

# **BENGALI DIPLOMATS IN THE INDEPENDENCE WAR OF BANGLADESH (1971): WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA (DELHI AND KOLKATA)**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to explore the role of Bengali diplomats who had submitted their allegiance to the government of Bangladesh and adopted the strategy of public diplomacy to fight against the colonial oppression of Pakistan. By disconnecting all sorts of association with Pakistan this group of Bengali diplomats joined the War of Liberation to support the cause of Bangladesh. In order to conduct the diplomatic fronts of the war the Bengali diplomats embraced the strategies of public diplomacy instead of following the policy of the traditional diplomacy. While the group relied on the strategy and means of public diplomacy the paper examines the effectiveness of the application of public diplomacy tools in order to form public opinion across the globe and regions in support of the Independence War of Bangladesh. The paper particularly focuses on the role of Bengali diplomats who had been in India and had defected and embarked to propagate in favour of the Bangladesh Independence War. They started preaching both among the Indian government and non-government circles through public diplomacy tools to get recognition from Indian authority to solve the political crises of the then Pakistan. The humanitarian issues such as millions of Bengalis' plight to India, a concurrent genocide, killing millions of Bengalis, tormenting women and innocent people, deviance of law and order situation, had repeatedly been raised and protested through press, media and public speaking programs to get support from Indian authority with the hope that India would raise these issues to the world community and Bangladesh crises would come to an end.*

## **Introduction**

The paper examines the different tools and methods of Public Diplomacy strategy initiated by Bengali diplomats among the Indian circles. In order to raise the issues of Bangladesh independence war and to get recognition for her, the Bengali diplomats followed a new type of

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diplomacy that is public diplomacy. In this context, it must be mentioned that, the issues such as secularism, linguistic nationalist spirit and policy of discrimination of Pakistan towards her eastern side contributed to make up the mind of the Bengali diplomats to resign from Pakistan especially from Foreign Service, the most prestigious job of Pakistan. From the capital city of India, Delhi and Bengali oriented Kolkata; they opened 'the window to the west' of the Independence War of Bangladesh. In this regard, they used different public diplomacy tools in order to expose the struggle of Bangladesh for her independence and appeal to the world community that they should come forward to support the cause of Bangladesh.

The present article sheds light on the public diplomacy strategy of the Bengali diplomats in India especially in Delhi and Kolkata. In this regard, it examines their different roles and initiatives to put forward the image of Bangladesh in Indian circles to get their support in favour of Bangladesh's Independence War.

## **Methodology**

The article has been prepared with the assistance of secondary data including several bodies of Bengali and Western texts, research articles and international as well as local dailies. The paper also brings into focus the activities and initiatives of Bengali diplomats who had defected and declared their allegiance to the Exile Bangladesh Government. These primary data had been collected by the author with her assistance during the period of her PhD field work.

This research work accordingly has the following objectives:

- a) To investigate how public diplomacy strategy became more effective for Bengali diplomats to put pressure on the Indian government to recognize Bangladesh formally and to appeal to the international community to extend their support in the struggle for Independence of the then East Pakistan.
- b) To identify the different non-government groups of India to whom the rationale of the Independence War had been explained. Also to ascertain that different public diplomacy tools such as public meetings, rallies, processions and public opinion mobilization campaign became more effective than the traditional diplomacy.

- c) To determine the socio-economic and cultural groups of India who helped to frame the notion of Indian public opinion about the Liberation War of Bangladesh that Bengali people was fighting for a just cause and India should stand on her side and recognise her immediately.

### **Public Diplomacy and Small States: Theoretical Understanding**

In order to comprehend the contribution of Bengali defected diplomats and their mode of operation regarding the application of tools and strategy of public diplomacy in the second front of the war, the researcher reviews the theory of Batora, Nye, etc in this regard. Although the term public diplomacy was originated in 1960, a debate is still going on among the practitioners and scholars about its precise meaning and usefulness in the political field. The term did not receive universal acceptance because of its ambiguous and paradoxical connotations. Indeed, the term has been defined from various perspectives in the light of targeted audiences, dialogue, cultural or informational program, promotional activities etc and differentiated from the traditional diplomacy.

Public diplomacy usually regarded as a process which includes the common people as well as non-state actors instead of the professional diplomatic persons for the presentation and promotion of the images and policies of the countries overseas.<sup>1</sup> It is often differentiated from the traditional diplomacy with the argument that the former is about the relationship between the representatives of state or other international actors whereas the latter targets the general public in foreign societies and more specifically non-official groups, organizations and individuals. Public diplomacy accordingly deals not only with the government but simultaneously with the non-government individuals and organizations. It operates through cultural program, media engagement, and academic grant. It involves dialogues and negotiations on bi-lateral and regional matter with foreign governments and multilateral organizations.<sup>2</sup>

Although the usefulness and applicability of public diplomacy has become a subject of great debate in the academic field and the diplomatic

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Mellison, *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), P.74.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Leonard and Vidhya Alakeson, *Going Public: Diplomacy for the Information Society* (UK: Foreign Policy Centre, 2000), p.19.

