

The Definitive Story

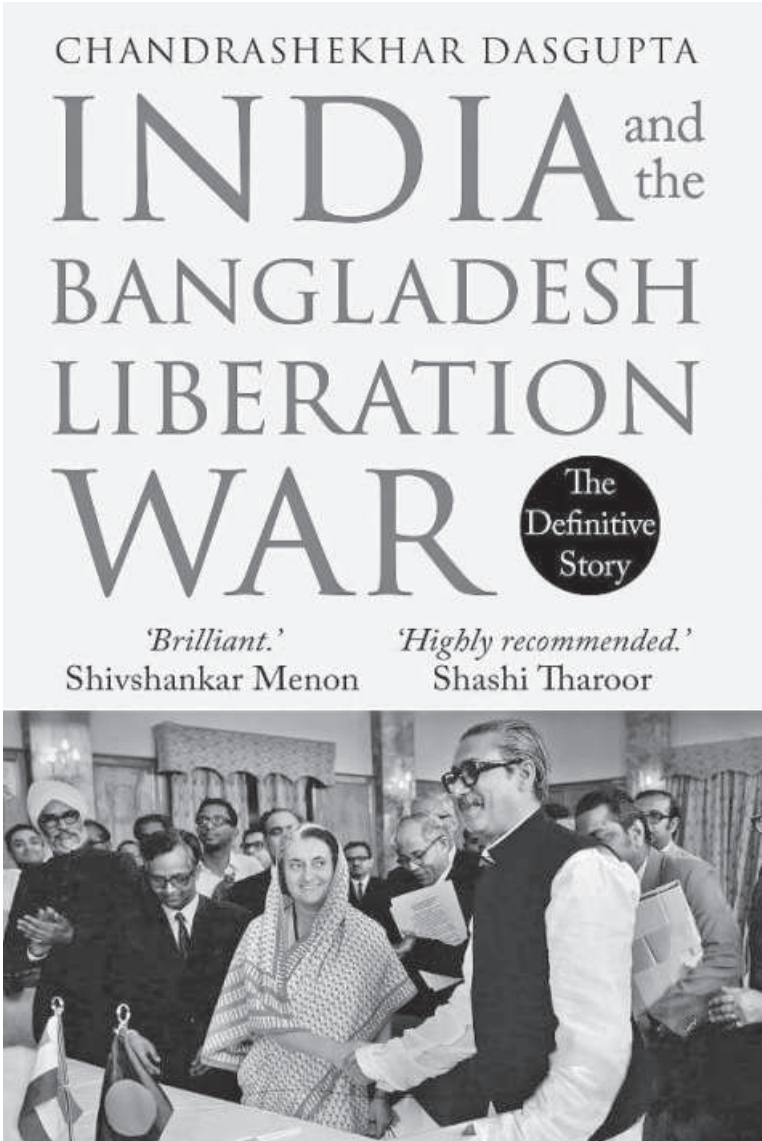
Why Chandrashekhar Dasgupta’s book is the last word on India’s role in 1971



Shamsheer M Chowdhury, BB is the former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

SHAMSHER M CHOWDHURY

RETIRED Indian diplomat Chandrashekhar Dasgupta’s recollection of the events of 1971, centring on the Bangladesh Liberation War as captured in his recently published book, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War: The Definitive Story* (Juggernaut, 2021), is



indeed what the sub-caption of the book suggests—it is arguably the most definitive story. As the author says in his introduction, the book is not about the military operations of December 1971, nor is it a global history of the war; it is about India’s grand strategy in 1971 and how this was played out comprehensively and in a seamlessly coordinated manner, employing all the resources available to a state—diplomatic, military and economic—to achieve a political objective.

Dasgupta highlights that even the absence of an institutionalised coordination mechanism in the establishment did not stand in the way of its execution. Going through it, any reader would agree that the book is the product of lengthy research by, and sheer perseverance of, the author. This explains the minute details of the events of the period, both inside India and in the international arena. Dasgupta goes to great lengths to talk of the interactions and discourse between and among the major stakeholders—the government of India, the Bangladesh government in exile and the key players in the global arena. Dasgupta’s emotional attachment to the events is perhaps explained partly by his personal experience of being among the first few Indian diplomats to be assigned to the just-opened Indian diplomatic mission in Dhaka—an assignment any Indian diplomat would have coveted and cherished—and partly by his own desire to understand, and record, the entire gamut of what transpired at various stages during the nine months between March and December of 1971.

