

INDIA'S ROLE IN THE EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE

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This paper aims to describe the role of India, the biggest neighbor of Bangladesh, and the outmost support of the Soviet Union in the emergence of Bangladesh as an Independent State. The paper describes the background of the Bangladesh's Liberation war in 1971. The political situation in East Pakistan just before the crisis is described in details, especially the results of general elections which were held in December 1970. A central part of the article is dedicated to the role of India and the contribution of Indian people, government and armed forces.

Almost 10 million men and women were forced to leave Bangladesh and entered various states of India like West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where they were accommodated as refugees. The personal implication of Indira Gandhi was very high, she traveled around the world to gather support for the Bangladesh cause. India spent thousand of rupees for the liberation war of Bangladesh; but also sacrificed the lives of its officers and soldiers.

Moreover, the paper touches upon the USSR's involvement into the Liberation war of Bangladesh in context of Soviet-American rivalry during cold war.

Key words: Bangladesh, East Pakistan, India, Indira Gandhi, Soviet Union, USA, Pakistan, Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, Liberation War, Independence.

Bangladesh is tied with India by civilizational, cultural, social and economic bonds. The two nations share a common history, linguistic and cultural heritage. This unity is reflected in multi-dimensional and expanding relations. India and Bangladesh's geographical locations complement each other and present an opportunity for both to further develop their ties and economic links. India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km of border, which is the largest land border that India shares with any of its neighboring countries, out of which 1116.2 km is riverine.

It is well known that India played a vital role in the Liberation war of Bangladesh. Not only political but also military as well as people-to-people support was given by India. Besides, India provided support and refuge to the people of Bangladesh. The contribution of Indian government and the citizens of India is an integral part of the history of the Independence war of Bangladesh [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004; Islam 1985].

THE BACKGROUND OF LIBERATION WAR OF BANGLADESH

In December 1970, the general elections were held in Pakistan and Awami League won a stunning victory winning 160 out of 162 seats in East Pakistan [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 461]. It bagged 72.57 % of the total votes cast. Awami League won a similar landslide victory in the Provincial Assembly elections also. It won 288 seats out of 300 and bagged 89 % of total votes cast. Awami League won all the 7 women seats in the National Assembly and all the 10 women seats in the Provincial Assembly.

As a result, Awami League emerged as the single majority party in the Pakistan National Assembly with 167 seats out of 313. Mujibur Rahman was the leader of Awami League. On the other side, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party won 88 seats (all from the western wing) and emerged as the second largest Parliamentary party.

However, without handing over power to Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the majority party, an unprecedented outburst of popular resistance shook Pakistan's integrity. On March 25, 1971 the regular army of Pakistani launched a brutal crackdown in Dhaka, particularly on students, the Bengali police and paramilitary forces. It finally led to a full-scale war.

On March 26, 1971, before being arrested by the Pakistan military, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, declared independence of East Pakistan and asked his people to continue the fight 'till the last Pakistani army' was driven away from Bangladesh [Panichkin, Musaeu 2013].

When the elected representatives of people formed a government in exile, with imprisoned Mujib becoming the President and Tajuddin Ahmed Prime Minister. Pakistani troops, aided by their local Islamist collaborators, killed an estimated three million people, raped over 300,000 women, destroyed homes, and forced more than ten millions people to leave their homes and took shelter in Indian territory during the bloody nine-month war [Bose 2005; Hossain 2009; Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 67].

India decided to go on with the war, when Indira Gandhi had failed to gain American support and sympathy for the Bengalis. Finally she took a hard move and on August 9, 1971 signed a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation with Soviet Union [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 215].

Supported by the bloc, led by the Soviet Union, Indira Gandhi travelled across the world to mobilize support for the beleaguered people of Bangladesh, in which India's support was crucial [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004].

ROLE OF INDIA: CONTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT

The contribution of Indian people, government and eventually armed forces are unforgettable fact of history. When Bangladeshi mass people were murdered by the military of Pakistan, India intervened and sent army to fight against Pakistani soldiers and supported freedom fighters. When American navy came to help Pakistan, the Soviet Union assured full support to India by sending their navy.