arena, a group of scholars including Batora, Nye have highlighted the importance of public diplomacy in the socio-political and cultural context of the small and medium sized states. Because of the lack of infrastructural development and hard power Batora considered public diplomacy as an important tool for the small scale societies in order to negotiate and bargain with the international actors for their particular issue.<sup>3</sup>

Nye has coined the term Soft Power in order to describe the significance of public diplomacy in contemporary global world. By identifying the popular culture and media as the sources of soft power, he has emphasized on the role of the domestic and non-state actors. In order to influence the behaviour or interest of other political body through cultural or political means he brings into focus the role of civil society, NGOs, journalists, media personalities in this regard.<sup>4</sup>

### **Role of Bengali Diplomats in India: Application of Public Diplomacy Tools**

The researcher finds the role of Bengali diplomats in diversified and confined ways in addressing public diplomacy strategy both at the national and international levels during the period of nine months of war of Bangladesh. Indeed, by conducting the interview of the defected diplomats and reviewing relevant literatures (written by some diplomats who had defected) the researcher discovers both the direct and indirect role of diplomats in portraying the image of Bangladesh and enhancing the national interest of Bengali people to the state and non-state actors of the global community. Indeed, the role of the defected diplomats varied from country to country according to the prevailing socio-political environment of different countries, public sentiment, responses of civil society and distinguished personalities.

### **Defection of Bengali Diplomats in Delhi: Opening 2nd Front of the War**

As a protest against the ‘Operation Search Light’ of March 25, 1971, Bengali diplomats started to switch over their side from Pakistan

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<sup>3</sup> Jozef Batora, *Multi-stakeholder Public Diplomacy Small and Medium Sized States, Norway & Canada Compared*, 2005 (available at: <http://www.diplomacy.edu/conferences/msd/papers/batora.pdf> Retrieved: 31/1/2010), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (USA: Public Affairs, 2004), p.2.

government to Exile Government of Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup> Although the Democratic Republic of Bangladesh was announced at Mujibnagar on April 17, 1971, the researcher contributes to discovering the fact that a group of Bengali diplomats including A. K. M. Shehabuddin, and Amjadul Haque declared their defection (6<sup>th</sup> April, 1971) even before the formation of Exile Government.<sup>6</sup> By receiving the news of ruthless massacre of Bengali people by the Pakistani army on the night of 25 March and the formal Declaration of Independence on 26<sup>th</sup> March by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, they prepared themselves psychologically to launch the Independence War on the second front. In this regard, Shehabuddin referred to the name of Peter Hazelhurst of 'The Times of London,' who unveiled how the Pakistani army had lined up several students of the University of Dhaka and shot them to death.<sup>7</sup> While he got deeply shocked with the news of such genocide waged by the Pakistan army he expressed his view how hard it was for him to live within the comfortable diplomatic life.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, since March, Shehab with Amjad started to strengthen their contacts with Indian politicians, intellectuals as well as foreign diplomats stationed in Delhi in order to map out their future course of action.

### **Diplomatic Endeavour**

In order to take the final decision of the defection, Shehabuddin, consulted the matter with his wife Bulbul and resigned from the Pakistan Foreign Service on 28<sup>th</sup> March to work for the newly born state of Bangladesh.<sup>9</sup> After taking the decision of defection Shehabuddin got an appointment with A K. Ray, the joint secretary, in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and requested the Government of India to grant them permission to work in Delhi for Bangladesh.<sup>10</sup> During that period, Bangladesh had not become an independent entity and India was still maintaining diplomatic relations with Pakistan, both diplomats were allowed to carry on their work in Indian soil for Bangladesh fully but discreetly.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> KM. Shebuddin, K. M. *There and Back Again, A Diplomat's Tale*, (Dhaka :The University Press) 2006, p.167

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Shehabuddin with the researcher on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Shebuddin, interview

<sup>10</sup> Shehabuddin,.

<sup>11</sup> *Shehabuddin*.

## Strategy of Public Diplomacy

Although at the initial stage of defection Bengali diplomats relied on the Indian Government for her assistance and support, latter they adopted the strategy of public diplomacy due to lack of state apparatus, administrative authority and hard power of a newly born state like Bangladesh. During that period, since the Exile Government did not assume formal shape and Bangladesh had not been recognized as an Independent nation state by India and other international communities, it was not possible for those two Bengali diplomats to carry on their mode of operation through traditional diplomatic procedure.

Under the circumstances, they adopted the strategy of public diplomacy to put pressure on the Indian government to recognize Bangladesh formally and to appeal to the international community to extend their support in the struggle for emancipation of the seventy five million people of East Pakistan. For this they relied on public diplomacy strategy through the employment of person to person contacts, press, broadcasting, electronic media etc.

