

MEDIA AND FOREIGN POLICY MAKING OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The media has a direct and indirect impact on foreign policy making. The trends of communication, reporting on foreign affairs, influence foreign policymaking of Bangladesh in twofold design, by providing an environment and an input source of decision making. Governments need to interact with public media houses to shape what people know and believe about foreign policies. It is important for policymakers to have agreement about the strategies and core objectives of external engagement to ensure policy credibility for any country. The terms such as —Al Jazeera Effect,” introduced by Philip Seib have discussed —new medial which is about widespread internet and satellite television and its impact on policymaking. Seib’s idea of —virtual statel is also relevant through which diverse communities achieve cohesion by internet at the international political map. These institutions have also led to the fostering of —virtual sovereignty. Such extensions of the borders have led to the development of common identity among diverse religious and ethnic communities (Arnold, 2011). One of the important movements in the recent history of Bangladesh was the Shabhag movement when protesters gathered and demanded execution of war criminals run by the Media. It was through the movement which led to personal political attitudes, and where interest groups and religious orientations did affect media’s content. Interest groups also influenced mass media. Such that media advisor to the office of Prime Minister.

INTRODUCTION

—*Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury* — also is the editor of a daily —*The Daily Observer*” and heads DBC News a private television that shows linkages between policy making and media. Also seen those Financial Express editors AHM Moazzem Hossain, editor-in-Chief of bdnews24.com, Toufique Imrose Khalidi, Senior Vice President of ATN Bangla, Tasik Ahmed have been raising their voices regarding the Rohingya issue on various occasions. At the same time the influence of media coverage on certain topics also affects international relations discourse in a negative way for example Assange’s WikiLeaks, through the disclosure of classified information (Cohen B. C., 1963, p. 136). History is also ridden with instances of media corporations going against the home government on foreign affairs issues. Networks such as Wikileaks and Twitter have also been able to circumnavigate the state powers. Newspapers such as *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* have had issues of feud over reporting from others borders. The terms such as Cross border Collaborative Journalism, Journalism across boundaries, reporters without borders are considered major instances of it (Wanta, Golan, Lee 2004)²⁸⁷. In international relations history media impact was visible when during the 1980s Reagan administration had mobilized the U.S. public in support of increase in arms expenditures and to have aggressive policy toward the Soviet Union. Media support was given to these policies since the general public was dubious about arms purchase, and the general public had to be shown the human rights violations happening in these regimes. It has also been alleged time and again that the media has allowed them to be mobilized to meet the agenda and foreign policy goals ²⁸⁸(Herman, 1993, 27). The role of Media had started since the time of Independence only, the international mass media had played an necessary role in Bangladesh’s War of Independence, the *Guardian*, *Daily Mirror*, *The London Times*, *The Sunday Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Observer*, had tried to expedite cooperation among the international community for the cause of freedom and to support Bangladesh in the war of Independence. One of the concerns for Bangladesh which had raised awareness about the war effort was organized in New York in August 1971 by *Pandit Ravi Shankar and George Harrison* was one such instance. Pandit Ravi Shankar opinioned —In one day, the whole world knew the name of Bangladesh. Bangladesh media has been an important player for the promotion of liberty and democracy through political movements since the 1971 national freedom struggle (Das, 2012). Later, the media was instrumental in mobilizing public sentiment leading to the fall of General Ershad, in 1991, and to make democratic regimes accountable. The sacrifices of the brave people of Bangladesh were told to the world about the tribulations which people were facing under the armed forces of Pakistan under the military administration. It was the relevance of the Journalists in the Independence War that of on March 25, 1971 on the night the military had launched its genocide campaign. The Pakistani military was in Hotel Intercontinental known as Rupashi Bangla presently in Dhaka. The media has helped Leaders in getting re-elected and the fall of the governments. In the new age of ‘Mediaism’ being a true transnational actor, media has promoted and hindered the aims and policies of national leaders. It is also crucial to see how far the news media has assessed the implementation of foreign policy or to communicate the rationale of foreign policy to people. In another foreign policy incident about the

