

Book Review

***From Autonomy Movement to Independence: The United States, Pakistan and Emergence of Bangladesh* by Mahmudul Huque, New Delhi: Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 2014, pp. XII + 332, Price Rs. 495.00**

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People usually think that the birth of Bangladesh is merely as the consequence of a short term war of nine months' duration. No, this is an injudicious consideration. The journey of the emergence of this country is not that brief. From autonomy movement, evolved shortly after the creation of Pakistan, to the bloody war of 1971 -- the canvas behind the creation of Bangladesh is very wide. Alongside the decades-long struggle for Bengali autonomy, American attitudes, especially its prominent policy of "tilt" towards Pakistan and other issues are the subject matter of the work under review. In the author's words: "This is a study of American attitude and policy toward the Bengali quest for self-determination" (Introduction, p. 1). Dr. Mahmudul Huque, a late Professor of History in the University of Chittagong, has dedicated this scholarly work to "the memory of uncountable men, women and children who lost their lives for Bangladesh".

There are eight chapters in the book besides an extensive bibliography and ten appedices. These chapters are arranged as follows: 1) Introduction; 2) US-Pakistan Relations: the Formative Phase; 3) Movement for East Bengal's Autonomy: American Attitudes; 4) The Ayub Regime: Resurgent Bengali Nationalism and the United States; 5) The Yahya Regime and the Endgame in Pakistan: American Perceptions; 6) Washington's Approach to the Bangladesh Liberation War: The Early Phase; 7) Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and the Emergence of Bangladesh; 8) Conclusions.

To write an objective and critical account of the subject under review, Dr. Huque has utilized the source materials he collected from America and Bangladesh. He collected on-line and in print meterials from the USA. In addition, Professor Mahmudul Huque consulted diplomatic papers

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compiled in the State Department's *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series which were unavailable before. He gleaned all these first hand sources during his tenure as a Senior Fulbright Fellow at Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2010. Moreover, he collected and utilized abundant research documents published in Bangladesh. They are mainly books, articles, memoirs, autobiographies and other writings in both English and Bangla. Of these *Bangladesher Swadhinata Juddher Dalilpatra* (Documents of the Independence War of Bangladesh, 16 volumes) edited by Hasan Hafizur Rahman has been considered by the author as one of the most valuable records.

At the beginning, the writer draws a clear outline of the work. Independent Bangladesh is the culmination of the long-standing nationalist movement of the Bengalis. The people of East Bengal started their struggle for provincial autonomy against the central ruling elite of Pakistan in the early 1950s. The dissatisfaction of the Bengalis, deriving primarily from various forms of deprivation, transformed the autonomy movement into the liberation war through the most eventful decade of the 1960s. In addition, the US approach to the Bengali struggle for self-determination in united Pakistan is an important part of the introductory chapter. American support for Pakistan, the "tilt" policy in particular, to suppress the independence struggle of East Bengal gets significant attention in this chapter. In this regard, most of the writers highlight that America showed its inclination towards Pakistan only during the liberation war of Bangladesh. But Professor Huque explains the historical background of how Bengali demands for provincial autonomy coincided with the formative phase of US-Pakistan relations in the early 1950s. In fact, Pakistan and America solidified their relation by signing the US-Pakistan Mutual Defence Assistance Pact in 1954. Moreover, Pakistani rulers' portrayal of the East Pakistan autonomy movement as communist-backed magnified American suspicion towards the Bengali sentiment. To stop the spread of communism in Asia, America desired Pakistan to remain united. In fact, this changing mindset of US policymakers was part of a tactic related to their cold war policy in South Asia which has been described clearly by Dr. Huque. In the introduction, the author also explains American endeavour to develop its relationship with India. Unfortunately, the US government failed to materialize it due to India's non-alignment policy.