The book is, at once, illuminating and instructive. It starts off with a potent quote from Bengal’s highly-revered political leader, Abul Mansur Ahmad, on how little there was in common between the two wings of Pakistan. This reflects Chandrashekhar Dasgupta’s deep insight into the political, social and cultural reality of Pakistan. In the opening two chapters, Dasgupta expands on Ahmad’s quote to understand how the fissure that existed at the country’s very birth, tectonically morphed into a gaping fault line and then led to its inevitable disintegration, and how Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a central figure in this historic passage. An entire chapter is devoted to the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini; its birth, its growth and its critical role leading to the final liberation of the

motherland.

During the nine months of the Liberation War, that Pakistan’s military leadership, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had their heads buried in the sand is all too well-known, that the Nixon administration—especially his principal analyst, Henry Kissinger—got it all wrong from the very beginning is also clear, and that, in the end, China’s posturing for Pakistan would not be matched by any military action also became evident. The book graphically elaborates on all of the above in finer details. What is illuminating in the book is its descriptive revelation of the process of convergence of minds between India and the then Soviet Union. This was not a given, as many erroneously thought it was. Dasgupta writes in great detail about how the process evolved. No denying that the prevailing Cold War played its part in this, but the driving force behind it was India’s well-choreographed diplomacy, anchored by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself, aided as she was by a highly-astute team of technocrats in the persons of PN Haksar, DP Dhar, TN Kaul, RN Kao, et al. The passage of the Soviet position—from one of initial circumspection to that of an ally, culminating in the historic Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971—was clearly the outcome of deft diplomatic handling by India and an equally mature response from Moscow. Dasgupta carries the reader through the entire process of negotiations step-by-step, with focus on dealing with the tricky Article 9. The Treaty was a game changer in more ways than one. It hardened the Soviet stance towards Islamabad, starting with cutting off arms delivery. Dasgupta amplifies this in Chapter 10 where Andrei Gromyko, the crafty Soviet Foreign Minister, made it known to the visiting Pakistan Foreign Secretary Sultan Mohammad Khan in September that Moscow’s words to the Pakistani leadership to not provoke a war with a treaty partner and to ensure the safety of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not a request. The strategically important convergence between India and the Soviet Union also gave the Nixon administration and China enough food for thought. For one, it served India to use this convergence as a countervailing tool against the emerging Sino-US entente. It also enabled Mrs Gandhi to talk with the leaders in Washington, London, and in other Western countries from a

position of confidence. Importantly, it caused Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to recognise that the Bangladesh freedom struggle was a war for national liberation and also of the crucial role the Bangladesh Mukti Bahini played in this process.

The author quotes a senior Indian diplomat involved in the earlier stages of the negotiations, who aptly commented, “Article 9 has just the right amount of substance and shadow to confound our enemies and hearten our friends.”

In the book, Chandrashekhar Dasgupta explains that the impact of India’s role in the Bangladesh Liberation War, besides changing the geographical and political landscape of South Asia forever, was also felt on the critical issue of Kashmir between India and Pakistan. An important outcome of the 1972 Shimla Summit between the two countries was an agreement to take the issue out of the ambit of any multilateral framework (read: the UN) and confine it to bilateral arrangements. It also led to a rearrangement of the Line of Control in Kashmir.

Chandrashekhar Dasgupta’s book derives its strength from the fact that it is based on indisputable evidence, irrefutable logic and undeniable truth. It is objective, succinct in both its form and content, easily readable and even easier to absorb. The book also reaffirms the point made by current Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar in his own book, *The India Way*, that India’s role in the Bangladesh Liberation War was the former’s greatest diplomatic and military triumph.

One could be excused for wondering why it took so long for such key details to emerge in their totality. The counterargument would be that the timing of the book’s launch coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Liberation War of Bangladesh, and India’s decisive role in it, makes the whole exercise more relevant.

