

Mohammad Tajuddin

DIPLOMACY OF BANGLADESH IN THE FORMATIVE PHASE

Bangladesh emerged as an independent state following nine months long Liberation War against the Pakistani armed forces. Diplomacy played a key role in the formation of the exile government, making India ready for providing political, diplomatic, financial and military support to the Liberation War of Bangladesh. To obtain recognition from the comity of the nations, the United Nations system, and to solicit economic and financial aid from the international community for the reconstruction of the economy and the rehabilitation of the refugees returning from India were the tasks before the first government of independent Bangladesh. These objectives were achieved by the means of diplomacy. This paper presents a critical narrative of the diplomacy of the provisional government (popularly known as Mujibnagar government) and the government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Formation of the Provisional Government

The Bangladesh War of Liberation started on the night of 25/26 March 1971 when the West Pakistan armed forces launched attack on the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR), a para-military force for border protection, the police and the pro-liberation political activists of what was at that time East Pakistan. The reason given by the army junta ruling Pakistan was that the Awami League had an alleged

Mohammad Tajuddin, Ph. D., is a Fellow at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Calcutta.

plan to declare independence on March 26, 1971. The declaration of independence did not precede but followed the army crackdown.¹

After the army crackdown the leaders of the Awami League started crossing the Indian border. By early April 1971, most of the leaders of the Awami League including the elected legislators of the national and the provincial assemblies and the leaders of the other pro-liberation political parties were in India. The entire Awami League High Command, except Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his constitutional adviser Kamal Hossain, reached India by April 10, 1971.² A large number of bureaucrats of the East Pakistan Civil Service, including a dozen members of the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and some fifty Bengalee military officers were present in India by that time.

The leadership felt the need to form a government in exile to lead Liberation War and to draw international attention and support for the cause of the Liberation War. A meeting of the Awami League leaders was held on 8-9 April in Agartala, the capital of Tripura province of the Indian Union, bordered by Bangladesh from

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- 1 The result of the first-held National Assembly Elections of Pakistan in December 1970 plunged the country into a political crisis. The Awami League won 160 out of 162 seats in East Pakistan but it failed to secure a single seat in West Pakistan. The People's Party won 81 seats out of 138 in West Pakistan but none in East Pakistan. The Awami League was in a position to form the government at the centre with its 160 members in the house of 300. The ruling elite in Pakistan was not ready to accept the government formed by the Awami League at the centre. For details see Golam Morshed, "Pakistan's 1970 Elections and the Liberation of Bangladesh: A political Analysis", *Journal of the Institute of Bangladesh Studies* (Rajshahi), Vol. 11, 1988, pp. 107-29 and Richard Sisson and Leo Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Visitor Publications, 1990).
 - 2 Sheikh Mujib and Kamal Hossain were arrested on the night of 25 March 1971 and taken to West Pakistan. Mujib remained in his residence and did not go underground even after getting the news of army crackdown. See, Iqbal Ansari Khan, *The Third Eye: Glimpses of the Politics*, (Dhaka, UPL, 1991), pp. 41-49.

three sides. Following the meeting at Agartala, the leaders with the acquiescence of the Indian government announced the formation of a provisional government of the independent 'People's Republic of Bangladesh' on 10 April 1971.³

The provisional government⁴ was ceremonially inducted into office on 17 April 1971 at Baidyanath Tala, a village which is located in Meherpur sub-division of Khustia district and is within a mile of the Indian Border Security Force outpost at Hridayapur in the Nadia district of West Bengal.⁵ To mark the occasion, the Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed renamed the spot symbolically Mujibnagar and issued a declaration of independence on the occasion. The provisional government became popularly known as the Mujibnagar Government. The government was actually functioning from Calcutta. All the communiqués of the government issued by the ministers from Calcutta guest houses were issued as from 'Mujibnagar'. Correspondents interviewing them were asked to use Mujibnagar as their datelines. Thus, a geographical location was transformed into a political symbol.⁶ A Radio, known as *Swadhin Bangla* (Free Bangla) was operative near Calcutta.

Diplomacy of the Provisional Government

Three conditions are essential for the success of any secessionist movement:

1. overwhelming support of the masses
2. sanctuary for the liberation fighters

3. *Bangladesh Documents*, External Affairs Ministry, Government of India (New Delhi, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 281.

4. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was proclaimed President, Syed Nazrul Islam was given the office of Vice President, Tajuddin Ahmed became Prime Minister and Khondaker Mostaque Ahmed got the portfolio of Foreign Minister. Other two members in the six member Government were A.H.M. Kamruzzaman and Capt. Mansoor Ali.

5. *Bangladesh Documents*, *op.cit.*, n. 3, pp. 291.

6. *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong), 5 September 1975, p. 27.

3. regular supply of arms and ammunition.

The masses had overwhelmingly supported the Awami League's demand for autonomy. The military solution of the political problem imposed by the West Pakistani leadership compelled the Awami League leaders to transform the massive mandate for autonomy into Bangladesh War of Liberation. The severe repression of the Pakistani army had removed all considerations for the unity of Pakistan among them.

