would be officially recognized by Pakistan and its principal allies in exchange for the return of the Pakistani POWs.

Reaction to the defeat and dismemberment of half the nation was a shocking loss to top military and layman alike. No one had expected that they would lose the formal war in under a fortnight and were also very angry at the meek surrender of the army in East Pakistan.

2. **Atrocities :**

The Bangladesh liberation war witnessed widespread atrocities committed mainly on the Bengali population of East Pakistan, at a level that Bangladeshis maintain is one of the worst genocides in history. The actual extent of the atrocities committed is not clearly known, and opinions vary, as the next section discusses. However, there is little doubt that numerous civilians were tortured and killed during the war.



The number of people that died in the liberation war of Bangladesh is not known in any reliable accuracy. There has been a great disparity in the casualty figures put forth by Pakistan on one hand (26,000) and India and Bangladesh on the other hand (3 million). Some maintain that the real number of casualties was closer to 300,000 and was wrongly translated. Though the figure of 3 million is unsubstantiated, many believe that the real number is still exceedingly high (more than 1 million) and the killing can clearly be termed a genocide. Supporters of this view would also point out to the enormous influx of refugees into India (8 million seems to be a widely accepted number) and that the death of 26,000 people like Pakistanis would like to claim would not have caused such a large number of people to leave their homes.

Numerous women were tortured, raped and killed during the war. Again, exact numbers are not known and are a subject of debate. Bangladeshi sources cite a staggering figure of between 200,000 and 400,000 women raped while Pakistani sources claim the number is much lower, though do not completely denied rape incidents.

There has been evidence of not only rape (and usually subsequent murder) of women, but of sex slaves kept captive by the Pakistan army, even more during the end of the war.

The minorities of Bangladesh, especially the Hindus, were the biggest targets of the Pakistan army. There was widespread killing of Hindu males, and rapes of women. In public places, men were often made to undress to prove that they have been circumcised and hence were Muslim. More than 60 percent of the Bengali refugees that had fled to India were Hindus, and many never returned.

The Pakistani ruling class had long formed a disgust for Bengali intellectual elite and students. They viewed them, correctly, as one of the main proponents of the rise of Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan. The famed six-point demand was derived from the earlier 11-point program penned by the students. The rulers also noted a growing leftist sentiment in this part of the population which they wanted to destroy. Hence during the war, a planned effort was made to void Bangladesh of its most enlightened people. In addition to the killings committed at the beginning and all throughout the war, a meticulously planned execution was carried out on December 14, 1971. Professors, journalists, doctors, artists, writers of unknown numbers were rounded up in Dhaka, blindfolded, taken to Rajarbag in the middle section of the city, and executed en masse. This day is now honoured in Bangladesh as Buddhijibi Hotta Dibosh ("Day of Martyred Intellectuals").

Timeline:

1947:

Pakistan's partition from India. Creation of two independent dominions, India and Pakistan. Religion is the reason of this split, although the decision to include East Bengal in the partition will be considered as mistaken because of the cultural differences between Bengal and what will become West Pakistan.

From the partition to 1971:

A transfer of 2,6 billion dollars worth resources was done from East to West Pakistan. Most of the income generated by the east was sent towards the west.

1948:

Mohammad Ali Jinnah declares that Urdu, a language only spoken in West Pakistan by Muhajir people and in East Pakistan by Bihari people, will become the official language for all of Pakistan, even though Bangla was spoken by the majority of the population.

February 21, 1952:

Language Martyrs' Day. East Pakistan revolts following Jinnah's declaration and several people lose their lives.

From 1958 to 1962 and from 1969 to 1972:

Martial law favoring West Pakistan economically speaking in force.

November 12, 1970:

The Bhol cyclone strikes East Bangladesh. West Pakistan fails to respond quickly and to alleviate the problem.

1970:

Landslide victory of the Awami League in the national elections. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People's Party, the ruling establishment, refuses to allow Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the Awami League, to become the Prime Minister of Pakistan and to accept the proposition of autonomy for East Pakistan.

March 3, 1971 :

The two leaders meet with the President General Yahya Khan in Dhaka to decide the fate of the country, but they can't find any solution. Rahman calls for a nation-wide strike.

March 7, 1971 :

Rahman, also called Bangobondhu, gives a speech encouraging people to rise up for their independence.

March 10 to March 13, 1971:

Pakistan International Airlines cancel all their international routes to urgently fly "Government Passengers", in fact mostly Pakistani soldiers, to Dhaka.