On 27 March 1971, the Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi, expressed full support of her government to the Bangladeshi struggle for independence. The Bangladesh-India border was opened to allow the Bangladeshi refugees safe shelter in India. The governments of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura established refugee camps along the border. Exiled Bangladeshi army officers and voluntary workers from India immediately started using these camps for the recruitment and training of Mukti Bahini guerrillas¹.

¹ Bangladesh Genocide Archive. Official web-site. URL: <http://www.genocidebangladesh.org> (accessed: 12.09.2016).

Almost 10 million men and women who were forced to leave their motherland to save themselves entered various states of India like West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where they lived as refugees. India willingly took the responsibility for taking care of the unfortunate men, women and children for nine months [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 236, 361]. India also provided training, arms and ammunitions for the freedom fighters. Not only for the freedom of Bangladesh, but also for the release of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the prison of Pakistan, the then Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi erstwhile traveled around the world to gather support for the cause. India not only spent seven thousand crores of rupees for the liberation war of Bangladesh; but also sacrificed the lives of 3630 officers and soldiers of her Army. About 9856 officers and soldiers were wounded and more than 213 officers and soldiers are missing till today. The people of India spontaneously took initiatives to give shelter and food to the refugees of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) [Salam 2008].

ROLE OF INDIRA GANDHI: PERSONAL, POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES

The personal, political and diplomatic role of the former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971 is inseparable from the country's history².

From 24 October 1971 Indira Gandhi started travelling to the USA and Western Europe countries (Belgium, German, France, and Great Britain) with a view to create world public opinion and gain support. The US president Richard Nixon called Indians aggressors and ordered to support Pakistan by the US troops deployed in Vietnam. On 9 August 1971, Indira Gandhi signed a twenty-year treaty of friendship and co-operation with the Soviet Union. It was greatly shocking for the United States, and decreasing the possibility, that China would become involved in the conflict. The Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev assured that if the US or China attacked India, the Soviet Union would take severe counter measures [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 377]. China, an ally of Pakistan, had been providing moral support to Pakistan, but little military aid, and did not advance its troops to the border with India [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 287, 598].

Indira Gandhi being determined to protect the interest of Bengalis launched a diplomatic offensive efforts in the early autumn of 1971 touring Europe, and was successful in getting both the United Kingdom and France to break with the United States, and block pro-Pakistan directives in the United Nations Security Council [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 287].

Indira Gandhi addressed to the India League, London October 31, 1971, which is evidence of her strong support, and concern for the people of Bangladesh and its independence.

Under the leadership of Indira Gandhi all out supports were given by India to the struggling people of the East Pakistan (Bangladesh) during the liberation war.

² Bangladesh Salutes Indira Gandhi. The Hindu, Jul. 25, 2011. URL: <http://thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article2290625.ece> (accessed: 12.09.2016).

ROLE OF INDIAN ARMED FORCES: BSF, ARMY, NAVY AND AIR FORCE

Prior to the involvement of the Indian army, the BSF (Border Security Force) was primarily responsible to provide support to Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighter) units. They also assisted in the training of Mukti Bahini (Freedom fighters)³.

They also portrayed 69 Indian-sponsored insurgent training camps bordering East Pakistan, with an estimated total of 30—50 thousand rebels in training⁴.

The BSF has established camps at which 10,000 Bengalis are reportedly receiving training in guerrilla and sabotage tactics. Limited quantities of arms and ammunition provided to the Bengali separatists and some Indian forces have infiltrated into East Bengal to provide assistance and training to the separatists⁵.

From the month of September, the Indian army gradually started to participate directly in the Liberation War. Initially the support was limited to indirect fire support (artillery support) to Mukti Bahini units. From November, the Indian army was permitted to conduct operations up to 10 miles inside Bangladesh territory.

On the Eastern front, the Indian Army joined forces with the Mukti Bahini (Freedom fighters) to form the Mitro Bahini (“Allied Forces”). India’s Army, Navy and Air Force were lauded for their role in ending a genocide [Saikia 2004] and giving birth to a new nation⁶ [Marwah 1979].

