



# The liberation war...

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At that juncture, it was essential to have official assurance and diplomatic immunities from the Indian government; otherwise it would not have been possible for deputy high commissioner and his colleagues to defect en masse and open diplomatic mission, first of its kind in any country, in Kolkata. The chief secretary of the West Bengal government assured Ali of all protection and even of 'continuation of diplomatic immunities.' The opening of diplomatic mission in Kolkata in the same building that housed the deputy high commission of Pakistan, was a great blow to the government of Pakistan. Defections of diplomat and staff of the Kolkata deputy high commission were followed by a large number of diplomats in other Pakistani missions. The opening of Bangladesh mission was a great event not only for the expatriate Bangladeshis but also for the Indians. Hossein Ali wrote in his diary:

'There was continuous singing in front of the mission interrupted by speeches. Many came with garlands and I had to

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Tajuddin Ahmed giving speech in March, 1970.

PHOTO: ABDUL HAMID RAIHAN

accept them. Those were placed near the large photo of Bangabandhu surrounded by photographs of Tagore and Nazrul Islam.'

Led by the Awami League, the liberation war against the Pakistani military junta was also actively participated by other political parties. Sheikh Mujib was in Pakistani custody while Maulana Bhasani took shelter in India. His movements were restricted. There were rumours that Maulana Bhasani was under house-arrest. Rumours were also circulating that certain members of the exile government were secretly negotiating with the Pakistan government for some kind of political settlement. To dispel the confusion, Bhasani on May 3 issued a statement ruling out the possibility of arriving at a political settlement on Bangladesh issue. He said, 'there might be set-back, but our fight against Pakistan would continue, if necessary, for a hundred years. Either we win or we die.' Seventy five million people of Bangladesh, he said, would reject any political settlement arrived at by anyone in Bangladesh or outside.'

Tajuddin on June 3 denied any knowledge of Pakistan approaching the US for intervention for a political settlement of the Bangladesh issue. He, however, made it 'absolutely clear' that there could be no compromise within the framework of Pakistan. 'Bangladesh', he said, 'is sovereign and independent and we shall defend its separate and free entity at any cost.'

In an interview with All India Radio, Tajuddin explained the foreign policy of Bangladesh. Asked what was his government's feeling about the silence or ambivalence of big powers, especially the USA, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, Tajuddin replied, "Our friendship for all" policy shall continue to guide our foreign policy irrespective of the variations in the response of world powers to our present difficulties. The government sent emissaries abroad to create favourable lobbies and in organising public opinion in favour of our movement, he added.

Replying to another question, the government in exile's prime minister said pro-Chinese National Awami Party leader Maulana Bhasani and other patriotic leaders and elements have extended their

unequivocal support to the struggling people and the Bangladesh government and demanded its recognition by other countries.

The then Soviet Union supported India's stand on demanding immediate release of Sheikh Mujib and an end to the atrocities and genocide being committed against the people of Bangladesh. China accused India of fermenting war and preventing the refugees from returning to their homes in Bangladesh. Most of the countries were either indifferent or unsympathetic to the independence movement, but world media gave wide coverage to atrocities in Bangladesh by the Pakistani military.

The exile government was based on the principle of collective responsibility, but Tajuddin played the vital role. He acted as the spokesman of the people of Bangladesh. But his choice as the prime minister was not unanimous. To run the provisional government, he had to overcome a lot of difficulties and to face many challenges. There were not only differences of opinion among the Awami League leaders, but also groupings and bickering

aplenty. Intellectually sound and unassuming, Tajuddin was a coolheaded person. In the absence of Bangabandhu, had he not been chosen as the prime minister of the exile government, it would have been difficult for any Awami League leader to handle the complex situation. He maintained proper liaison with the host Indian authorities as well as various groups and freedom fighters.

India sheltered around ten million refugees including leaders of different political parties. India's supporting role was vital to win independence in a short period of nine months.

Emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state has been one of the greatest events of the twentieth century. Pakistan suffered a humiliating defeat. The freedom-loving people of Bangladesh won independence at a very high cost. The British poet Byron said:

For Freedom's battle once begun,  
Bequeath'd by bleeding sire to son,  
Though baffled oft is ever won.

The writer is a journalist, researcher and columnist.