Only India was in a position to provide sanctuary for the freedom fighters and to give them military training and support. Political and financial support of India was also necessary for the smooth functioning of the provisional government. To get refuge in the Indian territory for the terrorized masses who were leaving their homes for safety was also a problem for the leaders of the Liberation War.⁷

Tajuddin Ahmed, as the General Secretary of the Awami League, had met K.C. Sengupta, the Deputy High Commissioner of India in Dhaka in the first week of March 1971 on the instruction of Sheikh Mujib. The purpose of the meeting was to know whether India would provide political asylum to the leadership and military assistance to the liberation fighters in case Pakistan started armed action in Bangladesh. The Indian High Commissioner went to New Delhi to get response from the political leadership on the request. Tajuddin Ahmed again met the Deputy High Commissioner on 17 March 1971 who conveyed to Tajuddin Ahmed that in case of military attack by the Pakistan rulers, India would provide 'all possible assistance to the repressed people.'⁸ The date of the next

7. Maidul Hasan, *Muldhara'71* (Bengali), (Dhaka, Dhaka University Press, 1985), p. 13. The author, as the Secretary to the Prime Minister Tajuddin, participated in the diplomacy of the provisional government.

8. *Ibid*, p. 10.

meeting was fixed on 24 March to decide the details of the assistance. In between Tajuddin Ahmed would intimate Sheikh Mujib about the decision of the Government of India. He could neither talk with Sheikh Mujib about the issue nor could meet Sengupta on the appointed date.

After the army action, he decided to cross over the Indian border. He was under the impression that New Delhi had decided to assist the Liberation War after some communication at the highest level between the Awami League leadership and the government of India. After crossing the border when he requested the Chief of the Border Security Force (BSF) of India for assistance to the liberation fighters the former expressed his inability to provide arms without training about which only Prime Minister could decide. It was necessary to meet the Indian Prime Minister to solicit Indian support. The BSF Chief arranged for the journey of Tajuddin Ahmed to New Delhi.⁹

Before meeting Indira Gandhi, Tajuddin Ahmed thought about the need of a provisional government to lead the Liberation War. He thought that it would be difficult to get assistance from India or any friendly country without the formation of a provisional government. In New Delhi it was not known whether a provisional government had been formed or not. It was decided with the consent of the representatives of different parties present at the time in New Delhi that Tajuddin Ahmed would meet Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of the provisional government which was formed by Sheikh Mujib before his arrest in which he was the President and the members of High Command of the Awami League were the other ministers.¹⁰ As a result of the negotiations between Tajuddin Ahmed

9. *Ibid*, p. 11.

10. Sheikh Mujib had not formed any provisional government before his arrest. The decision to form a provisional government was taken by Tajuddin in New Delhi before his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister to impress upon her the seriousness of the Awami League leadership about the Liberation War.

and Indira Gandhi in the first week of April, New Delhi agreed to provide :

1. working facilities to the provisional government
2. opening the Indian borders for the refugees
3. arrangement for the sanctuary, training and arms to the freedom fighters.¹¹

Tajuddin Ahmed and other leftist Awami League leaders in the provisional government were of the opinion that the Soviet assistance to India was necessary for the success of the Liberation War. In their perception India was incapable of providing allout support to the Liberation War alone and simultaneously maintaining its security. They thought that India's uninterrupted support to the Liberation War without endangering its security was not possible without security arrangement between India and the Soviet Union. To generate support for the Liberation War among the socialist countries a delegation headed by Abdus Samad Azad, a senior Awami League leader, went to attend the World Peace Conference in April 1971 in Budapest. From Budapest he went to Moscow to request for the Soviet help. He could not meet any government or party leader over there.¹²

In the last week of May 1971, Maidul Hasan visited New Delhi to convince the Indian leadership about the utility of a security arrangement between India and the Soviet Union. He discussed the idea with P. N. Haksar, the special representative of Mrs. Gandhi to co-ordinate the policy and programmes regarding Bangladesh, who liked it. In June, Maidul Hasan secretly met V. R. Gugiyanov, the

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11. Hasan *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14. Indira Gandhi has emerged as a strong leader after the March 1971 general elections in which her party got about two-third majority in the parliament. A small group of persons very close to her were assigned formal responsibilities to make foreign policy decisions who were working in a highly informal manner. Sisson and Rose, *op. cit.*, n. 1, pp. 137-4.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Soviet representative in Calcutta, at least four times on the instruction of Tajuddin Ahmed to solicit Soviet help to India and indirectly to the Bangladesh Liberation War. The meeting stopped when the Soviet representative left Calcutta. Moscow wanted a political solution of the problem without violating the unity of Pakistan in the initial period.¹³

The desire and the endeavour of the provisional government materialised in August 1971 when India and the Soviet Union signed a treaty in reaction to the Sino-American détente with the good offices of Pakistan. The emerging Sino-American and Pakistan axis was perceived by the ruling elite in New Delhi as a grave threat to India.¹⁴ Signing of the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty gave New Delhi a new enthusiasm and confidence as a result of which it progressively increased its support to the Liberation War. Both in terms of defence equipments and monetary help New Delhi's assistance to the Liberation War increased many times immediately after the treaty.¹⁵

The United States was interested in maintaining the unity of Pakistan. Some officials of the provisional government met the American Consulate General in Calcutta in late July to request him for an American mediation for the peaceful resolution of the crisis. The initiative to pursue Washington for mediation could not achieve anything, it was abandoned in the mid-way due to New Delhi's disapproval of the initiative and also due to indifferent attitude of the US.

13. Golam Mostafa, *National Interest and Foreign policy: Bangladesh's Relations with the Soviet Union and its Successor States*, (New Delhi, South Asian Publisher, 1995), p. 78.