Former Indian Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor, Shiv Shankar Menon—undoubtedly one of the finest minds in India’s foreign policy establishment—describes the book in one word: “Brilliant.” He goes on to add that it is a must-read for scholars of history and geopolitics, diplomats and anybody willing to study the emergence of a different South Asia. Chandrashekhar Dasgupta’s masterful scholarly work is all that, and then some.

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When politics is all about partying



Kamal Ahmed is an independent journalist who writes from London. His Twitter handle is @ahmedkal

KAMAL AHMED

THE one issue dominating British politics for weeks is nothing other than the partying going on at the heart of the government, at 10 Downing Street, the office-cum-residence of the prime minister. This scandalous partying, now dubbed as “Partygate” by the British media, raises serious questions about not only the standards in public life, but whether one of the world’s oldest democracies can cling on to its global standing. Prime minister Boris Johnson’s influence and grip over the nearly 200-years-old party, the Conservatives, has been quite remarkable and unprecedented.

Johnson’s electoral successes, both in the Brexit referendum and in the 2019 general election, almost made him larger than his party. A veteran of British political journalism, Andrew Marr, wrote in *The New York Times*, that the Conservatives are in an agonised, self-flagellating panic. Should they get rid of Boris Johnson, their populist leader whose deceit and flouting of lockdown rules has infuriated a chunk of the country and embarrassed his party? Or should they stick with a man who, so far, has kept them in power?

The Partygate scandal is not about just one party for which Prime Minister Boris Johnson was in attendance, but over a dozen other similar ones that took place at 10 Downing Street, and which are now contributing to the description of the government’s “partying culture.” Twelve of those parties are being investigated by London’s Metropolitan Police. Despite heavy redactions, Gray’s report

had enough damning elements against the prime minister as it criticised “failures of leadership and judgement” at the heart of the British government. The report said, “At least some of the gatherings in question represent a serious failure to observe not just the high standards expected of those working at the heart of Government but also of the standards expected of the entire British population at the time.” The scandal has engulfed Johnson’s government so much that he had to cancel his prescheduled telephone call to President Putin to talk about the Ukraine crisis and attend parliament instead to table the Sue Gray report and respond to its findings.

Opinion polls show that the Partygate scandal has severely dented the electoral prospects of the Conservatives, giving the Labour party an advantage varying between 10 and 14 points. At least 15 MPs from his own backbench have openly called for Johnson to quit. The actual number of rebelling MPs, however, is speculated to be three times higher. It is hard for many people outside Britain to understand how Johnson is still holding on to his position, despite losing so much support outside and within his party. The main reason is that he holds a majority of more than 80 seats in the Commons, which frustrates any potential move by opposition parties to have a no-confidence vote.

The only option left for his removal is a clear, no-confidence vote within his party. But the Conservatives’ internal rule stipulates that discussing any proposal to replace the leader requires a written submission to the chairman of the backbench committee (known as 1922 committee) by at least 15 percent of its MPs. This means that about 54 MPs have to officially call for a leadership change. But that does not automatically seal the fate of an incumbent leader of the Tory party. The party rules say that if the current leader is able to retain a majority within the parliamentary party, his/her position is secured for at least another year.

Despite such rigid rules of the Tory party, many pundits say there are signs that, despite Johnson’s long history of beating the odds and pulling through rough waters, this Partygate scandal could end his premiership. According to them, if the police investigation results in him being handed a penalty for breaking lockdown rules or if Sue Gray’s final report finds he lied to parliament, then it would be



ILLUSTRATION: COLLECTED/MARIAN KAMENSKY

terminal. Few others say, if the upcoming local elections in May show that Johnson is no longer a vote-winner, as the opinion polls have been indicating consistently,

then a sufficient number of party MPs would rally round his likely challengers.

Amidst the Partygate turmoil that prompted a series of high profile resignations and clearing out at Downing Street, and an attempt to revamp his administration, PM Johnson has come under renewed attack from all sides following an unruly mob confronting the Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer outside parliament on Monday. MPs from all sides angrily accused Boris Johnson of whipping up political poison by falsely accusing Sir Keir of protecting a notorious paedophile, Jimmy Savile. Johnson provoked widespread fury last week when he suggested Sir Keir had protected Savile during his time as director of public prosecutions. This latest incident has now fueled speculation that many more Tory MPs will have pens poised to write to the 1922 committee chief demanding a vote of confidence.