impact of media on foreign policy it was the *Iran-Contra affair* which had started with an article in a small Beirut newspaper. The incident was powerful enough to help the Reagan administration facilitate the sale of arms that were subjected to arms embargo to Khomeini government of Iran²⁸⁹. In the same way, Bofors deal signed in 1986, a major arms purchase scandal in India, which was the primary reason of Rajiv Gandhi led Congress' defeat in 1989, was also broke out by a Swedish newspaper. The cross border investigative journalism led by N. Ram of The Hindu Group and journalist Chitra Subramaniam had secured 350 documents to cover the story²⁹⁰. And similarly, the arrest of Reuters Journalists in Yangon for gathering evidence of military abuse and mass grave on the international Rohingya crisis ensured the impact the media had on foreign policy decision making²⁹¹. The media represents the public's right to be informed about foreign policy by serving as a major means of communication between the governing and the governed.

A strong presence of media in decision making about foreign policy is also rooted in the idea that UN agencies and multilateral development partners promote a free press and civic freedom and reorient their support for the countries based on these parameters²⁹². The importance of garnering domestic support for foreign policy is recognized that Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the important tasks is in handling domestic media and to build foreign policy consensus in the news circles of the country. The Foreign Affairs Ministry depends to a greater degree on the media to report and explain foreign policy developments. At one level, the government exercises some pressure on the media professional to provide or deny the access, while the reporters and correspondents, through their reportage and commentary, are able to nudge policy in certain directions²⁹³. This process has its roots in the colonial practices when the foreign reporters also known as war correspondents were key elements in manufacturing consent for the policies of the colonial power²⁹⁴.

Major events like the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in Romania, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the deaths at Tiananmen Square, and the Gulf Wars of 1999 and 2003, have been conveyed to the world through real-time TV coverage. It is through media reports that intentions of armed Jihad are made available to governments, and are made open for foreign policy considerations. Such media reports have been very critical in communicating to the public about waging an armed jihad to restore what ISIS considers the dignity of the Arakani/Rohingya Muslims (Basher, 2015). The media reports played an important role in spreading news about attacks on critical infrastructure, including the port, naval bases in Chittagong in Bangladesh and petrochemical plants²⁹⁵. In the area of media related research where there is due shortage of finance the research institutes take support of money laundering, international aid corruption and such illegal sources.

In return it is expected that the media is obliged to meet the demands of a specific ideology and suit the demands of specific audiences. Public engagement is done by the set of experts and scholars that comprises research and support staff, since they are the major carriers of information. Media generates policy-oriented research and are considered mostly independent, non-profit, nonpartisan, and provides suggestions on domestic and international issues and to the officials of the government.

Media Profile in Bangladesh-

The media covers newspapers, television, youtube channels, and other journals for the purpose of thesis. In the subcontinent of South Asia, —Kangal Harinath Majumdar could be called the first investigative reporter with the publication of Gram —Barta Prokashital, which was a Bangla weekly journal. This weekly had aimed to reveal veiled tyranny of those in power and generate public awareness about it. The birth of Bangla language newspapers was led by English newspapers but had different goals. In Calcutta, the English newspapers were considered a means of entertainment and profit.

The Bangla newspapers at the same time were for the privileged class and for cultural enhancement. The Gram Barta Prokashika was dealing with philosophy, poetry, philosophy along with hard news apart from the defense and security issues. BISS Journal, Bangladesh institute of law and international affairs its Journal of Law and Journal of International Affairs, Bangladesh Foreign Policy Surveys, Nuclear Press Digest, various projects on necessary topics such as Small Arms and Light weapons on IED improvised Explosives Devises, conduct of human security survey on links between Climate change and security address the issues on foreign policy. Apart from it the fourth estate does play a role to mediate conflict between the legislature and executive branches of Bangladesh. Younger members of the subcommittee chairmen also seek out opinion for proposals about conflicting viewpoints. The chairmen of the standing committee on Foreign affairs have access to information and intelligence from the government of Bangladesh. All the sides of a conflict in the International area are being visited by the countries involved who personally investigate all sides of a conflict in the international arena. BISS Journal, Bangladesh institute of law and international affairs its Journal of Law and Journal of International Affairs, Bangladesh Foreign Policy Surveys, Nuclear Press Digest, various projects on necessary topics such as Small Arms and Light weapons on IED improvised Explosives Devises, conduct of human security survey on links between Climate change and security address the issues on foreign policy. Apart from it the fourth estate does play a role to mediate conflict between the legislature and executive branches of Bangladesh. Younger members the subcommittee chairmen also seek out opinion for proposals about conflicting viewpoints. The chairmen of the standing committee on Foreign affairs have access to information and intelligence from government of Bangladesh. All the sides of a conflict in International area are being visited by the countries involved who personally investigate all sides of a conflict in international arena. Reporters have extensive linkages with the members of the committee. Nahim Razzak the youngest Member of Parliament in Bangladesh keeps frequent media interactions such as being part of Young Bangla Live, Meet the Leader and other interaction platforms.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK : ROLE OF MEDIA IN FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING

The concept of soft power understood as the cultural and social capital which a country possesses globally entails role of media, and public opinion. Media is one agency capable to co-opt the interests of other nations. Nations in developing transitional countries including Bangladesh establish soft power, by established media outlets, brands and news houses, having foreign policy experts, and encouraging research on foreign policy issues more importantly in transitional countries³⁰². Media helps in collecting data required to make informed decisions which is also used by parliamentarians and bureaucrats. The ‘CNN Effect debate’ popularized after the Operation Restore Hope in Somalia to feed starving people after the media reports of mass starvation there, had led editorials to circulate that American foreign policy was driven by Media news stories. The ‘cascade network activation model’ explains media coverage of foreign issues. Hachten’s, 1999 five concepts of press system. The media connects diplomacy and opinion makers associated with foreign affairs to society which has also changed because of IT and new media techniques, thus links soft and hard power potential of the country. Public diplomacy is inclusive of members from parliament, personalities drawn from the media and employees of government agencies. Rana describes it as foreign ministry and embassy integration which helps in mobilizing resources to influence foreign societies and people of other countries to leverage soft power. Social Media has become diplomacy’s significant other. Susan Moeller says through social media leaders represent the country’s inside picture. Sheikh Hasina’s representation in the media has engineered trust for foreign policy issues. Role of media for developing nation states is also relevant since it is trying to create a powerful field for non-Western narratives against the Western viewpoints. The emergence of ‘the post-American world’ has been made possible by social media space given to them. ISIS has also used this framework for the developing countries that innovative propaganda and unprecedented manipulation of social media and its recruitment of foreign fighters. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant also mentioned foreign policies of the republic to be more peaceful because the public could play a role in it to constrain policymakers, specifically about the war making proclivities of Leaders. The world war was the first event to contextualise the role of public opinion in diplomacy that both allied and central powers wanted to win the world opinion through even diplomatic means such as by publishing colour books which were used to put war blame on the adversaries. Later yet it was Lippmann who presented counter narrative by mentioning if average citizen could make a constructive contribution to world

An Analysis of Media’s Role and Bilateral Relations of Bangladesh Media for the bilateral relations functions as- a) It provides source of information for policy decisions is an agenda setter, B) Proxy for diplomats, c) A tool used by religious, non-governmental and sometimes terrorist organizations. Television also plays distinct diplomatic roles through air negotiations, also known as television diplomacy. Policy officials use media for immediate useful information, in the early stages of decision making, media is considered as the important source of information in crisis like situations, and official data also needs inputs from the media. Some of the policy officials’ interviewed indicated that information usefulness was very important.