While both Shehabuddin and Amjadul Haque had the realization that they had to rely on public diplomacy to win the fight against Pakistan by promoting their national interest, they arranged a press conference on 6<sup>th</sup> April at zero hour of that night.<sup>12</sup> The representatives from the BBC, AFP, UPI, TASS etc. and several Indian dailies attended the press conference.<sup>13</sup> In that conference, Shehabuddin and Amjad made it explicit that they had resigned from the Pakistan Foreign Service in order to protest against the atrocities perpetrated by Pakistan on the civilians of Bangladesh. By identifying Pakistan army in Bangladesh as an occupation force they unveiled how that force got engaged in massacre of the innocent people of Bangladesh. Under the circumstances, they appealed to all civilised people everywhere in the world for sympathy and concrete assistance.<sup>14</sup> They appealed to the nations of the world to recognize the sovereign state of Bangladesh in a similar fashion. By cutting all connections with that government they accordingly declared their allegiance to Bangladesh which derived its authority from the unambiguous mandate of 75 million Bengali people since that day.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Shehabuddin.op.cit* p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Hindustan Standard, 1May , 1971

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*,92

The significance of that event lies on the fact, that, it had received wide media coverage in India and abroad and contributed to rousing the conscience of the world. Although Shehabuddin started working for Bangladesh since 6<sup>th</sup> April, he did not have any office or official recognition. Since, it was not possible for them to conduct their mode of operation through the traditional diplomatic procedure under the prevailing situation so they depended heavily on media and on 8<sup>th</sup> April their interview was broadcast by All India Radio and the Indian Television Network, Doordarshan.<sup>16</sup> In that interview, Shehabuddin claimed that Pakistan was a dead state and buried under the blood of millions of Bengali martyrs who had been massacred by its army.<sup>17</sup> Along with this he also raised his voice by claiming to take urgent steps to end foreign occupation and genocide in their motherland and save the lives of millions of their displaced compatriots.<sup>18</sup>

### **Communication with Government Circle**

Bengali diplomats who had defected started their mode of operation with specific objectives and strategies by targeting both at the government and non-government circles to maximize support for Bangladesh's cause. After the formation of Mujibnagar Government on 10<sup>th</sup> April Shehabuddin and Amzad communicated with Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed on 21st April.<sup>19</sup> With the objective to open the first Bangladeshi mission in Delhi he met with Indian Minister Sardar Singh on April 28 and handed over the letter of Mujibnagar Government formally to the Government of India. That historical incident contributed to initiating the first diplomatic dealings of Bangladesh with India. Indeed, the Government of India granted permission to open the first Bangladesh Information centre (Bangladesh Mission) in New Delhi, on April 30, after that promotional meeting with Indian foreign Minister.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the aim of their constant lobbying to the political circles of India was 1) to make repeatedly appeal for Indian recognition for Bangladesh who were sympathetic to Bangladesh cause; B) to determine the war policy of the Exile Government with the consultation of senior leaders of Indian Government that they

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p112

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.113

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.105-106.

thought would be effective; d) to evaluate the strategy and policies of Exile Government with the necessary information collected from different Indian sources.<sup>21</sup>

Since Delhi was one of the hubs of Asia and a centre of foreign delegates and officials the Bengali diplomats undertook the opportunity of living in that city. Shehabuddin, accordingly used to be present at the airport regularly to receive foreign political leaders—Senators, Congressional representatives, and Members of Parliament (MPS) with the aim to dispense messages and press notes to those foreign delegates about the Pakistani atrocities in Bangladesh.<sup>22</sup>

### **Communication with Non-Government Circles**

In order to put pressure on the Indian Government to get its unconditional support for the recognition of Bangladesh, the Bengali defected diplomats undertook the strategy to appeal to all sections of people and classes of India. By comprehending the fact that the support of the Indian mass, cultural artists, civil society would be effective in their public opinion mobilization campaign Shehabuddin started travelling in different parts of India and addressed well-attended public meetings,<sup>23</sup> rallies and processions in a planned and systematic way. With the consultation of the Exile Government he set some particular agendas in this regard including the issues of genocide, refugee, and the trial of Sheikh Mujib. Through this procedure, he brought into focus, the matter of reorganization of Bangladesh in order to get the sympathy from the general mass and draw the attention of the cultural elite, academicians, press and media etc of India.<sup>24</sup>

While public diplomacy is the art of engaging, informing and influencing the international audiences,<sup>25</sup> Bengali diplomats revealed to the Indian people how the politicians, professionals and the unarmed civilians including women and children had been deliberately killed and reign of terror was created in East Pakistan. In order to shape public impression, the defected diplomats equally remained very careful and aware about the deliberation and selection of the words. Since most people in India were

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<sup>21</sup> Shebuddin, interview

<sup>22</sup> *interview*

<sup>23</sup> Shehabuddin, interview

<sup>24</sup> Shebuddin, interview

<sup>25</sup> John Brown, 'Public diplomacy During the Cold War' in *GJIA*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2005. P.1



not acquainted with English in most cases the discussants used to discuss Bangladesh issue in Hindi in those seminars.<sup>26</sup>

