Chapter - IV

Internationalization of the Liberation Movement
Chapter - IV

Sucheta Ghosh argues that in the Bangladesh crisis of 1971, the Government of Pakistan under Yahya Khan and the Government of India under Mrs. Indira Gandhi adopted diametrically opposite stand. For the Pakistan Government it was a secessionist movement directly instigated by India. Islamabad emphasized that all the trouble in East Pakistan was the conspiracy that India designed earlier to dismember Pakistan; otherwise, the situation in East Pakistan is quite normal. The Pak army was engaged only in a patriotic action against Indian infiltrators and several groups of 'miscreants'. On the other hand, New Delhi claimed that the crisis resulted from the massive attack by the West Pakistan armed forces on the democratic urges and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. The press and other media of India termed the atrocities committed by the Pak army in East Pakistan as 'genocide'. The Indian Prime Minister claimed in the Lok Sabha on 26 May, 1971, that the struggle between the two parts of Pakistan 'is certainly not our making but of the rulers of Pakistan.'

Sucheta Ghosh continues to say that the Pak Government could not conceal the real fact of atrocities in spite of the imposition of an iron curtain around East Pakistan. The Pakistani version that the conditions in her eastern wing were normal and that all reports of governmental atrocities over the Bengalis were nothing but false Indian propaganda, sporadic reports of atrocities by the Pakistani army leaked out through diplomats, missionaries and the refugees to the outside world and they were given wide publicity in the world press.

The role of Tripura in internationalizing the Bangladesh liberation movement is quite remarkable. From the above discussion, it is clear that the refugees including the most of the leaders of the Bangladesh Movement who took shelter in the different bordering states of India including Tripura were the sources of information about the atrocities committed by the Pak military Junta in its Eastern Wing; moreover, some of the refugees & leaders did not sit idle, on the contrary, they were very much active in drawing the attention of the international community to the inhuman genocide committed by the Pak Junta under Yahya's control. On the other hand, the media, intelligentsia & political leaders of Tripura seeing the plight of the evacuees who were mostly the brethren of the residents of Tripura, also sided with the refugees and their leaders to attract the attention of the international community. Dr. Abul Azad in his book *Muktiyuddhey Tripurar Sambad Patrer Bhumika* (The Role of Newspapers of Tripura in the Liberation Movement) sum-
marizes the role of the newspapers of Tripura in six heads of which fifth runs thus: *Drawing the attention of the World community about the Liberation Movement.* The *Dainik Sambad* and the *Dainik Jagaran* of 29 March and 19 August, 1971, respectively published news which may be cited as examples:

**The Telegram of the Residents of Tripura to U Thant seeking Interference : Agartala, 28 March (1971) :** In a Telegram to Mr. U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization, the people of Tripura had drawn his attention to the recent developments in East Bengal. He was fervently requested to take necessary arrangement for stopping the genocide in East Bengal committed by the Pak army using tanks and fighting Jets.

**Telegram to U Thant: Demand for saving the life of Mujib****under this Headline, the following news was published in the *Dainik Jagaran:* Sri Sunil Dey, on behalf of the Bangladesh Swadinata Sahayak Committee (Sonamura), sent a Telegram to Mr. U Thant, the Secretary General, UNO, on 14 August. The Telegram demanded the interference of the Secretary General to save the life of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was detained in the Pak Jail averting the fake judgment attributed by the Pak Government.

"STOP This GENOCIDE" resolution sent to the UNO from Agartala

On 2 April, 1971, on the 8th day of genocide committed by the Yahya Junta in the East Wing of Pakistan, a meeting of 35 prominent leaders of Awami League including MNA (Member of National Assembly) and MPA (Member of Provincial Assembly) who took shelter in Tripura as refugees met at a Govt. quarters at Melarmath, Agartala, owned by Ms. Sunanda Bhattacharjee, a nurse by profession and wife of Anil Bhattacharjee, a veteran journalist to find a way out on the barbaric attacks on the Bengalis of East Pakistan and influx of refugees pouring into Indian states like Tripura, West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya. The meeting was presided over by the veteran leader of Awami League, Mr. Jahur Ahmed Chowdhury. A unanimous resolution to stop the Genocide in eastern Bengal was passed to send it to the Secretary General, UNO, for compelling the Yahya regime to stop the massacre in East Pakistan forthwith. That was the first instance of Appeal to the UNO from the devastated people of Bangladesh sheltered at Agartala against the inhuman & barbaric activities of the Yahya Junta. This historic information is given by Anil Bhattacharjee and confirmed by Haroon Habib, also a famous journalist from Bangladesh. Abdullan-al-Harun, a leader from Chittagong took the leading part in drafting this joint press release. Mr. Subhash Chakraborty, a journalist from the *Times of India,* and Mr. Amar Raha, the journalist
attached to Pannalal Dasgupta's "The Compus", helped in drafting the resolution while they were at Agartala at that time to cover the Muktiyuddha of Bangladesh. That draft resolution with headline "STOP THIS GENOCIDE" was sent to the UNO for its immediate intervention in the grave situation of East Pakistan. The special correspondent of the Press Trust of India, Mr. Madhu Guha Roy was at Agartala to cover the Muktiyuddha and he was given the News for wide circulation. Mr. Guha Roy immediately sent this prominent news to his Head Office at Hare Street, Calcutta, and that was a scup news and got a wide publicity throughout India and the World.6

The Legislative Assembly of Tripura: Request made to the Govt. of India to draw the attention of the UNO