14. The Sino-American thaw pacified the ruling party potential opposition by the pro-West elements in the ruling party and the pro-western parties. Pakistan had provided good offices in the Sino-American detente to win the support of both the states.

15. For details of the increase in assistance see, Hasan, *op. cit.*, n. 7, pp. 80-81.

There are contending viewpoints about the initiative to involve Washington for mediation. According to authors like Lifschultz, Nikhil Chakravarty and Anisuzzaman, America and a section in the provisional government who sought a solution of the problem without violating the unity of Pakistan took a secret initiative for a peaceful solution which was stopped by India when it came to know about it and the section was marginalised in the government.¹⁶ Richard Sisson and Leo Rose think that there was no secrecy in the whole affairs. The initiative was taken with the consent of New Delhi and terminated under its instruction in September.¹⁷

For a guaranteed assistance of New Delhi in the final phase of the Liberation War, Tajuddin Ahmed proposed a treaty between Bangladesh and India in September. He discussed the idea with D.P. Dhar.¹⁸ After further negotiations between Tajuddin Ahmed and Dhar a draft of the proposed treaty was prepared. In November Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed met Indira Gandhi in New Delhi for signing of the treaty. She told to keep the treaty in abeyance because it would be construed that Bangladesh had signed the treaty under duress.¹⁹ She assured them of the continued Indian help and India's readiness to face any eventuality in the way of liberation without treaty. Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed accepted the assurance.²⁰

16. For details see, Lawrence Lifschultz, *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution* (London, Zed Press, 1979), pp.113-16, Nikhil Chakravarty, "Bangladesh", in U. S. Bajpai, ed., *India and Its Neighbourhood* (New Delhi, Lancer International, 1986), p. 280., Anisuzzaman, *Identity, Religion and Recent History* (Calcutta, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), pp. 56-57.

17. See, Sisson and Rose, *op. cit.*, n. 1, pp. 193-94.

18. D. P. Dhar became the special representative to the Indian Prime Minister on Bangladesh at the place of P. N. Haksar after signing of the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty.

19. Hasan, *op. cit.*, n. 7, pp. 148, 177-8.

20. Humayun Rashid Choudhury, the present speaker of the Bangladeshi Parliament, was at that time the Chief of the Bangladesh Mission in New Delhi. He in his interview with the author on 25 October 1991 said that he negotiated the treaty with Dhar on behalf of the provisional government. The draft treaty prepared by Dhar and him was signed by Indira Gandhi and Tajuddin Ahmed. He also said that Sheikh Mujib rejected the treaty signed by the provisional government.

The Foreign Ministry of the provisional Government established missions at Calcutta, Delhi, London, Washington, New York and Stockholm. These missions did not enjoy official diplomatic status as Bangladesh had not yet been recognised by the host countries. But they played important role as propaganda and information offices for the Liberation War in the host countries.

The provisional government sent a sixteen-member delegation to the UN General Assembly session in October 1971. The members of this unrecognised delegation met diplomats of more than one hundred states and apprised them of the Bangladesh situation.²¹

Delegations were also sent to Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other South East Asian countries. Intensive lobbying was done by East Bengalees and their sympathisers in UK, USA, France, Sweden, Japan and a few other countries in favour of the Liberation War. News related to the Liberation War received very favourable press coverage in these states. Funds were collected in these countries to help the Liberation War.²²

The provisional government encouraged the East Bengalee diplomats in Pakistan embassies abroad to defect to Bangladesh so that it could be shown to the world that the Liberation Movement is supported by all sections of the East Bengal people and also to convince the world community of the seriousness of their commitment for independence. Nearly one third of the Bengalee diplomats in the service of Pakistan switched allegiance. High ranking diplomats in Calcutta, New Delhi, London, Washington, New York, Kathmandu and Hong Kong declared their allegiance to the provisional government. Pakistan's ambassador to Iraq, the

21. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Dhaka, Bangladesh Books International, 1980), p. 110.

22. *Activities of the Government*, a release from the Secretariat of the provisional government (Mujibnagar, 20.10.71), appended in Hasan, *op. cit.*, n, 7, p. 294.

Philippines and Argentina also declared their allegiance to the provisional government. The Deputy High Commissioner along with all the Bengali personnel in the Calcutta mission of Pakistan was the first mission to pledge their loyalty to the provisional government.²³ Civil Service officials under training abroad, seven in the USA and two in the UK also offered their services to the provisional government.

When the war broke out between India and Pakistan on 3 December 1971, Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed sent an urgent letter to Indian Prime Minister on 4 December 1971 in which they requested for diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh by India to facilitate the success of the joint war strategy by the freedom fighters of Bangladesh and the Indian armed forces against Pakistan. In response to the letter India and Bhutan recognised Bangladesh on 6 December 1971.²⁴

After the independence of Bangladesh, Tajuddin Ahmed negotiated with D. P. Dhar from 18 to 21 December 1971 about every aspect of the functioning of the government in Dhaka and the possible Indian assistance. To run a government in Dhaka was a great challenging task because the whole system of governance had collapsed. There were immense problems of law and order, finance, communication and transportation. After finalizing every details of the Indian assistance the provisional government flew to Dhaka on 22 December 1971.²⁵

Mujib's Diplomacy for Recognition and Opening Up of Relations

The great diplomatic challenge before Bangladesh as an independent sovereign state and also before the government of

23. Mizanur Rahman Shelly, *Emergence of a New Nation in a Multi-Polar World : Bangladesh* (Dhaka, University Press Ltd., 1979), p. 43.