By bringing into focus the issue of refugees Shehabuddin, Amjad, and Humayun Rashid Chowdhury (defected in October) in several processions meetings and public speaking programs exposed the story of inhuman condition of millions of frightened people who took shelter in India.<sup>27</sup> By narrating the miserable condition of hundreds of thousands of people who were helpless, homeless, and jobless and in desperate need of food and medical support they endeavoured to organise fund collection and provide arms for the freedom fighters who were then fighting without any modern weapon. In name of civil war as they asserted that the cruelty in East Pakistan could not be ignored by the international apathy, several humanitarian and non-governmental organization came forward in response to the appeal for the refugees.<sup>28</sup>

With the objective to frame the perception of the Indian public, Shebuddin simultaneously raised the issue of unconditional release of Sheikh Mujib in many public forums, political circles as well as among the civil society, and in procession meetings. The subject of trial of Mujib in fact remained as a significant political phenomenon in the political sphere and caused considerable anguish in the government circles of both Bangladesh and India. In the light of such emotional sensitivity Shehabuddin repeatedly claimed that military junta did not have the authority to court martial Mujib, who is the President of a sovereign state.<sup>29</sup>

Instead of accepting the verdict of the people and regarding Sheikh Mujub as the elected and undisputed leader of Bangladesh, Pakistan government carried out genocide in a planned way. Under the circumstances, such trial was nothing but an illegal initiative.<sup>30</sup> While the demand of releasing Mujib had been justified and rationalized in such a way, that demands and appeals received wide publicity in all major newspapers and drew the attention of the international press including AFP and PTI.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Shehabuddin, interview

<sup>27</sup> Shehabuddin, *op.cit*, p121

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*,p.109-110

By getting the news of the postponement of the trial of Sheikh Mujib, Shehabuddin further demanded that some neutral observers must be allowed to meet him. That strategy to appeal consistently to the Indian public about the trial of Mujib proved successful as in the session of Lok Sabha (Lower Chamber of Parliament) Indian foreign minister issued a strong statement expressing India's grave concern over the well being of Sheikh Mujib on August 9, 1971.<sup>32</sup> Shehabuddin attended that session in order to support the issue of release of their leader as a part of his promotional effort.<sup>33</sup> Humayun Rashid Chowdhury (defected on 13<sup>th</sup> October) attended several seminars, assemblages and meeting in Delhi in the similar fashion with the demand to release Bengali leader Sheikh Mujib when he became the Mission Head..<sup>34</sup>

Demonstrations, public speaking programs, assemblages were the other important instruments through which the defected diplomats fought against the propaganda war of Pakistan. By organising several demonstrations before foreign diplomatic missions, they endeavoured to convey messages particularly to the American Embassy for considerable results. Indeed, their memorandum to the American political counsellor ran like this, "the people and Government of Bangladesh got shocked because of the supply of arms shipments by the US to Pakistan which unleashed an unprecedented genocide in Bangladesh. In order to create and shape public opinion, Shehabuddin routinely held demonstrations at Palam Airport carrying placards with the demand of "Stop Arms Supply to Pakistan", 'Stop the ship', 'Stop Genocide in Bangladesh', 'Don't Strengthen the Hand's of the Pakistani Butcher'.<sup>35</sup>

The public speaking program had been used by the defected diplomats as a channel to have conversation and dialogue with the Indian public directly. By taking the advantage of such tool they got the opportunity to explain the motives and causes of the War of Independence precisely and logically. While they used to receive several questions through such a procedure of two way of communications once a question had been raised by some Indians that, "By rejecting the Two-Nation Theory will

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<sup>32</sup> Hasan Hafizur Rahman(eds.), *Bangladesh Documents* vol. 13.(Dhaka: Hakkani Publishers, 1977) P.877-886.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Amjadul Haq conducted by the present researcher on 24 September, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> *Shehabuddin op.cit*134.

Bangladesh join secular India?.”<sup>36</sup> The question was very sensitive in nature as the Pakistani side heavily propagated that conflict in East Pakistan was the result of conspiracy of India. In order to handle such sensitive and delicate question he remained very assertive and answered the question with the strong argument that ‘the people of Bangladesh was fighting for the independence, not to remain or become part of any other state’.<sup>37</sup>

While public diplomacy is both for public and diplomatic strategies<sup>38</sup> Shehabuddin being the Head of Delhi Mission used to arrange the meetings among the Bengali intellectuals and parliamentarians as well as their Indian counterparts and the press. Because of such initiatives, Phani Bhusan Mozumder, Shah Muzaem Hussein and Noor Jahan Murshid<sup>39</sup> came to Delhi in May as the members of the first parliamentary delegation and delivered passionate speech in Indian parliament. Being the eye-witnesses they provided a vivid description of Pakistani atrocities, rape and massacre in Bangladesh, which received excellent coverage in the media and contributed to a great extent in creating public opinion in India and abroad at that early stage of the Liberation War.<sup>40</sup>

### Communication with Cultural Group

While the idea of a nation is often represented by the intellectual and cultural artist,<sup>41</sup> the defected diplomats endeavoured to establish association with that force of Bengali community too. Indeed, a group of Bengali intellectuals including Professor Rehman Sobhan, Anisuzzaman etc. played an active role in India preaching about Bangladesh War. Whereas Mallick and Anisuzzaman provided comprehensive accounts of atrocities of the Pakistani army in Bangladesh,<sup>42</sup> some renowned

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>38</sup> Jarol B. Manheim, *Strategic Public Diplomacy and American Foreign Policy*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 5

<sup>39</sup> Two are prominent parliamentarians and Famous female activists of Bangladesh.