The politicians of Tripura were also very much worried about the news of unprecedented atrocities committed by the Pak Military Junta on the unarmed Bengalis in East Pakistan following the Operation Searchlight on 25 March, 1971. This criminal act led to the influx of refugees on a torrential scale to the neighbouring states of India which adversely affected Tripura, West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya and, above all, India. The Legislative Assembly of Tripura was in its important Budget Session during March, 1971, which coincided the genocide in the Eastern Bengal. Whosoever goes through the Proceedings of the session of the Assembly will find that both the Members of the Treasury Bench and of the Opposition showed unprecedented solidarity in supporting the cause of the freedom movement of Bangladesh. While the members of the Assembly grudgingly condemned the act of genocide in East Bengal, they enthusiastically showed their sympathy for and solidarity with the Bengali nationalists; most of the Members including the Chief Minister, Sri Sachindralal Singh, earnestly requested the Government of India under Mrs. Gandhi to stand forth in favour of the Bangladesh movement and they also requested the Govt. of India to take the issue to the international forum like United Nations Organization (the UNO) for its immediate intervention for solving the crisis in East Bengal and to compel the Yahya Govt. to stop the act of atrocities on the innocent people of East Bengal who fought for their legitimate right to establish democracy in the country for which General Election was held in Pakistan in the last part of December, 1970 & in the first part of January, 1971 and the Awami League under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman acquired overwhelming majority to form the Government in Pakistan. But the League was denied its legitimate right and, instead, the Pak Junta attempted to nip the movement in the bud by using brutal force. The Members of the Legislative Assembly became impatient but they were bound by the law; they could not go to the UNO directly; so, the Members urged to the Government of India to the effect that India being a member of the UNO, should not remain idle. The Government had to pursue the matter seriously in the UNO so that the UNO could compel
the Yahya Govt. to stop the massacre and establish the right of the Bengali people and thus save the democratic value.\textsuperscript{7}

Dr. Mahadev Chakraborti in a write-up testifies that during the period of the Muktiyuddha of Bangladesh in 1971, Tripura was not a full-fledged State; however, it had a Legislative Assembly of 30 members. That Assembly irrespective of its party politics tried to draw the attention of the UNO through the Govt. of India for helping the refugees of Bangladesh and to solve the Bangladesh crisis.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Request Letters from the fear-stricken Evacuees sent to the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, Geneva, from Agartala.}

Many letters were written by the fear-stricken evacuees who left their country and came over to India to save their lives. The main intention of the letters was to draw the attention of the Human Rights Commission, Geneva, and letters were posted from Agartala. As many as 12 such letters were published in the Documents of the History of the Liberation Movement in Bangladesh. Some of the letters are reproduced here as examples.\textsuperscript{9}

"To,
The Chairman,
Human Rights Commission,
Geneva.

Sir,

I beg to relate below some of the facts of your information and action.

I was a permanent resident of Daudkandi in the District of Comilla within Bangladesh formerly known as East Pakistan. But since by no means I could save myself there I escaped to Agartala in India and I was writing this letter from here.

What is strange is that young men are caught, their hands and feet are tied and entire quantity of blood is drawn out of their bodies and the dead bodies are consigned into water.

Dt. 10. 6. 71

Yours Faithfully,

Sd/

118
Choudhury A. B. M. Kaiser Ahmed  
Daudkandi, Comilla,  
Bangladesh.

N.B. *I post this letter after escaping to Agartala in India.*” (italics are used by the Scholar).

"To,  
The Chairman,  
Human Rights Commission,  
Geneva.

Sir,

………………………………………………………………………………………………

After the bombing of Narsingdi on 28th March, 1971, from Air, I crossed into Agartala in India and have been residing in the care of Gouranga Chandra Saha of Nazirpukur, Agartala.

Yours faithfully,  
Swapan Kr. Saha,  
A student of Narasingdi College,  
Dacca" 

"To,  
The Chairman,  
Human Rights Commission,  
Geneva.

Sir,

I am a permanent resident of village Ulwon, P.S. Tej Gaon, Dacca in Bangladesh formerly known as East Pakistan.

On 11-5-71 three armed soldiers of Pak Army entered into the house of my neighbour Mr. Kader and two of them forcibly dragged away his young daughter. On hearing the cries of his daughter Mr. Kader rushed to her rescue and grappling with the other armed soldier. But he was
also forcibly taken out and the Pak troops assaulted him mercilessly and wounded him by bayonet. They assaulted the daughter and left her.

One Peace Committee Member Mr. Golam Azam in vain complained to the Military Authority.

One Awal ….. the Union Committee Chairman invited the Pak troops to village Boira PS. Tejgaon alleging presence of Mukti Fouz there. The Pak Troops came and killed about 500 to 600 persons-all Namasudras (S/C =Scheduled Cast) and the other collaborators of the Pak troops caught hold of passerby, took away all their money and assaulted them.

These are for your information and action.

Yours faithfully,
Sd/
Supal Chandra Das
10/6/71

N.B. To save my life, I escaped to Agartala in India and I am posting this letter.”

The other refugees who had written almost the same kind of letters to the Human Rights Commission, Geneva, are:

A.F.M. Fazlul Haque
Dt. 11-6-71
Darindahat, Bancharampur, Comilla.

He mentioned "At present I am residing with Professor Khurshid Alam, MNA (Member of National Assembly) at Agartala"

Mian Tajul Islam,
Dt. 17.6.71
Vill: Ichakhali,
P.O. Baganbari
Dist: Comilla.
He mentioned: *This letter was posted from Tripura, India.*

Dipali Rani Sarkar,  
w/o, Amal Kanti Sarkar,  
She stated: Two days back I crossed into Tripura

The influx of refugees from East Pakistan to India after the *Operation Searchlight* on 25 March, 1971, on a torrential scale added a new dimension to the problem, opines Sucheta Ghosh. They were not the refugees coming out of religious persecution but they were political refugees coming out of the policy pursued by the Pakistan Central Government. The *Times* published a report on this touchy issue in the first week of April: "Thousands of refugees, both Hindus and Muslims, have begun to cross the frontier. The refugee camps have already been set up in Assam and other parts of India." The *Statesman* (23 May, 1971) also published report sent by Manojit Mitra, a staff reporter, under the caption: *Flight from Terror & Butchery-*

"Between Tripura's border Town, Sabroom and Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh - one morning while in the last week of April, I crossed the river by a country boat, I could see thousands of Bangladesh refugees behind me at Sabroom, thousands more waiting on the other bank of the river to cross over and countless other fording the river at swallow points, their meagre belongings on their shoulders.