24. The provisional government was pursuing New Delhi for recognition since April 1971.

25. Hasan, *op. cit.*, n. 7, p. 245.

Sheikh Mujib²⁶ was to get recognition from different states and the United Nations system. Recognition was essential for establishing legitimacy and legality of the nascent state. Secondly, it was not possible to get aid for the reconstruction of the war devastated economy and for the rehabilitation of the returning refugees from different international sources without their recognition. Another important diplomatic task before the government was the removal of about 100,000 Indian troops from Bangladesh which was necessary to prove complete independence and sovereignty of the state. The government of Sheikh Mujib pursued active diplomacy to attain these objectives. He succeeded in achieving most of them made for the rest which were completed by the successive regime.

At the time of independence on 16 December 1971 Bangladesh was recognised only by India and Bhutan. Soon after, others followed.

(a) *The Soviet Union and the Allies*

The Soviet Union, a friendly country recognised Bangladesh on 24 January 1972 when a government was well established in Dhaka.²⁷ Other East European countries i.e. East Germany, Mongolia, Bulgaria and Poland had recognised Bangladesh before Moscow. By March the Soviet Embassy in Dhaka with a staff of ninety, many of them fluent in Bengali language started functioning.²⁸ Sheikh

26. Sheikh Mujib was freed from Pakistani jail on 8 January 1972. He reached Dhaka via London and New Delhi on 10 January 1972. He took over the charge of the government from Tajuddin Ahmed on the same day as President according to the Proclamation of Independence. He transformed the presidential form of government into parliamentary form through a Presidential Order issued on January 11, 1972 and became Prime Minister. He again switched over to presidential form through fourth amendment of the constitution in January 1975 and took over as President.
27. Mizanur Rahman Shelley, "Bangladesh : The Quest for International Recognition", *Asian Affairs* (Dhaka), Vol. 5, No. 4, October-December 1983, p. 405
28. Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Moscow and Bangladesh", *Problems of Communism* (Philadelphia), Vol. 24, March-April 1975, p. 60.

Mujib visited the Soviet Union in the same month where he was warmly welcomed by the Soviet leaders.²⁹

(b) *The United States of America*

The United States was indirectly against the creation of Bangladesh since it was not in favour of the disintegration of Pakistan. American arms supplied to Pakistan were used by the Pakistani armed forces against the Bengali liberation fighters. Washington also supported Pakistan at the UN and sent its seventh fleet into the Indian Ocean to express its solidarity with Pakistan. Anti-American feeling was overt in the Bengali middle classes after the liberation of Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh was conscious of the importance of Washington for its security and development.

Sheikh Mujib did not castigate the American administration for its negative role in the Liberation War. In his first speech after his arrival in Dhaka he expressed thanks to the people of the United States for their support in the liberation of Bangladesh. President Nixon also expressed similar sentiments: "We have never been hostile to Bengali aspirations, we have no intention of ignoring these 70 million people."³⁰

The administration had not totally withdrawn its diplomatic personnel accredited to its Dhaka Consulate during the war period. The United States was willing to give aid to the new state even without formal recognition. An agreement was signed on March 30, 1972 between Bangladesh and the US through which a cash grant of 90 million dollars was given to the Bangladesh government. The US government had reservation about the sovereignty of Bangladesh as long as there was the presence of Indian army on its

29. Dilara Choudhury, "Major Powers Involvement in South Asia", *BISS Journal* (Dhaka), Vol. 7, No. 3, July 1986, p. 319. For details, see, Mostafa, n. 13 pp. 90-104

30. President Nixon's Report to the United States Congress, 9 February 1972 quoted in Shelley, *op. cit.*, n. 27, p. 405.

soil. Washington gave formal recognition on April 4, 1972 after the withdrawal of the Indian forces from Bangladesh.

In the autumn of 1974 Sheikh Mujib visited the United States to address the UN General Assembly. He met Bangladesh friendly members of the Congress, the State Department officials, Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, and President Ford. In November 1974 Kissinger came to Dhaka during his visit to the South Asian countries. He had a two-hour meeting with Sheikh Mujib.³¹

Sheikh Mujib succeeded in establishing formal relations with the United States during his regime but the bad memories of independence war and his Indo-Soviet oriented foreign policy kept the relations cool.

(c) *China*

Due to the compulsion of the Cold War politics interplaying in the Liberation War of Bangladesh, China supported the integrity of Pakistan and so indirectly opposed the liberation of Bangladesh. The Chinese government had no ill will against the Bengalee people.³² In the Chinese perception the independence of Bangladesh was at the cost of the territorial integrity of its ally in South Asia: Pakistan and secondly it was supported by alliance of its 'number one enemy' - the Soviet Union and the hostile neighbour - India. China vocally opposed the struggle unheeding the appeals of pro-Chinese organisations participating in the Liberation War.