Role of Media in India Bangladesh Relations

Dev Nath Pathak, Chayanika Priyam and Ratan Kumar Roy have explored internet activism and its impact on politics with regard to India and Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh stands at 144th place in the Press Freedom index given by —Reporters without Borders. The relationship between Journalists and Bangladesh Government has also not been easy going, since independence in 1971. Bangladesh’s new broadcasting policy was implemented since 2014 for regulating the media. Yet, the low rate of Internet access which is 9.6 percent compared South Asian countries (ITU, 2015) does also affect media’s role. Within the nation due to the increase in cyber communities and print media is shifting toward online internet based journalism. It helps in making the reach available to all. It is the mushrooming of web based news and role of corporate print and television media outlets because of which own web version is created which includes various web portals and news sites in Bangladesh³¹⁰. Haq (2014a) has outlined four categories of online news practices, small scale news media which are independent and print media which have corporate investment and citizen journalism using blog sites and social media. The growth of telecommunications and ICT in Bangladesh has led to convergence of cyberspace and media which includes Congress and other official elite. The infiltration from Bangladesh has also been reinforced by media in political mainstream. One instance of it is that in the Indian Defense Review, V.K. Shashikumar has described how smuggling and trafficking operate on the border areas. The media has also highlighted the failures of the BSF to stop this genocide. Bangladeshi civilians being killed by BSF’ is one of the sensitive issue taken up by Media. In the narrative presented by the media on the Indian side is that incidents of armed attack at by smugglers also lead to lack of trust among BSF BDR³¹⁶. On the other hand it is also considered that dealing with water resources issues and the media hype has not been able to ensure effective dialogue between India and Bangladesh.

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and BDR had exchanged heavy gunfire on Zakiganj upazila in Sylhet on 10 August 2006. Both sides alleged each other and media covered it to the extent that Indian High Commission in Dhaka also showed concern over the —one-sided and factually incorrect coverage of the incident in Bangladeshi media. It is through the media narrative that Led Bangladesh government intervention. Media over the years has helped in covering the visits by the leaders of both the countries. Yet one section of media has also represented India to be as an imperious power which treats the country as subservient, lesser partner the long term special friendship. The literature on media also suggests that Media has to act positive towards Indian visits due to the pressure the press faces by the government. On the other side of the coin that Bangladeshi media does not

cover activities at the border under the same government pressure. The celebrations, holding of Camps and Vijay Diwas 16th December are not covered well in the local media in the local languages. It could be helpful to generate goodwill among people.

The other major bone of contention majorly covered by the media in Bangladesh is the coal-based Rampal Power Plant. It was noted that there was risk of Sundarbans near Rampal the largest mangrove forest also a world heritage site is considered to be at risk. The newspapers such as —The Daily Star, The Independent, The Financial Express, The New Age, The Daily Observer, and The New Nation and other media portals local and international as well such as *Mongabay*, *GreenWatch*, *Dhaka Tribune*, and *The Bangladesh Chronicle* have reported environmental movements around the Rampal Power Plant in Bangladesh. The political opposition, civil society, and media have also contributed to achieve policy consensus. The above project also has bilateral implications also because was started by —Bangladesh India Friendship Power Company (BIFPC), a joint venture company shared by Bangladesh's state-owned Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) and India's state-owned National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC). The issue of South Talpatty island concern is also widely covered by media. It is situated on the estuary of Haribhanga River on the borders of countries. It has been a source of contention and issue has been time and again given to joint Indo- Bangladesh teams. It is also due to the reason that Bangladeshi media circles view India with suspicion for its activities over the disputed piece of landmass. Media reports also narrate the stories about JMB regrouping to be opened in northern and north-eastern regions of the country also leading to resurfacing of HUJI in the region. These reports also mention training camps being organized in the Southeastern and northern part also covered by Bangladeshi and Indian Media (Singh, 2006). During the Modi regime, maritime issues have been resolved positively after the visits by Modi. The Indian public remains deprived as a result of a nuanced understanding of Bangladeshi policy and public opinion on key bilateral issues. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government's expediency in ratifying the long-pending Land Boundary Agreement in 2015 was praiseworthy. It is through the help of media outlets that it has been made clear by Government of Bangladesh that deep sea port in Chittagong is not considered a part of 'String of pearls'. It is not part of the larger concern of China to encircle Bangladesh.

Prime Minister ensured it to the public through Media that China can benefit from using the deep seaport, while all neighbouring countries can also use it. (Chowdhury, 2010). In the context of BRI, Bangladesh being the neighboring country of China has received cash from China for the projects for infrastructure since 2016. Media has widely covered all the agreements for loans and investments and Bangladesh being the second-largest recipient (after Pakistan) of Chinese loans under BRI in South Asia. Thus the Media being influential in shaping public opinion about the 2,800-km Bangladesh- China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) which is to link Kunming in China with Kolkata in India via Mandalay and Dhaka. The huge coverage of the issue in Bangladeshi media helped.