Sabroom was the most crowded border of Tripura in the 3rd & 4th weeks of April when nearly 200,000 refugees arrived within a few days. In other border area, refugees had started coming earlier. Tens of thousands had arrived from Sylhet, Comilla and Noakhali districts of Bangladesh through Sonamura, Kamalasagar, Debipur, and other boarders. Everywhere, I found refugees in roadside Camps, Schools & Colleges, Private houses, fields and streets.

"The worst scene I saw, however, at Sabroom. Thousands of people were living in the streets and the premises of the Thana (Police Station). .........................

"Camps were being set up at different areas, but the authorities found it difficult to cope with the rush till the first week of May.
"A film actress, who had signed for more than 3 dozen films walked through rain and mud for 48 hours and came to Agartala."12

The Government of India quickly reacted to the developments in its neighbouring country. Mrs. Gandhi, the Prime Minister, moved a resolution in the Parliament on 31 March, 1971, expressing deep anguish and grave concern at the recent development in East Bengal. The Prime Minister confirmed Govt. of India's support towards the liberation movement of Bangladesh asserting:13

"This House expresses its profound sympathy for and solidarity with the people of East Bengal in their struggle for democratic way of life."

On 24 May (1971) she reiterated her feeling more strongly in the Lok Sabha on the situation in Bangladesh:

"Mr. Speaker Sir,

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

On the 15th and 16th May I visited Assam, Tripura and West Bengal to share the sufferings of the refugees, to convey to them the sympathy and support of this House and of the people of India and to see for myself the arrangements which are being made for their care. ……. The district authorities are under severe strain. Before they can cope with those who are already here, 60,000 more are coming across every day.

"So massive a migration, in so a short time, is unprecedented in recorded history. ….. Many refugees are wounded and need urgent medical attention…… This House has considered many national and international issues of vital importance to our country. But none of them has touched us so deeply as the events in Bangla Desh."

She continues her statement: "The problems which confront us are not confined to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and West Bengal. They are national problems, indeed the basic problem is an international one. (Italic is used by the researcher)

"We have sought to awaken the conscience of the world through our representatives abroad and the representatives of foreign governments in India. We have appealed to the United Nations
"We welcome Secretary-General, U Thant's public appeal. We are glad that a number of States have either responded or are in the process of doing so. . . . ""14

We can have a quick look on the influx of refugees in the border states of Tripura, West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya from the Statement of the Labour and Rehabilitation Minister placed before the Rajya Sabha on the same day i.e. on 24 May:

(i) Week ending 17-4-1971 1,19,566 persons
(ii) Week ending 24-4-1971 5,36,308 persons
(iii) Week ending 1-5-1971 12,51,544 persons
(iv) Week ending 7-5-1971 15,72,220 persons
(v) Week ending 14-5-1971 26,69,226 persons
(vi) Week ending 21-5-1971 34,35,243 persons

The Minister continues to inform the Rajya Sabha: "Up to 21-5-1971, 24.35 lakh persons have entered India as refugees from East Bengal. Approximately, 50 per cent of them are staying in relief camps and the rest outside the camps with their friends and relations. . . . The extremely heavy expenditure involved in providing relief assistance to these refugees, whose number is mounting every day, is causing a severe financial strain on India's economy. The Government of India, have, therefore, urged the United Nations and Foreign Governments, through Indian Missions abroad, to share the responsibility in tackling this vast refugee problem which should be the concern of the International Community."15

It is also known from the above statement that the Government of India had prepared an estimate of about Rs. 132 crores which would have to be spent on giving necessary relief assistance to these refugees for a period of 6 month. The Minister informed the House that the above estimates had been conveyed to the UNHCR Delegation which recently visited India and made an on-the-spot study of the situation by going round the refugee camps in the border States of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. On the basis of their study and these estimates, the United Nations
had already issued an appeal to all member countries for contributing liberally for relief operations among the refugees from East Bengal.16

The above statements of the Prime Minister of India and the Labour and Rehabilitation Minister of India in the Indian Parliament reveal the policy of the Government of India towards the Liberation Movement of Bangladesh. On one hand, the Government of India tried to manage the acute problems of the refugees that entered India on a torrential scale, and on the other hand, it tried to activate the attention of the international community to that humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the Govt. of India urged to the world community to solve the Bangladesh problem politically and not by using military force while the Pak Govt. tried to resist all Indian move claiming the problem as their internal one.17

The Govt. of India was very much worried about the influx of refugees in Indian States and sent its representatives to the affected States to guide the local administration and to look after the refugee management and other associate problems. Sri Robin Sengupta informs that the Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi, sent Mr. Triguna Sen, the then Education Minister of the Govt. of India, to Tripura as a special envoy to guide the Govt. of Tripura and to investigate the actual nature of the Muktiyuddha of "Joy Bangla." Mr. Sen had been hailed from Srihatta (under Sylhet district, once the zamindari area of the Maharajas of Tripura) and he was elected to the Rajya Sabha from Tripura. So, Mr. Sen was very much active in this regard and he examined the happenings of East Pakistan very carefully and submitted his report to the Central Govt. in favour of the movement.18 Captain B.R. Chatterjee who played a prominent role in shaping the Liberation Army in Tripura Sector corroborated the above view of Sri Sengupta. He said that in the first week of May, he was taken to the Official Residence of the then Chief Minister of Tripura, Sri Sachindralal Singh, at about 9.00 pm to meet Mr. Triguna Sen, the Education Minister and after preliminary discussion about the troubles that began in East Pakistan Mr. Chatterjee was permitted to go ahead with a scheme of organizing guerrilla force to fight the Pak Junta in the light of his experience of his fighting against the guerrillas of Pakistan in the Kashmir Front in 1964. Mr. Chatterjee also informed that while the first batch of the guerrillas / Muktiyoddhas was being despatched to Bangladesh (officially it was then East Pakistan), Mr. Triguna Sen along with some high officials both from Tripura and East Pakistan remained present for boosting them up.19