Sheikh Mujib and his government were well aware of the importance of the recognition by China, at least to get its support for

31. Lifschultz, n. 15, pp. 139-41.

32. There were many pro-Chinese communist parties in East Pakistan which were more organised and strong than their allies in West Pakistan. Most of the different Maoist organisations in East Pakistan were actively participating in the liberation of Bangladesh. The National Awami Party of Maulana Bhasani, NAP (B) was the strongest among them.

the membership of the United Nations.³³ The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Abdus Samad Azad wrote a letter in the third week of January 1972 to the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in which he expressed his country's desire to have good neighbourly relations with China as with any other country and indicated the hope that China would reciprocate the sincere feelings of the people and the government of Bangladesh. China ignored the letter with indifference.³⁴

When the issue of Bangladesh membership came in the Security Council, Beijing used its veto power for the first time and blocked the entry. Despite this open hostility Bangladesh's reaction was polite, though anti-China feeling was growing in the country. Sheikh Mujib in a public meeting said, "We do not want to maintain hostility with our neighbour China. We have nothing against the biggest country in the world."³⁵ China progressively softened its tone against Bangladesh in the Security Council. When Pakistan recognised Bangladesh in February 1974 and a Tripartite Agreement about POWs among India, Pakistan and Bangladesh was signed in April 1974, China removed its veto and Bangladesh was admitted in the UN in September 1974. In October 1974 the Bangladesh Foreign Minister met his Chinese counterpart in New York.

The Chinese Red Cross Society sent aid for the flood victims of Bangladesh. Dhaka continued its effort for recognition and establishment of diplomatic relations. Emissaries were sent to meet the Chinese leaders in 1975. China allowed Bangladeshi delegation in the Canton Trade Fair in May 1975 in which four trade agreements

33. The People's Republic of China became permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in October 1971 replacing Taiwan, when the US withdrew its objection as a result of the Sino-US detente in July 1971.

34. J. N. Mahanty, "China and the Emergence of Bangladesh: Role of Great Power Global Perceptions", *India quarterly* (New Delhi), Vol. 39, No. 2, April- June 1983, p. 146.

35. *Hindustan standard*, 19 February 1973.

were signed at Canton in May 1975 between Bangladesh and China. Beijing also agreed to recognise Bangladesh soon.³⁶

Bangladesh's close relations with India and the Soviet Union were a limitation on Mujib's side and an abhorrent reality for China. China might have recognised Bangladesh even during Sheikh Mujib time. But his sudden and violent assassination and the 'positive' signals conveyed by the new regime provided an opportunity to China to recognise Bangladesh without any reservation.³⁷

(d) *Islamic Countries*

During the Liberation War of Bangladesh, Iran and the Arab states of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and the Sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf, gave their diplomatic and political support to Pakistan while other Arab states - Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Algeria - remained neutral and indifferent.³⁸ After the emergence of Bangladesh the Pakistani President Z.A. Bhutto toured the Arab states in January 1972 to pursue these states to withheld recognition to Bangladesh till Islamabad normalize its relations with Dhaka. Those Islamic states which had supported Pakistan during the Liberation War of Bangladesh accepted the plea.³⁹ But the neutral Arab states displayed and early willingness to develop relations with Bangladesh. An Egyptian cultural and religious delegation visited Dhaka in June 1972. These radical Arab states had to withheld recognition because they did not want to alienate the rich Arab countries like Saudi

36. *Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 5 and 20 May 1975.

37. For details, of the Chinese policy towards Bangladesh during Sheikh Mujib and post-Mujib periods see Mohd. Tajuddin, "China and South Asia: A perspective for the Study of Bangla- China Relations", Azad Institute Paper-5, (Calcutta, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, 1996).

38. Asghar Ali, "Bangladesh and the Muslim World", *United Asia* (Bombay), Vol. 23, No. 3, 1971, p. 193.

39. Denis Wright, *Bangladesh : Origins and Indian Ocean Relations* (1971-1975), (New Delhi, 1988), p. 226.

Arabia and Libya on this issue. Iraq was not dependent on aid from these countries so it recognised Bangladesh on 8 July 1972.⁴⁰

The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh visited Iraq, Syria and Egypt in August-September 1972. In spite of the negative attitude shown by many Arab states Bangladesh consistently avoided any link with Israel. Sheikh Mujib spurned Israeli overtures for friendship. Israel was one of the first countries to recognise Bangladesh. Aatur Rahman a career diplomat who was well known and respected in West Asia was appointed special envoy of Bangladesh to the region shortly after the independence was established.

Bangladesh did not lose any opportunity to express its solidarity with the Arab countries *vis-à-vis* Israel on the issue of Palestine. Bangladesh strongly supported the Arab states in the October 1973 Arab-Israel war. In a symbolic gesture Bangladesh sent tea and a military medical team to Cairo. Sheikh Mujib personally visited the war zone within weeks of the cease fire. These efforts paid fruitfully. Most of the Arab and Islamic states excluding Saudi Arabia and Sudan recognised Bangladesh during the regime of Sheikh Mujib.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister met King Faisal of Saudi Arabia at the Non-Aligned Summit of 1973 and Islamic Summit of 1974. There had been several Foreign Minister level meetings between the two countries at which detailed discussions were held regarding normalization of relations.⁴¹ The two Foreign Ministers again met in July 1975 on the occasion of the Islamic Foreign Ministers' conference. They discussed the modalities for the formal announcement of diplomatic relations to be established within next two months. It

40. Saudi Arabia as a conservative Islamic state had some misunderstanding about the ideology of secularism included in the constitution of Bangladesh due to which it delayed recognition. Fakhruddin Ahmed, *Critical Times: Memoirs of a South Asian Diplomat*, (Dhaka, 1994), p. 105.