<sup>40</sup> Shehabuddin, *op cit*. p.113-114.

<sup>41</sup> Zeenat Huda, *Problem of National Identity of the Middle class in Bangladesh and State-Satellite Television* (UK: University of Warwick, 2005)p.101

<sup>42</sup> A respected History Professor, Mallick later became first Bangladesh High Commissioner in India (1972) and Anisuzzaman professor of Bengali Department at Dhaka University, became a vocal human right activist on Bangladeshis independence struggle. Interview with Professor Anisuzzaman conducted by researcher on August, 30 2009.

economists of India such as Asoka Mitra came forward to help Bengali delegates in India.<sup>43</sup>

The role of '*Rupanthar* (Transformation), a Bangladeshi cultural organisation is praise worthy whose cultural artists including Hasan Imam, Laila Hasan travelled all over India, and rendered patriotic songs and music to promote the Bangladesh movement.<sup>44</sup> By developing excellent rapport with those cultural groups and organisations, Bulbul, wife of Shehabuddin assisted in fixing the date of the meetings between Bengali and Indian groups and played a crucial role in mobilising support for Bangladesh in the cultural arena.<sup>45</sup>

### **Paradoxical Role of Intellectual**

In order to conduct public diplomacy the co-operation between the government and non- government circles remained as an important phenomenon.<sup>46</sup> However, the joint efforts had been found sometimes complex and controversial as a couple of private group or individual became aware of their self-interest instead of Bangladesh cause in India.

Although Bengali intellectuals and cultural artists played the unique role in organizing meeting, procession and raising voice against the atrocities of Pakistan some incidents created confusion and caused embarrassment for the defected diplomats of Bangladesh. The role of a Professor thus became paradoxical who identified himself as a Pro-vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University and close associate of Sheikh Mujib<sup>47</sup> However, at a university gathering he recommended that the current crisis of Pakistan would be possible if Pakistan agree to a loose confederation and that statement had been broadcast instantly by All India Radios news bulletin.<sup>48</sup>

While Shehabuddin got stunned by hearing that statement he informed the matter to Foreign Secretary Mahbub Alam Chasi and requested All India Radio to stop broadcasting such unauthorized statements. He also referred the matter to Mujibnagar Government with a request to restrict the

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<sup>43</sup> He had become the minister of Finance and Economy later on in the West Bengal. Shehabuddin, interview

<sup>44</sup> Shehabuddin, interview

<sup>45</sup> *Shebuddin, op cit.* p.116

<sup>46</sup> *ibid,*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid,*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid,*

travel of that professor and instructed him to have his speeches cleared before delivering them. Although the Professor claimed that he was a friend of Henry Kissinger, and intended to have a meeting with Kissinger during his visit in Delhi, Shehabuddin could not arrange that meeting as Kissinger was fully booked during that period. However, after the Liberation War that professor wrote an article claiming that he had met Kissinger in Delhi through a senior Bengali diplomat.<sup>49</sup> That incident is indicative to comprehend how the war of Bangladesh had been used as a bandwagon by some individuals for promoting their own image.

### **Pakistani Propaganda and Public Diplomacy Strategy**

The Government of Pakistan endeavoured to convince the world opinion with a flood of propaganda materials that normal condition was prevailing in Bangladesh and the entire independence movement was engineered by a handful of India inspired miscreants.<sup>50</sup> By portraying the image of India as the conspirator which was trying to break up Pakistan it successfully issued a statement to the American House of Representatives to cut off American aid to India.<sup>51</sup>

While Pakistan propagated the crisis of East Pakistan in such a way Indian side wanted some delay in her direct intervention in the internal matter of that country.<sup>52</sup> Before undertaking any drastic decision or direct military intervention she preferred to adopt the strategy of public diplomacy to create international public opinion in favour of Bangladesh and herself. In this regard, her strategy was to highlight genocide and the influx of millions of refugees into India which put tremendous burden on her economy.<sup>53</sup>

On 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1971, although both Houses of the Indian Parliament adopted a resolution pledging sympathy and support to the Freedom Movement in Bangladesh,<sup>54</sup> still a debate continued among the senior

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, 123

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Yunus and Shamsul Bari (compiled ), *Bangladesh Newsletter*(Chicago: Bangladesh Defence League, 1971), p.14

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>52</sup> Richard Sisson and Leo E Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan India and Birth of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.156.

<sup>53</sup> D. K. Palit, *The Lightning Campaign* (New Delhi: Thomson, Press, 1972), p.69.