Track Two Diplomacy in Bangladesh, Media & Foreign Policy Making

For India Bangladesh relations, 35% of foreign patients are covered by Bangladesh and more than 50% of the total revenue is covered from medical tourism. It is the largest contributor to medical and health tourism of India. Opening up of Bangladeshi-owned IGlobal University in the United States, International Health Tourism and Services Expo, organisation of 11th Meditex Bangladesh, and 4th Bangladesh Clinical Lab Expp such as organized by CEMS Global at Bashundhara international center are examples of track two diplomacy. The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) which works with various activities in the socio-cultural field. Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) to deal with people's movement and displacement in the region, other such incidents such as the dialogue by centre for Policy development in 2015 has helped for trafficking, smuggling and related exploitation which are present in Cox's Bazar. Conventional military stability, nuclear risk reduction, non-proliferation. The India- Bangladesh dialogues which were to facilitate the Farakka Barrage dispute resolution between Bangladesh and India, which led to signing of the Ganges Water Treaty. In these dialogues, I.K. Gujral from Indian side, and S. A. M. S. Kibria from Bangladesh had participated in the delegation on economic relations. One of the negotiator for the Ganges treaty Salman Haider acknowledged the role of track two groups in getting the problem was solubel (quoted in Behera, 2002).

Representation of Bangladesh in International Media

International media has appreciated Bangladesh for having women for 29 years as prime ministers at the same time being criticized for violence on women. Bangladesh has got journalistic attention from global media also due to it being most vulnerable due to global warming. The wide coverage and reports on mass migration, garment collapse, climate change, to be brought in the frontline of Western media³²⁷. One section of the media points out the limited coverage given to the issues of disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, maritime intelligence, port reconstruction. Bangladesh is represented in the media as a country in need of constant support of financial aid. Prominent issues such as 'Poverty' and 'over population' are highlighted in the developed nation's media. The other major issue covered is of Bangladesh Human rights concerns due to which Bangladesh is asked to be in negative light by International Media.

The media has also given coverage to the issues such as election observation by Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and countries such as Japan, Germany, Spain, US, EU were invited to observe elections³²⁸. Bangladesh's dominant values found in the literature of Tagore, Nazrul and Jashimuddin are significant sources of soft power as shown by Bangladesh Diaspora. Few

instances of such practice are the establishment of Bangabandhu Chair at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, Bangladesh Bhavan at Visva-Bharati University and it is also considered that allowing of Rohingya refugees inside her territory promoted Bangladesh as peace-loving country, even despite having its own weak economic condition (Islam, Daily Star).

CONCLUSION

Thus the media has been influential in shaping and influencing the foreign policy of Bangladesh, and operates at multiple levels—domestic, regional, and global. The media acts as both a channel of information and a tool of diplomacy. It decides the agenda and Public Opinion- Media outlets in Bangladesh (TV, newspapers, online platforms) highlight international issues—such as relations with India, China, or the United States—which shapes public perception. Public opinion, in turn, influences policymakers, especially in a democratic setup. At the same time leads to diplomatic signaling, Government statements, press briefings, and interviews published in the media often serve as indirect diplomatic messages to other countries. For example, how Bangladesh communicates its stance on the Rohingya crisis is carefully framed through the media. The Media also influences soft Power and image building of Bangladesh highlighting economic growth, garment industry success, climate leadership, and participation in peacekeeping missions. Positive coverage strengthens its international reputation. The Channels have been instrumental in crisis communication, during international crises (border tensions, refugee issues, trade disputes), media plays a crucial role in informing citizens and the global audience while also helping the government manage narratives. Policy advocacy and debate is also influenced by Editorials, talk shows, and expert commentary that provide platforms for debating foreign policy decisions—like trade agreements or regional alliances—helping refine policy through public discourse. With the rise of social media, Bangladesh's government institutions and diplomats increasingly use platforms like Facebook and Twitter to communicate directly with global audiences, bypassing traditional media filters.

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