Salam Azad in his book Role of Indian People in Liberation War of Bangladesh stated that after September the all the Central Ministers started visiting Tripura frequently to collect actual information on the refugees and about the developments in East Pakistan. (His statement that all
the Central Ministers started visiting Tripura seems to be exaggerated; record shows that some Central Ministers, MPs and others visited Tripura frequently. They spoke to administrative officers and journalists to assess the real situation. Mr. Triguna Sen brought huge amount of relief material for the refugees. Mr. Azad informs that Mrs. Gandhi entrusted special responsibility to Mr. Sen and he was specially permitted to speak Mrs. Gandhi on any occasion on the Bangladesh crisis. He was also allowed to accompany Mrs. Gandhi on 15 & 16 May, 1971, while she was on tour to Tripura Assam and West Bengal to see the condition of the refugees sheltered in those States.20

Another important Central Minister was Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray who was hailed from West Bengal and who was also entrusted by Mrs. Gandhi with many tasks related to the crisis in Bangladesh. Salam Azad informs that in the first week of April, 1971, the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the Central Minister, Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray, decided in a meeting that Mr. Ray would be visiting Tripura to assure the refugees coming from Bangladesh that the Govt. of India would support the liberation movement at any cost. He visited Tripura repeatedly to collect first hand information and guide the Government of Tripura on the said matter. Mr. Ray recalls a memorable moment: "I along with the Brigadier went to remote area around the border to deliver a speech amongst the stranded people of Bangladesh who took refuge in Tripura. But before my speech they sang a number from Rabindranath Tagore's 'Amar Sonar Bangla … ' Ironically, everyone on the audience and stage was full of tears. I still cherish the gathering in my nostalgic memory."21

The other Central Ministers and distinguished personalities who visited Tripura on different occasions to have first hand information on the refugee problems and the developments in East Bengal, mention may be made of the Minister of State Ms. Nandini Satpati (date of visit: 13 May, 1971), Mr. Tridip Choudhury, the Member of Parliament (31 July), Guljarilal Nanda, Vice President of Central Citizen Society, (28 Oct.), Mr. Moinul Haque Choudhury, Central Minister, (1 May), Prof. A. K. Kisku, Deputy Minister for Health, (10 June), Babu Jagjiban Ram, the Defence Minister, (25 June; he addressed a gathering at Agartala), Joy Prakash Narayan, the famous Social Activists (17 Oct.), Swami Hiranmayanandaji, Ramkrishna Mission, Bombay, Swami Gahanandaji, Ramkrishna Mission, Calcutta, Swami Satyanandaji, Ramkrishna Mission, Karimganj, Assam, (22 October, 1971; the leaders of the said Ramkrishna Mission visited the refugee Camps at the remote places at Sabroom and Belonia).22

Mrs. Gandhi, the Prime Minister, herself visited Tripura, West Bengal and Assam on 15 and
16 May accompanied by Ms. Padmaja Naidu, Sri Siddhartha Shankar Ray, Sri Triguna Sen, the Central Ministers and the very high officials of the Govt. of India and that of Tripura. She visited some refugee camps at the northern outskirts of Agartala and the Govinda Ballabh Panth Hospital (G.B. Hospital, Agartala). She stated in the Lok Sabha on 24 May: "On 15th and 16th May I visited Assam, Tripura and West Bengal to share the suffering of the refugees, to convey to them the sympathy and support of this House and of the people of India and to see for myself the arrangement which are being made for their care."23

"India speaks up for Bangladesh"

The above caption is used by Salam Azad in his book *Contribution of India in the War of Liberation of Bangladesh*. His observation that the World opinion was against Pakistani massacre in East Pakistan in 1971 cannot taken as fully true; it is only partially true because Khondaker Mostaque Ahmed, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, condemned the Chinese and the American Administration for their nefarious role in the Bangladesh independence movement and said that imperialist attitude was laid bare during all those days. He also said that Nixon Administration had played an evil role both inside and outside the UN and added that its shameful support to the military Junta of Yahya Khan was aimed at suppressing the independence movement of Bangladesh.24

On the other hand, Mr. Ahmed highly praised the stand of Indian Government and its people in the liberation movement. He said the people of Bangladesh would never forget the material and moral support given by India during long nine months during their struggle for independence. "The Indian Government had to forgo her development programmes to feed the uprooted people of Bangladesh."25

The reflection of the above statement of Mr. Ahmed in respect of the role played by the United States and China is well elaborated in *The Liberation War* of Mohammed Ayub and K. Subramonium. The authors state that during the month of October and November (1971) the United States and China adopted public stands which tended to create an impression of firm support to the Pakistan Government. The Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Sultan Mohammed, visited the United States between November 13 and 15 and had discussions with Rogers and Kissinger, the Secretary of State and the Presidential Adviser respectively. The authors affirm: "This special treatment to an official could only have been interpreted as indicative of strong US support to the policy pursued by the military junta." The above authors referred to the statement of the then
acting Chinese Foreign Minister, Chi P'eng-fei to understand the Chinese policy towards Pakistan. The said Foreign Minister of China opined:

"Our Pakistan friends may rest assured that should Pakistan be subjected to foreign aggression, the Chinese Government and people will as always resolutely support the Pakistan Government and people in their just struggle to defend their state sovereignty and national independence."26

On the other hand, Mr. Ahmed's evaluation in respect of the role played by the Government of India as well as its people is found in the explanation given by Salam Azad in respect of the activities of the Indian Government under Mrs. Gandhi in the international forum. He said,

"Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, sent special envoys to many countries to explain the situation in East Pakistan and its probable solution. Her special envoys sent abroad to create world opinion in favour of Bangladesh included central ministers and senior diplomats." Mr. Azad continues to inform that Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the central Minister who was assigned special responsibility in respect of Bangladesh affairs, visited Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan and Australia as the special envoy of the Prime Minister of India. Mr. Ray admitted that everywhere he visited received warm sympathy and support for the people of Bangladesh.27

India in the UNO on Bangladesh issue

Sri Samar Sen, India's permanent representative to the United Nations, called on its Secretary General, U Thant on 23 April, 1971, and formally requested him to for assistance from the UN and its specialized agencies to deal with the influx of refugees from Bangladesh. The Secretary General reacted positively on humanitarian ground and, accordingly, after discussing matter with all the executive heads of all the agencies of the UNO, decided on 29 April that the High Commissioner for refugees should in this case act as the Focal Point for the coordination of assistance from the United Nations. All the humanitarian organizations of the UN e.g. the Children's Emergency Fund, World Health Organization etc. came together to form a standing inter-agency consultation unit in Geneva. Its main task was to secure international support and contributions, to deliver the supplies to India and to maintain close liaison with the Government of India. On 19 May, Mr. U Thant, the Secretary General, issued an appeal to various governments, inter-governmental, non-governmental and private organizations urging them to contribute generously and help the UN to tackle the refugee problem of East Pakistan that took shelter in India in huge
numbers. The UN understanding of the crisis in East Pakistan had been collided with that of India; the UN authorities could not come to the conclusion on the diametrically opposite versions of the problems put forward by the Govt. of India and that of Pakistan. So, there arose a misunderstanding on the visit of East Pakistan and the affected states of India by the High Commissioner of UNHCR, Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan. The President of Pakistan in a speech on 28 June, 1971, could convince the UNHCR to do something positive for hastening the process of repatriation which was strongly objected and condemned at almost all levels of India and by Samar Sen at the UNO. The second visit of the UNHCR in November, 1971, in both the countries could not solve refugee crisis as both India and Pakistan took opposite view on the issue of repatriation and led them on the verge of war. International relief work, however, went on a massive and colossal scale.  

The Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, was tireless in convincing the world forum about the undoing in East Pakistan. She achieved a remarkable success while she and her government could convince the then Soviet Government on the South Asian Crisis. The result was the 20-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed on 9 August, 1971. According to its terms, the Soviet Union would come to India's help in case of attack or threats of an attack by Pakistan, China or any other country. The manner of help would be settled after mutual consultations. The treaty contains more articles which include subjects like respect for independence, sovereignty, mutual economic, scientific and technological cooperation etc. Muyeedul Hasan in his book Muldhara:’71 opines that the 6-hour meeting between Indian delegates under Mrs. Gandhi and Soviet delegates including Brezhnev, Podgorny and Kosygin in Moscow on 28 September, 1971, cleared all hesitations of Soviet Leaders about the emergence of Bangladesh. He has appended a statement of Mr. D. P. Dhar, a High Official of the Government of India in support of his opinion which runs thus: "Uptill now the Soviet side was preoccupied with the need for avoiding war in the sub-continent. In a long, remarkable presentation Mrs. Gandhi narrated the difficulties with the refugees, Pakistan's intransigence and India's very limited choice of building up military pressure while keeping the door open for political solutions. …. Brezhnev observed that, 'there is an element of national liberation in the present situation,' to which Podgorny gave a nod." Mrs. Gandhi could impress all most all world leaders on the Bangladesh issue except that of the United States and of China. V.B. Kulkarni states that the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, left on 23 October, 1971, for three-week tour of seven Western countries to apprise them of the seriousness of the situation in the sub-continent. She called on President Nixon at his Oval Office at Washington on 4 November and pleaded with him to use his good offices with Yahya Khan to
restore normalcy in East Pakistan but the President was not convinced and he was of the opinion that India wanted to "seize this opportunity not just to destroy Pakistan's control of East Pakistan but to weaken West Pakistan as well." The Chinese views were clearly in favour of Pakistan. Sucheta Ghosh shows that Peking was of the opinion that the entire trouble in the sub-continent arose out of India's interference in Pakistan's internal affairs.

**Tripura : An International Focal Point in the Backdrop of Liberation Movement in Bangladesh**

A very backward state in the North-East, both economically and geographically, Tripura attracted the international attention in the backdrop of the Liberation Movement in East Pakistan. Not only huge number of refugees had poured into Tripura, but all most all the major leaders used Tripura specially its capital, Agartala, as their military capital and also as a corridor to pass to the other parts of India, specially, Calcutta. Its geographical location is very much strategic; it is like a knife in the heart of East Pakistan. Major General Ashok Kalyan Verma, AVSM, (Retd.) finds Tripura as it physically protrudes into that country from the east. The capital of the East Wing i.e. Dacca is within 80 kms from Agartala with a Railway Junction at Akhaura which is only 5 kms from Agartala. Moreover, Akhaura is open towards Chittagong, the port city, Sylhet, the tea town, and Dacca, the capital of the East Wing. The 856 kms. border was fully open to East Pakistan and surrounded on three sides especially by that East Pakistan.