41. Kamal Hossain, "Bangladesh's Sovereignty and Independent Non-Aligned Foreign Policy", *Man and Development* (Chandigarh), Vol. 7, No. 4, December 1985, p. 72.

was agreed that the Bangladesh Foreign Minister would stop at Jeddah, when he would visit Lima for the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers' Conference, scheduled to be held in early September, for the purpose of finalization of the announcement.⁴² The recognition by Saudi Arabia after Sheikh Mujib's assassination was not sudden, but the hasty culmination of a process started during his regime.

(e) *Pakistan*

The recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan, was very important. The main problems between the two countries were:

1. repatriation of the ninety thousand Pakistani prisoners of war (POWs) held in India
2. repatriation of the Bengalee military and civilian personnel held in Pakistan
3. repatriation of stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh⁴³
4. division of assets and liabilities between the two successor states.

Bangladesh's stand on the POWs was that no POW would be released until Pakistan recognised it. India had a role to play in the negotiation for the settlement of these issues because of India's role in the Liberation War of Bangladesh, its role in the organisation of the civil administration in the nascent state and also due to fact that the Pakistani POWs were kept in India. After the normalization of Indo-Pak relations in July 1972 as a result of the Simla Agreement, New Delhi persuaded Bangladesh to deal with the repatriation problem softly. Under India's persuasion Bangladesh reached a consensus on the repatriation issue and signed an agreement on 17

42. Kamal Hossain was the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh at that time.

43. They are mainly Urdu-speaking refugees from the Indian state of Bihar and opted for Pakistan following the independence of Bangladesh.

April 1973 for simultaneous repatriation involving a three-way exchange of prisoners and civilians in all categories involving over half a million people including most of the 90,000 Pakistan and around 260,000 stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh who had opted for Pakistan.⁴⁴

On the basis of the agreement negotiations began between India and Pakistan and they reached an understanding in July 1973. A final agreement known as Delhi Agreement was signed between the two countries on 28 August 1973.⁴⁵ According to the Agreement all POWs except 195 charged by the government of Bangladesh for crime against humanity would be released. Pakistan agreed to release all the Bengalees except 203 Bengalees charged for espionage.⁴⁶ The trial of 195 POWs by Bangladesh and 203 Bengalees by Pakistan was kept in abeyances. The agreement was ambiguous on the issue of repatriation of those Biharis who were not Central Government employees in the united Pakistan. A massive three-way repatriation programme started on 19 September 1973 which continued till April 1974 when the repatriation of the POWs and the Bengalees to their respective destination was completed.

A delegation of the OIC member states under the leadership of the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister visited Dhaka just before the second Summit to be held at Lahore on 22-23 February 1994 to persuade Bangladesh to attend the Summit. Sheikh Mujib categorically insisted for recognition from Pakistan as a precondition to attend the Summit at Lahore. The delegation returned to Pakistan and convinced Bhutto for recognition. Islamabad recognised Bangladesh which paved the way for Sheikh Mujib's visit to Lahore to attend

44. Wright, *op. cit.*, n. 39, p. 185.

45. Bangladesh was consulted by India throughout the negotiations. Direct negotiation between Bangladesh and Pakistan was not possible without recognition. For details see *Times* (London), 1 August 1973.

46. The category of spies among the Bengalees stranded in Pakistan was made by Bhutto during Indo-Pak negotiations for repatriation. It was a bargaining strategy for the release of 195 POWs against whom Bangladesh wanted to bring criminals charges.

the Summit. He attended the Summit and acquiesced the trial issue.⁴⁷ Recognition by Pakistan cleared the way of recognition by every other Islamic country those had withheld in deference to Pakistan. Turkey, Iran, Kuwait and the U.A.E. announced their recognition one day after Pakistan.⁴⁸ Recognition by Pakistan did not result in establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states.

During the tripartite India-Bangladesh-Pakistan talks held in Delhi from 5-9 April 1974 Bangladesh announced its clemency to the 195 alleged war criminals.⁴⁹ Prime Minister Bhutto visited Dhaka on the invitation of Sheikh Mujib on 27-29 June 1974. The visit could not produce any new agreement or improved the bilateral relations in any respect. Bangladesh demanded a just division of assets of undivided Pakistan before establishing diplomatic and commercial relations which Pakistan refused to accept. On the question of repatriation of the 'Biharis' Pakistan reiterated its earlier position.

All other states which have not been studied separately recognised Bangladesh in the first year of its existence. There is nothing remarkable to their recognition process to be studied and analysed separately.⁵⁰

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47. India's reaction on the recognition was cool. In New Delhi's view, right thing had happened in the wrong way. Sheikh Mujib had not consulted even his cabinet colleagues on the issue of attending the Summit. This was the first foreign policy decision taken by Bangladesh without prior consultation with India. Mrs. Gandhi was informed after the decision. For details see, Ahmed, *op. cit.* n. 40, p. 104.
48. Wright, n. 39, p. 241.
49. Bhutto had appealed to Sheikh Mujib to grant clemency since any attempt to hold trial would lead to a military backlash which could overthrow his government in Pakistan.
50. A list of the states and their date of recognition is given in Nurul Momen, *Bangladesh : The First Four Years* (From 16 December 1971 to 15 August 1975) (Dhaka, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, 1975), p. 21.