Chapters II deals with the evolving relations of America with the Middle East and South-Southeast Asian countries including Pakistan. The US

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wanted to extend its military support for Pakistan besides keeping a normal relationship with India. Actually, the prime concern of America was to keep Pakistan away from communism. However, leaders of East Bengal observed US attitude towards Pakistan with anxiety and discontent.

Chapter III discusses the impact of Bengali language movement in 1952 and the United Front victory in the election of 1954 on Pak-US relations. At one stage, America truly started apprehending the possibility of emerging communism in East Bengal. In this chapter, the author also investigates the reasons behind the emergence of autonomy movement in East Bengal. Pakistan reasoned that to consolidate its position against India and communism it required military and financial assistance from the US. And Mahmudul Huque explains this issue very aptly. He also reviews the causes of Suhrawardy's pro-American stance and Bhasani's anti-American attitude. Besides, the motive of the central government for delaying the framing of the constitution has been explained by the author properly. The injustice of Pakistani rulers against East Bengal in dismissing the United Front government and the declaration of Martial law in 1958 intensified the nationalist movement in East Bengal. Paying no importance to Bengali struggle for democracy and provincial autonomy, Pakistan negotiated with the US and received considerable help from it. How this situation escalated the crisis in East Bengal is the central issue of this chapter.

Chapter IV is devoted to the narratives of economic disparity between the two wings of Pakistan under the Ayub regime. In this chapter the author discusses in detail the rise of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the six-point movement. Surprisingly, at one stage, Pakistan became suspicious of US-East Bengal relations. They thought that the US inspired Sheikh Mujib to declare the six-point programme. However, in spite of showing a positive attitude towards America, Sheikh Mujib, at the end, did not get any support from the US during the Bangladesh liberation war. Moreover, American concern regarding the Sino-Pak relationship has also been discussed by the author.

Chapter V analyses Sheikh Mujib's continued endeavour to frame a new constitution for Pakistan on the basis of six points during the Yahya government. At this critical juncture, to keep Pakistan united, America tried to get the support of Mujib and Bhutto. On the contrary, the Pakistani ruling class started believing that the American Central Intelligence Agency was encouraging separatist sentiment in East Pakistan; though the Nixon administration denied their doubt outright and offered full support to

Pakistan. The US government paid no heed to the demands of maximum autonomy for East Bengal in accordance to the six-point programme. Actually, both America and Pakistan were very serious to bridge its gap which came into view in the last days of Ayub rule. Finally, it became as clear as daylight that the Nixon government was providing their active support to Pakistan.

Chapter VI narrates the attitude of Washington towards the liberation war of Bangladesh. At the beginning, Nixon and Kissinger did not want to interfere in this war. But, at certain stage, the US government changed its mind. It started defending itself for helping Pakistan by highlighting the American geo-political interest in South Asia. At the same time, in the name of keeping Pakistan undivided, Yahya Khan began to waste time by conducting frequent dialogue with Sheikh Mujib. In this chapter the Yahya-Bhutto drama has been unfolded by the author meticulously.

Chapter VII illustrates the geo-political interests of Nixon-Kissinger government in South Asia and the emergence of Bangladesh. At this phase anti-Chinese sentiment of India brought America closed to China. However, the crackdown by the West Pakistani troops started at midnight of March 25-26, 1971. After Bangabandhu's arrest at midnight of the same day, the Zahirul Qayyum group, very close to Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad, started regular conversation with American diplomats in Kolkata. The sole motive of this anti-Tajuddin group was to negotiate an armistice with Pakistan through the US government so that they could stop the independence of Bangladesh. The author offers very informative description of this conspiracy. Dr. Huque writes that after the conclusion of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty on 9 August 1971, America's celebrated policy of "Tilt" towards Pakistan got exposed more nakedly. Nixon decided to stand absolutely unswerving behind Pakistan, turning a blind eye to the indiscriminate killing of the innocent and unarmed Bengalis by the well-equipped West Pakistani Military force. This might be considered insanity and moral bankruptcy of the Nixon-Kissinger duo. In this chapter, the author also critically explains the causes of Indian support and its active involvement in supporting the Bangladesh liberation war.