ROLE OF INDIA IN RECOGNITION OF BANGLADESH AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE

The subject of recognition was complementary to the birth of a nation. At first, the responsibility of recognition came on the shoulder of India. ‘Bangladesh’s Recognition’ became an integral part of India’s internal politics. The Indian political parties, various professional organizations, cultural organizations and the common man of India wanted that India should recognize first. The ruling Congress Party was also in favor of recognizing Bangladesh as a nation but it had to take place at an appropriate time. The existing practical situation forced India to be very cautious regarding the recognition issue. Indian government was vigilant on regional and international politics as well as on international law and its effects.

Bangladesh attained all the conditions to be recognized in accordance with the International law *de jure*. However, in order to get recognition, it had to wait till 6th December, 1971. Although the recognition issue was legal, but overall it was a political decision. The demand for recognition of Bangladesh turned into a national issue within Indian politics since the end of March to December for nine long months.

³ Bangladesh Genocide Archive. Official web-site. URL: <http://www.genocidebangladesh.org> (accessed: 12.09.2016).

⁴ Pak Military Intelligence Briefing for Congressman Frelinghuysen, Oct. 1, 1971.

⁵ Contingency Study for Indo-Pakistan Hostilities May 25, 1971.

⁶ Mizanur Rahman Shelley Super Powers in Liberation War. The Daily Star Victory Day Special, Dec. 16, 2012. URL: http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/victory_day/2012/pg4.htm (accessed: 12.09.2016).

In the light of International law and the series of incidents in Bangladesh during Liberation war, it can be said that before 6th December Bangladesh received implied recognition. First in Kolkata and later in Delhi, Bangladesh Mission officially directed work schedules which can be accepted as Indian Government's de facto recognition. Other than this after the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty, the East European countries took a positive attitude towards Bangladesh issue. The participation of Abddus Samad Azad (Former Foreign Minister) in Budapest International Seminar as Mujibnagar government's representative, Bangladesh had recognition in East Europe.

In Delhi, a three-day International Conference on Bangladesh took place where 150 delegates representing 24 countries participated. On 20th September, on behalf of the conference, an appeal was made to all the governments of the world to recognize Bangladesh as an independent nation and to stop helping West Pakistan with any kind of military aid. In a resolution of the conference it was said that, international community should recognize the Bangladesh people's political struggle as a National Struggle for Freedom. From the beginning Mujibnagar government was active due to India's recognition. The Indian government along with private organizations at various levels was formally or informally associated with the policy making body of Mujibnagar government and various initiatives to influence the public opinion in favor of Bangladesh.

On 6th December, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said in the Lok Sabha: "Pakistan had declared war against India. There is no importance of peaceful solution. Bangladesh people are engaged in their struggle for existence and India is fighting against aggression. They are, like us, fighting against a common enemy. I am pleased to inform the Houses that in the existing situation and due to repeated request of Bangladesh government, we have carefully decided to grant recognition to People's Republic of Bangladesh" [Salam 2008].

For Bangladesh, it was a tough diplomatic effort to earn the nation's recognition because Zulfikar Ali Bhutto clearly stated that if any nation recognized Bangladesh, then Pakistan would break all diplomatic relations with that nation. For recognizing Bangladesh, Pakistan really suspended diplomatic relation with a few countries.

The Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, made the statement in Indian Parliament announcing the decision of the Government of India to grant recognition to 'the Government of Gana Praja Tantri Bangladesh' which in essence highlighted the struggle and travails of the Bangali nation.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union was the first great power to deplore publicly the Pakistani military crackdown on Bengalis. It was also the first major power to officially recognize the State of Bangladesh, which it did within thirty-eight days (on 26 January, 1972) of its de facto liberation from the Pakistani forces.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE USSR: COLLABORATION WITH INDIA

The USSR's involvement in the Bangladesh's liberation war was mainly in response to the US's initiatives to assist Pakistan [Lokhova 2009]. The US sympathized with Pakistan, because of various reasons: firstly, Pakistan belonged to American led military