<sup>54</sup> Sheelendra Kumar Singh (ed.), *Bangladesh Documents Vol. 1* (New Delhi: The Ministry of External Affairs, 1972), p. 66.

leaders about the appropriate extent and nature of Indian support. Despite India's awareness about the legitimate aspiration of the people of Bangladesh and the brutal operation of Pakistani force, she wanted to move cautiously for several reasons. While India had full diplomatic relations with Pakistan and maintained one of its diplomatic missions in Islamabad, she did not want unnecessary sufferings for her officials in those missions.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, India intended to move carefully to avoid giving the impression that she was meddling in Pakistan's internal affairs with a objective to breaking up that state.<sup>56</sup> In order to refute all these allegations of Pakistan as well as to mould the public opinion across the globe public diplomacy had been adopted directly by India along with the diplomatic procedure. She accordingly relied on international media, publications, cultural channels to make world understandable that if(1) genocide continued in East Pakistan unabated;(2) refugees continued to pour into India;(3) and the democratic government of Bangladesh requested for support and assistance India would extend her support directly and instantly.<sup>57</sup> By countering Pakistani propaganda Indira Gandhi through her speeches, media deliberations made it clear that India could not remain silent spectator at the event in East Pakistan although she did not have any intention to interfere in the internal affairs of another country.<sup>58</sup>

While ten millions refugees poured into India because of the creation of massacre by the Pakistani military, India used that problem to gain legitimacy for its involvement in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.<sup>59</sup> Because of geographical reasons since the people fled from East Pakistan to India, she argued she would not be blamed for sheltering those refugees in her territory being the immediate neighbour.<sup>60</sup> While the issue of refugees remained as an intolerable burden for India, the internal affair of Pakistan became her internal problem as well. From the humanitarian point of view although India extended her support for the refugees, she also asked for international assistance. The tremendous pressure of

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<sup>55</sup> Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. II No.1 24 May 1971, p.188

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II No.3, 26 May 1971 pp.220-221.

<sup>57</sup> Shehabuddin, interview

<sup>58</sup> Indira Gandhi, *India and Bangladesh: Selected Speeches and Statements* (Orient Longman: Delhi, 1972), P62.

<sup>59</sup> Udit Sen, *Refugees and the Politics of Nation building in India 1947-1971*(UK: University of Cambridge, 2009) (Unpublished thesis), p.29

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*,

refugees could not be left for her shoulder alone since it was impossible for her to feed millions of refugees for an indefinite period. Although Pakistan never admitted the exodus of the refugees to India, she treated the refugee's problem as an international concern in the light of humanitarian need.<sup>61</sup>

By following the path of India, Bengali diplomats who had defected, narrated in details the horror and brutalities perpetrated by Pakistani army on the defenceless people of Bangladesh, to refute the Pakistani propaganda which considered the National Independence Movement of Bangladesh as the internal conflict of Pakistan. In order to end the silence of the world by revealing the appalling tragedy in East Pakistan, Shehabuddin demanded the formation an international tribunal for trying Yahya Khan for committing horrendous genocide, rape and arson in Bangladesh in a symposium of Andra Pradesh Urdu Periodicals Associations in New Delhi, on September 2.<sup>62</sup>

He equally adopted the strategy to influence the Muslim world by propagating that Islam did not sanction killings<sup>63</sup> and justify the suppression of minority by the rule of majority for social and economic justice. While the heinous deeds of Yahya Khan accordingly would be considered as an un-Islamic he asked the Muslim World not to remain silent over the oppression and killing of fellow Muslims in East Pakistan.<sup>64</sup>

In order to create confusion and suspicion Pakistan propagated another rumour that, the incumbent Government had permitted elected 88 Bengali Parliament Members to retain their seats in the National Assembly. Pakistan intended to create the impression that not all elected representatives of Bangladesh wanted independence.<sup>65</sup> In order to counter that propaganda, Shehabuddin personally met some of the MNAs who expressed their allegiance to the Exile Government with firm commitment and determination to fight until their death for the total Liberation for Bangladesh. Shehabuddin himself issued a statement on September 7, by clearing that they would not return to Pakistan as it was a dead state for them.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Muntasir Mamun and Mahbubar Rahman, *Media and the Liberation War of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Ahanya, 2010), p.120- 129.