March 25, 1971:

Beginning of a planned military pacification called *Operation Searchlight*. The Pakistan Army begins to fight back the Bengali opposition. It is the beginning of the Bangladesh Genocide.

March 26, 1971:

Rahman is arrested. Hannan, an Awami League leader, makes the first announcement of the declaration of independence. Beginning of the war.

April 4, 1971 :

The Bangladesh Forces begin to be organised thanks to the Colonel M.A.G. Osmani. Creation of the title Mukti Bahini, which refers to the freedom fighters.

April 17, 1971:

Provisional government formed in western Bangladesh bordering India with Rahma, in prison at the time, as President.

June 13, 1971:

A Pakistani journalist, Anthony Mascarenhas, sent to the province by the military authorities to write a story favorable to Pakistan's actions, flees to the United Kingdom and publishes an article in *The Sunday Times* describing the atrocities of the war in his country.

July 11, 1971:

Bangladesh Forces Command set up with Colonel M. A. G. Osmani as commander-in-chief.

August 15, 1971:

Operation Jackpot. Naval commandos mine and blow up berthed ships in Chittagong, Mongla, Narayanganj and Chandpur. It is one of the most successful operations amongst the numerous guerrilla operations by the Mukti Bahini.

October-December 1971:

Bangladeshi conventional forces attack border outposts.

December 3, 1971:

Pakistan launches a series of preemptive air strikes on North India. India indeed equipped and trained the Mukti Bahini, the freedom fighters, to counter the Pakistan Army. India joins the war.

December 16, 1971:

Pakistan surrenders in Dacca. End of the war.

Major Countries involved:

- **Main actors:**

Bangladesh:

Former East Pakistan, major actor of the war. The Bengalis started a revolution in order to show their discontentment as the exploited part of a country they did not really belong to and to become free and independent.

Pakistan:

Former West Pakistan, major actor of the war. The Pakistani violently fought back the Bengali opposition and eventually surrendered and granted independence to Bangladesh.

India:

Major actor of the war. Supported Bangladesh and welcomed fleeing Bengali families. A regional rival of Pakistan and already in a border dispute over Kashmir, the Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi declared war on Pakistan.

United States:

Supported Pakistan, ally of China from which they tried to get closer to, and sent military supplies to the country, fearing Soviet expansion into the region.

Soviet Union:

Supported Bangladesh and Indian armies, recognizing that the independence of Bangladesh would weaken its rivals, the United States and China.

China:

Long-standing ally of Pakistan due to border disputes with India and because of the Sino-Soviet split (they naturally supported the nation the USSR did not back). Asked for an immediate ceasefire.

• **Other countries indirectly involved or with a position**

Britain:

Abstained on the resolution of the United States for "immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of troops" because of the Pakistani atrocities.

Belgium:

Sold weapons to India.

France:

Abstained on the resolution of the United States for "immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of troops" because of the Pakistani atrocities.

Bhutan:

First state to recognize the newly independent country of Bangladesh on December 6, 1971.

Japan:

Picked up the independence message of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the Bay of Bengal.

Australia:

Broadcast the declaration of independence by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on Radio Australia, the international broadcasting and online service operated by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Supported Bangladesh.

Afghanistan:

Thousands of Bengali families escaped to Afghanistan.

Jordan:

Let the United States pass through the country to provide military supplies to Pakistan.

Iran:

Let the United States pass through the country to provide military supplies to Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia:

Supported Pakistan.

Egypt:

Supported Pakistan.

The liberation war in art:

- **Documentaries**

- Stop Genocide by Zahir Raihan (1971), available on Youtube
- Nine Months to Freedom : The Story of Bangladesh by S. Sukhdev (1972), available on Youtube
- Shei Rater Kotha Bolte Eshechi ("Tale of the Darkest Night") by Kawsar Chowdhury (2001), available on Youtube
- Muktir Gaan by Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud (1995), available on Youtube

- **Movies**

- Aguner Poroshmoni by Humayun Ahmed (1994)
- Shyamal Chhaya – feature film by Humayun Ahmed (2005), available on Youtube

- **Memoirs**

- Ami Birangona Bolchhi by Nilima Ibrahim
- Ekattorer Dinguli by Jahanara Imam (1986)

- **Novels**

- *Ma* by Anisul Haque (2004)

- **Songs**

- *Song of Bangladesh* by Joan Baez

- *Bangla Desh* by George Harrison

- **Poems**

- *September on Jessore Road* by Allen Ginsberg

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