In December, when the liberation war reached its zenith, the Nixon-Kissinger decision to dispatch a task force of the 7th fleet into the Bay of Bengal is still a mystery. Dr. Huque has demystified this incident through proper arguments and corroborative evidences. The real objective of deploying the task force, full of nuclear power, was to intimidate India-

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Bangladesh forces and invigorate the tottering morale of the Pakistanis so that India would not attack West Pakistan. But India had no plan to attack West Pakistan at that hour. The writer argues that it would have been more logical for America to send their taskforce to the Arabian sea instead of the Bay of Bengal if it wanted to save Pakistan from Indian attack at all. However, all the American attempts for keeping Pakistan united ended in vain. The war in Bangladesh came to an end on December 16 with the surrender of the Pakistani Forces. Thus, Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in the world atlas.

Professor Huque draws the conclusion by piecing together the substance of all chapters along with some fresh arguments about the deep-rooted causes of American support for Pakistan. He mentions that Pakistani rulers were always describing the autonomy movement as an internal affair of the state aggravated by India's collaboration with the Bengali separatists. But the movement in Bengal was absolutely the impact of nationalist pursuits of the middle class. It did not originate from interest in communism. The Bengali liberty-loving leaders believed that to thwart a democratic movement, Pakistan government carried out a dreadful repression against them with American military and financial aid. In addition, according to the leaders of East Bengal, American aid was altogether responsible for militarizing the Pakistani politics.

The author dissects the US, specially, Nixon-Kissinger government's attitude towards Pakistan and the East Bengal autonomy movement assiduously. According to the US government, East Bengal autonomy movement was against their cold war ideology and geo-political interests in South Asia. The anti-American sentiment of the left-leaning leaders of Bengal including Bhashani also provoked America for tilting towards Pakistan. Furthermore, Indo-Pak antagonism incited the United States of America to support Pakistan. In addition, the psychology of Nixon and Kissinger had an impact upon their policy towards South Asia. Nixon was, so to say, an anti-communist all through; and both of them were always down-to-earth in making decisions. For this, ignoring the genocide in East Bengal, they only thought how to stop the spread of communism in Asia. Their impolitic decision and action was severely criticised by the US Congress, academic community and mass media. Many Americans expressed their deep shock at the Nixon government's support of a genocidal military regime. Even, at one stage, the State Department started non-cooperation with the government. From April to December 1971, US Senetors and Congressmen issued 210 statements against the insane

decision of the Nixon administration. But turning a deaf ear to all these criticisms, they continued sending military equipment to Pakistan.

The author concludes his book observing that American policymakers generally failed to discern the real nature of Bengali demand for self determination because they were over-concerned with their ideological and strategic goals in the cold war. In fact, following the strategic goals, they showed a marked tendency to suspect any democratic and nationalist movements in the Third World as seriously pernicious to American interests. To remain too loyal to the so called 'ideological and strategic goals', they ultimately displayed their outrageous and inhuman attitude by supporting Pakistan; and with that help Pakistani barbarous military junta soaked the land with the blood of millions of innocent Bengalis.

One of the appendices, number seven, is the English translation of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic 7 March speech which earned him a very special place in history. Professor Huque makes a commendable attempt at translating this great speech. It is really tough to express the poetry and spirit of that fiery utterance properly.

The language of the book is simple, lucid and resonant. Diplomats and researchers of the international relations, political science and history disciplines would treasure the book as a valuable contribution. Himself being a freedom fighter, Mahmudul Huque draws an objective account of a long-drawn struggle of Bengali people for independence. He also provides a penetrating account of how the apostle of democracy, America, opposed a democratic movement. Any inquisitive mind, searching the true history of the emergence of Bangladesh, will surely appreciate the value of the book. Moreover, from the book, readers might get a transparent picture of the making of a great leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.