As it is mentioned earlier that the Bengali-speaking people in Tripura form the majority of the population while they migrated from the East Pakistan in different times under different compulsions specially due to the pre & post partition violence both in India and in two wings of Pakistan. Both the ethnicity of the people and the proximity of Tripura boosted the refugees to enter Tripura for safety and security of their lives. As internal turmoil had already commenced in East Pakistan, the refugees started to enter Tripura through Sabroom border (South Tripura) as early as 12th March, 1971, much earlier than the "Operation Searchlight" by the Pak Junta in the night of 25th March. And after that crack-down, the 26th morning saw huge number of devastated & humiliated people (male, female, the aged, children, Hindus & Muslim by religion) lined up to have their shelters in Tripura, West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya, the adjoining states of East Pakistan. It is mentioned earlier that the State government of Tripura under the leadership of Sachindra Lal Singh and the Opposition leaders hailed the democratic movement in East Pakistan and passed resolution unanimously in the Territorial Assembly to request the Govt. of India to recognize the Bangladesh Government in exile and to help the tortured & helpless refugees coming from East Pakistan.
What Maj. Gen. Ashok Kalyan Verma tells about the geographical location of Tripura is testified by Haroon Habib. He is of the opinion that geographical position of Tripura helps reporters greatly to collect news of Dacca and other parts of Bangladesh from Agartala i.e. from Tripura because Dacca was very close to Agartala and easily accessible from Agartala. Mr. Habib informs that the Pak Junta ousted all most all the journalists from East Pakistan except some selected one after Operation Searchlight on 25 March, 1971. Symon Ding, a reporter of the Daily Telegraph (London) skipped the hands of Military Junta and collected the news of genocide that committed by the Pak army in East Pakistan and he left Pakistan to save his life and arranged to publish the news to the Daily Telegraph on 30 March where he argued that the Pak military junta in the name Allah and the integrity of Pakistan were killing the innocent people mercilessly which made Dacca a moribund city. Moreover, Kalyanbraya Chakraborty informs that Swadin Bangla Radio was not traceable at the beginning from Calcutta or Guwahati or Shillong but it was easily heard from Agartala as it was first aired from Kalurghat, Chittagong; then sifted to Bakafa (also known as Bagafa in South Tripura) and later on to Saal Bagan situated at the out skirts of Agartala. Two young reporters from Calcutta, namely, Surajit Ghosal and Deepak Banerjee, entered East Bengal just before Operation Searchlight and they had to face obstacles at different places due to unnatural situation already started in East Pakistan. They somehow managed to escape the situation and entered Tripura while Anil Bhattacharjee helped them to publish their reports to different Newspapers of India. The people came to know the horrible conditions that were prevailed in East Pakistan. These two young reporters took the risk of entering East Pakistan again on 31 March through Sonamura-Comilla Border and were brutally killed by the Pak Military Junta on the plea that they were Hindus and so failed to recite Kaledma. These two were the first foreign reporters who had to risk their lives for journalism in the Liberation Movement of Bangladesh.37

Thus, Bikach Choudhury mentions, "All eyes were turned to Tripura." He said that tiny Agartala became the 'Dateline' for the world media while sun of the new civilization started to be risen in the east. Kalyanbraya Chakraborty writes that besides the reporters of all India based newspapers, the reporters of Indian news agency, All India Radio, foreign newspapers, radio, and other international news agencies came en masse in phase-manner during the 10-month liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 to cover the war-field news. Some of them entered the war-front crossing the international border with the risk of their lives. Mrs. Gandhi herself spoke to the editors of the national newspapers. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry of India always kept contact with news agencies and requested to highlight the events of the liberation movement so that the news could boost up the Muktyoddhas as well as the refugees and other freedom-loving people of East Bengal. Mr. Chakraborty affirms that the request was materialized and all
the news papers and the news agencies of India published in Bengali, Hindi or in English supported the liberation movement unconditionally. The Calcutta-based national news papers sent their representatives to all the affected zones including Tripura and the prime news of Indian newspapers was certainly the liberation movement of Bangladesh. And for this reason, perhaps, Haroon Habib, names his book on this issue as “Muktiyuddha: Dateline Agartala” published by Jatiya Sahitya Prokashani, Dhaka, 1992.38

**Members of World Peace Council visited Agartala.**

Amongst the four Members of the World Peace Council two Members visited Tripura in the month of August, 1971 to see and observe the plight of the refugees coming from the disturbed East Wing of Pakistan. Among them were Dr. Entinello Trombadari, a communist member of the Italian Parliament, and Mr. Mahumood Temboo, a prominent advocate and a leader of the Socialist party of Lebanon. During week-long stay in Tripura, both the members met various political leaders of the Bangladesh movement; visited the refugee camps and had conversation with the refugees of the camps. They also walked through the bordering villages tormented by the indiscriminate firing and shelling of the Pak army. Moreover, they addressed public meetings at Agartala, Udaipur and Belonia. Mr. Saroj Chanda, a leftist leader and Begum Motia Choudhury, the “Ognikannya” of Bangladesh Movement who took refuge at Agartala accompanied these Members of the Peace Council. Before leaving, in a press conference at Agartala, Dr. Trombadoori, opined that the preliminary terms & conditions for the solution of the political crisis of Eastern Bengal was the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the Pak custody. They also affirmed that the experiences they gathered in Tripura with regard to the greatest human disaster of the world that happened in East Pakistan would be circulated throughout the world. They firmly hoped that Bangladesh would emerge as a liberated country from the clutches of the West Pakistan very shortly.39

**Representatives of the UN Refugee High Commissioner at Agartala**

Three representatives from the United Nations Refugee High Commission visited Tripura in connection with the refugee and other problems faced by the bordering states of India. They were personified as under:

Mr. T. Johnson, Director of Operation,
Mr. Charles Mess, Deputy Commissioner,
Mr. Swiss, Legal Adviser,
They visited various refugee camps at the outskirts of Agartala; they talked to the refugees and came to the conclusion that the inhuman atrocities caused by the Yahya regime in East Pakistan was real cause for the unprecedented refugee influx in the adjoining states of India. Representatives of the World food Organization, the UNICEF, and the International Red Cross Society also visited Tripura at that time.\textsuperscript{40}