(f) *United Nations Membership*

For a newly independent state trying to confirm its legitimacy, membership of the United Nations, imply the final seal of its international recognition. The UN recognition was more necessary for Bangladesh because it was the first state in the history of the organisation to emerge after its secession from a member state. For a newly independent Third World country like Bangladesh the membership of the UN is a source of security to its independence and sovereignty. It is also the biggest source of multilateral aid.

Bangladesh applied for the membership on 8 August 1972. Prior to the application for the UN membership, Dhaka had joined the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in May 1972 and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Labour Organization (ILO) by July 1972.⁵¹ By the end of 1973 it had become member of practically all the UN agencies and other international organizations such as the International Development Association (IDA), Colombo Plan and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

When the application for its membership was taken by the Security Council on 10 August 1972, the People's Republic of China objected to it. The Chinese representative unsuccessfully opposed the inclusion of the item in the Council's agenda, but successfully deferred a decision on it for a fortnight and finally, blocked the clearance of the resolution by using its veto power for the first time.⁵² Beijing placed two conditions for withdrawing its objection against Bangladesh's membership. The conditions were :

1. Bangladesh must be cleared of Indian forces
2. Bangladesh must repatriate 90,000 POWs and civilian detainees to Pakistan.

51. *Ibid*, p. 21

52. *Ibid*, p. 22.

The Indo-Pak repatriation agreement of 28 August 1973, Islamabad's recognition of Bangladesh on 22 February 1974 and the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh agreement of 9 April 1974 according to which Dhaka gave clemency to the alleged war criminals among the POWs removed all Chinese objections. The Security Council reconsidered the membership application in May-June 1974. China refrained from voting against the resolution in the Security Council.⁵³ A resolution co-sponsored by 68 states including Pakistan and the USA was unanimously accepted by the General Assembly on 17 September 1974. Bangladesh became 136th fullfledged member of the UN.⁵⁴

Mujib's Aid Diplomacy

After independence the main problems before the government were: reconstruction of a war torn economy, rehabilitation of ten million refugees returning from India and re-organisation of the socio-political and administrative systems.⁵⁵ The total cost of rebuilding the damaged economy estimated by the Bangladesh government was approximately three billion US dollars, about eight times the total annual revenue of East Pakistan in 1969-70.⁵⁶ The country had no foreign exchange at the time of its independence because it had not received its share from Pakistan. Very large amount of foreign exchange was needed to overcome the problems of the nascent state.

The state treasury was not even in a position to pay salaries to the administrative staff all over the country.⁵⁷ Bangladesh was also

53. Resolution 351 (1974), Doc. S/11316.

54. Resolution 3203 (XXIX), Doc. A/L 728.

55. For an elaborate study of the economic loss during the liberation war see, *A Survey of Damages and Repairs*, United Nations Relief Operations (Dhaka, University Press Ltd., 1972).

56. Marcus Franda, *Bangladesh: The First Decade* (New Delhi, South Asian Publication, 1982), p. 8.

57. Sayed Anwar Husain, "Formative Phase of Bangladesh Foreign Policy, 1972-1975 : Dependency Relations?" *Clio* (Dhaka), vol. 5, 1987, p. 4.

in acute need of foreign assistance in the form of food, commodity and medicine to avoid many more human disasters.

In his first press conference as Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujib, appealed to all countries and international humanitarian organizations for assistance.⁵⁸ The government regarded the obtaining of resources for relief operation as a non-political humanitarian issue. It was ready to accept relief aid from any source without any inhibition.

For recovery and reconstruction work in Bangladesh the UN launched its relief operation under the name of United Nations Relief Operation in Dhaka (UNROD) during the Liberation War with the permission of the Pakistan government.⁵⁹ After independence the name was slightly changed from UNROD to UNROB (B stands for Bangladesh). UNROB closed its work officially on 31 December 1973 after fulfilling the task entrusted to it by the Secretary General. The relief operation was the largest that any nation had ever witnessed during the life of the United Nations. Within three years the nation had received more aid than it had received in its twenty five years of existence as East Pakistan.⁶⁰ Along with the UN at least ninety countries were doing relief work with their personnel; and material in Bangladesh.⁶¹

In the first year of the nascent state, India provided massive aid to Bangladesh. It was a crucial period for Bangladesh, since it was not recognised by most of the states. Aid from New Delhi was a great sacrifice on the part of India which was itself an aid dependent country. When government and administration in Bangladesh stabilised, most of the countries of the world recognised it and

58. *Times of India* (New Delhi), 15 January 1972.

59. The area, hitherto East Pakistan, was not recognised by most of the states, or the UN as Bangladesh. To call it Bangladesh would be objectionable to Pakistan and to call it East Pakistan would be offending to the struggling nation.

60. Besty Hartman and Janes Boyce, *A Quiet Violence : View from a Bangladesh Village* (Delhi, Oxford, 1983), p.268.

61. Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh : Legacy of Blood* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), p. 20.

Dhaka joined the IMF and the World Bank, India decreased its aid which was substituted by the Western countries and the international organisations. In the first six months from December 1971 to June 1972, 36 per cent of the total aid committed and 67 per cent of the aid disbursed came from India.⁶²

The material and technical aid from the Soviet Union and its eastern allies also played important role in the initial years. The Soviet navy cleared the Chittagong port from mines and sunk vessels to make it navigable. All out assistance from friendly states and the world community salvaged the country from its critical phase and provided time to properly establish its government.