<sup>62</sup> Shebuddin, *op cit.* p.136.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p.112-113

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*,

## Public diplomacy in Kolkata

Hussain Ali, with 65 Bengali officials defected on 18<sup>th</sup> April and transferred the Pakistan Embassy of Kolkata into Bangladesh Mission. Those defected diplomats of Bangladesh intended to use Kolkata as a potential channel in their public diplomacy endeavour for two very practical reasons. While Kolkata was the only de facto mission of Bangladesh Government, and the seat of Bengali speaking dwellers the main target of Ali was to utilise the massive support of those Bengali speaking dwellers of the city in order to get recognition from Indian government.<sup>67</sup>

Under the circumstances, Hussain Ali, being the High Commissioner for Bangladesh in India attempted to establish association at the preliminary level with the government circles to get assistance, shelter and support for Bengali refugees who took shelter in various Eastern States of India. While more than ten million refugees fled from Pakistan to India who was in desperate need of food and shelter, he expressed his grave concern to the Indian authority and sought aid for those refugees.<sup>68</sup>

In this regard, he contributed to communicating with the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Sirdharta Sankar Roy, Health Minister Joynal Abedin, CPM leader Samar Mukherjee MP, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi of Congress in order to influence them by revealing the magnitude of suffering and requirements of the Bengali refugees.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Ali in parallel remained in constant touch with other political elites including Indrajit Gupta of the Communist Party of India, Jotimoy Basu of the Marxists Communist Party, Dr Ranen Sen as well as Prasanta Sur, Pran Krishna Chakravarty, Gaur Kunda, Subhas Basu and Biva Ghosh who had already raised their voice in support of refugees on humanitarian grounds by unveiling their impoverished condition.<sup>70</sup>

The protection of Bengali officials (who transferred their allegiance to Bangladesh government) remained another grave concern for the Bangladesh Mission due to which Mr. Ali accordingly pleaded to the members of ruling Congress Party in order to convince Pakistan side to

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<sup>67</sup> In a group interview with third secretary Nazrul Islam, Sikander Ali and Mustaffizur Rahman conducted by researcher on June 19, 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Amirta Bazar Patra, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1971

<sup>69</sup> Hindustan Standard, 1 May, 1971

<sup>70</sup> Singh (ed.), *op cit.* vol.1.p.35.



take no legal action against Bengali officials' who had defected.<sup>71</sup> While the Mujibnagar Government was formed by Awami League leaders who got the direct mandate from the people of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Mission considered Mujibnagar Government exclusively as the legitimate government.<sup>72</sup> Other than Mujibnagar Government since there was no acceptable alternative KK Mitra, the food Minister of West Bengal, Sheban Saksina, the Chairperson of Socialist Congress, and other MPs raised their voice to recognize Bangladesh immediately.<sup>73</sup>

### **Communication with Non-government Circle**

The people of West Bengal, who had the Bengali origin and migrated to East Bengal during the period of partition of 1947, were found sympathetic to the refugees and loud against the atrocities of Pakistan. Because of massive influx of refugees from East Pakistan into India, the Kolkata dwellers got sympathetic towards the victims and destitute of East Pakistan. By comprehending the fact Bangladesh Mission (Information Centre) intended to appreciate that strong Bengali ethos of Kolkata at maximum level to put pressure on the political circle of Delhi, which could not be remained indifferent towards the Bangladesh issue.<sup>74</sup> Although Delhi was deeply concerned about the creation of the gigantic problem after the massive influx of refugees (whose number had been reached from seven to ten million) its political circles got conscious about the overwhelming sympathy of West Bengalis towards Bengali refugees.<sup>75</sup>

Hence, by taking the full advantage of that situation the defected diplomats started public mobilization campaign by highlighting the issues of genocide and refugees as well as communicated with both electronic and print media. They equally organized visiting program, staged demonstration, and circulated leaflets in order to make an appeal to recognize Bangladesh as a free independent state.<sup>76</sup>

While the defected diplomats including Hussain Ali (Deputy High Commissioner), Rafiqul Islam (first Secretary), Anwarul Haque

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p.56

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.62

<sup>73</sup> The Statesman, 1 May 1971.

<sup>74</sup> Kazi Nazrul Islam, interview

<sup>75</sup> Sucheta Ghosh, *The Role of India in the Emergence of Bangladesh* (Kolkata: Mohan & Chand, 1974), p.68-70.

<sup>76</sup> Kazi Nazrul Islam, interview

Chowdhury, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Maksud Ali (all Third Secretary) intended to reveal what was happening in East Pakistan to the Indian people, they used to communicate and visit cross section of people including the youth, academicians, intellectuals, cultural activists, journalists and the member of civil society regularly.<sup>77</sup>

In order to narrate how the Pakistani army got engaged in a wanton massacre of the innocent and unarmed people of Bangladesh, they played a significant role in communicating with several organizations, cultural artists, civil society etc. Indeed, both Indian and Bengali civil society and intellectuals already raised their voice against the terror which was created by the ruling elite of Pakistan.<sup>78</sup> Several organizations including Bangladesh Intellectuals Associations, Bangladesh Teachers Associations, Committee for the Assistance to the Freedom Struggle of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Sarba-kalyan Samity (Bangladesh Welfare Association), Bangladesh Intellectuals Aid Committee, A National co-ordination Committee for Bangladesh, The All-India Bangladesh Assistance Committee had been formed in order to support Bangladesh independence movement.<sup>79</sup>

Through these Associations Bengali intellectuals, artists, literary persons accordingly arranged several processions, rallies and meetings to take moral stand against the ruthless operation of Pakistan army and raised unanimous support for the East Bengalis in their national Independence Movement.