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ফাইন্যান্সিয়াল রিপোর্টিং কাউন্সিল (এফআরসি)
অর্থ বিভাগ, অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়
পর্যটন ভবন-৯ম তলা
প্লট নং- ই-৫, সি/১, পশ্চিম আগারগাঁও
শেরে বাংলা নগর প্রশাসনিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-১২০৭

মুহাম্মদ আনওয়ারুল করিম, এফসিএ
নির্বাহী পরিচালক - মানদণ্ড নির্ধারণী বিভাগ
টেলিফোনঃ +৮৮০২-৪১০২৪৬৮৫
ই-মেইলঃ ed.ss@frcbd.org
admin@frcbd.org

নং. ১৮৫/এফআরসি/এসএস/২০২২/১২৫
তারিখঃ ৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি, ২০২২

সংবিধিবদ্ধ কর্তৃপক্ষ এবং রাষ্ট্রীয় মালিকানাধীন বাণিজ্যিক প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহের আর্থিক প্রতিবেদন প্রস্তুতকরণে
প্রযোজ্য মানদণ্ড এবং কাঠামো চূড়ান্তকরণে প্রাক-প্রকাশনা বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ফাইন্যান্সিয়াল রিপোর্টিং আইন (এফআরএ) ২০১৫ এর ধারা ২(৮)(খ) অনুযায়ী উপরোল্লিখিত প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহ যারা জনস্বার্থ সংস্থার সংজ্ঞার অন্তর্ভুক্ত যেমন, রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব বাণিজ্যিক প্রতিষ্ঠান, কর্পোরেশন, রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব ব্যাংক, কাউন্সিল, বোর্ড, ইনস্টিটিউট, কমিশন, ট্রাস্ট, বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, কলেজ, ফাউন্ডেশন, কর্তৃপক্ষ, পরিষদ, একাডেমি ইত্যাদি প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহের প্রতিষ্ঠা সংক্রান্ত আইন এবং এফআরএ ২০১৫ এর ধারা ৪০, ৪০ (৪), ৪৪ অনুযায়ী, “প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহ সরকার কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত পদ্ধতিতে, যথাযথভাবে উহার হিসাবরক্ষণ এবং হিসাব বিবরণী প্রস্তুত করিবে।”

এই লক্ষ্যে এফআরসি বিভিন্ন সংবিধিবদ্ধ কর্তৃপক্ষ এবং রাষ্ট্রীয় মালিকানাধীন বাণিজ্যিক প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহের কার্যাবলী এবং আর্থিক বিষয়াদির বিবেচনায় পাঁচ স্তরের খসড়া আর্থিক প্রতিবেদন কাঠামো ও এতদসংক্রান্ত খসড়া মানদণ্ডসমূহ প্রণয়ন করে প্রযোজ্য প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহের তালিকা এবং উক্ত প্রতিষ্ঠানের জন্য প্রযোজ্য মানদণ্ড, কাঠামো এবং স্তর নির্ধারণ করেছে। আর্থিক কাঠামো, মানদণ্ড এবং আনুষঙ্গিক বিষয়াদির খসড়া এক খণ্ডে পিডিএফ আকারে এফআরসি ওয়েবসাইটে (www.frcbd.org) Public Sector Entity Financial Reporting Framework (PSE FRF) শিরোনামে প্রকাশ করা হয়েছে। সংশ্লিষ্ট মানদণ্ড, আর্থিক কাঠামো, স্তর ইত্যাদি বিষয়ে সম্পূর্ণ এবং অগ্রাহ্য প্রতিষ্ঠান বা ব্যক্তিগণের কোন আপত্তি বা মন্তব্য থাকলে তা এই বিজ্ঞপ্তির তারিখ হতে ৬০ দিনের মধ্যে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর নিকট প্রেরণের অনুরোধ করা হলো।

জিডি-২৪৫