

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the war between India and Bangladesh. A delightful and informative two-day event on military history and strategy, focusing on the 1971 war, was conducted at **United Service Institution of India (USI)**, a national security and defence services think tank based in New Delhi, India on October 9th and 10th, 2021. The festival was a part of several literature and arts festivals that **Valley of Words (VoW)**, a literary organization based in Dehradun, conducts annually. This episode on military history and strategy was first among many theme-centric festivals that VoW is going to pull off in the coming weeks. It brought together army veterans of India and Bangladesh, diplomats and authors to the table, to provide a hindsight view of the 1971 war.

Here are the excerpts from the session titled “Creation of Pakistan- construction of fault lines”

1. The salience of geography

The first session titled ‘The Salience of Geography’ set the tone of the event. It went into the debate of whether geographical divisions are deterministic of the fate of a nation. Each panellist invoked theories of geopolitics such as the Heartland theory of Mackinder, Rimland theory of Spykman and the book “The Revenge of Geography” by firebrand author Robert Kaplan to understand how far geographical divisions were instrumental in understanding the 1971 war between India and Pakistan. Major General B.K. Sharma, director of USI, set the stage for the discussion by invoking Kaplan and underlined the significance of geography. He said geography “is not only the physical attributes of the land, but it also includes the resources, people, politics, trade and conflicts, which are all impacted by modern technology.”

For Major Gen. Sharma, India is “quintessentially a rimland state” whose influence extends to the heartland and the waters of the Indo-Pacific. He also cursorily pointed out the inroads that China is making into the South Asian region.

This session dived deep into the ontology of Pakistan’s geographical reach extending up to Bangladesh, formerly called East Pakistan. Major General Sharma explained that the creation of Pakistan has its roots in the two-nation theory that advocated the partition of Muslim majority areas of western and eastern parts of India to make it a whole body polity for the Muslim League. Major General Sharma also asked the panellist to comment on the colonial cartographic lines of the Radcliffe line and Macmohan line and what impact they had on the 1971 war.

In this background, Dr Sanjeev Chopra, patron of VoW, invoked the constructs of India as a “civilisational state” and “nation-state” to gaze at the map of India. He pointed out that the “nation-states ought to recognise the salience of geography”. Taking a deterministic view of geography, Dr. Chopra argued that politics should pay lip service to the geographical boundaries of a nation, although he didn’t explicitly mention any examples to that end.

On the impact of geography on the 1971 War, Shiv Kunal Verma, a military historian, author of the bestselling book “1962: The War that Wasn’t”, argued that the Indian army was blindsided and unaware of the geographical terrain of both West Pakistan in the 1965 Indo-Pak war and East Pakistan in the 1971 war. Based on his correspondence with Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, who led the invasion of East Pakistan, he said that Gen. Manekshaw had no idea about the terrain of East Pakistan. Gen. Manekshaw wasn’t eyeing for Dhaka and was happy with whatever inroads he had made into East Pakistan.

For Shiv Kunal Verma both Radcliffe Line and Macmohan Line are strategic lines rather than geographical lines.



Meanwhile, Aarti Tikoo Singh took a contrarian position from the above three panellists and said that nations can overcome the constraints of geography. She gave the example of China and Pakistan, the immediate neighbours of India, which have done that through their imperialistic policies in the South China sea and Gilgit-Baltistan respectively.

Later she underlined how much stakes geography has in the conundrum of Kashmir. Sandwiched between three nuclear powers, Kashmir, Tikoo said that the Indian state was unable to make the most out of the geographical opportunities that the region provided in the aftermath of the 1971 war. Essentially, Tikoo wanted India to be imperialistic and to behave like Pakistan and China, by capturing Pakistan occupied Kashmir and further deep into the Pakistani heart.

Watch the full video here: [Creation of Pakistan - Construction of Fault Lines: The](#)

[Salience of Geography, Valley of Words 2021](#)

2. Pakistan- A garrison state

The Session was moderated by Lt Gen PJS Pannu and with the gracious presence of Ambassador Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty (Retd.) and Ambassador TCA Raghavan (Retd.) in dialogue with Lt Col Quazi Sajjad Ali Zahir Bir Protik (from Bangladesh). The panellists shared their perspectives, facts, historical opinions, and personal experiences on Pakistan's status as a garrison state and its incapacity to operate along the lines of modern democracy.

The key historical event of the Indo-Pak conflict of 1971 was used to shed light on the issue. Ambassador Raghvan claimed a lack of structural coherence among ruling mindsets regarding how to build national sovereignty that goes far beyond being subject to national security. Ambassador Chakravarty, who stood next to him, followed by bringing up the perceptions of East Pakistan and West Pakistan in relation to each other, which crossed the borders of nationalism and legitimate statehood.



Later, Lt. Col Sajjad spoke on India's valiantly fought and triumphant 1971 war and explained how the man behind the gun not only kills life and humanity in war but also assassinates history, which must be integrally preserved and passed on with pride, saying, "Let's love history, if you don't love history, it will hail, it will hate you, and fall apart."

Watch the full video: [Creation of Pakistan: Construction of Fault Lines: Pakistan - A Garrison State, Valley of Words 2021](#)

3. Factors drawing India into conflict

The session welcomed keynote speakers Lt Gen Nirbhay Sharma and Lt Gen Arun Sahni, both of whom are well-known for their immense knowledge and experience in the field of defence and in India's relations with its neighbours. Lt Gen Nirbhay Sharma discussed the

factors that led to India's engagement in the 1971 war. He expressed his thoughts on the war's political, economic, and humanitarian dimensions. He added that India's



engagement in the East-West Pakistan dispute was motivated by the threat to our national security and the country's genuine desire to avoid wars. Even after two decades of conflict, Lt Gen Arun Sahni emphasised, the emotional bond that Pakistanis and Indians have are still alive.

Watch the full video: [Bangladesh National Movement and Liberation War](#)

4. Bangladesh national movement and liberation war

This session featured a discussion between Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia and Col Sajjad Ali. Ambassador Vikram Doraiswami, India's High Commissioner in Dhaka, was also invited.

Session attempted to highlight the Bangladesh Liberation Movement and the Liberation War. Bangladesh was liberated after a great deal of suffering. In 1971, the movement devolved into genocide. However, the movement's origins can be dated back to 21 February 1952, when students at Dhaka University began protesting. Col Sajjad Ali discussed the entire history of the genocide, demonstrating how it was planned for the aim of obtaining power. He related his own storey of how he and his family were affected by the genocide.



Ambassador Vikram Doraiswami delivered the closing remarks, emphasising the importance of building peace between India and Bangladesh through bilateral and transregional cooperation.

Watch the full video: [Creation of Pakistan - Construction of Fault Lines: Bangladesh National Movement and Liberation War](#)

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