The real problem of the regime started in mid-1973 when the first Five Year Plan (1973-78) became ready. The plan envisaged a socialist model for the development of the economy.⁶³ The principal aid donors from the West and the international institutions viz., the IMF and the World Bank prefer capitalist path of development from the recipient states. Through the conditions imposed on the aid, they control the policy making bodies of the recipient governments. The question before the regime was whether to accept all sorts of aid and modify the government policy according to the donors' suggestions or adopt a self-reliant strategy of development without surrendering its sovereignty in policy making to the donors. The problem was accentuated when the sympathy aid under the auspices of the United Nations began to dry in 1973.

The World Bank wanted to play vital role in the reconstruction and development programme of Bangladesh. The Bank has a good image in Bangladesh at its emergence because the mission of the Bank in Dhaka had sent an elaborate report to the Aid Pakistan Consortium meeting about the atrocities of the Pakistani army on the

62. Husain, *op. cit.*, n. 57, p. 10.

63. There was a strong and vocal socialist group in the government led by the Finance Minister Tajuddin Ahmed.

masses. The Consortium had decided to stop any aid to Pakistan in 1971. In early February 1972 the Bank's President Robert D. McNamara visited Bangladesh in course of his visit to the subcontinent to discuss its contribution for rehabilitating the war ravaged economy. The visit could not achieve much due to the suspicion of the government about the role of the Bank in the economy and its impact on the sovereignty of the country.⁶⁴

Bangladesh wanted to avail the aid facility of the Bank but it was against any role for the Bank in the economic policy of the country. To channelize and coordinate the donors' contributions, the Bank wanted to create Bangladesh Aid Consortium under its Chairmanship on the traditional pattern in Paris. Bangladesh wanted that the aid should be given on the basis of bilateral negotiations. Another legal problem between the Bank and the government was the debt liability of Pakistan incurred in East Pakistan. Dhaka was not ready to accept the liability without recognition by Pakistan. It wanted to settle the issue of the division of liabilities and assets with Pakistan through bilateral negotiations on the basis of sovereign equality.⁶⁵ The World Bank was insisting for the acceptance of the liability before the clearance of any further assistance. The Bangladesh government hosted and chaired a meeting of the donor countries and the World Bank in March 1973 in Dhaka. This unconventional meeting showed the government's zeal to get the aid on its own conditions.

Managing the external economy of Bangladesh in the first few years was a continuous nightmare for the government. The balance of payment position was highly negative. The oil boom and the resultant inflation in the international economy was crushing for

64. The suspicion was based on the role of the Bank on the economic policy of the Pakistan government.

65. Rehman Sobhan, *The Crisis of External Dependencies : The Political Economy of Foreign Aid to Bangladesh* (Dhaka, University Press Ltd., 1982), p. 174.

Bangladesh. All pervasive corruption, dwindling enthusiasm of the masses and increasing opposition to the regime weakened the position of the government *vis-a-vis* the World Bank. The socialist countries could not provide the massive aid needed by Bangladesh. The charisma of Sheikh Mujib was also eroding. Sheikh Mujib was compelled by the situation to progressively dilute his economic nationalism and to accommodate the World Bank demands. In March 1973 Kamal Hossain, a known pro-West barrister was appointed Foreign Minister in place of the socialist Abdus Samad Azad.

Bangladesh accepted the liability of twenty on-going projects in mid-1973. Bangladesh agreed to accept the liability for projects visibly located in Bangladesh without the settlement of the debt issue with Pakistan after the recognition by Islamabad. The heavy flood of 1974 monsoon and the resultant worst famine forced the government to meekly accept other demands of the World Bank.

The Government requested the World Bank in July 1974 to constitute a consortium of aid donors on the conventional line for Bangladesh.⁶⁶ At its request an emergency meeting of the consortium was held in August 1974 in Washington. The government took many decisions to transform the economic policy according to the wishes of the donors.⁶⁷ The leader of the socialist faction in the government, Tajuddin Ahmed, the finance minister was made to resign on 26 October 1974. Incidentally Kissinger visited Bangladesh during his South Asian tour after the resignation. The first regular meeting of the Bangladesh Aid Consortium was held in Paris after the

66. Just Faaland, ed., *Aid and Influence : The Case of Bangladesh* (London, Macmillan, 1981), p.118.

67. Taka was devalued by fifty per cent, decisions were taken to promote private sector and foreign investment and the de-nationalisation and dis-investment of state owned industries began. For details see, *op. cit.*, Husain, n. 57, pp. 15-16.

resignation of Tajuddin Ahmed in October 1974⁶⁸ in which the new Finance Minister represented the country.

The pattern of relationship which was established during Mujib period in 1974 with the international donors led by the Bank-Fund duo has progressively increased in its scope and intensity during the post-Mujib regimes. It has not changed even during the regime of Sheikh Hasina.

The underpinnings of the political and economic diplomacy of Bangladesh were led by Sheikh Mujib during the formative phase of the nation-state. The foreign policy of the country has developed and changed according to the domestic and external needs of the time on this basis.

68 Tajuddin Ahmed, as the Provisional government's Prime Minister has prepared the blue print of a socialist Bangladesh in the last phase of the independence war. As Finance Minister he was working on the same line. His removal was a positive signal to the aid donors.