**Visit of Senator Edward M. Kennedy to Agartala.**

Haroon Habib gives the information that the representatives of the democratic minded people of the world visited Salt Lake, Calcutta and Agartala, Tripura to share the pains of the evacuees coming from eastern wing of Pakistan. The United States of America, which is popularly known as the mouthpiece of the free world, was not in favour of the independence of Bangladesh. Neither People’s Republic of China nor most of the Arabian countries supported the cause of the freedom of Bangladesh. The role of the USA in the Vietnam crisis as well as in the Bangladesh crisis can’t be justified in any standard; because, its role in both the cases were against the humanity. Mr. Habib continues to say that the people of America and the independent news agencies did their best to lessen the misdeeds/ scandalous activities of the Govt. of the USA.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, one of the veteran members of the Senate of the USA and the Chairman of the Refugee Sub-Committee of the Senate, took the pains to visit West Bengal and Tripura to make a field-study of the plight of the refugees coming from the devastated East Bengal. He landed at Agartala airport on 12 August, 1971; received very warmly with floral tributes both from the refugees and the people of Tripura. The populace loudly cried with the slogans- "Edward Kennedy, Zindabad; Banghabandhu, Zindabad; Long live Edward Kennedy; Kennedy-Mujib Zindabad" etc. Kennedy was seen as a Santa Claus at that moment. Mr. Kennedy went straight to the GB Hospital and shared the sufferings of the refugee patients and wounded Muktiyoddhas. He was very much eager to know the roots of the actual incidents. So, he questioned both the doctors and the injured persons. Two injured girl-students of the University of Dacca appealed to the Senator to try to get release of Sheikh Mujib from the undue custody of the Pak Government. The students had drawn the attention of Senator Kennedy towards the unprecedented & inhuman sufferings of the mothers & sisters of East Pakistan and requested the Senator to draw the attention of the world forum about the plight of the people of East Pakistan. The Senator replied that he would acquaint the people of America and the Senate of America about the unbearable sufferings of the people of East Pakistan caused by the Pak army.\textsuperscript{41}
Bikach Choudhury, the then reporter of the *Dainik Sambad* and a well-known intelligentsia, reported that the Senator then reached to the Governor's House at Agartala for rest. In the afternoon, he went to the practical field. He visited some refugee camps at Mohanpur and Gokulnagar at the outskirts of Agartala. Thousands of people saluted him from two sides of the High Way. He quickly roamed one room to another and questioned the refugees and he requested the interpreter to get him understand the real situation and root of their plight.

He came back to the Circuit House at Agartala for a Press Conference. He came to this distant land not as a Government nominee but as a Chairman, Senate Sub-committee on Refugees. Mr. Kennedy witnessed very closely the results of the crackdown of the regimented Government on the arms-less and helpless people of its own country under the banner of religion, national integrity of Pakistan and factually for power for the West Pakistanis.

In the press conference, he assured that he would try his level best to get the US Government understand the actual situation so that the Government could stop the supply of arms and ammunition to the Government of Pakistan. He would search every possible corner to get Sheikh
Mujib free from the custody of Pak Government. He also met in a secret meeting in that Circuit House with the Bengali intelligentsia coming from East Pakistan as refugees and had to bear the allegation that the American Govt. had been supporting an unjust war launched by Pak Junta on its own people.42

**Mr. Kennedy's Endeavour: Tripura in the National Press Club, Washington, on August 26, 1971.**

"I am grateful for this chance to speak to the members of the National Press Club and to share with you my experiences during a week-long visit to the refugee camps of India-a scene which only can be described as the most appalling tide of human misery in modern times.

"In just a few months, since early April, the civil war in East Bengal has driven nearly 8,000,000 men, women and children into India to escape conditions in their homeland. Unnumbered thousands of others have been slaughtered in the civil strife, displaced within their country. Millions more in East Bengal face continued terror, disease and starvation, unless they receive immediate relief.

"This stark tragedy is not yet understood by the world. And although it has been a source of urgent concern to me and the Senate Sub-committee on Refugees from the outset, I can tell you that not until you see it first-hand can you begin to understand its immensity. For only being there can you sense the feelings and understand the plight of the people, and the forces of violence which continue to create refugees and increase the toll of civilian casualties.

"In India, I visited refugee areas along the entire border of East Bengal-from Calcutta and West Bengal in the west -to the Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts in the north-to *Agartala in the state of Tripura in the east* (italics is used by the researcher). I listened to scores of refugees as they crowded into camps, struggling to survive in makeshift shelters in open fields or behind public buildings-or trudging down the roads of West Bengal from days and even weeks of desperate flight. Their faces and stories etch a sage of shame which should overwhelm the moral sensitivities of the people throughout the world.43

**Kennedy's suggestion to the US Government**

Under these serious circumstances, Mr. Kennedy's suggestions are the following:
"First, we must arouse America to the real human tragedy now taking place in Pakistan and India. The tragedy of East Pakistan is not only a tragedy for India. It is the tragedy for the entire world community, and it is the responsibility of that community to act together to ease the crisis. If America is to fulfill its role as the leading humanitarian nation of the world community, then America must take the lead in ringing international aid and relief to the millions of refugees and other victims of this international conflict.... (italics are used for highlighting the importance of the Speech).

"Second ... we must end immediately all further US arms shipments to West Pakistan. We must end all other economic support of the regime that continues to violate the most basic principles of humanity. We must demonstrate to the Generals of West Pakistan and to the peoples of the world that the United States has deep and abiding revulsions of the monumental slaughter that has ravaged East Bengal.

"My experience in the field last week has strengthened these views immensely. No American who has seen the faces of children too weak to cry, too tired to live, too shocked to care, could settle for less. No American would recommend less against a government that tries a political leader in secret—and, as many fear, may put him to death for the crime of winning a free election.

"I do not, at this time, suggest a break in our diplomatic relations with Pakistan. Let us continue to talk urgently. Let us express our candid views. Let President Nixon makes personal representations to President Yahya Khan about every aspect of crisis. To the beleaguered Government of India let us reaffirm our faith in the ability of men of good will everywhere to work together to end the crisis.

"Third, I believe that the United States should work strongly within the frame work of the South-East Asia Treaty organization to bring as much pressure as possible to bear on the Government of West Pakistan to modify its cruel policy of repression towards east Bengal. ...........