Along with this they simultaneously staged several demonstrations in order to get release of Mujib.<sup>80</sup> Thus, by expressing grave concern Tarashanker Bondhupday, a famous Bengali novelist urged the world community to come forward for immediate release of Sheik Mujib on August 7 in a big rally.<sup>81</sup>

The West Bengal Provincial Farmer Association, Jamayeet-Uil-Ulema in a conference on August 18, the West Bengal Women Association on 11 August in the similar fashion condemned any attempt to

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<sup>77</sup> Kazi Nazrul Islam, interview

<sup>78</sup> Hindustan Standard, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1971

<sup>79</sup> Most of these organizations were formed in April after Operation Searchlight after 25<sup>th</sup> March, Sucheta Ghosh, *op cit*, p.75

<sup>80</sup> Kazi Nazriul Islam, interview

<sup>81</sup> Mohammad Selim, *The Liberation War of Bangladesh and the Political Parties of India* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Charcha, 2004), p.22

try to Mujib and execute him secretly.<sup>82</sup> While Hussain Ali, from Bangladesh Diplomatic Mission appealed to West Bengalis for the financial and material assistance, the famous singers including Manna Dey, Salil Chowdhury, and Sabita Chowdhury donated their royalty money for the freedom fighters of Bangladesh.<sup>83</sup>

### Communication with Foreign Delegates

In order to influence the world public opinion Bangladesh Mission had seen several delegations headed by non-diplomatic persons including the educationists, lawyers', civil society representatives, cultural groups to different parts of India, embassies of Europe and America as well as different institutions like UNO, FAO ETC.<sup>84</sup>

Those non-state actors explained how the West Pakistanis crushed the victorious result of National Election, imprisoned Mujib and employed brutal force against the helpless Bengalis of East Pakistan. By roaming several parts of India they disclosed the story of millions of refugees who had poured into India from Bangladesh due to extreme brutality of Pakistani military operation. In those visit programs they used to display the war photos, distribute leaflets, news bulletins in support of their narrative.<sup>85</sup>

While the aim of Bengali diplomats was to portray the image of Bangladesh through the prism of National Liberation Movement, they intended to bring out the focal point of Bengali's right to self-govern and accordingly communicated with the both ruling and non-governing elites of several countries of the world.<sup>86</sup> In order to raise the conscience of the global community they therefore accompanied the foreign delegates and the distinguished personalities including Senator Kennedy, Senator Saxby, the representatives of Amnesty, World Bank, Oxfam, and the UK and USA who visited Kolkata refugees camps during that time.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53

<sup>83</sup> Dulal Bhowmik, 'The Contribution of Kolkata University in the Independence War of Bangladesh', in *Bharat Bichitra (The Indian Magazine)* N.9, (Dhaka: The Indian High Commission, 2007), p.18.

<sup>84</sup> HT Imam, *Bangladesh Government, 1971* (Dhaka: Agamee, 2004), pp.168-169.

<sup>85</sup> Sikander Ali and Mustaffizur Rahman, interview

<sup>86</sup> Salam Azad, *Contribution of India in the War of Liberation of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Ankur Prakashani, 2003), p.225

<sup>87</sup> Rahman (ed.), *op. cit.* 68-69.

Indeed, by utilising those opportunities they expressed their deep concern to them and made appeal for large scale assistance to provide food, pure water and clothing for the refugees.<sup>88</sup> The attempt proved successful as Senator Kennedy lent his support on humanitarian grounds and delivered several speeches at Senate with the argument that USA must stop sending arms and ammunitions which would be used to kill more Bengalis.<sup>89</sup> In addition he called for the increase of the subsidies for East Pakistan. While Senator Saxby and the representatives of World Bank and UNO had been deeply distressed by observing the state of destitute and physical exhaustion in refugee camps, they asked for the suspension of funding to Pakistan in the similar fashion.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

The strategy followed by the defected Bengali diplomats in 1971, as defined by academics as, Public Diplomacy, is a successful endeavor to put a political pressure on Indian circles to support Bangladesh cause as well as recognize Bangladesh as an independent state. Instead of following the traditional diplomatic procedure, they pursued a new type of diplomacy known as public diplomacy using press media, procession, meetings, as the main instrument to propagate in favor of Bangladesh independence War. Since India was the most prominent country among the South Asian region so their main target was to get Indian recognition for Bangladesh as soon as possible. The hesitance of Indian government to recognize Bangladesh, embarked Bengali diplomats to make an appeal not only to governments circle but also to non-government circles of India. Through press, media, public mobilizing campaign, cultural program, public speaking program they appealed to the non-government circles to recognize Bangladesh as an independent state. The application of Public Diplomacy strategy thus contributed to draw the attention of the local, national and international actors, both state and non-state actors about the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

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<sup>88</sup> *Relief Problems in East Pakistan and India*, Part 1. No.71. p.23.

<sup>89</sup> Statement of Senator Kennedy on 22 June, 1971, *Relief Problems in East Pakistan and India*, Part, 1, N. 71.93.

<sup>90</sup> Yunus, *op cit*.p.43