Pact, CENTO and SEATO, and, secondly, the US believed that any victory of India will be considered as the expansion of the Soviet influence in the parts gained by India with the victory, as it was believed to be a pro Soviet nation, even though they were pursued the Non Alignment policy⁷.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union's close tie with India was a vital factor in shaping the Soviet response towards the East Pakistan (Bangladesh) crisis in 1971. An amiable working relationship had prevailed between the two countries since the visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev to New Delhi in December 1955. The Indo Soviet ties were further strengthened in the wake of the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. India's defeat in the 1962 clash and the worsening Sino-Soviet relations eventually (mainly during 1969—1971) caused Moscow to attach more significance to its ties with India [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004].

On December 9, 1971 Nixon decided to send the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal to threaten India. The plan was to surround India from all four sides and force them to retreat and leave East Pakistan. The US sent their 7th Carrier battle group to Counter Indian Navy⁸.

To counter this threat, the USSR dispatched a nuclear-armed flotilla from Vladivostok on December 13, 1971 under the overall command of Admiral Vladimir Kruglyakov, the Commander of the 10th Operative Battle Group (Pacific Fleet). Though the Soviet fleet comprised of nuclear-armed ships and atomic submarines, their missiles were of limited range (less than 300 km). Hence to effectively counter the British and American fleets the Russian commanders had to undertake the risk of encircling them to bring them within their target⁹.

The Soviet Union also sent a group of Destroyers and a Nuclear Submarine to support the existing Soviet fleet in the Bay of Bengal. Soviet cruisers, destroyers and nuclear submarines were equipped with anti-ship missiles and they chased the US Navy out of Indian Ocean. The Russians blocked US fleet advance towards India¹⁰.

The relatively high priority given by the Soviet policy makers to Bangladesh crisis in 1971 was the consequence of their concerns for the contemporary world and Asia [Bakshi 1977]. Moscow was concerned about maintaining the stability and security of its ally, India. It wanted to ensure the position of India as the dominant power in South Asia. Bangladesh might have been viewed by the leaders of the Soviet Union as a “fringe

⁷ Sanskar Shrivastava, 1971. India Pakistan War: Role of Russia, China, America and Britain. *The World Reporter*, Oct. 3, 2011. URL: <http://www.theworldreporter.com/2011/10/1971-india-pakistan-war-role-of-russia.html> (accessed: 12.09.2016).

⁸ Indias-secret-war-in-bangladesh. *The Hindu*, Feb. 11, 2012. URL: <http://thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article2747538.ece> (accessed: 12.09.2016).

⁹ Rakesh Krishnan Simha, 1971 War: How Russia sank Nixon's gunboat diplomacy // *Russia & India Report*, Dec. 20, 2011. URL: https://in.rbth.com/articles/2011/12/20/1971_war_how_russia_sank_nixons_gunboat_diplomacy_14041 (accessed: 12.09.2016).

¹⁰ Sanskar Shrivastava, 1971. India Pakistan War: Role of Russia, China, America and Britain. *The World Reporter*, Oct. 3, 2011. URL: <http://www.theworldreporter.com/2011/10/1971-india-pakistan-war-role-of-russia.html> (accessed: 12.09.2016).

responsibility to their Indian interests”. In 1971 it was of considerable importance to them as the first test case of their political and diplomatic abilities in an emerging “triangular world”.

‘Treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation’ between India and the Soviet Union; under which Russia was bound to defend India in case of any external aggression. It was a shock to America as this was what they feared, expansion of Soviet influence in South Asia. They feared that involvement of Soviet Union could sabotage their plan to expand the influence in the East and South Asia.