"As Chairman of the Senate Sub-Committee on Refugees, I plan to file a formal report on the findings of recent field investigation. Our Sub-Committee will conduct further hearings at the end of September. These hearings will be an effort document what our government is doing, what it is prepared to do, and what it is capable of doing to provide the leadership necessary to bring peace and relief to South Asia........"
The Foreign Dignitaries visited Agartala

The then British Lord and prominent journalist John Criss visited Agartala in October, 1971, paid personal visit to various refugee camps at Mohanpur and Madhuban in the suburb of Agartala; met the refugees and could not keep the rolling down of tears while he heard pathetic stories of barbaric actions of the Pak military force on the poor Bengalis from a young girl and a very simple village bride. He discussed with leaders of Bangladesh freedom movement manifold problems of the refugees and made a historic remark that the Two-nation Theory of Mr. Jinnah and the unscientific union of two wings of Pakistan being geographically separated by 1200 miles proved to be a myth. He gave assurance that he would try his level best to draw the attention of the world forum to the Bangladesh problem. After going back to Great Britain, he lent interviews with famous Medias like BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) which opened a new feature of Bangladesh liberation war to the world community and another picture of inhuman activities of Pak Junta in East Pakistan.45

Tripura in the SECURITY COUNCIL, the UNO, NEWYORK

Both the countries i.e. India and Pakistan tried to impress the United Nations Organization and other World Forums about their stands on Bangladesh crises and more particularly, on the border skirmishes from both sides. While the Pakistan representative in the UN tried to make India aggressor in respect of Bangladesh and made India responsible for the crisis in the East Wing of Pakistan due to its unlawful interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan, Mr. Samar Sen, the permanent representative of India in the UN referred to a Single Day's Provocations by Pakistan which occurred on 7 November, 1971 in the Tripura-Bangladesh border:

"I shall just give you list of incidents on the Bengal front on 7 November, 1971:

* Pakistan army started firing towards the Indian village of Rahimpur under Kalamchoura police station in Tripura. Ten artillery shells and 14 bombs landed inside Indian Territory.

* Pakistan Army opened fire, LMG and MMG fire, towards the Indian village of Gourangala, Tripura.

* Pakistan Army opened fire towards the Indian village of Mandabag in Tripura. Several bombs of 3 inch mortar and a number of artillery shells landed inside Indian Territory.
* Pakistani Army subjected the Indian village of opposite to Kasba in Tripura to intermittent firing. Several shells landed inside Indian Territory.

* Pakistani Army opened fire towards the Indian village of Simna in Tripura. Several artillery shells landed inside Indian Territory when the Pakistani Army opened fire towards the Indian border outpost of Sidhai, Tripura.

* Several LMG, MMG and 2 inch mortar shells landed inside Indian Territory when Pakistani Army opened fire towards the Indian village of Amlighat near Sabroom police station.

* Pakistan Army opened fire towards the Indian village of Malua (sic. actually Nalua) under Belonia police station in Tripura. Several artillery shells landed inside Indian Territory.

* Pakistan Army opened fire towards the Indian village of Belonia in Tripura.

* Pakistani troops opened unprovoked fire towards the Indian village of Chandannagar under Kamalpur police station in Tripura. Several artillery shells landed inside Indian Territory.

* Pakistani Army opened fire from Dhalai area towards Indian Territory in Tripura. Several artillery shells landed inside Indian Territory.

* Pakistani Army subjected the Indian village of Rangauti under Kailashahar police station in Tripura to heavy and intermittent firing.

* Several shells of 3 inch mortar fired by Pakistani army landed inside the Indian village of Puran Raj Bari in Tripura.

That is the record of one day. I am quite sure the Council would not like to recite this litany military aggression from Pakistan day after day.”

Records found in the State Archives, Tripura, under caption: Visit of U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan to Agartala on 7.11.71 shows that the UN body for refugee relief could not stay idle in respect of the "Greatest Human Tragedy" of that time though the view of the High Commissioner in respect of the Bangladesh crisis and his pro-Pakistani attitude on the repatriation of the refugees could not be assimilated by the Indian Government.47
Notes and References


2. ibid. p.61


10. Ghosh Sucheta, op.cit. pp. 64-64.

11. Loc, cit.

13. *Bangladesh Documents*, Publication Division, Govt. of India, Patiala House, New Delhi, pp-672

14. ibid, pp. 672-674

15. ibid, p. 675

16. ibid, pp. 675-676

17. Ghosh, Sucheta, op. cit p. 68


20. Azad, Salam- *Role of Indian People in Liberation War of Bangladesh*, Book well, Delhi, 2008, p-112; for Prime Minister's visit to Tripura please see the *Dainik Sambad* of 16 May, 1971.

21. ibid. p.96

22. The *Dainik Sambad* of 14,16 May, 1 August, 20 October, 28, 29 October, 1971.

    The *Saptahik Samachar* of 2 May, 13 June, 27 June,17 October, 1971.


New Delhi, 1972. pp. 204-205.


32. Ghosh, Sucheta - op. cit. pp- 181-182


34. ibid. p. 37.


36. *Proceedings of Tripura Legislative Assembly*-op. cit pp. 10-34.


38. Choudhury, Bikach- op. cit. p-14.

Chakraborty, Kalyan (ed.), op. cit. pp. 93-94

Hazra, Nidhubhushan-- in more than one Oral interview at his residence at Agartala on 14.3.09, 25.4.10.


42. Chowdhury, Bikach in The Dainik Sambad, 13 August, 1971.

43. Bangladesh Documents, op. cit. p. 596.

44. ibid, pp.599-601.

45. Azad, Salam, op. cit. p. 112

   Habib, Haroon, op. cit. p.64.

46. From a speech by Mr. Samar Sen in the Security Council on December 5, 1971 as cited in 1971 WAR IN PICTURES, Publication Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, Patiala House, New Delhi, February, 1972 (n. p.)

47. State Archives, Govt. of Tripura, Agartala, File No. F.5 (68)-p/71