Thinking that the Soviet Union might enter the war if they come to know this, which could cause a lot of destruction to Pakistan and the American equipment given to Pakistan, the US ambassador to the United Nations George H W Bush [later the 41st president of the United States] introduced a resolution in the UN Security Council, calling for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of armed forces by India and Pakistan. Believing India can win the war and Indira Gandhi being determined to protect the interest of Bengalis, the Soviet Union vetoed the resolution, thus letting India fight for the cause. Nixon and Kissinger pressurized the Soviet Union to a very extent but the situation was not in their favor [Independence of Bangladesh... 2004: 307, 326].

The salient aspects of the contribution of the USSR in the liberation war of Bangladesh are the following.

- ◆ Calling upon the Government of Pakistan simultaneously to take effective action towards a political settlement in the East Pakistan, giving immediate recognition to the will of the East Pakistan population as expressed in the election of December 1970. The USSR placed 5 draft resolutions and one amendment to a draft resolution in UN Security Council (in between 4—16 December 1971). The USSR casted 3 Votes (of Soviet Union, Belarus and Ukraine) in the UN Security Council in favor of Bangladesh in different times [Ashfaque 2012].

- ◆ Signing Peace, Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with India on 9 August 1971, the USSR expressed its strong support to India’s initiatives in favor of Bangladesh.

- ◆ Sending Soviet Navy from Vladivostok to prevent America’s warship entering into Indian Ocean, and finally,

- ◆ Imposing Veto Power — the USSR vetoed 3 times against the cease-fire proposed by the US in the UN Security Council during the Security Councils’ Session-1606, 1607 and 1613 (in between 4—13 December 1971) [Ashfaque 2012].

Irrespective of the motives and gains of the Soviet Union in its involvement in the Bangladesh war of liberation, its solid and unflinching support to the Bengali cause was invaluable to the Bengali. During the penultimate days of Indo-Pak war over Bangladesh, the Soviet veto in the UN Security Council against US backed proposal for cease-fire paved the way for the Indo-Bangladesh allied forces to march into Dhaka and secure the defeat and surrender of 90 thousand Pakistani troops on the 16th December 1971. Soviet Union’s positive role thus contributed immensely to the historic triumph of ‘Bangladesh’¹¹.

¹¹ Sanskar Shrivastava, 1971. India Pakistan War: Role of Russia, China, America and Britain. The World Reporter, Oct. 3, 2011. URL: <http://www.theworldreporter.com/2011/10/1971-india-pakistan-war-role-of-russia.html> (accessed: 12.09.2016).

The response of the Soviet Union to the 1971 crisis in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) was conditioned by the general Soviet policy with regard to Asia in the 1960s. It was a policy of growing involvement, initially undertaken to contain America's influence in East and South Asia.

To conclude, India's role in the Independence of Bangladesh was a unique history. Its contribution was more of a facilitator than a creator. It was a war jointly won by India and the people of East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, the government and the people of India did unprecedented sacrifices for the people of Bangladesh.

Three million people had to shed their blood and 300,000 women had to sacrifice their innocence by the Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators. People of Bangladesh cannot forget that the Government and the people of India stood solidly by them. The support and help of India is unique in the history of the world. The birth of Bangladesh came in reality with India's support and sympathetic supervision of the USSR.

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РОЛЬ ИНДИИ В СТАНОВЛЕНИИ БАНГЛАДЕШ КАК НЕЗАВИСИМОГО ГОСУДАРСТВА

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В данной статье анализируется роль Индии, крупнейшего соседа Бангладеш, а также СССР (Советского Союза) и других влиятельных акторов международных отношений в становлении Бангладеш как независимого государства. В статье рассматривается Освободительная война в Бангладеш в 1971 г. Особое внимание уделяется анализу предпосылок бангладешского кризиса 1971 г., роли властей Индии и в особенности И. Ганди, участию индийских вооруженных сил (в том числе погранслужбы, армии, флота и авиации) в конфликте, а также роли Индии в признании Бангладеш как независимого государства. Автором также затрагивается вопрос участия СССР в этой войне в контексте советско-американского противостояния в годы холодной войны.

Ключевые слова: Бангладеш, Восточный Пакистан, Индия, Индира Ганди, Советский Союз, США, Пакистан, Договор о дружбе и сотрудничестве, Освободительная война, независимость.

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